

Text: John 8:12-20

Title: "Believe because Jesus is the light of the world"

Time: 11/17/2024 am

Place: NBBC

Introduction: It was Indiana's *Fort Wayne Daily* newspaper that on September 6, 1912 first referred to New York City as "the city that never sleeps." The nickname was popularized by Frank Sinatra's anthem, "New York, New York," with the lines, "I want to wake up in a city that doesn't sleep and find I'm king of the hill, top of the heap."

Although it never bore this title, for seven days in late September and early October, Jerusalem became a city that never slept during the Feast of Tabernacles. It did so in anticipation of Israel's king, whom the Old Testament prophesied would one day be the King of the hill, the true "top of the heap."

Long before the electricity that powers the bright nights of New York, Jerusalem shown brilliantly around the clock because on the first day of the Feast, four huge golden candelabras were lit, which illuminated all the neighborhoods of Jerusalem for those special days.

Jesus was there. We have seen that earlier on that last great day of the Feast, He captured the symbolism of the out-pouring of water by crying out above the noise of the worshippers, "If any man thirst, let him come to me and drink" (7:37). And now from the treasury in the court of the women, as the candelabra are lit on that final night, He calls out again, "I am the light of the world" (8:12).

Once again, it is the purpose of the Apostle John to write so that we might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of

God, and believing have life in His name. Our verses this morning tell us that we must believe that Jesus is the Christ because He is the light of the world.

Many Old Testament passage prophesied that the coming Messiah would be the light of the world. We read one such passage this morning in Zechariah 14 (“And there shall be a unique day, which is known to the Lord, neither day nor night, but at evening time there shall be light,” v. 7). That day of this coming light would be a day in which the whole world worships the King, the Lord of hosts, while observing the Feast of Tabernacles (v. 16, “And it shall come to pass, that every one that is left of all the nations which came against Jerusalem shall even go up from year to year to worship the King, the Lord of hosts, and to keep the feast of tabernacles”).

Other passages could be added, like Isaiah 60:1-3, “Arise, shine; for thy light is come, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee. For, behold, the darkness shall cover the earth, and gross darkness the people: but the Lord shall arise upon thee, and his glory shall be seen upon thee. And the Gentiles shall come to thy light, and kings to the brightness of thy rising.” The passage goes on to describe a world-wide Feast of Tabernacles, the promise to which those celebrating at this Feast in A.D. 30 looked with hope. When Jesus cried out “I am the light of the world,” He claimed to be Israel’s hope. Notice three things with me about this cry.

I. The light of the world claims to give the light of life who those who follow Him (v. 12).

Illustration: God required that the first day of the Feast of Tabernacles happen on the 15th of the seventh month of the Jewish calendar, the month Tishri (our late September, early

October). The dedication of Solomon's original temple, when the Shekinah glory descended on the temple such that the priests were unable to continue the Feast ceremonies, happened in this month (2 Chron. 5:3). According to the traditions held in Jesus's day, it was also believed that the Lord's pillar of cloud by day and pillar of fire by night first began to lead the people of God on the 15th of Tishri in the days of Moses.

Application: With all of this symbolism in the minds of His hearers, Jesus cries out, "I am the light of the world; he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life" (v. 12). The *I am* of this cry is another echo of the *I am* of God's self-identification at the burning bush where Moses asked the Lord His name. The Lord called Himself, "I am that I am" (Exod. 3:14). Here Jesus says "I am the light of the world." He is the God of the bush.

And this claim of the light of the world not only tells us who He is, but also what we must do in response. Like Israel had to follow the pillar of cloud by day and fire by night through the wilderness as they lived in tabernacles, these worshippers at the Feast of Tabernacles must follow Him to not walk in darkness and to have the light of life.

Illustration: Through the scientific wonder of photosynthesis, sunlight gives life to all living things on our planet. Plants capture energy from sunlight to produce oxygen and energy stored as glucose. Herbivores ingest this energy when they eat plants, and carnivores ingest it when they eat herbivores. Sunlight not only allows us to see better during the daytime, but also it gives us the energy to live.

Application: Following Jesus gives us this same kind of energy to live spiritually. What sunlight does for our bodies,

Jesus, the light of the world, does for our spirits. His life is offered to us to have as our possession (v. 12b, *he shall have*). What makes it possible for us to walk in the light, to follow the light of the world, and to possess the energy to live the life He gives?

The Day of Atonement provides an answer. It was celebrated five days prior to the Feast of Tabernacles, on the 10th of Tishri. The atoning sacrifice of shed blood prepares the way for walking in the light of life. 1 John 5:7 explains the connection explicitly, "If we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin." It is the cleansing of Jesus's blood through His atoning sacrifice on the cross that allows us to follow Him and to live His life.

How have we responded to this cry of the light of the world? Do we stand back and admire the light without ever really intending to follow Him? Do we recognize its brightness but yearn for the darkness of following our own desires and will? If so, we shall not have the energy of the light of life to bless us any more than an Israelite who refused to follow the Lord's pillar could get to the blessings of the Promised Land of Palestine.

The response of the Pharisees was tragically not to follow, to reject the light, to remain in darkness, and so we come to the second thing we must see about the light of the world.

II. The light of the world still shines in the face of unbelief (vv. 13-15).

Illustration: How do you know that the sun is real? We know that the sun is real because it shines on us. It gives off tremendous light that testifies each and every new day, "I am the star that gives light to this world." We do not

disbelieve that claim for a lack of other witnesses. It is the very nature of the sun that testifies convincingly to us that it is the star that gives light to the world every new day.

Application: As the spiritual light of the world, Jesus shines like the sun in that same way. We do not need witnesses more credible than His brightness to believe Him. But it is for this that the Pharisees ask in their desire for proof.

Having never felt the shine of the light of the world warm their hearts of unbelief, the Pharisees object that Jesus's claim to be the light of the world is not valid because His testimony is lacking the corroboration of a second witness (v. 13). Jesus points out that their use of the law in this way was judging according to the flesh (v. 15), meaning it lacked spiritual insight. His own judgment never did.

Their judgment lacked spiritual insight in at least three ways. First, their judgment assumed that Jesus was on trial in their courtroom; second, they saw themselves as presiding over this courtroom as judges and jury; and third, they look for corroborating witnesses according to the rules of their courtroom, which they found in the Old Testament.

But they had all of this completely backwards. In truth, they were in Jesus's courtroom, where He was the judge of them. When He refers to the place He came from and the place He is going to (v. 14), He refers to His glorious pre-incarnate existence and His glorious post-resurrection glorification. Today, He sits at the right hand of the Father, with all authority given to Him in heaven and in earth, waiting for His enemies to be made a footstool for His feet. He is never on trial in our courtroom; we are in His.

So, the meaning of verse 15 is that the Pharisees operated in a merely human courtroom of their own invention, but

Jesus never operated this way because He is not merely human. Have we approached Him in the same way? Have we constructed our own courtroom where we are judge and jury and can make demands of our God? Or do we see that in truth our lives are lived in the courtroom of God 's authority and at His mercy?

Jesus is clear on the matter - "My record is true." We may like to imagine ourselves in the position that the Pharisees imagined for themselves, but if we do we are self-deceived. The light of the world always keeps shining, even in the face of this sinful unbelief.

III. The light of the world shines from the Father (vv. 16-19).

Illustration: When we come to chapter 9, the light of the world is going to heal a man born blind. Jesus is going to spit in the ground, make some clay, rub it on the man's eyes, and tell him to go bathe in the Pool of Siloam, which is the same pool the priests found their water for the Feast of Tabernacles water ceremony. The man went his way, washed, and came back seeing (v. 7).

And just before Jesus does this amazing miracle, He reminds His disciples, "As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world" (John 9:5), tying that miracle to the truth of our passage this morning. The light of the world could make a man born blind see again. That is how argumentation works in the courtroom over which Jesus presides.

Application: But here in our passage, Jesus condescends for the sake of argument to join the Pharisees in the courtroom that they imagined they were in. He willingly places Himself on trial before them according to their rules to show them further how sinful their horrific unbelief truly is.

Unbelief is horrific because even in this context there are two witnesses that these unqualified and corrupt judges have refused to hear. One witness is Jesus Himself, and the other witness is the Father who sent Him. It was allowed in the Jewish courts to have the accused testify in his own defense as one of the two witnesses, so long as there was another witness with him. But still there is a problem.

The problem that persists is expressed by the Pharisees' question, "Where is thy father?" Our KJV has the word *father* capitalized here, but I do not think the Pharisees meant the capitalization. They asked about Jesus's human father, whom they could see was not there in their courtroom. What they meant to imply by their question becomes plain in verse 41 of this chapter, where they will accuse Christ of having been born of fornication. They knew that before Mary and Joseph came together, she was found to be with child (Matt. 1:18). They rejected His virgin birth.

Jesus, of course, refers to His Father with a capital F. His response to their unbelief highlights the fact that they know neither Him nor His Father. Jesus knew who His Father was, and He was a great source of comfort to Him in the face of these false teachers.

The Apostle Paul taught that the same Father is our Father, who will comfort us when we face the enemies of Christ this way: "Wherefore, come out from among them and be ye separate saith the Lord. And touch not the unclean thing, and I will receive you, and will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty" (2 Cor. 6:17-18). He taught us to pray, "Our Father."

For Jesus, it was enough that His Father knew that He was the light of the world. He was determined to shine having

been sent by Him (v. 18b). He will later tell His disciples, "As the Father has sent Me; so send I you" (John 20:21). Jesus also told His disciples, "Ye are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hid" (Matt. 5:14). As we follow Jesus and refuse to walk in darkness, we have the light of life in us. Let's walk in the light, not in darkness. Let's live boldly for truth not putting our light under a bushel basket.

Conclusion: Our final verse contains a promise for those who will do so. It says that Jesus spoke these words in the very public and populated place of the treasury of the temple's Court of Women. We read in chapter 7 that the temple officers refused to seize Him, and that the Pharisees criticized them then for their negligence. And now it is the Pharisees themselves that fail to lay hands on Him, because His hour had not yet come. God decides when our ministry is done. It is His courtroom. As we follow the light of the world, we need not fear what man will do to us. Will you?

"A man came—I think it was actually in Philadelphia—on one occasion to the great George Whitefield and asked if he might print his sermons. Whitefield gave this reply; he said, 'Well, I have no inherent objection, if you like, but you will never be able to put on the printed page the lightning and the thunder.' That is the distinction—the sermon, and the 'lightning and the thunder.' To Whitefield this was of very great importance, and it should be of very great importance to all preachers, as I hope to show. You can put the sermon into print, but not the lightning and the thunder. That comes into the act of preaching and cannot be conveyed by cold print. Indeed it almost baffles the descriptive powers of the best reporters."

—David Martin Lloyd-Jones,

*Preachers and Preaching*