

Jesus is...the Light of the World

John 8:12-59

I Jesus is the Light of the World (Jn. 8:12)

1. The Context-- the Feast of Booths/ Tabernacles: Jesus' declaration in John 8:12 "has immediate reference to the joyous celebration each night [of the Feast of Booths /Tabernacles] in the... lighting of 4 huge lamps in the [Jerusalem Temple's] court of the women... There was no court in Jerusalem that was not bright from the light..." [George Beasley-Murray, *John*, p. 127]
2. This celebration was associated with "recollection of Israel's experience at the Exodus... In the wilderness wanderings, the presence of the Lord with His people was manifested in...the pillar of cloud by day and the pillar of fire [light] by night—which saved them ...(Exo. 14:19-25) and guided them through the wilderness to the promised land... When the original setting of 8:12 is seen in the Feast of tabernacles, it is understood why the imagery of 'following' the Light is employed...This is what Israel did in the wilderness! The people followed the Light as it led from the land of slavery through the perilous wilderness to the promised land." [George Beasley-Murray, *John*, pp. 127-8]
- A The reality of the light in the wilderness – the pillar of cloud and fire (Exo. 13:21-22)
- B Calling people to follow Him
 - 1 Followers of Christ have the light of life, they do not walk in darkness
 - 2 Followers of Christ are on a life-long journey
 - 3 Israel on a 40 year journey of following the pillar of cloud and pillar of fire.

II Not merely being a Believer, but also a Disciple

A Believing – the first requirement (vv. 24, 30)

- 1 So we wouldn't die in our sins (v. 24)— "...unless you believe that I am (he) you will die in your sins."
- 2 *I am (he)* at one level may simply mean "I am the Messiah" or the one "sent" by the Father (or, in view of v. 12, "I am the light of the world"). The Greek phrase *egō eimi* simply means "I am" and is used in an ordinary sense in Jn. 9:9 by a man Jesus healed. However, John is fond of using words with a double meaning and this verse is one of several that hint at a connection with God's statement to Moses in Ex. 3:14, "I AM [Greek: OT Septuagint: *Egō eimi*] WHO I AM." (ESV)
- 3 In Jesus, the Son of Man lifted up (crucified, resurrected & exalted)--"Jesus said, 'When you have lifted up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am (he), and that I do nothing on my own authority'..." (Jn. 8:28)
 - *Son of Man*--Jesus is not merely "a son of man" (an ordinary male human being), but he repeatedly (80+ times in the 4 Gospels) calls himself **the Son of Man**, suggesting the greatest, most notable son of man of all time. "*The Son of Man*" is thus a messianic title that refers back to the mysterious, human-divine figure of "one like a son of man" in Dan. 7:13–14, one who would be given rule over all the nations of the earth forever (cf. Matt. 26:64). The Son of Man will be "lifted up" by being crucified (Jn. 3:14), will provide divine revelation (Jn. 6:27), and will act with end-time authority (Jn. 5:27; 9:39) [ESV]
 - "*Son of Man lifted up*"--This reference to the Son of Man being lifted up is the 2nd of 3 "lifted up" sayings in John's Gospel (3:14; 8:28; 12:32). All 3 sayings speak of the future "lifting up" of the Son of Man with John's typical double meaning, so that it refers to Jesus' death, resurrection, and exaltation to glory. [ESV]
- 4 Many believed His words (v. 30)

Jesus is...the Light of the World

John 8:12-59

- B. Becoming a disciple by abiding in His word (vv. 31-32) “Jesus said to the Jews who had believed him, ‘If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, & you will know the truth, & the truth will set you free.’” (Jn. 8:31-32)

1. Letting God’s living word have a place in us
2. Letting the word be light to us to lead us
3. Knowing the truth
4. Being set free by the truth

- C. **Question:** Did the Jews in 8:30-31 really believe? “Jesus said to the Jews who had believed him, ‘If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, & you will know the truth, & the truth will set you free.’ They answered him, ‘We are offspring of Abraham & have never been enslaved...’ Jesus answered them, ‘...if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed. I know that you are Abraham’s offspring; yet you seek to kill me because my word finds no place in you...’ They answered him, ‘Abraham is our father.’ Jesus said to them, ‘If you were Abraham’s children, you would be doing the works Abraham did, but now you seek to kill me, a man who has told you the truth that I heard from God. This is not what Abraham did.’” (Jn. 8:31-40) **Note:** The conundrum is that it seems that Jesus accuses those Jews who believed in Him (v. 31) of seeking to kill him (vv. 37, 40)!

1. “The opening sentence poses a problem that involves the whole section John 8:30-59. In the words of C. H. Dodd, ‘A group of Jews described as believers are accused of attempted murder and roundly denounced as children of the devil.’” [George Beasley-Murray, *John*, p. 132]
2. The ESV Study Bible says these Jews’ belief was false-- “Their ‘belief’ is shown to be false in the course of the story (vv. 33–47). To *abide in Jesus’ word* (v. 31) means to continue believing what Jesus said and walking in obedience to Him. This verse shows that continuing to trust Jesus & obey him is one test of who are *truly My disciples*. ESV
3. However, Beasley-Murray calls the notion that it’s a false faith, “a grave mistake.” He says, “the assumption that the faith response recorded in [John] 8:30-32 is... a sham faith...makes [John] appear an inconsistent and implausible writer.” [George Beasley-Murray, *John*, p. 141]
4. Some expositors think that the protesters in v. 33 & v. 41 are not the Jewish believers (of vv. 30-32) but the Jewish opponents of Jesus. “In that case we are presented in 8:30-59 with a typical statement of Jews coming to faith in Jesus; they are [then] instructed by Him as to what true discipleship means, and there follows a mass of typical propaganda calculated to destroy faith in Jesus....[propaganda] that was a perpetual threat to Jewish believers [including during the era when John wrote his gospel].” [G. Beasley-Murray, *John*, p. 132]

- D. Becoming a disciple by knowing ourselves (vv. 39-46)

1. Not self-deceived (v. 33) (never enslaved to anyone)
2. Not trusting in our religious heritage (v. 39)
3. Jesus had just agreed that they were physically descended from Abraham (v. 37), but now he denies that they are truly *Abraham’s children*, for their behavior contradicts their claim. This implies that Abraham’s true children are only those who believe in Jesus (cf. Rom. 2:28–29; 9:6–8). *What Abraham did* most prominently was believe God (Gen. 15:6; Rom. 4:3; Gal. 3:6; James 2:23). Similarly, the Jews who are speaking here should believe in Jesus, for he comes from God and is speaking the very words of God. (ESV Study Bible)

Jesus is...the Light of the World

John 8:12-59

4. Recognizing pride, self-confidence
5. Watchful of our resistance to God's word (v. 43, 47)
6. Throughout this Gospel many people misunderstand Jesus and his teaching. Here he gives the reason: it is *because you cannot bear* (or, "you are not able," Gk. *dynamai*) *to hear my word*, where "hear" should be taken in the sense of "hear and receive," or "hear and accept." (ESV)
7. Knowing our fallen source (v. 44)

E. Becoming a disciple by knowing Christ

1. Seeing Christ as the "I AM." (vv. 12, 24, 28, 58)
 - a I am the light of the world (v. 12)
 - b Believing that Christ is "I am" so that we will not die in our sins (v. 24)
 - c Knowing that when Christ was lifted up He was the "I am." (v. 28)
 - d Knowing that He is the ever-existing, eternal "I AM." (v. 58)

If there had been any uncertainty about Jesus' identity in other passages where he said, "*I am*" (e.g., 6:35; 9:5; 11:25), there was no confusion here because Jesus is claiming to be the one who was alive *before Abraham was*, that is, more than 2,000 years earlier. Jesus does *not* simply say, "Before Abraham was, I was," which would simply mean that he is more than 2,000 years old. Rather, he uses the present tense "I AM" in speaking of existence more than 2,000 years earlier, thus claiming a kind of transcendence over time that could only be true of God. The words "I AM" in Greek use the same expression (*Egō eimi*) found in the Septuagint [the Greek translation of OT] in the first half of God's self-identification in Ex. 3:14, "I AM WHO I AM." Jesus is thus claiming not only to be eternal but also to be the God who appeared to Moses at the burning bush. His Jewish opponents understood his meaning immediately and they "picked up stones" to stone him to death for blasphemy (see John 8:59). (ESV Study Bible)
 - e. "Before Abraham came into existence I AM" expresses the contrast between the existence initiated by birth and an absolute existence. The statement implies a real pre-existence and is possible because the 'I' of Jesus is one with the 'I' of the divine Logos [John 1:1-2]...no predicate is intended here"—i.e., not "I am (he)," but "I AM" [George Beasley-Murray, *John*, p. 139]
2. Being set free by the Son (v. 36)

Sets you free from both the guilt and the life-controlling power of sin (and probably also from the accompanying influence of demonic activity, as Jesus mentions in v. 44). (ESV Study Bible)