

I AM THE LIGHT, JN.8:12-20

Who is I AM? #2

◆**Intro:** Our family once camped at Mammoth Caves National Park, in KY. I recall a couple of very strongly impressed memories of the place. One, that it was so hot and humid that occasionally we'd go stand in the campground bathrooms because they were air-conditioned. (I know, it probably looked kinda weird.) And two, that when we went into the caves, the air was so cool there you needed a sweatshirt or something! If you had glasses they fogged up when you entered or left. But there's another thing I recall.

◆Standing deep underground, in the largest of the caves, they told us there was enough room for a 747 airliner! And then for a little fun they said they were going to turn off all the lights for just a few seconds, which they did. I have never experienced such complete darkness in my entire life. It was as though I no longer had eyes at all. And then knowing how massive a space we were standing in, the thought of "how would we ever get out of here if the lights didn't come back on?" was seriously running through my now blackened mind! Then someone light a match, and oh the glow, the Brilliance, the POWER! All the darkness of that mammoth cave could not overpower one tiny match. And such is the power of light.

◆Just what was Jesus saying when he claimed to be the "Light of the World"? We read it quickly and shrug our shoulders perhaps and say "Oh Jesus can "enlighten" us on some things." But then that's quite like saying we can summarize all we know about

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planet orbits, and stellar formation with the phrase "twinkle twinkle little star, how i wonder what you are."

◆ All through human history the contrast between light and darkness has been associated with moral powers, good and evil.

The Persian Zoroastrian religion, for example, taught that the universe was one giant struggle between the power of light and the power of darkness. The fire is



a prominent symbol for them. The Yin Yang philosophy of ancient



China posits two equal, and opposite ultimate forces of light and dark which must be balanced for health to be achieved. There's a reason for this. There's a reason bars tend to be dark rather than well lit. There's a reason more crime happens at night.

◆ The Biblical writings equate God with light, while sin and evil are associated with darkness but they don't for a moment concede that they are equal in power or both necessary for life. No, the true God's mission is to destroy the powers of darkness, so much so that the Rabbis concluded that "light" was also another name for the promised savior Messiah!

◆ *"The LORD is my light and my salvation--whom shall I fear? The LORD is the stronghold of my life--of whom shall I be afraid?" Psalms 27:1, NIV.*

◆ *"Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the LORD rises upon you. See, darkness covers the earth and thick darkness is over the peoples, but the LORD rises upon*

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you and his glory appears over you. Nations will come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your dawn.” Isaiah 60:1-3, NIV.

◆ Of Jesus, John writes in typical Hebrew imagery...

◆ *“In him was life, and that life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not understood it.” John 1:4, 5, NIV.*

◆ [note: καταλαμβάνω can be translated “comprehend” or “overtake”, or to “lay hold” of. Some versions read “darkness has not overcome it. We’ll come back to that later.]

◆ But there’s even deeper content to what Jesus does and says in John chapter 8. You will note that verse 20 tells us Jesus made his claim in the part of the temple known as the Treasury. The Treasury was in the outer court of the temple known as the Court of Women. All of this took place during the week long Jewish feasts, the Feast of Booths, or Tabernacles. People would construct make-shift booths to live in. Call them shelters, lean-to’s, tents; the point was to remember what it was like for Israel to travel in the wilderness of Arabia for forty years living in nothing more permanent than tents and relying on God. And how did they know where to go?

◆ *By day the LORD went ahead of them in a pillar of cloud to guide them on their way and by night in a pillar of fire to give them light, so that they could travel by day or night.*
Ex.13:21

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◆ This light would also come to rest on the Tabernacle, Israel's portable temple/tent and the light was called the Shekinah (presence) of God, or the Glory Cloud. So then, at the close of each day of the Feast of Booths, it came time for the torch dance which lasted well into the night. Four great pillars, or candelabra, were erected in the Court of Women, and topped with four great golden bowls of oil, so large that for the wicks of these lamps they used a pair of the priest's pants! Four priestly youths would conduct a ceremony much like the torch-lighting at the Olympics. They'd climb ladders to light the lamps atop the pillars and, since the temple was on the highest point of Jerusalem, the light was said to be so strong as to lighten every street in Jerusalem as though it was day.

◆ Now, it was at this place, the Court of Women, at this time, during the Feast of Booths, where they lit the pillars of fire, –that Jesus stands up and shouts across the courtyard, "I AM the light of the world!" What's he saying? When Jesus said he was the light of the world he was saying...

◆ I am the fire that led Israel through the desert! I am the cloud that descended on the Tabernacle, the presence of God. I am the Messiah. I am salvation.

◆ As you will recall, just saying YHWH, which means "to be", was radical enough for a Jew, who wouldn't even whisper that name. But take a look at verse 52 in our chapter!

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- ◆ *"I tell you the truth," Jesus answered, "before Abraham was born, I am!"* John 8:58, NIV.
- ◆ What?! This is explicit language of Exodus 3 where Moses asked God's name and God said his name was "I AM"!
 - ◆ *"God said to Moses, 'I AM WHO I AM. This is what you are to say to the Israelites: 'I AM has sent me to you.'"* Exodus 3:14, NIV.
- ◆ Remember how we said last week that we should never think of Jesus as simply a nice teacher from the olden days? Nice, helpful people don't think they are God! Those are crazy people, unless of course it's true... then we need to take them very seriously.
- ◆ **2. Ok, what does Jesus' claim to be the Light mean to you and me?** If Jesus is the light in the darkness, the light of the world, the perfect goodness that will bring all evil to an end, then that means a number of things. Let's think about them.
 - ◆ A. Since Jesus is the Light, the Shekinah Glory of God, he is the power we need to be different when we can't on our own. Let's unpack it. Have you ever tried to be nicer, or friendlier, or intended to be more generous, and then that same person slights you, or counters your opinion really, no matter what it is, for the zillionth time and you think inside about how much you really don't like him or her? And then also suddenly remember that Jesus isn't like that? Have you ever tried to not want something the Bible clearly says is wrong but you feel strongly drawn to anyway? What kind of conclusions do you come to? Well if

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you're like me you think, "It's not gonna happen. I can't change how I feel about this or that." There's someone here in the room who feels that way. I'm talking to you. Listen, it's not true. Jesus *can* change even how you feel about something if you ask him and follow him. And let's admit, we humans feel a lot of illogical, even unscientific things these days.

◆ See Jesus didn't come JUST to save us from the punishment of our sins in the eternal scheme of things, when we face God as the Last Judgment and give an account for every word and act. He came to save us from our sinning, and the bondage of our sinful nature.

◆ "I have come into the world as a light, so that no-one who believes in me should stay in darkness." John 12:46, NIV.

◆ So all those times you tell yourself, it's no use, I'm never gonna change, this is who I am, I was born this way –well that's a lie from hell. All things are possible with God.

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◆ B. Since Jesus is the Light, the Shekinah Glory of God, he is the holy guide I need. Remember the Shekinah Cloud was Israel's guide through the desert. When the cloud moved the people moved. When the pillar of fire started moving in the night, the people packed up and followed. "Where you go I go" was the motto.

◆ On the day the tabernacle, the Tent of the Testimony, was set up, the cloud covered it. From evening till morning the cloud above the

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tabernacle looked like fire. That is how it continued to be; the cloud covered it, and at night it looked like fire. Whenever the cloud lifted from above the Tent, the Israelites set out; wherever the cloud settled, the Israelites encamped. Nu.9:15-16

◆ In other words, they trusted God so much that when he said “jump” they said “How high?” Can’t you hear some of the Israelites? “Awe man! I just set up the latrine in the “out-tent”. Why is the fire cloud moving already?” Listen friends, is there a place in your life where you know what Jesus would do, you know what Jesus would say about what you’re doing, but you really don’t mind? You’re OK with it? Well you can keep going that way if you want, but eventually the Glory of God will be far down the trail and you’ll be left in the dark of the desert with your special choices. And it won’t be OK then.

◆ *“There is a way that seems right to a man, but in the end it leads to death. Even in laughter the heart may ache, and joy may end in grief. The faithless will be fully repaid for their ways, and the good man rewarded for his.” Proverbs 14:12-14, NIV.*

◆ What am I saying? Be humble. Doubt yourself. Do NOT be confident in your choices because that’s how you “feel”. How you feel is the worst thing to stand on. Stand on the truth. God’s word is truth. Jesus is the truth. (John also records both those things!) So exercise humility in the way you declare your thoughts and opinions. After all, you are a man, or a woman and you have been wrong many times. But God has not.

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◆C. Since Jesus is the Light, the Shekinah Glory of God, he is my promised protector. There are only two other places in the holy writings that mention the “light of life” which Jesus claims to be. So it’s a good move to look at them. One is Psalm 56 which is all about trusting in God’s protection in the face of all the stuff life throws your way, all the atrocities, all the tragedies, all the killings and wars, and viruses, and fears about where this world is going. So just in case there might be someone here that has felt one of these, listen to the last verse of the psalm.

◆“For you have delivered me from death and my feet from stumbling, that I may walk before God in the light of life.”

Psalms 56:13, NIV.

◆When you follow God as your guide you know that it will work out for you in the end (Romans 8:28). Jesus is the I AM. I AM cannot fail. I AM is never wrong. His way is life. He is the LIGHT. The darkness can never overtake the light (katalambanw, remember?) All the darkness in the world cannot overtake the light. Darkness is the absence of light. But light is not the absence of darkness. Light is the presence of something: photons. So remember this friends, when Jesus tells you he is the Light he is proclaiming in a voice which can crush the strongest army that God and satan, good and evil are NOT equal and opposite powers. Jesus name is above every other name. All nations and people’s will bow to his name. That means he can take care of you.

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◆ **Conclusion:** I think you can see that Jesus is making an explicit and enormous claim when he says "I am the light of the world." He is the Shekinah, the presence of God, his power in your inability, his guidance in your wandering, his protection is a promise!

◆ If you read further in John 8 you discover that Jesus repeatedly invites us to believe on him so that we do not die in our sins (v24). Accepting him as our "light" is the same as accepting everlasting "life". The claim is something akin to what Moses said in Deuteronomy 30:19-20.

◆ "This day I call heaven and earth as witnesses against you that I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Now choose life, so that you and your children may live and that you may love the Lord your God, listen to his voice, and hold fast to him. For the Lord is your life..."

◆ Choose Life! Choose the Light. Decide over and over again to choose the presence of God.

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◆ The captain of a ship looked into the dark night and saw faint lights in the distance. Immediately he told his signalman to send a message: "Alter your course 10 degrees south." Promptly a return message was received: "Alter your course 10 degrees north."

◆ The captain was angered; his command had been ignored. So he sent a second message: "Alter your course 10 degrees south--I am the captain!" Soon another message was received: "Alter your course 10 degrees north--I am a seaman third class Jones."

◆ Immediately the captain sent a third message, knowing the fear it would evoke: "Alter your course 10 degrees south--I am a battleship." Then the reply came: "Alter your course 10 degrees north--I am a lighthouse."

◆ In the midst of our dark and foggy times, all sorts of voices are shouting orders into the night, telling us what to do, how to adjust our lives. Out of the darkness, one voice signals something quite opposite to the rest--something almost absurd. But the voice happens to be the Light of the World, and we ignore it at our peril.