12 Again Jesus spoke to them, saying, “I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.” 13 So the Pharisees said to him, “You are bearing witness about yourself; your testimony is not true.” 14 Jesus answered, “Even if I do bear witness about myself, my testimony is true, for I know where I came from and where I am going, but you do not know where I come from or where I am going. 15 You judge according to the flesh; I judge no one. 16 Yet even if I do judge, my judgment is true, for it is not I alone who judge, but I and the Father[a] who sent me. 17 In your Law it is written that the testimony of two people is true. 18 I am the one who bears witness about myself, and the Father who sent me bears witness about me.” 19 They said to him therefore, “Where is your Father?” Jesus answered, “You know neither me nor my Father. If you knew me, you would know my Father also.” 20 These words he spoke in the treasury, as he taught in the temple; but no one arrested him, because his hour had not yet come.

My message this morning is entitled *The Light of the World*, and it will fall under three subheadings: 1) The Context and the Claim; 2) For Those Who Follow; 3) The Questions of Witness and Judgment.

**I. The Context and the Claim**

Jesus claimed to be the Light of the world. If you are like me, you already agree with that claim and everything within you says AMEN!!! This morning we will deal with the claim that Jesus made and the impact of that claim both then and now, but first, let’s dig in and understand the context of this moment in John 8 when Jesus first makes this unprecedented claim.

To begin, let us remember that Jesus is in Jerusalem during the great and hugely popular festival called the Feast of Tabernacles. Tabernacles was a feast that celebrated the harvest each fall, and it was the most popular of all the annual feasts. Hundreds of thousands of Jews crammed into the city, living in temporarily constructed huts called sukkahs, and their celebration lasted an entire week. When we last saw Jesus, He was teaching on the last and final day of the feast known as the Hoshana Rabbah. Now, if we jump to the end of our text, in vs. 20, we learn that on this final day of the feast Jesus is now teaching in the area known as the temple treasury which was located in the Court of Women. Right away there is something you must know about the relationship of the temple treasury in the Court of Women and the Feast of Tabernacles because it creates context for what Jesus is about to say. This is fascinating stuff so stick with me for a minute!

On the first night of the Feast of Tabernacles, four candlesticks and four gigantic bowls of oil and wood were lit in the Court of Women. The Mishna describes the brilliance of the light from the Court of Women on that night to be so intense that “there was not a courtyard in Jerusalem that was not illuminated” by its light. Following the lighting ceremony, the musicians would assemble on the 15 steps that led up to the Court of Israelites, and they would play music while “men of piety and good deeds would dance with lighted torches” singing songs of praise to the Lord. This dance party would last all night long until the rising of the sun, at which time there would be three blasts of the trumpet, and the entire company of worshippers would walk slowly to the east gate of the temple. There they would turn around, facing the west, and recite these words: “Our fathers who were in this place, their backs were toward the Temple of the Lord, and their faces toward
the east, and they worshipped the sun toward the east, but as for us, our eyes are turned toward the Lord.” And then they would repeat over and over again, “We are the Lord’s, and our eyes are turned to the Lord” (Mishna Sukkah 5:1-4).

So here, in the Court of Women near the temple treasury, where the great fires illuminated all of Jerusalem, in that place where the Jews claimed to turn their eyes away from the brilliant sun to the even more brilliant light of the Lord…Jesus proclaims “I am the light of the world!” Pretty amazing, right? But there’s more…

As we know from last Sunday, the adulterous woman story in 7:53-8:11 is not present in our earliest manuscripts, and Dr. Kent Matthews dealt with that question last week during the Q and A. That being said, if you were reading the earliest manuscripts, the Pharisees’ last words prior to our text this morning were (7:52): “Check and see that no prophet arises from Galilee” and then the very next verse in the earliest manuscripts (8:12), reads: “Again, Jesus spoke to them, saying ‘I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness…”

Now, Jesus referring to Himself as the Light of the world in response to the Pharisees’ criticism of Galilee may mean little to you; but I guarantee it spoke volumes to the Pharisees. They would have immediately recalled the famous Messianic prophecy of Isaiah 9: “…in the latter time He has made glorious the way of the sea, the land beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the nations. The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness, on them has light shone.”

Can you see it Church? Did you catch what just happened here? Jesus is reminding His scholarly critics of the greatest and most important reference to Galilee in the entire Old Testament! They should have remembered that it is from Galilee One will come who is the Light for those who live in darkness!

OK, there is one last and important piece of context for us to recall. There were three great manifestations of God’s presence with the Israelites during their wanderings in the wilderness celebrated at the Feast of Tabernacles: the manna from heaven; the water from a rock; and the light of God’s presence made manifest in a cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night. We’ve already heard Jesus claim in John 6 to be the bread of life that must be eaten to inherit eternal life. In John 7 Jesus claimed to be the source of living water for those who thirst. And now, here in John 8, Jesus claims to be the light of the world who provides the light of life to all who follow Him. Don’t miss this Church: Jesus presents Himself as the subject and the fulfillment of the entire Old Testament. Everything was pointing to Him.

Now, in addition to the context already provided, there was a wealth of biblical meaning for the Jewish listeners when Jesus invoked the imagery of light. D.A. Carson summarizes it this way:

The light metaphor is steeped in Old Testament allusions. The glory of the very presence of God in the cloud led the people to the promised land (Ex. 13:21-22) and protected them from those who would destroy them (Ex. 14:19-25). The Israelites were trained to sing, ‘The LORD is my light and my salvation’ (Ps. 27:1). The word of God, the law of God, is a light to guide the path of those who cherish instruction (Ps. 119:105; Pr. 6:23); God’s light is shed abroad in revelation (Ezk. 1:4, 13, 26-28) and salvation (Hab. 3:3-4). ‘Light is Yahweh in action, Ps. 44:3). Isaiah tells us that the servant of the LORD was appointed as a light to the Gentiles, that he might bring God’s salvation to the ends of the earth (Is. 49:6). The coming eschatological age would be a time when the LORD himself would be the light for his people (Is. 60:19-22; cf. Rev. 21:23-24). Perhaps Zechariah 14:5b-7 is especially significant, with its
promise of continual light on the last day, followed by the promise of living waters flowing from Jerusalem—this passage probably forming part of the liturgical readings of this Feast….” (Carson, 337-338).

Church, of all the claims that Jesus made in the Bible…of all the great “I am” statements that He made, this particular claim is perhaps the greatest of them all.

The great Martin Luther observes that by claiming to be the Light of the world, Jesus is saying, “Darkness rules wherever I am not; whenever I am extinguished, no one sees anything.”

Calvin writes: “…Christ is not speaking of what He has in common with others, but claims light as uniquely His own. Hence it follows, that outside Him there is not even a spark of true light.”

NT scholar Fredrick Bruner observes that Jesus is making a Christo-exclusive claim and a Christo-inclusive claim. When Jesus claims to be “THE Light of the world,” His claim is exclusive. Christ is the singular Light…there is no other. If Christ is not among us, we walk in darkness…we are void of light altogether. However, when Jesus claims to be “the Light of the WORLD,” His claim is inclusive. There is no place in the cosmos…no people group… that is excluded from this claim: Jesus is the LIGHT of the WORLD…all are invited to walk in His light, all are included. But to access the Light, one must choose to follow the Light. And that leads me to my second subheading:

II. For Those Who Follow

I want you to think about this for a moment. Jesus made a claim in vs. 12 that no man in his right mind would ever make. He said, “I am the Light of the world.” No thinking human being of any kind of humility or self-awareness…no man familiar with his failures, his weaknesses, his past mistakes, or his limited vision would ever claim to be THE LIGHT of the world, as though everyone else would be lost in darkness if not for him. Had there been any person before Jesus, or any person since, who had the gall to make such a claim, we would have rightly laughed him or her out of the building or locked them away in a place for the delusional and insane. And yet…who has made a case that Jesus was anything less than the Light of the World? Why do we continue to study what this Man said and shape our lives around His teaching if, in fact, He is a crazy egomaniac with delusions of grandeur?

Did you know that today, June 14th, 2020, approximately 2.3 billion people around the world still refer to themselves as “Christ-ians,” as those who identify as followers of this man, Jesus the Christ? Another 1.9 billion people (the Muslims) continue to honor Jesus as a great and enlightened prophet, the one through whom all things were made and the one who will return again to judge the living and the dead according to the Qur’an. Another 1.9 million people (the Hindus) believe that Jesus was a Shaktavesha Avatar or an empowered incarnation; meaning that God sent Him to us for a specific mission to fulfil God's will on Earth.

By my count, that accounts for 6.2 of the 7.8 billion people alive today who are convinced that Jesus was not a madman or a lunatic; they would never even suggest that he was an egomaniac or a fraud. In fact, at least 80% of the people in the world, when asked, would honor Jesus as one of the greatest, if not the singular greatest man who has ever lived. Even the now-famous atheist, Dr. Richard Dawkins, writes “Somebody as intelligent as Jesus would have been an
atheist.” In other words, even the most famous atheist of our day would not dare suggest that Jesus was insane or a liar. Many atheists recognize the intelligence and lucidity of the carpenter from Nazareth.

Friends, listen to me: based upon what Jesus said about Himself, He is either a liar, a lunatic, or the Light of the world! He simply cannot be anything else! We’ve already observed that the general witness of the ages, including our own age, is that Jesus was not a liar or a lunatic…and this conclusion is shared by many who are not followers of Jesus. But you see what that means, right? It means there is only one possible option that remains: Jesus IS the singular light of the world! But if that is the case, why is there still so much darkness in the world? Why is our nation so divided and full of riots? Why do injustice, cruelty, greed, and evil still wreak havoc throughout the world? If Jesus is the Light of the world, why do so many walk in darkness? Listen to what Jesus said: “Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.” The life promised by He who is the LIGHT of the world is given to those who FOLLOW Him. If we are not following Jesus…we walk in darkness.

If you are familiar with the Israelites’ journey in the wilderness following their exodus from Egypt, you will remember that their life consisted of “following” God’s light, right? The glory of God appeared before them in a brilliant cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night. When the cloud of God’s glory moved, the people moved. When the pillar of God’s glory remained, the people stayed and waited upon the Lord. This is the imagery that Jesus draws upon when He says, “Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.” To have faith is to follow. Alexander Maclaren writes:

None but they who trust Him will follow Him. He who does not follow, does not trust. To follow Christ means to long and strive after His companionship; as the Psalmist says, ‘My soul followeth hard after thee.’ It means the submission of the will, the effort of the whole nature, the daily conflict to reproduce His example, the resolute adoption of His command as my law, His providence as my will, His fellowship as my joy. And the root and beginning of all such following is in coming to Him, conscious of my own darkness, and trustful in His great light. We must rely on a Guide before we accept his directions; and it is absurd to pretend that we trust Him, if we do not go as He bids us. So ‘Follow thou me’ is, in a very real sense, the sum of all Christian duty.

80% of the world might agree that Jesus was special, enlightened, or even God’s Son. But unless we follow Him, we walk in darkness. This is why we see so much darkness in the world, and sometimes, even in churches. It is one thing to say that Jesus is the Light of the world; it is quite another to follow Him. Many people follow Jesus for a short time until they come to a comfortable place, and they decide that they will follow no further…they are content where they are. Others follow Jesus into a difficult time of painful challenge and conflict, and it is there that they abandon their Lord…convincing themselves that a loving Lord would never lead them into a wilderness. But to follow Jesus is to go where He leads us, no matter how comfortable or uncomfortable that may be at any given time. Maclaren writes:

Do not let the warmth by the camp-fire, or the pleasantness of the shady place where your tent is perched keep you there when the cloud lifts. Be ready for change, be ready for continuance because you are in fellowship with your Leader and Commander; and let Him say, ‘Go,’ and you go; ‘Do this,’ and you gladly do it, until the hour when He will whisper, ‘Come,’ and, as you come, the river will part, and the journey will be over, and the fiery, cloudy pillar that guided you all your journey through will spread itself out as an abiding glory, in that higher home where the Lamb is the light thereof.
Isn’t that a beautiful picture of following? And an accurate picture, right? The invitation of Jesus is always the same: “Follow Me.” And here’s the promise for those who follow Jesus: 1) You will not walk in darkness. Have you ever tried walking in darkness, as in, so dark you can’t see anything at all? I have tried it a handful of times, and here’s what I can tell you: a) you have no sense of direction—you don’t know where you are going or even where you came from; b) you move VERY slowly…it’s much safer not to move at all; c) you run into things that hurt; d) it’s impossible to lead others when you don’t know where you are going; and e) the longer you walk in darkness, the more you long for some kind of light; but when someone suddenly turns on the light, it hurts your eyes and you instinctively turn away from the light! Think about that, friends. Are you walking in darkness? Are you lost and without direction, inclined not to move at all out of fear and uncertainty, running into things that hurt, and generally offended by the light? Jesus said, “I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness anymore…”

The second promise Jesus made to those who follow is this: the followers “will have the light of life.” Notice, Jesus does not promise that those who follow will see the light; they will HAVE the light! The light will be with them, in them, around them, before them…the followers will enjoy the privilege of HAVING the light, and that Light which shall be theirs is that which ushers forth LIFE.

All of life as we know it in the physical world is dependent upon LIGHT to some degree. So also does the spiritual life depend upon the Light that is our Lord Jesus Christ and the presence of His Holy Spirit. Apart from His light in us that brings salvation and forgiveness of sins, that very life first breathed into us by our Creator, that which is our soul, will slowly but consistently shrivel in the darkness of our condemned condition. When at last the darkness has ruined our soul, we will know an eternity of regret for the life we wasted, and the scriptures tell us that these condemned souls will spend eternity in the outer darkness where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth.

Church, Jesus is the Light that brings the life you’ve always longed for…the true life…the legit life…the REAL LIFE…the Eternal Life. But that life is found in the following; it is not a transaction that happens only once upon our profession of faith. The authentic life…the eternal kind of life… is out there on the path of righteousness for His name’s sake, as we read in the 23rd Psalm! It is by grace that we have been saved and are even empowered to follow Jesus…but follow we shall! He will lead us in paths of righteousness for His name’s sake, and that path will sometimes lead us beside still waters and green pastures, and sometimes it will lead through the valley of the shadow of death…but the real LIFE is wherever the Shepherd leads us…the real life comes in following His Light… ’til at last we shall dwell in the house of the Lord, forever! Amen!

Now, very briefly, let me conclude with my third and final subheading:

III. The Question of Witness and Judgment

John records the response of the Pharisees in vs. 13, “So the Pharisees said to him, ‘You are bearing witness about yourself; your testimony is not true.” The Pharisees are quoting Jesus
back to Himself from an earlier confrontation when Jesus said in John 5:31, “If I alone bear
witness about myself, my testimony is not true.” In that exchange in John 5, Jesus already made
a case to these same people that His works, the Father, and the Scriptures all bear witness to the
authenticity of Jesus’ testimony. Here in John 8, Jesus is not going to repeat His previous
argument. Instead, Jesus responds beginning in vs. 14,

Even if I do bear witness about myself, my testimony is true, for I know where I come from and where I am going,
but you do not know where I come from or where I am going. You judge according to the flesh; I judge no one.
Yet even if I do judge, my judgment is true, for it is not I alone who judge, but I and the Father who sent me. In
your Law it is written that the testimony of two people is true. I am the one who bears witness about myself, and the
Father who sent me bears witness about me.

Jesus’ argument here is not easy to understand at first. It would seem that Jesus is making
Himself out to be an exception to the rule that one cannot serve as his own witness…and, of
course, that is exactly what Jesus is doing. To understand the exceptional nature of Jesus, we
must consider what He just said. Jesus just said, “I am the light of the world.” It is common
knowledge that light, and light alone, is self-evidencing. Light bears witness to itself by its mere
existence. Everything else is revealed by the light. In other words, you don’t need some
alternate form of light to see light, right?! This is what Jesus is saying about Himself. Jesus is
the LIGHT of God’s self-revelation. There is no earthly “witness” who can bring any new or
equal “light” to that which God has revealed in His son. No human testimony will do, nor is any
needed. Still, says Jesus, there is Another. The Father bears witness to the Son. We know Jesus
is referring to the truth of His words that come straight from the Father; the power of His work
that is empowered by the Father; and the judgments that Jesus makes, which are the judgments
of the Father. As we’ve seen throughout John’s gospel, when we hear Jesus, we are hearing the
Father. When we see Jesus, we are seeing the Father…so great is their Oneness (John 14:9;
17:21-22). Jesus then appeals to Deut. 17:6; 19:15 which both state that two witnesses are
sufficient to corroborate a testimony when it comes to levying a charge against another person.
Again, the self-revelation of God through His Son is hardly to be compared to a human court
where sinful men make accusations against sinful men. Nevertheless, Jesus makes His case that
even if His own testimony as the Light of the world is self-evident, Jesus is actually never alone
in His testimony…the Father is always with Him, and the Father is always validating and
“seconding” what Jesus is saying.

By the way, Church, the “seconding” of the Father through the conviction of the Holy Spirit is
exactly why we have a completely different experience reading Jesus than when we read
philosophy or some other form of literature. Comparatively speaking, we don’t have a lot of
words spoken by Jesus as compared to many people who have taught or written throughout
human history. But here’s what we can observe and experience for ourselves: every word that
comes from the mouth of our Lord Jesus Christ has power to convict the human soul. That is
because we are hearing from God—the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. It is for that very reason
that we can study the Bible our whole lives, reading the same texts over and over again, and find
ourselves learning something new…something profound…something that gives us light and
hope and life no matter the circumstances, amen?

Now, Jesus also says a bit here about judging. In vs. 15 Jesus states, “You judge according to
the flesh; I judge no one.” I think Jesus is basically saying, “I judge no one by the standards that
you judge.” Jesus does not judge according to the flesh. Furthermore, we know that Jesus “did not come to condemn the world, but to save the world.” (John 3:17) Jesus will return to judge the living and the dead, but that is not His mission at the time of His incarnation. Still, says Jesus in vs. 16, “Even if I do judge, my judgment is true, for it is not I alone who judge, but I and the Father who sent me.” Only God can judge truly, because only God can see all that there is to see. Nothing is hidden from His sight. God looks upon the hearts of us all; He sees our intent, our motives, and everything that we hope to keep hidden from the watching world. Since Jesus is perfectly one with the Father, His judgments are also true. Jesus concludes in vs. 18, “I am the one who bears witness about myself, and the Father who sent me bears witness about me.”

The Pharisees respond in vs. 19, “Where is your Father?” Again…the Pharisees, representing the very best religious people of their day, are still demanding existential proof because they cannot see the Father (although they recently chanted, “Our eyes are turned to the Lord!”…remember?). They claim to have their eyes turned to the Lord…but they can’t recognize the Lord when He is standing right in front of them!

Jesus answers them saying, “You know neither me nor my Father. If you knew me, you would know my Father also.”

Again…what Jesus just said here is unprecedented in all of human history. No mere mortal…no man aware of his insufficiencies and failures would dare to say, “If you knew me, you would know God!” But that is exactly what we find here in John 8: If you know Jesus…the carpenter from Nazareth…you know God almighty! And the inverse is also true: if you don’t get to know Jesus, you know little of God the Father. As Jesus will say explicitly in John 14:9: “Whoever has seen me has seen the Father.” We will return to this theme later in John’s gospel, but for now, I will conclude with a few thoughts for us to ponder.

Closing:

We all want to know what is true about where we came from and where we are going. We want to know what is true when it comes to how life came about on planet Earth; or what happens when we die. We want to know how we are doing in this thing called life, and we want to know what we are supposed to be doing with the time that remains. We all want to know what is true about a lot of things…including the race riots in our cities and the various claims of truth from politicians. However, the desires of the human heart run deeper than simply desiring to know the truth. Let us admit that we all battle with the darkness. We all battle with horrible thoughts, temptations, and times of depression. And at times, we all feel lost. All of that is to say: we are all looking for the Light.

Now, we all think that we would see the light, believe in God and be better people if God would simply come down and talk to us in person. If only God would show up in our car or our house or join us up on the mountaintop…then we would know for sure, then we would believe…then we would follow.

But notice: it doesn’t work that way…it never has. The New Testament bears witness that God did come down and personally spoke to the most informed and committed group of religious
people on the planet...He made it abundantly clear who He was; and they didn’t suddenly believe and start living a better life...nor would we.

Listen: we come to know God when we follow the Light that He sends us. For the Israelites, they came to know God as they followed the Cloud and the Pillar. They came to know God as they ate the bread that He provided and drank the water that spilled out of the Rock. The disciples came to know God when they followed Jesus, listening to His words and doing what He commanded of them. Knowing God comes by following the Light that He has sent us; and here’s what Jesus just said: “I am the Light of the World. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.”

I implore you: follow the Light who is Jesus our Lord. Follow Him. Go where He directs you. Do what He commands you to do. Trust Him with every decision. Wait until He says go, and then go and do not look back. He is the Light of the world; and should you follow Him, should we follow Him together, we will never walk in darkness again. Will you pray with me?