

Sermon- Light that Blinds, Light that Illumines

Scripture: John 8:12-20

Sunday, August 5, 2018

After God created 24 hours of alternating darkness and light, one of the angels asked him, “What are you going to do now?”

God said, “I think I’m going to call it a day.”

How many Mexicans does it take to change a light bulb? – Just Juan.

The last time we were in John, I preached on the famous story of the woman caught in adultery. Now if you remember I mentioned that there is a peculiar fact about that story. That was that while it was a very important story for various reasons it was not part of the oldest manuscripts of the New Testament. So if you were to look at the literary context of today’s story, there is a natural continuity from John 7 and that is where I am going to start today. You see in John 7 if you remember Jesus had made a spectacular revelation of himself right in the middle of the Festival of the Tabernacles. That was also His first I Am saying. He had revealed about Himself, “I AM the water of life”. And I had explained that this teaching would have had an incredible impact on the people because one of the highlights of the Festival of the Tabernacles was the water drawn from the pool of Shilom brought in a big procession and poured on the altar in the temple courtyard.

In today’s passage, Jesus presents his second I Am saying. I Am the Light of the world. And the way he communicates it would have been as dramatic in its impact as his first I Am saying. To be able to see the power of Jesus’ presentation you have to know

something about the setting He presents His message in. Remember we are still in the Festival of the Tabernacles. One tradition that was part of this festival I have not mentioned so far was that there were a series of Golden lamps set-up in the court of the woman at the temple. And every evening before the elders would break out into joyful dancing, all the worshipers would wait for a signal. And the signal that was given was the special lighting of the Golden lamps. The light of the lamp was meant to remind the people that Yahweh had lead the Israelite's through a pillar of fire by night in their wilderness wandering. When the golden lamps were lit the rabbis and elders would be dancing with joy. For the Jewish people, light was a very clear symbol of a good God. The Old Testament has numerous references that connect God with light, right? The very first words uttered by God in the Bible were "Let there be light", Gen 1:3. In Psalm 44 verse 3 it says, "They did not conquer the land with their swords; it was not their own strong arm that gave them victory. It was your right hand and strong arm and the blinding light from your face that helped them, for you loved them." In Ps 56:13 it says, "For you have rescued me from death; you have kept my feet from slipping. So now I can walk in your presence, O God, in your life-giving light." So light was a very strong symbol of Yahweh. Now light and fire is actually a universal symbols for God. So now I want you to imagine, given this understanding of Yahweh as light, in midst of the Festival of the Tabernacles where the golden lamps are being light to specifically remind the festival goers that Yahweh had lead the Israelite's in the night through a pillar of fire, Jesus stands up and says "I am the Light of the World ... If you follow me, you will not walk in darkness, but have the light that leads to life". Imagine the impact of His message in that setting.

Now there are three parts of this I AM saying that I want to draw your attention to.

The first is he says, he is "the" light of the world, not a light of the world. What he is implying are that there may be many people who claim to be lights, but there is only one light and that is Jesus Christ. I will preach a whole sermon on this when we come to

John 14:6 But for now, I want to just point out that every I Am saying is an exclusive characteristic of Jesus and a deeper revelation of the I AM, God Himself. And today we are looking specifically at Jesus being “**the** Light of the **whole** world”.

The next part of this revelation is a promise. Jesus' promise to the whole world is, “If you follow me, you will not walk in darkness, but have the light that leads to life.” Note this is a conditional promise. This light is for everyone, but it does not reach everyone automatically like when you turn the lights on in this room. The light of Jesus Christ is more like the light that came from the pillar of fire in the wilderness. If you want that light, you have to follow that light wherever it goes. If the Israelites decided there were fed up of following that light around and decided one night to go where they wanted to go, they were free to do it. But they would not have the light from the pillar of fire. And they would end up somewhere but it would not be in the promised land I can tell you. Christ's light is for everyone but you only receive His light if you follow Him because these were His words, “Follow me and then you will not walk in darkness, but have the light that leads to life”.

So the third thing I want to draw your attention to is the promise itself. What does it mean that you will get the light that leads to life. We understand how it works in the physical world right. Light falls on plants and it causes them to grow. If you want things to not grow, you don't need to weed or spray deadly chemicals. A simple black fabric that cuts off light is all it takes. Cover up the ground and nothing will grow. But Christ is not talking about physical light here. He is talking about spiritual things here. So how does Jesus' light work? You see, what He is saying is that when you walk with Jesus He helps you see truth. He is answering the prayer of the Psalmist in Ps 119:125, “I am your servant; give me discernment that I may understand your statutes”. 2 Timothy 3:15 says, “and how ^afrom childhood you have been acquainted with ^bthe sacred writings, ^cwhich are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.” The light of Christ brings truth and capacity to see right and wrong. And that capacity

helps us get on the right path that leads to Salvation. That is where Christ wants to lead us. You see when we base our thinking on reality and not fiction or deception, you can see clearly where all the pits and traps are. And with the light of Christ, you can also see the path through all those traps going right to eternal salvation. That is what Jesus means when he says, “I AM the light of the world. If you follow me, you will not walk in darkness but have light that leads to life”.

So the question is, what effect does this powerful message and promise have on his hearers? The Pharisees of course straight away dismiss the claims in the span of one verse. In verse 13 you get an example of what not following looks like. The Pharisees say, “you are making claims about yourself and such testimony is not valid”. Jesus says. Yes, if a human being makes claims about themselves it won't stand in a court of law. But remember not too far back in John 5 you will see that after Jesus had revealed his identity as the son of God, we had explained that there are 4 witnesses to him. Do you remember who they are? They are John the Baptist, then Jesus' teachings, Jesus' miracles, both coming straight from His Father and finally the testimony of Scripture. So Jesus had already explained all this to the Pharisees. But did it look like the Pharisees did their homework and study these 4 witnesses' before shooting their mouth? Not really. So what does Jesus do?

Does he go back and repeat what he had said in chapter 5. Not really, because Jesus knows that it is no use. So Jesus says, let's operate on your level. And he says, sure for a regular human being, one person's self declaration will not hold up in court. But by their own standards what will hold up in court is the testimony of two witnesses. So you want two witnesses, I can give you two witnesses, my Father and myself. There you go. Now Jesus knows that this is not going to prove anything to them because if they can't relate to Him, how are they going to know anything about the Father because the Father is actually revealed only through Jesus Christ himself. The way it was supposed to work was that if you care about Jesus you would pay careful attention to His teachings and

His miracles. And because both of these come from the Father you would get a sense of the Father's heart. If you don't care about Jesus, how can you know anything about the Father. So what will it mean to you if you are told that there are two witnesses, Jesus and the Father. So you see how even within this passage you can see the light becoming more distant when you walk away from Jesus?

I want to also touch upon another thing the Pharisees were doing in response to Jesus' revelation as the Light of the World. You will notice that in response to Jesus' promise, intend of following Him they actually start judging Him. And what Jesus tells them is this. These chaps are judging him by human standards, which itself is a mistake. Because unlike every other human being, Jesus has both the authority and capacity to make perfectly accurate self declarations. But even if they were to judge by human standards, their judgment of Jesus' declarations have no merit. Because Jesus is true in his identity. And if Jesus were to do the judging it would not be him doing it alone but it would be Him and His Heavenly Father. However Jesus does not judge because judging was not part of his earthly mission. We know from John 3 that Jesus earthly mission was to save and not to judge. On the other hand, when the Pharisees behavior is seen through the spiritual light that comes from Jesus. Their judging of Jesus exposes them and their complete spiritual deadness and total inability to discern anything that is God related. Which is a big shame because they were the God experts of the Jewish people. What a sad and sorry plight!

There is a verse right in the introduction of the book of John that hinted at this very story. John 1:9 said this. "The one who is the true light, who gives light to everyone was coming into the world... He came into the very world he created, but the world did not recognize him". In today's passage we saw exactly how this works. Jesus is the true light, but Jesus' light is only given to those who follow him, like the Israelite's did in their wandering phase. But many people instead of following him, respond to Jesus like the pharisees did, and judge Jesus. The problem is this, when you judge someone, you are

placing yourselves in a place of superiority over them. So think about this. Remember Jesus said there are 4 witnesses to him, John the Baptist, his teachings and miracles and finally scriptures? So if you judge Jesus, you are not only placing yourself above Jesus, which is bad enough, but you are placing yourself above John the Baptist, Jesus' teachings, Jesus' miracles and Holy Scripture. You are placing yourself above all four witnesses. This is spiritual darkness my friends. And this world is arrogant enough to place itself as judge over Jesus' Christ and all four of 4 witnesses.

And while it is a terrible thing that those people out there do, we can say, none of us in this room would place ourselves over Jesus. Well, Ok. We may not do that. But friends I don't want us to be complacent. Because it does not take long for God's people to fall back from following the light. There are many lights out there to follow. In fact there is so much unwanted light out there that scientists had to invent a new phrase to describe it. It is called light pollution. And this light pollution blinds us from seeing the true light. And human being look around at all the lights thinking that they have the capacity to judge which light to follow. Most of the time they choose the wrong light and it leads to nothing but death.

So where are we my friends in this journey? Are we blinded by all the lights out there or are we homed in on the light of Jesus Christ? And if we know the light of Jesus Christ, the bigger question is, are we following His light or are we hanging back allowing his light to fade in the distance while we take detours following over lights thinking that we will come back to Jesus later. My prayer friends is you will be filled like the Psalmist prayed for with such a strong sense of discernment that no matter how bright these other light may shine around us, that we will not be distracted but we will recognize clearly the light of Christ and not only that, but that we will make it our lives work, to follow His light all the way to eternity. Let us pray.