

Summary 8:12-59

Throughout this discourse, Jesus will address a deeply polarized crowd. On the one side, the Lord had those who were openly hostile to him, whereas, on the other side, some fully believed in him. Thus, the core element moving this particular narrative along revolves around comparisons.

For instance, Jesus will compare those who "walk in darkness" to those who follow the "light" (vs. 12). He will speak of himself as being "from above," but he will then condemn others when he says they're "from below" (vs. 23). What's more, Christ will mention his relationship to the Father no less than nine times throughout his discussion (vs. 16, 18, 19, 27, 28, 29, 38, 49, 54). But when he speaks about the Pharisees, Jesus does not mince words. He says that anyone who rejects God's heir is nothing more than a "servant" to their "sin" (vs. 34). Far from being a Son of God, like Jesus, these so-called rulers of Israel wear the bonds of slavery. So much so that Jesus even goes so far as to call them children of the "Devil" (vs. 44)!

Yet, undeterred by Christ's accusation, they not only insist on their connection to Abraham, apparently trying to distance themselves from that devil comment, they also accuse Jesus of being possessed (v. 48). After all, who could be "greater" than their father Abraham (vs. 53)? Surely not this young upstart rabbi from the backwaters of Galilee. And it is here where the plot truly begins to thicken; because, as Jesus points out, unlike these unbelieving Jews, Abraham looked forward to Jesus' coming. In fact, Jesus says that Abraham, in some sense, actually "saw it" and was even delighted by Christ's "day." Implying that yes, there was one who was greater than Abraham, and it is he who stands in their midst.

Not surprisingly, this last little factoid threw the religious leaders for a loop. They begin citing Jesus' youth and how it would've been impossible for Jesus to have seen anything in the OT, let alone Abraham. And this, it seems, was the very thing that Jesus was trying to lead them to; for, immediately, he declares in no uncertain terms that, "Before Abraham was, I am" (vs. 58). Who cares about one's lineage—even one that can be traced back to Abraham—when God in the flesh stands before you?

Understandably, the Jews lose their minds. So much so that they're prepared to stone Jesus right then and there. Yet, even though Jesus was right in "midst of them," and, by all accounts, he should've been a dead man, John tells us the Lord left the Temple passing right by the very ones who sought to kill him (vs. 59). The day of Christ's death would come. It just wasn't this day.

Exegesis

Vs. 12 – While we're not given a transition between verses 11 and 12, it appears that a crowd must've regrouped after the scene with the adulterous woman; for now, we find Jesus talking to a throng of eager listeners. And it is at this point, with all eyes on Jesus, that the Lord makes a startling claim when he says, "I am the light of the world." (Notice the global implications of the term "world.") This is the second "I am" statement in John's account, of which "I am the bread of life" was the first (cf. 6:35). But unlike when he compared himself to bread, here, the light imaginary harkens back to John's own prelude where the Beloved Disciple said that the Word was "life and the life was the *light* of men" (1:4; cf. 1 Jn. 1:5).

Not surprisingly, using illumination as a metaphor is common throughout the Bible. For instance, the Scriptures are likened to that of a candle (cf. Psalms 119:105, 130; Proverbs 6:23). And likewise, God is associated with light both literally and symbolically throughout the OT (cf. Psalms 27:1; 36:9; 44:3; Ezekiel 1:27-28; Micah 7:8; Habakkuk 3:3-4; Zechariah 14:5-7).¹ But interestingly, God is not the one being equated to light here; Jesus is associating it with *himself*. He doesn't say "God is the light of the world," though that is true; Jesus says, "*I* am the light of the world." This is very clearly a reference to the "servant" prophesied by Isaiah who would be sent by God and is called the "light for the nations" (Isaiah 42:6; 49:6; 51:4; cf. Revelation 21:23-24).² Jesus was the one to whom Isaiah was referring. In a world shrouded in darkness, Jesus is that solitary light chasing the shadows away.

What's more, Jesus is not just any light. He is The Light of God himself. Or, as it's said in Hebrews 1:3, "He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power." Just as we are blanketed by the night, Jesus is engulfed by a light that none but him can stand. This is what Paul means when writes says to Timothy that Christ "dwells in unapproachable light" (1 Timothy 6:16). If not for Jesus cloaking his majesty through the incarnation, no one would be able to look at him and live to tell the tale (cf. Exodus 33:20). After all, he is the source of all things (cf. Hebrews 1:3). All things require light to be illuminated. Light is the only thing that illuminates itself.³ And to stand exposed in the presence of such a power would be deadly.

Jesus goes on to say that the one who follows him will not "walk in darkness" but will have "the light of life." Now, had Jesus been talking about a standard light, pointing out that a person won't walk in darkness would be needlessly specific. Anyone who's ever used a light knows the

¹ Carson (1991), p. 337-338.

² Keener (2012), 1:739.

³ Morris (1995), p. 390.

effect it can have on the dark. But, as we know, Jesus isn't speaking about a literal light. He's talking about himself. He is the light. And all those who follow him—i.e., the Light—will not behave like those who do not have the light—i.e., those who walk in darkness. Why? Jesus explains that since those who follow him will also possess ("have") the very "light of life," they will no longer grope aimlessly in the dark.

Interestingly, given that this whole ordeal takes place during the Feast of Tabernacles (cf. 7:2), it is likely that Jesus was playing off of the torchlight ceremony. This was a ritual where the Jews would commemorate how the Israelites were led and protected by a pillar of fire during the wilderness (cf. Ex. 13:21-22; 14:19-25).⁴

Beasley-Murray shares an account of the torch-lighting ceremony:

Towards the end of the first day of the feast of tabernacles, people went down into the court of the women, where precautions had been taken [to separate the men from the women]. Golden lamps were there, and four golden bowls were on each of them, and four ladders were by each; for young men from the priestly group of youths had jugs of oil in their hands containing about 120 logs and poured oil from them into the individual bowls. Wicks were made from the discarded trousers of the priests and from the girdles. There was no court in Jerusalem that was not bright from the light of the place of drawing [water]. Men of piety and known for their good works danced before them [the crowd] with torches in their hands, and sang before them songs and praises. And the Levites stood with zithers and harps and cymbals and trumpets and other musical instruments without number on the 15 steps, which led down from the court of the Israelites into the court of the women and which corresponded to the 15 songs of the 15 steps in the Psalms.⁵

Jesus' point was that Moses and the Israelites had a light to guide them. This torch-lighting ceremony ensured the Jews would not forget the pillar of fire which led them in at night. And, now, that same Light speaks to them, wanting to guide them once again. Jesus wants them to trust him just as their ancestors had done.

Even more interesting is that this whole ordeal doesn't only occur during the Feast of Booths; this particular speech takes place on the festival's last day (cf. 7:37). Now, why is that significant? Because while candelabras were lit throughout the entirety of the celebration, no one so much as touched a torch on the second to last night. This is because the second to last

⁴ Carson (1991), p. 337.

⁵ Beasley-Murray, George R., *John: Revised Edition*, The Word Biblical Commentary, Volume 36, (Grand Rapids; Zondervan, 1999), p. 127.

day of the festival fell on a sabbath, and no one was permitted to work.⁶ Thus, after an entire day where there was no light in the evening, Jesus stands before them on the last day of the festival, bathed in the glow of all those torches, and declares, "I am the light."⁷

What's more, notice that trusting Jesus as the light assumes that the believer will also follow Jesus. What's the point in putting your faith in something if you're not going to go where it says you should go? Thus, as in many places throughout John, believing in Jesus and behaving like Jesus are essentially saying the same thing.⁸ And when we become followers of the Light, amazingly, we too become like lights to the world and like cities that are set on a hill (cf. Mat. 5:14-16).⁹

⁶ Kruse (2017), p. 231.

⁷ Morris (1995), p. 387-388.

⁸ Köstenberger (2008), p. 254.

⁹ Morris (1995), p. 388.

VIDEO DESCRIPTION

Wednesday Night Live | John | Week 3

Text: John 8:12-59

This passage continues the Feast of Tabernacles scene in the previous chapter. And, here, Jesus will make two startling claims: first, he will say that he is the "Light of the world," and, then, secondly, he will claim to be the "I am." Unsurprisingly, these two statements alone throw the religious leaders into such a frenzy that they pick up stones to kill Jesus right then and there. But, miraculously, Jesus simply walks out of the Temple without so much as a pebble striking his skin.

Pastor's manuscript can be found here: