

The Light of the World

<i>Text</i>	John 8:12
<i>Readings</i>	Isaiah 60:1-3, John 9
<i>Theme</i>	Jesus invites you to follow him as the light of life.
<i>Purpose</i>	To urge you to follow Jesus as the light of life.

All of us can identify with these words of the Lord Jesus because we know the importance of light and being able to see. We make the best use of the daylight hours for work and play, doing what we can while it is still light. In our modern world people do work at night, especially roading gangs working in the big cities on major highways; but they are working under floodlights so they can see what they are doing.

Light is essential to life. We need the light of the sun for life and health and work. Without it we could not work or function or live.

But in these words we have read Jesus claimed that we cannot live without *him*. *He is* the light of life. This is the second 'I am' claim which John records in his gospel. Again Jesus compared himself with something physical and tangible, in this case with light. You need him to be able to see clearly. You need him to live as God intended you to live and to be what he created you to be.

As we look at these words we'll consider:

1. His astounding **claim** to be the light of the world;
2. **His invitation** to follow him;
3. **His promise** of life to those who do.

1. Jesus made **this claim** while talking to the Jewish leaders in the temple courts.

He was in Jerusalem for the Feast of Tabernacles (John 7:10). That feast commemorated God's care for his people during their 40 years of wandering in the wilderness.

We are not sure just when in the festival Jesus said these words nor exactly where he was. Many commentators think he was in the Court of the Women. In that area there were four huge lamps made up of many candles. These were lit at the beginning of the feast and each night many people would celebrate under the light of these huge lamps. Those celebrations would go right through the night with music and dancing.

In this setting Jesus made this astounding claim. He may well have been standing near these great lamps. The feast came to an end and the lights were put out but Jesus announced; "*I am the light of the world.*"

His claim has a strong **background in the Old Testament**.

We read about light in the opening verses of the Bible. One the *first day of creation* God said; "Let there be light," and there was light (Genesis 1:3).

Light for Israel was also associated with the *glory of God*; one of the meanings of the word glory is 'light' or 'radiance.'

Light was also connected with *God's law* and truth; Psalm 119:105 - "Thy word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path."

And light was used of *God himself*; Psalm 27:1 "The Lord is my light and my salvation."

In making this claim to be the light of the world Jesus made a claim to be *God*!

He aligned himself with God's creation, his glory, his word, and his person! God the *Father* was the light and *Jesus* was the light! This is why the Jews immediately challenged him (verse 13); "Here you are, appearing as your own witness, your testimony is not valid." His claim was astonishing and outrageous. How could a mere man say such things?! How could he make such a claim?! Who did he think he was?!

In the rest of this discussion with the Jews recorded in chapter 8 Jesus gave his credentials. He explained that he testified about *himself* (verse 14), that *his Father* testified about him (verse 18), and that his *death* in the future would also prove his claims (verse 28).

Not only did he claim to be the light, but even that he was the light ***of the world!***

The prophets of the Old Testament had predicted his. Through Isaiah God had foretold that the Servant of the Lord would be "a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring my salvation to the ends of the earth." (Isaiah 49:6b).

When Jesus was born he was taken to the temple in Jerusalem. There his parents met old Simeon, who praised God that these prophecies had been fulfilled (Luke 2:28-32) and that the light of the world had come!

Sadly, Jesus came to his own, but his own did not receive him (John 1:11). But after he had ascended into heaven, then the good news about him was proclaimed to the whole world - to Jews and Gentiles, to peoples of all races and places.

That is still going on today. Jesus is continuing to shed his light in the dark cities and regions of this world so that people might have this light of life.

We should note that Jesus is making this claim about himself as a *person*, not as some vague force or power. Listen to these words that appeared as a Christmas meditation written by the Liberal Catholic Church: "The love-light which the Christ floods the planet each year at Christmas is gradually changing the atomic vibration of the earth, and it is this great out-pouring of love-light each year which is the real Christmas gift of Christ to the world."

This quote is typical of the New Age spirituality that is common today. But this is not what Jesus meant. When he said that he was the light of the world he did not mean that he would change its atomic vibration!

Rather he called people to a living relationship with himself as the world's light and he pointed them to a true knowledge of God the Father.

2. This brings us to consider **HIS INVITATION** to *follow* him.

During this Feast of Tabernacles the people of Israel remembered how God had led them through the desert. During the day he led them by a pillar of cloud, which symbolised the presence of God, and during the night this changed to a pillar of fire.

Just as the people of Israel had followed the light of this pillar of fire so Jesus urges us to follow him.

If you are going to follow someone you want to be sure that he is **a reliable guide**.

On the West Coast of the South Island you can go for a walking tour on the Fox Glacier. A glacier is a moving object and so the surface changes day by day. Your guide knows what to look for and can choose the best path that will avoid the crevasses and holes in the ice.

If you are going to follow Jesus you want to be sure that he too is a reliable guide, that he knows the proper path, that he can lead you in the right direction.

You can safely follow him because he is the Son of God and the Son of Man. He is divine and human.

Because he is God he holds the map; he knows the journey from beginning to end; he knows the route you need to follow.

And because he is a man he knows exactly what you will face on the journey. He has travelled this road already. He knows the difficulties and temptations you face. You can rely on him.

The writer of Hebrews urges us to "run with perseverance the race marked out for us. Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith." (Hebrews 12:1-2). You can follow him because he has travelled this path already and he knows the way.

To follow him takes **faith**.

Abraham was listed as one of the great men of faith because he obeyed the Lord when God told him to move to another country. He obeyed and went not knowing where he was going. He trusted God.

A soldier who trusts his commander will follow him into battle; he believes his commander will lead him in the right path. In the same way a Christian who trusts in Christ will follow him through life, no matter where that leads.

Do you trust in the Lord Jesus? Are you following his shining light, or do you prefer your own feeble lamp? Will you keep on following him, every day, through all of life, no matter what that costs?

Because to follow Jesus takes great **commitment**.

Jesus called his disciples to follow him - to leave their nets and their tax collectors booth and whatever they were doing and to become his disciples, to walk in his light.

Jesus calls you to follow him. That will not be easy. He warned people to count the cost. He said that those who followed him would have to deny themselves and take up their cross. In the first century he meant that quite literally - many Christians were crucified for their faith in Jesus. That required courage and conviction.

Jesus invites you, commands you, to follow him. Will you do that? Will you keep it up, not only in the good times, but also when life is difficult?

3. Jesus encourages us to do this with **HIS PROMISE**: "Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life." He expresses this negatively and positively.

If you follow me you will **"never walk in darkness."**

"Darkness" describes a world without God - human society in rebellion against its maker. This world is in darkness. We see evidence of that all around us. People live in a moral and spiritual darkness. They are ignorant of God and are disobedient to him.

Paul explained that "The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God." (2 Corinthians 4:4).

In his letter the apostle John described the connection between disobedience and darkness; "Whoever hates his brother is in the darkness and walks around in the darkness; he does not know where he is going because the darkness has blinded him" (1 John 2:11).

This describes many people today, in our own society. They hate each other, they walk around in the darkness, they are blind, they have no idea where they are going, they live in the night.

But Jesus promises that those who believe in him will "never walk in darkness". Instead they **"will have the light of life."**

On the fourth day of creation God created the sun to give light on earth. The constant heat and light of the sun gives warmth and light and life to the plants and animals and people on earth.

What the sun does for the earth, Jesus does for his people - he gives us the light of his truth, the warmth of his presence, and the life he has gained through his death and resurrection. Malachi described him as the "sun of righteousness".

The prophet Isaiah spoke about the coming of Jesus when he wrote; "Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord rises upon you" (Isaiah 60:1)

If you know the Lord Jesus then you will live in the light and you will see clearly.

John has recorded the story of one of Jesus' miracles to **illustrate this**. In chapter 9 we read about the man born blind. He lived in the darkness. His physical blindness was a picture of his spiritual blindness. He could not see where he was going. He did not know Jesus. He had no saving knowledge of God.

But Jesus saw him and cured him. He worked a miracle and gave him sight. The man could see! He could see the light of day and people's faces and the trees and buildings. He could live in the light.

Not only could he see with his *physical* eyes, but he could also see *spiritually*.

He believed in Jesus as the Son of Man.

He worshipped him as Lord.

Earlier he had been in a discussion with the Pharisees who had said to him; "Give glory to God. We know this man is a sinner." He replied, "Whether he is a sinner or not, I don't know. One thing I do know. I was blind but now I see." (verses 24-25).

Can you say that? "One thing I do know. I was blind but now I see." Do you know this? Has this been your experience? Can you see the Lord Jesus with the eyes of faith? Are you living in the light of life?

When Paul wrote to the church in Corinth he gave us a beautiful description of this light of Christ shining in us; "For God who said, 'Let light shine out of darkness', made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ." (2 Corinthians 4:6). If you believe in Jesus you have this light shining in your heart.

Now your task is to *spread* this light. Jesus wants his light to shine through you. "You are the light of the world", he told his disciples. "A city on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your father in heaven." (Matthew 5:14-16).

God has "called you out of darkness and into his wonderful light." Live in that light. Reflect it to those around you. Hold it up for the people of the world.

A Sunday school song expresses this well:

"Jesus bids us shine with a clear pure light,
Like a little candle burning in the night,
In this world of darkness we must shine,
You in your small corner and I in mine."

Are you shining with a clear pure light?

Are you holding up your candle?

Are you lighting up your small corner of the world?

Are you letting your light shine before men?

Jesus said; "I am the light of the world. Whoever believes in me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life."

Amen.