

The following is a rough transcript, not in its final form and may be updated.

The Light Is Shining John 8:12

Intro: It's not by accident that this claim of Jesus to be the Light of the world appears immediately after the story of the woman taken in adultery. That story may not have been in the original Gospel as John wrote it but few can doubt that the place where it was finally installed was well chosen. The story follows close on the heels of the complete failure of the religious rulers original plan to have Jesus arrested in ch7 and naturally leads right into the Lord's statement about being the Light of the world. The story of the woman and her accusers does a great job of revealing the dark, horrible nature of sin; more than anything yet recorded in John's Gospel and provides a stark contrast for the purity and brightness of Jesus Christ to shine forth in a greater way.

After the disgusting display of human nature in the previous verses, it's comforting and altogether appropriate to hear Jesus declare, "I am the light of the world. He who follows me shall not walk in darkness, but have the light of life." This is the 2nd of 7 great "I am" statements that are made by Jesus in this Gospel. The 1st was in 6:35 when He said, "I am the bread of life" and there are 5 more to come; they are a unique feature of this book. The "I am" in each of these statements is emphatic; it is the very style of deity and Jesus uses it exactly in this context on purpose.

There's been a good deal of speculation among theologians concerning the origin of the expression "the light of the world" but Jesus already has been described as light in John's Prologue. In 1:4 he wrote, "In Him was life, and the life was the light of men." He mentions the light 6 times in this section. Later, John says, "And this is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light because their deeds were evil" (3:19). In this context, John mentions light 5 times in reference to Jesus. In each case, the image is only in John's words. But, why does John refer so much to Jesus as light? Where did he get this imagery? How did he develop this idea? John refers to Jesus as light because Jesus referred to Himself as the light and John remembered it and developed the images even further, both in this Gospel and in his 1st Epistle.

So, we know where John got this reference but what is Jesus actually comparing Himself to here? There's no doubt that this statement is extremely important but in order to understand the full importance of what Jesus is claiming here, we must also understand with a certain degree of confidence what Jesus is actually referring to. This is even more important because the connection He is making is not one we would naturally think about. When any reference is made to "the light of the world," most people would naturally think of *the sun*. In fact, the OT even uses this same imagery when the prophet Malachi refers to the coming of the Messiah as "the Sun of righteousness" rising "with healing in His wings" ([Mal 4:2](#)). This is not a bad thing to do; you can even find valid applications from it, but this is not the image that Jesus is using here in our text.

To correctly understand what Jesus is referring to in this text, we need to remember when these words were spoken and discover where they were spoken. The where is pretty easy, just drop down to [vs20](#). Jesus was in the middle of teaching in the temple when those scoundrels brought the woman to Him for judgment. After He effectively turned their accusations back on themselves and sent them packing, Jesus simply continued teaching. The when is even more telling: these words were spoken just a day or 2 after the Feast of Tabernacles in the courtyard of the temple area where all the ceremonies that were part of this feast had been conducted.

We've already looked at one of these ceremonies. Each morning of the 8 day feast the temple priests would march to the pool of Siloam and draw out water in golden pitchers. When they returned to the temple area, they would pour out this water on the altar of sacrifice. As they did this the worshippers would sing or chant passages from the OT like [Isa 12:3](#): "Therefore with joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation." Also [Ps 114:7-8](#): "Tremble, O earth, at the presence of the Lord, at the presence of the God of Jacob, who turned the rock into a pool of water, the flint into a fountain of water." The use of [Ps 114](#) shows that this ceremony was primarily a remembrance of God's provision of water for the people of Israel during the years of their wilderness wandering, though it also pointed forward to the spiritual water that men would draw from God in the day of God's future visitation. It was most likely at the high point of this ceremony that Jesus cried out and said, "If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink. He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water" ([7:37-38](#)).

The 2nd ceremony was similar. On the 1st night of the feast, after the sun had gone down, two great lamps were lit in the court of women in the temple. It's said the lamps cast their light over every quarter of the city. The purpose of the lamps was to recall the pillar of cloud and fire that accompanied Israel all through their wilderness wanderings. This was the cloud that appeared on the day when Israel left Egypt and stood between them and the pursuing army of Pharaoh the night before they crossed the Red Sea. It kept the Jewish people from being attacked. Later it guided them through the wilderness. It also spread out over them to give shade by day and light and warmth by night. This is clearly the reference being made in the ceremony of lighting the lamps and thus, Jesus must also be referring to this same miraculous cloud when He claimed to be this world's light.

This conclusion is further supported by the fact that, in 3 successive chapters, John's given us 3 striking wilderness images in regards to the person and work of Jesus Christ. In [ch6](#), Jesus is the new manna sent down from heaven. In [ch7](#), He is the water miraculously provided from the rock. In [ch8](#), He is the pillar of cloud and fire. In going verse by verse as we do, we don't always notice the large scale movements of the book. I find this one very interesting. The annual feasts were important to the Jews; they enjoyed the observance of them and all their symbolisms. What they failed to realize at the time was that not only did the symbolism of the feasts point back to spiritual realities in their nations past, but those past realities actually pointed forward to their long awaited Messiah. Thus, it's important for Christians to see just how Jesus Christ fulfills all the spiritual truths that these feasts pointed to.

Now, let's consider the cloud and its functions so as to gather the full meaning of Jesus' statement here in [vs12](#).

Why was the cloud important? It symbolized God's presence with Israel. This would be obvious from the fact that the cloud gave off light. In an age that didn't have an abundance of artificial light, a supernatural light would always suggest God's presence. Plus, the cloud was so huge and so striking that it would imply a theophany in itself.

We see this in some of the texts that reference this unique phenomenon. The 1st reference to the cloud in the OT clearly identifies the presence of the

Lord with it ([Ex 13:21-22](#)). Other passages say that God spoke from the cloud and that He sometimes broke out from it in judgment on the sins of the people. In one passage, the cloud is even addressed as God, for God is said to have raised Himself up when the cloud rose and to have descended when the cloud descended ([Num 10:35-36](#)). At no time in their wandering was Israel able to forget that the presence of God went with them and overshadowed them in everything they did.

Apply this now to the claim of the Lord Jesus Christ. The cloud of God's glory had departed from Israel many years before this. It had once filled the Holy of Holies of the very temple that Jesus was standing in front of. Now the Holy Place was empty, and even the lamps that commemorated the cloud were extinguished. It was in this context and against this background that Jesus cried, "I am the light of the world. I am the cloud. I am God with you." Here, God was with His people once again. The glory of God was in the temple! Have you found God's presence in Jesus?

The cloud was also important because it was the primarily how God protected His people. Without it, Israel would have died off long before they ever arrived at the Promised Land, let alone entered it. They would've perished either from human enemies like Pharaoh or from the natural dangers inherent in the wilderness itself.

Remember, when Israel left Egypt, there were likely about 2 million of them. The Bible says that there were 600,000 men, but, wives and children must be added to that number. This massive gaggle of people would have been impossible to provide for in the best of environments and they were being led out into a desert that is one of the most inhospitable regions on earth. In daytime the temperatures can easily reach 140 or 150 degrees, and at night it can fall below freezing. To survive in such a desolate place the vast host of Israel needed water (lots of it) and shelter from the sun. God provided water from the rock, which Moses was instructed to smite with his rod, but where would they find a canopy large enough to cover 2 million people? That shelter was also provided by God by way of the cloud, which spread out over the camp of Israel to give them protection from the sun's burning rays. Without this special and miraculous provision the people would surely have not survived very long. In the exact same way, Jesus Christ is a protector for all who come to Him in faith and follow Him.

The cloud was also important because it was mainly how God guided Israel through the desert. There were few, if any, landmarks in the desert, and the Israelites wouldn't have recognized any of them if they had been there. All of them had been born and raised in bondage in Egypt and none of them had ever left there except Moses. Besides, desert heat produces mirages, distorts distances, and makes most terrains indistinguishable. How were the people to find their way? How were they to avoid wandering into hostile territory or worse: wander around in circles? The solution God provided was the cloud. When the cloud moved Israel was supposed to move; in fact, they had to move, because if they didn't, they would soon have died from the heat of the desert by day or from the cold at night. When the cloud remained in one place, they remained (Num 9:17-23).

You know where I'm going with this, right? Can you see how perfectly this applies to Jesus' statement in our text? When Jesus claimed to be the light of the world in clear reference to the pillar of cloud and fire, He was not only claiming that He was God with His people, or that He was the One who protects them; He is also claiming that He's the One who gives guidance. So, when Jesus moves: we move. When He stays in one place, we should too.

Of course, having stated this and in the spirit of full disclosure, it's important to point out that there are 2 errors we are in danger of making in this area. One error is to be overly hasty in following Him; that is, to follow so closely to the moving cloud that we mistake it's moving and end up going in a different direction. This is most commonly the plight of those who are quick to assume that they know what God wants from them and for them. They tend to expend a lot of energy only to find themselves lost in the desert all alone, wandering in circles. We should remember that before Joshua led Israel across the Jordan, he instructed the people to keep a clear space between themselves and the ark of the covenant that was guiding them, so there would be no mistakes about which way to go (Jos 3:3-4). Likewise, it's unwise for us to presume that we know what God's going to do or how He's moving. Our best bet is to humbly seek His will in prayer and wait for clear direction. He will provide it to those who patiently follow Him.

The 2nd error, which is more common in our time, is to be slow to follow His guidance. Often times in this life, God will lead us to a place of peace, rest and comfort. We do ourselves a great disservice if we assume this is a

permanent situation. It never is! Jesus often called His disciples aside for a time of rest but this was only to prepare them for more service; more often than not it was more strenuous service. I'm sure Israel occasionally stumbled upon a nice campsite a time or two and may have been tempted to just stay put. If they had, things would've gotten warm quickly. In our own lives, it doesn't take very much to go from being in a resort to being at your last resort. We must always remember that the only place of true blessing is under the shadow of God's presence.

Spiritual light is not a natural human possession. It can only come from Jesus Christ. Jesus is the light – to have light is to have Jesus. Only those who follow Jesus are delivered from the darkness and enjoy the blessings of the light. We must also point out that the word follows is in the present participle tense, which implies a continual following. Jesus is referring to a wholehearted discipleship, not just a casual adherence to Jesus as most western Christians seem to be satisfied with.

So many Christians today are severely malnourished in a spiritual sense. They wander around in circles, in a dry and desert land, chasing after emotionalism or entertainment or the next “big thing”, thinking they are serving the Lord. But, they have yet to worship the Father in spirit and in truth because they haven't learned the necessity of it. They haven't learned that this is the only kind of worship the Father will accept. So they spin their spiritual wheels year after year and never realize that they're no better off for it. They simply accept the marginal Christian life as normal when God never intended it to even be an option, let alone a constant reality. Jesus didn't die so we could play church. He died so that we might have life and that we might have it more abundantly!

What does that life look like? It is a life that is characterized by God's presence, God's protection, God's provision – each of these blessings can only be found in Jesus. Not just in knowing about Him or even knowing Him but they are found and obtained only by following Him. Do these things currently characterize your life? Can you point to God's presence in your everyday life? Do you recognize His constant protection? Do you regularly experience His divine provision in your life? Not just financially or emotionally but; are you properly tuned into His spiritual guidance, do you regularly receive spiritual strength do accomplish His revealed will?

These are the things Jesus can provide, what He desires to provide for all those who follow Him. If these things are a rarity in your life, you should take a serious look at how committed you are to following Him. 😊