



# 'I Am the Light of the World'

## The Reality of Life

Jesus made this great statement, "*I am the light of the world*" in the public arena of the Temple Treasury (John 6:20), which was extremely busy with a constant flow of people coming and going, and therefore an excellent place to disseminate important truth. But the background against which Jesus made this claim made it doubly vivid and impressive. Most commentators believe that John 8:12 follows on chronologically from 7:52 so that John connected these discourses and arguments with the Feast of Tabernacles (7:2). This is indicated by "again" he spoke to the people – ie still in the context of the Feast.

Now at this Feast there was a 'pouring of water' ceremony which tied in with Jesus's claim to give "living water". But a 'lighting of the lamps' ceremony also took place in this Court during the Feast. In this, four poles (about 20 metres high) were set up, at the top of which were four bowls filled with oil. When darkness came each night the wicks of these sixteen lamps were lit and, we are told, they sent such a blaze of light throughout Jerusalem that every courtyard in the city was lit up with their brilliance. And all night long people danced and sang before the Lord in remembrance of the pillar of cloud by day and pillar of fire by night by which God had guided his people through the wilderness. Now it was in this context that Jesus publicly declared, "I am the light of the world." And what he was saying was "The Temple illuminations have dispelled darkness for the past seven nights. Well, 'I am the Light of the World', and, whoever follows me will have light, not just for seven nights, but for their whole lifetime". Note...

### **1. The Claim He Made**

"I am the light of the world." There are three things to reflect upon here:

#### **a) The Divinity of His Person**

"I Am", Jesus said. Jewish translators quite often used the emphatic pronoun when recording words that God had spoken. And this is what we find here – the "I" is emphatic. This is the way God speaks. It calls to mind that at the revelation of the burning bush God said to Moses I AM THAT I AM. Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, I AM hath sent me unto you. "I am", says Jesus. "I AM", says God. The conclusion is inescapable: Jesus claims divinity for himself; he claims to be part of the Godhead, to be the Messiah, the Anointed One, the Son of God. The Pharisees and the people were incredulous. Here was a man, an ordinary man, a carpenter from Nazareth, the son of Mary – and He was claiming to be God! He was using God's own, personal name; claiming to be the promised light, the Anointed One, the Messiah, coequal to and coeternal with the great "I AM."

We must never lose sight of the fact that in Jesus we see the glory and majesty of God (cf John 1:14, 18). Jesus of Nazareth is God, the eternal God, the everlasting I AM. And there is none other like him, the unique God-man! This is reinforced when we consider that the word "light" was specially associated in Jewish thought and language with God (cf Ps 27:1; Is 60:19; Micah 7:8). When Jesus made the claim that he was the Light of the World, he was making a claim which could not possibly be higher He was saying: I am God.

#### **b) The Revelation of His Glory**

While on earth Jesus had the natural appearance of a man. However, his coming to earth was accompanied by light. (cf Matt 2:9; Lk 2:9) Later, his glory was revealed in the transfiguration when he became dazzling white. (Mark 9). So when Jesus said, "*I am the*

*Light of the World, he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness but shall have the light of life*", it was a statement about his glory. But it was also indicating what he came to do. Essentially his life was about bringing life to people. John 1:4 says, *"in him was life, and that life was the light of men."* He brought life, hope and restoration to a world of death, hopelessness and brokenness.

In saying that he is "the light of the world", Jesus was also saying that the world lies in darkness. Our world is one in which there is spiritual blindness and moral darkness. It lies in the darkness of sin, unbelief and ignorance. By and large, people today don't understand realities such as sin, righteousness, eternity, heaven, hell, repentance, or salvation. They are in darkness! But Jesus is "the light of the world." He has come to free people from ignorance concerning God, man, redemption and true life. And the light of life Jesus brings is rooted in his sacrificial act of offering himself on the cross to take away the guilt of sin. John declared: *"Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world."* (John 1:29). So it is in Jesus – and him alone – that you meet God, know God, and obtain life from God.

### c) The Universality of His Reach

The problem of man left to himself is that he cannot over-come his natural darkness. But Jesus claims that he can bring the illumination that will banish that darkness – and this wherever they are in the whole world. Most 1st century Jews tended to confine the love of God to Israel. They forgot that the blessing of Abraham was to extend to all families of the earth (Gen 12:3; cf Isa 42:6, 49:6). So Jesus' teaching that he was the light, not simply of Jews, but of the whole world, was breathtaking. How wonderful that the Son of God came to bring light to all people – that God has a love for all mankind (not only for Israel) and that no one is beyond the love and the care of God. He is the light of the whole world. He alone is the light the world needs. Apart from him there is no saving light. The fact is that God's arms are open wide to receive anyone, from anywhere. No matter what a person's background or history may be; or what turmoil of mind and heart, Jesus can bring them light, forgiveness, hope, direction and life. Without exclusion or exception, there is light for everyone who will come to him – including you. The claim He made.

## 2. The Promise He Gave

### a) A Conditional Promise

Jesus talks of those who *follow* him. What does that mean? It is to give oneself body and soul into the obedience of the Master. It is to trust in him, to depend on him, to obey him, to do what he says. It means being totally committed to him at all times and in all circumstances, without reservation. To be a follower of Jesus, then, you, by grace, must have a right personal relationship with him and be committed to a continuous following. Jesus is speaking of a whole-hearted discipleship, not of a casual relationship. Are you a follower? A close follower? A whole-hearted follower?

### b) A Converting Promise

The follower of Jesus is promised two things:

- i. ***Not to walk in darkness.*** Darkness is often used to convey negative things – obscurity, concealment, deception, error, and the like. Sometimes it is used of the darkness of death. Jesus is saying that anyone who follows him is delivered from all such things. When we walk alone in darkness we stumble and fall, and find that life's problems are beyond our solution. Walking in darkness we inevitably take the wrong way, because we have no light to guide us. A person who has a sure guide is one who is bound to come in safety to the journey's end. Jesus Christ is that guide. He alone possesses the map to life. To follow him is to walk in safety and certainty through life and afterwards to enter into glory.
- ii. ***To have the light of life.*** Jesus is the very light of God come among men, and Jesus is the light which gives men life. Light means life. This means Jesus is the source of life and

the well-spring of being. All life comes from Jesus and stems from Jesus. If you want to really live, you must turn to Christ, in which case your life will be suffused with the light of the presence of Jesus Christ. So if you follow him he will be with you every step of the way. Yes, it will involve difficulties and troubles, sadness and trials as well as joys and pleasures. But you will never have to face these situations alone. He will be there to lighten your path and help you see the way through. Furthermore, life is the opposite of death. So ultimately to follow Jesus means to be delivered from eternal death and to experience eternal life in the glory of heaven.

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