

The Gospel of John

Week 17

I am the Light of the World (8.1-20)

1. Introduction and Review

- All information, study notes and related material can be found on the internet at <http://www.rtrc.net/biblestudy/john/john.htm>
- Course Syllabus
- Weekly Outlines (notebook)
- Discussion Forum: <http://www.rtrc.net/forum/> [go to the forum marked "Bible Studies"]
- Audio files are available on the web site

2. Outline for the next two weeks

- This week: John 8.1-20
- Next week: John 8.21-59

3. Brief Discussion on 7.53-8.11

- This account is not found in the best and most reliable manuscripts. These include those that bear the strongest, earliest witness to John's original writings.
- In those manuscripts that it is found it is located in a different place, usually after 7.36 or 7.44 or at the end of the Gospel, or after Luke 21.38.
- The language of the account is not typical of the language found in the majority of John's writings. However, due to the account's brevity it is difficult to hang the entire verdict on this point alone.
- The typical flow of thought found in 7.1-52 is interrupted by this account and is later picked back up again in 8.12. In fact the flow of argument really starts in chapter 6 and ends with the healing of the blind man in chapter 9.
- The early versions of the Syriac and Coptic texts omit this story entirely.

- Byzantine manuscripts began to include this story in the 9th century but even then the scribes expressed reservations about including it.
- Tertullian when he deals with judicial directives for cases about adultery fails to cite this passage.

4. I am the Light of the World (8.12-20)

Background

- The Feast of Tabernacles remains the backdrop of our current discussion:
 - This feast occurred in late autumn
 - Tabernacles celebrated the passing of the long summer days
 - The autumn equinox provided the context for a light ceremony that was popular in Jerusalem and orchestrated during this feast
 - Zechariah 14.7 sets the theological context for this ceremony:

For it will be a unique day which is known to the LORD, neither day nor night, but it will come about that at evening time there will be light.

- The imagery found in the ceremonies of this feast pulls from the desert stories: water flowing from the rock and the pillar of fire that guided Israel for so many years (Exodus 13.21-22; Numbers 14.14) Thus,
- This feast witnesses the converging of multiple motifs: harvest, drought, the coming of darkness, desert wandering and eschatological vision.
- Consider what the Mishnah [The Mishnah ([Hebrew](#) המשנה, "repetition") is a major source of rabbinic [Judaism](#)'s religious texts. It is the first recording of the [oral law](#) of the [Jewish](#) people, as championed by the [Pharisees](#) and is considered the first work of [Rabbinic Judaism](#).] says about this feast:

Four large stands each held four golden bowls. These were placed in the heavily used Court of Women. These sixteen golden bowls were filled with oil and used the worn undergarments of the Priests for wicks. When they were lit at night all Jerusalem was illumined

- Court of Women:

If you were to approach the Temple in Jerusalem in the first century A.D. you would pass through the eastern gate where Jesus made His triumphal entry. Then you would come to the Court of the Gentiles which was a large court paved with stones of various colors. It was open to all comers including the cattle-dealers and the money-changers who desecrated the Temple. This court was also called the Outer Court, the Lower Court, and the rabbi's usually called it "the Mountain of the Lord's House." All around the Temple proper was a 9 foot high terrace with stairs which was higher than the Court of the Gentiles. It was surrounded by a 5 foot high wall which was designed to keep out the gentiles. There was also pillars in the wall at various distances (the Soreg) with inscriptions in Latin, Greek, and Hebrew, warning all gentiles to come no further under penalty of death.

Going beyond the Court of the Gentiles and at the top of the terrace there was a platform for about 15 feet and then there was another wall. On the east side stood the magnificent 60 foot wide "Gate Beautiful" mentioned in Acts 3:2,10. It was also referred to as the "Gate Susan" because it contained a beautifully sculptured relief of the city of Susa. During the time of the morning and evening sacrifices this great entrance was the place of public worship.

Entering through the Susan Gate you would come to a large court called "the Court of the Women" not because there were only women there but because women could not go beyond it. There were smaller courts with columns in the four corners of the court.

According to the Mishnah (Middoth 2,5) the Women's Court was just over 200 feet square between bounding lines. Each court on the outside was 60 feet square.

- This was the scene: Jesus is speaking in the treasury (see 8.20) located within the Court of Women in the very court where this lighting ceremony takes place. Here Jesus offers his 6th discourse.

The Pronouncement (8.12)

I am the light of the world; he who follows Me shall not walk in darkness but shall have the light of life (NASB)

- Spiritual use of light -
 - In previous chapters we have seen the references to the wilderness wanderings of the Jews:
 - Chapter 6 - references the manna (6.26ff)
 - Chapter 7 - references the water from the rock (7.31)
 - Chapter 8 - references the pillar of light that led the Jews (8.12ff)

- Light is a common theme in both the Old and New Testaments. Consider:
 - John 1.5 – light shining in darkness
 - Genesis 1.3 – light in creation
 - Exodus 13.21 – pillar of fire that led the Jews
 - Psalm 27.1 – guidance and salvation
 - Psalm 119.105 – God’s word, which guides and provides wisdom (cp with John 1.1,14)
- The use of light is offered sixteen times in John’s Gospel to describe the work of Christ. Even the letters of John use light to make his point, (1 John 1.5-7)
- One commentator writes:

Light is not a natural human possession. It comes only from Christ. And it is not a separable entity which may be possessed in itself. It is not an objective revelation which men may receive and hug to themselves. Jesus is the light. To have the light is to have Jesus. There is no light apart from a right relationship with Him. [Bultmann]

- This light is not offered indiscriminately. Notice the qualifier: “he who follows me shall not walk in darkness. Jesus here is not speaking of a mere profession of belief or faith but a living, active faith which requires whole hearted discipleship. This term here translated means “to obey, or to serve” and is to be distinguished from those that temporarily followed Christ.

5. The Reaction of the Pharisees (8.13-20)

- The Pharisees response echoes that which was offered in Chapter 5 during Jesus’ last visit to Jerusalem.
- Notice that they never deal with the substance of His pronouncement. The focus on a legal technicality. Their argument hinges on the fact that Jesus was bearing witness of Himself which was not acceptable under Jewish law. The Law required more than one witness to validate any testimony (Deuteronomy 17.6; 19.15, etc)
- Jesus, in his “mini-trial” of John 5 offered numerous witnesses to His defense: John the Baptist (5.23); His works (5.36); The Father (5.37) and the Scriptures themselves (5.39). Here in this discourse He once again repeats Himself by offering the Father as a witness (verse 18)

- Jesus words in this section are condemning: He tells the Pharisees that they are judging “according to the flesh” and then asserts that He does not judge in this manner.
- The root problem with Jesus’ opponents is that they do not know the Father (8.19) thus this leaves them incapable of spiritual discernment. This is the same criticism offered in 5.24

6. Application

Jesus makes an amazing pronouncement in verse 12. We noted in the lesson that Jesus is the light. We need to take notice that He says “He is the light”. He is not just any light but He is the very light that illumines the way for mankind. We also noted that this light was not given indiscriminately. It is given to those who believe and obey. This is no different than the message offered to the people of God in the Old Testament. They were given the light. They were given the light of God’s message (His word spoken by the Prophets and in the temple ordinances and found in the Law). They were given the pillar of fire to guide them and lead them as they moved from bondage in Egypt to their covenantally promised land of rest and prosperity. This was given to God’s people and no other. Therefore, the message is for us today as well. By virtue of our identification with God’s people, baptized into Christ’s body, the Church, we have been given the same light. We have the rich blessing of receiving the preached and written Word of God contained in the Scriptures. We have the covenant blessing of the Sacraments offered to all those who are covenantally joined to Christ. We also have the covenant responsibility to believe and obey that which Christ has taught us. Consider:

You shall therefore love the LORD your God, and always keep His charge, His statutes, His ordinances, and His commandments. Know this day that I am not speaking with your sons who have not known and who have not seen the discipline of the LORD your God--His greatness, His mighty hand and His outstretched arm, and His signs and His works which He did in the midst of Egypt to Pharaoh the king of Egypt and to all his land; and what He did to Egypt’s army, to its horses and its chariots, when He made the water of the Red Sea to engulf them while they were pursuing you, and the LORD completely destroyed them; and what He did to you in the wilderness until you came to this place; and what He did to Dathan and Abiram, the sons of Eliab, the son of Reuben, when the earth opened its mouth and swallowed them, their households, their tents, and every living thing that followed them, among all Israel--but your own eyes have seen all the great work of the LORD which He did. You shall therefore keep every commandment which I am commanding you today, so that you may be strong and go in and possess the land into which you are about to cross to possess it. (Deuteronomy 11.1-18)

See, I have set before you today life and prosperity, and death and adversity; in that I command you today to love the LORD your God, to walk in His ways and to keep His commandments and His statutes and His judgments, that you may live and multiply, and that the LORD your God may bless you in the land where you are entering to possess it. But if your heart turns away and you will not obey, but are drawn away and worship other gods and serve them, I declare to you today that you shall surely perish. You will not prolong your days in the land where you are

crossing the Jordan to enter and possess it. I call heaven and earth to witness against you today, that I have set before you life and death, the blessing and the curse. So choose life in order that you may live, you and your descendants, by loving the LORD your God, by obeying His voice, and by holding fast to Him; for this is your life and the length of your days, that you may live in the land which the LORD swore to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, to give them." (Deuteronomy 30.15-20)

As God's covenant people, that is, as those who have been baptized into God's Church, we are to be mindful of our covenant obligations. Those who follow Christ follow His covenant obligations which are contained in His Word. Elsewhere we read:

Why do you call Me, 'Lord, Lord,' and do not do what I say? Everyone who comes to Me and hears My words and acts on them, I will show you whom he is like: he is like a man building a house, who dug deep and laid a foundation on the rock; and when a flood occurred, the torrent burst against that house and could not shake it, because it had been well built. But the one who has heard and has not acted accordingly, is like a man who built a house on the ground without any foundation; and the torrent burst against it and immediately it collapsed, and the ruin of that house was great." (Luke 6.46-49)

A mere profession of faith is not the answer. We are told what is required of man: to do justice, to love kindness, And to walk humbly with your God (Micah 6.8). The light is given to those who follow Christ. It is given to those who obey their covenant obligations. It is given to those who believe and obey.

Jesus not only says that He is the light of the world but he also states:

You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden; nor does anyone light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house. Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven. (Matthew 5.14-16)

The light that is Christ is shown in you as you work to believe and obey that which God has required of you. In summary then let me offer these simple but important applications:

1. The light is offered only to those who **follow** Christ. This means that it is given to those who **believe** and **obey**.
2. God's people are under **obligation** to obey. Any offering of the gospel that removes this aspect is **contrary** to the teachings of the Bible
3. Our **obedience** becomes light to the world. It illumines the darkness of sin and shows forth the glory of God