

March 14/15, 2020

The Light of the World
These Things are Written that You May Believe Series
John 8:12-30
Pastor Bryan Clark

So, on any given day, there's evidence in our culture—maybe you'd think of it as a consequence of kicking God to the curb—of those making the decision, “We've got this.” “I want to be my own god. I want to run my own show. I want to live my own life on my terms.” So there's consequences to that, and you see them every day in our culture. But there are occasions when the evidence or the consequences of that choice are abundantly clear. This has certainly been one of those weeks around the world. We were so sure we could be our own god. “We've got this,” but then suddenly we are panicked by a virus. Suddenly we realize we're not in control. We're not in charge. What do you know? We don't have this, and you see so much fear and so much panic.

But that certainly shouldn't be true of the people of God, should it? God's got this. It's not frightening; it's not terrifying. It's not out of control. God is still on His throne. We trust Him. Jesus, in the Sermon on the Mount said, “*Don't worry about tomorrow. Tomorrow isn't here yet. Just make sure you live today well.*” So we trust God. Think of it this way:

Is it possible that some of us listening today will get the virus? Probably. Is it possible that some may even die? It's unlikely, but possible, statistically. But here's something to think about. Every weekend when we meet, there are people walking through these doors, trusting God. And for them, it's not theory about something that might happen. They're actually dying of cancer. They're actually dying of heart disease. They're actually struggling with ALS and other diseases, where it's not theory. It's a reality that life is hard. There are diseases in this world. It's a fallen, sin-cursed world. The last couple of months there have been so many tragedies within families in our church. And I see them every weekend, and they're sitting in these seats, and they're courageously trusting God. This is not a theory of something that might happen. They've experienced devastating loss. But they're courageous, and they trust God. And it's a reminder that this isn't heaven. It's not supposed to be. The hope of the gospel is not that everything in this life is going to work out. There's sickness; there's disease; there's death. The last time I read the Book, nobody gets out of this alive. There's just a reality to that, that the hope of the gospel is in the world to come—the new heaven and the new earth. If that's true, then we should live like it. God is on His throne. Everything is under control; it's going to be fine. Even if I die, I live, because Jesus lives!

I know this church well enough to know we are not going to be hiding under our beds, hoarding toilet paper, and waiting for the storm to pass. That's just not us. This is an opportunity. It's an opportunity to love your neighbor. It's an opportunity to serve the community. It's an opportunity to figure out what we can do to help. Maybe more than anything else, we can just help calm the fears at work, at school, in our neighborhoods. People need to be reminded it's going to be okay. God is still in charge. But it's also true that every single one of us suffers from a sickness far more devastating than a virus. And if we don't get this particular sickness dealt with, it will affect us forever. That's what we want to talk about.

If you have a Bible, turn with us to the Gospel of John, Chapter 8. If you're new with us, we've been working our way through the Gospel of John—last week chapter 8, verses 1 through 11. I mentioned

that there's a lot of discussion as to whether or not that particular section of the book belongs where it is in the Gospel of John, or perhaps in another Gospel, or perhaps not at all. So, if we take it right where it's at—and that may be the case—then what happened with the woman caught in adultery, happened early in the morning. This is likely, just simply later on in the day. If that particular section doesn't belong there—it's possible this is part of the discourse that's recorded in chapter seven, just the ongoing conversation—but either way, it doesn't really affect the meaning of the text at all.

But just before we read the opening words, I want to give some backdrop to Jesus' comments. I mentioned a couple of weeks ago that this discourse is happening during the Feast of Tabernacles, and Josephus and others record that this was the most significant, the most attended feast of all the major feasts in Jerusalem. One of the features was a procession that had to do with water. It commemorated when Moses struck the rock and the water flowed out of the rock. There was a procession of thousands strong that went down to the pool of Siloam. A priest filled up a pitcher, brought it back, and there was singing and there was dancing. There was the blowing of the shofar, and the water was poured over the altar in the courtyard of the temple.

There was also a significant celebration not just around water, but around light. We've talked about this before, but the idea of light and darkness were powerful images in an ancient culture. It's hard for us to understand that when we have so much artificial lighting. But in an ancient culture, you lived in the light, and once it got dark, you didn't really do much except go home and go to bed. So it was a vivid imagery. During the Feast of Tabernacles, commemorating the pillar of fire by night, when the nation was wandering in the wilderness, they had four massive lampstands that sat in what's called the court of the women that were lit each night. These were massive lampstands! As a matter of fact, we were trying to figure out how to give some sort of perspective to that, and the best I can do is tell you they would not have fit in this auditorium. They're too tall to even fit in here. There were four of them, and they had massive bowls that they filled with oil. The priests had an undergarment they wore and, as that undergarment wore out, they actually contributed those which were used as wicks to sit in the oil to light. So each lampstand had four massive bowls, and there were four lampstands—so sixteen of these bowls. Historians tell us the light not only completely lit the temple area, but all of Jerusalem. So you think about the yellow stone of Jerusalem glowing by the fire of these massive lampstands. The only time this occurred was during the Feast of Tabernacles. They were lit every evening, so you again can see why Josephus and others said that this was the most magnificent, the most celebrated of the feasts. So the light would shine all over Jerusalem. There were choirs singing; there were people carrying torches in the street. There were people dancing in the streets. It would have just been a magnificent scene! So this is somewhere around the last day or a couple of days after the feast when Jesus utters the words in verse 12:

Then Jesus again spoke to them, saying, “I am the Light of the world; he who follows Me will not walk in the darkness, but will have the Light of life.” (*NASB, John 8:12)

It's likely the feast has just ended. There was no light, and Jesus steps up and identifies Himself as the Light. Jesus has also said, “I am the Bread.” He identified, “I am the Water.” Now He identifies, “**I am the Light.**” What do you do with the Light? You follow the Light, and in the Light you live. This imagery would have been powerful to them. There's been a lot of discussion in the Gospel of John related to the concept of light. When I go back to chapter one, starting in verse four, John says,

In Him was life, and the life was the Light of men. The Light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it. There came a man sent from God, whose name was John. He came as a witness, to testify about the Light, so that all might

believe through him. He was not the Light, but he came to testify about the Light. There was the true Light which, coming into the world, enlightens every man. He was in the world, and the world was made through Him, and the world did not know Him. He came to His own, and those who were His own did not receive Him. But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, *even* to those who believe in his name. (John 1:4-12)

Jesus picks up this light theme then in John chapter three, starting in verse 19:

“This is the judgment, that the Light has come into the world, and men loved the darkness rather than the Light, (Why?) for their deeds are evil. For everyone who does evil hates the Light, and does not come to the Light for fear that his deeds will be exposed. But he who practices the truth comes to the Light, so that his deeds may be manifested as having been wrought in God.” (John 3:19-21)

So when Jesus stood and said, **“I am the Light of the world; he who follows Me will not walk in darkness but will have the Light of life,”** raises the question. “Then why wouldn’t everyone follow the Light? Answer: Because light exposes our rats; it exposes our cockroaches; it exposes our sin. People like religion because you can go do your religious thing and remain hidden in the darkness. But Jesus exposes our sin and people don’t like that. So Jesus identifies that those who want to live, follow the Light. Those who want to hide their sin, remain in darkness. So chapter eight, verse 13:

So the Pharisees said to Him, “You are testifying about Yourself; Your testimony is not true.”

We’ve seen this before in the Gospel of John. The law said that you had to have at least two witnesses to testify when it says, **“not true,”** meaning *not valid*. So Jesus talked to these same religious leaders about that when He said, “Right, I’ll provide five witnesses.” So He talked about John the Baptist. He talked about His miracles. He talked about the Father. He talked about the Scripture. He talked about Moses. These were His witnesses that validated His claim to be the Savior of the world. The conversation in chapter eight is going to be a little different than that. Verse 14:

Jesus answered and said to them, “Even if I testify about Myself, My testimony is true (meaning valid), for I know where I came from and where I am going; but you do not know where I come from and where I’m going. You judge according to the flesh;

(Vs. 14-15a)

Jesus is saying here that, “Just because I don’t have multiple witnesses, doesn’t mean My testimony is not true.” What we learned about Jesus is that Jesus, in chapter one, the first three verses, is *the eternal Son of God, the Creator of the universe*. So just think about that. Who exactly is going to witness that? What human is going to say, “Yeah, I saw that.” It’s not possible. It doesn’t mean it isn’t valid. It doesn’t mean it isn’t true. So part of what Jesus is saying is that you can’t take human measurements to measure God. He said, *“I know who I am. I know where I came from. I know where I’m going. Just because you don’t have a human measurement to validate all of that doesn’t mean it isn’t true.”*

This is a huge problem in our culture. There are people that think if you can’t validate it scientifically, it can’t be true. But when you think of the claims of God, “How exactly are you going to validate that? Who are going to be the witnesses?” There are actually things we believe and take for granted every

day in life that cannot be proved or validated through science. So this is what Jesus is saying. “I know who I am. I know what I did. I know where I come from. Just because you can't find a human to witness to that doesn't mean it isn't true.” In verse 15, when he says **you judge according to the flesh**, he just means, “You judge with human measurements that aren't going to be adequate for God.”

Jesus then says at the end of verse 15, **“I am not judging anyone.”**

It's a very interesting statement. The Pharisees and the Scribes are constantly judging. That's what religion does. That's what legalism does. It's constantly judging and measuring people to see if they measure up. Religion judges. Religion condemns. Jesus forgives. Jesus grants grace and mercy. Just imagine if Jesus' purpose as God in the flesh was to judge every sinner He saw along the way, it would have been constant lectures and condemnation and finger pointing, because He lived among sinners all day, every day. What Jesus is saying is, “That's not why I came. I came to seek and to save the lost. I came to be the Savior of the world. That's why sinners and tax collectors and prostitutes gathered around Jesus—because He was full of grace and mercy and forgiveness. They were exhausted at the condemnation of religion, but they found in Jesus forgiveness and grace and mercy. That's what Jesus is saying. Verse 16:

But even if I do judge, My judgment is true; for I am not alone *in it*, but I and the Father who sent Me. Even in your law it has been written that the testimony of two men is true. I am He who testifies about Myself, and the Father who sent Me testifies about Me.” So they were saying to Him, “Where is Your Father?” (Vs. 16-19a)

So Jesus goes on and says, “If I was judging, My judgment would be valid; it would be true. I have two witnesses. I'm one witness, and the Father is the other witness, and everything I do is in perfect alignment with the Father. Now it's worth stopping and thinking about this for a minute. The Scribes and the Pharisees are the experts in the law, and they are making accusations that Jesus is breaking the law. As a matter of fact, they've already issued an arrest warrant for Jesus because He's breaking the law. We learned last week that when Jesus wrote on the ground with His finger, it was a reminder that Jesus is the Author of the Law. How did Moses get the Law? God gave it to him. With His finger, He wrote it on tablets of stone. This is the same God. Jesus is saying, “That was Me. I wrote it.” So why do they think they're experts in the law and Jesus is violating the law? What Jesus is saying is, “God's the giver of the Law and everything I do is in perfect alignment with the Father.” Jesus isn't breaking the Law. He's come to fulfill the Law, to fulfill all the images of the Old Testament system, to be the Savior of the world. In verse 19 they're still confused trying to figure out, “What are you talking about?” By this time, most scholars think Joseph, Mary's husband, was deceased. So they're trying to figure out, “What father are You talking about, and where is he?”

Jesus answered, “You know neither Me nor My Father; if you knew Me, you would know my Father also.” (Vs. 19b)

Now, we've had this several times, but I think it's worth mentioning every time it comes up. These are highly religious people. These are the Scribes and the Pharisees. They are experts in the law. We tend to see them today as self-righteous hypocrites, but a first century Jew did not view them that way. They viewed them as the best-of-the-best. If anybody had a chance with God, it was the Scribes and the Pharisees. It's probably fair to say that these were some of the most religious people on planet earth in the first century. And what Jesus just said to them is, “You don't know God. You don't know Me, and you don't know the Father. If you knew Me, you would know My Father.”

There is this belief that religion always gets us to God. If it's religious, then it connects us to God. But the consistent message in the Gospel of John has been, "Religion is not the way to God; it becomes the barrier to God. If my religion can make me self-righteous, I don't need Jesus." So again Jesus is saying to them, "Your problem is you don't know God. For all your religion, you don't know the Father, and you don't know Me." Verse 20:

These words He spoke in the treasury, as He taught in the temple; and no one seized Him, because His hour had not yet come.

So the **treasury** was just an area alongside of the women's court, which was a large court area where the teaching was often done. That also confirms that Jesus is teaching in the very area where the massive lampstands would have been. Verse 21:

Then He said again to them, "I go away, and you will seek Me, and will die in your sin; where I am going, you cannot come." So the Jews were saying, "Surely He will not kill Himself, will He, since He says, 'Where I am going, you cannot come'?" (Vs. 21-22)

So we had this in chapter seven. Jesus said, "I'm going away, and you won't be able to find Me." And the religious leaders speculated, "What does He mean? He's probably going to the Gentiles, and they won't follow Him there because it will defile them." So here again, they're hearing Jesus say these words. They're hearing, in Jesus' words, some sort of hint of death, which is true. He's talking about going to the cross, but they're trying to figure out, "Is He talking about killing himself? Is that what he means?"

But look at what Jesus said in verse 21 when He said, "**I go away, and you will seek Me.**" Lots of discussion about, "What exactly does that mean?" So, it's talking about Jesus' death, burial, resurrection, and ascension. So are they actually still looking for Jesus? Are they trying to find Him? That's highly unlikely. It's more likely what Jesus is saying is, "You don't understand that I am the long-awaited Messiah. I am the Savior of the world. I'm the fulfillment of the old covenant. This is what everybody's been waiting for. But because you don't get it, because you don't understand the law, what's going to happen is after I leave and ascend to the Father, you're going to still keep looking for a Messiah. You're going to keep looking for a Savior; you're going to keep seeking Me." That's what he means by **Me**. You're going to keep waiting for the fulfillment, even though He's come and gone. You have highly religious Jews today; they're still waiting for the Messiah. It's a reminder, that's what Jesus was saying. He's standing right in front of them. He's talking to them. But they are so confused, that after He leaves, they're going to keep looking for the Savior, even though the Savior has come. And he says, "**And you will die in your sin.**" No, it's not sins plural; it's sin, singular. What Jesus is saying is, "Your great sin is your unbelief—your unwillingness to believe that I am the fulfillment of the promise, that I come as the Savior of the world." Every person that will end up lost forever is not because anyone sinned too much. There is no such thing as anyone who sinned too much. It will be because of the one great sin of unbelief, an unwillingness to believe that Jesus died and rose again and offered salvation as a gift. The unwillingness to believe leaves people with no way to deal with their sin problem. They will die in their sins because of this great sin. Verse 23:

And He was saying to them, "You are from below, I am from above; you are of this world, I am not of this world. Therefore I said to you that you will die in your sins; (This time it is plural.) for unless you believe that I am *He*, you will die in your sins."

(Vs. 23-24)

So, essentially Jesus' argument is, “*If you die in this sin of unbelief, then there's no way to be forgiven of the rest of your sins. Therefore, you will die in your sins if you do not believe.*” One of the things I love about verse 24 is Jesus is clearly saying, “If you choose to believe, your sins are forgiven. You're no longer guilty of the sin of unbelief, and God's grace and mercy and forgiveness is adequate.” Nobody needs to die in their sins. But if they reject Jesus, there's no other way. Verse 25.

So they were saying to Him, “Who are You?” (Now they were not saying it like, “Who are you? You're just so amazing!” They were saying it like, “Who do you think you are, talking to us like this? That's what they meant.) **So Jesus said to them, “What have I been saying to you *from the beginning*? I have many things to speak and to judge concerning you, but He who sent Me is true; and the things which I heard from Him, these I speak to the world.”** (Vs. 25-26)

Now Jesus has said this multiple times recorded in the Gospel of John. It is not so unusual in our culture that people will say something to the effect. “If God is real, why doesn't He just come to earth, manifest Himself and tell us the truth?” People have different ways of saying it, but that's ultimately what they're saying. What Jesus has said over and over again is, “That's what I did. I'm from heaven. I live there. Just because you don't have eye-witnesses doesn't mean it isn't true.” God took on human flesh in order to become the Savior of the world, and over and over and over again, He keeps telling them, “This is the way. This is the only way to the Father. This is the only way to have forgiveness of sin. This is what God says.” But they just won't believe it.

We've identified two primary reasons why people won't believe it. Now think about this. The God of the universe actually took on flesh to walk on this earth and tell people how to be saved, and they won't listen—two reasons! One is because Jesus is Light and light exposes the darkness and people don't like their sins exposed. Jesus told us that they prefer darkness where they can remain hidden. So they don't want the Light. This is why religion is so appealing. People can hide in the darkness and nobody knows. The second reason is because when you have a self-righteous religion, you have no need for a savior. “I don't need help; I can do it myself.” And this has been the conversation Jesus has had with these religious people over and over again. That's what He's saying there. “I keep telling you from the beginning, “This is the message!” Verse 27:

They did not realize that He had been speaking to them about the Father. So Jesus said, “When you lift up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am *He*, (The *He* should be an italics, which tells you it's not actually in the Greek. It reads, then you will know that *I am.*) and I do nothing on My own initiative, but I speak these things as the Father taught Me. And He who sent Me is with Me; He has not left Me alone, for I always do the things that are pleasing to Him.” As He spoke these things, many came to believe in Him. (Vs. 27-30)

So what does it mean in verse 28, “**When you lift up the Son of Man, then you will know that I Am.**”? There's a lot of discussion around that. But pretty much everybody agrees that *lifting up* is a reference to the crucifixion. It's already come up once in the Gospel of John. Now it comes up again. So when the religious leaders crucify Him on a cross, what He's probably referring to is between the darkness, the earthquake, the tearing of the veil, and probably including the resurrection, the evidence will become so overwhelming that this is not just another human, that many of them will come to believe. Historically it is true that many of Jesus' antagonists, of His opponents, of His critics, of these religious leaders were so overwhelmed by the weight of evidence, that after the resurrection, they came to believe. We know those like Nicodemus. We know those like Saul of Tarsus, the great

Apostle Paul. He was a Pharisee; he was one of these. The Book of Acts tells us that many of these Scribes and Pharisees came to believe because the evidence was so overwhelming. That's probably what Jesus is referring to, and he reminds us again that He and the Father are together on this. This is His mission. Jesus' crucifixion on the cross was not because the plan went badly. This was the plan to seek and to save the lost, to give His life as a ransom for many, to be the fulfillment of the images and pictures of the old covenant, to come and sacrifice Himself, the Lamb of God, for the sins of the world. Those who believe, not those that go out and clean up their act, not those that go out and get religious, but those that believe, experience forgiveness and new life in Christ. Those that follow the Light find the life that their souls long for.

This section of John's Gospel reminds us that the greatest concern that any of us should have is not a virus. It's not cancer. It's not heart disease. The greatest sickness, not that we might get, but what we already have, and that is we're all sinners before a holy God. And if we die in our sins, we are separated from God forever. Just imagine if people around the world were as fearful and as concerned about their sin this last week as they have been about a virus, we would call it a revival. The world would be different tomorrow. This is the great sickness that we all have—and Jesus is the great Physician. He offers the forgiveness of sin and new life through His death, burial and resurrection. The great sin is unbelief—“Don't want it, don't need it.” But Jesus offers it freely as a gift to those who choose to believe. The promise is not just forgiveness of sin. Now the promise is that we will be with Jesus forever in Paradise in the New Heaven—and that is the hope of the gospel. If I die tomorrow, my future is glorious. We have nothing to fear; we have nothing to be terrified about. Understanding our future gives us the confidence and the hope we need to live every day on mission—to accomplish God's purpose in the world!

Our Father, we're so thankful that You sent Your son to be the Savior of the world. The great sickness today, it's not cancer; it's not heart disease; it's not a virus. It's the sin that separates us from You and condemns us forever. Jesus, remind us again that if we choose not to believe, we will die in our sins and be lost forever. God, give us the faith and the courage to believe You tell the truth, and to find our hope in the Gospel of Jesus, in whose name we pray, Amen.

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The Light of the World

That You May Believe

John 8:12-30

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Opening Discussion

1. Why do you think unbelievers around you don't believe in Jesus as their Savior?
2. What are the primary things people around you worry about? What are the most common fears? How does that compare with how much time people spend addressing their sins?

Bible Study

1. Read John 8:12-20. Review what you know about the use of light in the Feast of Tabernacles as the background to Jesus' comments. See also John 1:1-4, 3:19-21.
2. Consider the conditions of light and darkness in the ancient world. How would life have been lived differently in the light rather than in the darkness? How would you view the images of light and darkness in our culture today?
3. People often claim if God just came to earth and made Himself known they'd believe. Do you think that's true? Why or why not?
4. Review the 5 witness Jesus presented in John chapter 5. He's asking them to believe but it's not a blind faith. How has Jesus validated His claim to be God in the flesh?
5. Read John 8:21-30. What does Jesus tell these highly religious leaders? What does this tell us about the ability of religion to save us?
6. The Pharisees are accusing Jesus of breaking God's law. Jesus is saying that He fulfills the will of the Father perfectly all the time. What does this tell us about the religious leaders understanding of the law and how does this relate to Jesus writing or drawing with His finger in John 8:1-11?

