

## I AM: The Light of the World

John 8:12 (NIV)

<sup>12</sup> When Jesus spoke again to the people, he said, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life."

Imagine a world without lights. At first, maybe that doesn't sound too bad because you're thinking of normal nighttime, but that's not a world without lights. Normal nighttime has streetlights, car lights, light from the moon and stars, your phone. It may take a couple of seconds, but your eyes adjust to the new amount of light. But, seriously, remove all lights - no glow from streetlights, no stars or moon, not even from your phone screen. That's pitch black. That's the absence of light. That is total darkness, which is not hard to see in but impossible.

Now, in that total darkness, could you navigate from here at church to your house? Me, I only live about a half a mile from here. I kind of want to nonchalantly say, "Sure, I can do that. I've already made that trip more than 3,000 times already in my time here, mostly during the day while it is light out. So, just give me some extra time, and I'll make it." Then I think about it some more. I think about the fact that with absolutely no light, I won't actually be able to see anything, any of the normal markers guiding me on my way. I would probably have to get down on my hands and knees and feel my way home, feel for where the sidewalk starts and stops, where the curb is. And then, even if I made it home, I would still have to fumble around to actually get into my house.

But give me a destination that I'm not familiar with. Give me a long journey, like a trip to Wisconsin. Then I don't know that I would ever make. I would lose my way and die. But give me light, and I can do it because I can see where I am going. Light shows the way.

Do you know what light also shows? It shows me what I'm doing wrong, when I'm going the wrong way. With light, I can look around, know where I am, and know how to fix going in the wrong direction.

When I have the light, when I know what is right, I not only see what I do wrong and correct it, but I also see the wrong others are doing. When I know the CDC and state guidelines, I can see when you are not social distancing, when you're touching your face (which I am super guilty of), when you're not wearing a mask at Smith's or Lowe's, when you're not using hand sanitizer or disinfectant on your shopping cart. When I see others not doing what we've been told to do, I can bring that to light to that person. Or I can rant in my head or to my friends and family or to the internet: "Can you believe how stupid people are? Do you know what I saw today?..." And then there's the other side where people see others wearing masks and comment on how they're letting fear take control of their lives, letting this disease completely paralyze them from living a normal life. I'm not going to do all these social distancing things because I won't give in to this fear-mongering, we might say. Besides, with the economy being virtually shut-down, people losing their jobs, losing their healthcare, the cure is worse than the disease.

Even when we are not living in a COVID world, we are quick to shine the light of right and wrong on people. We scrutinize others, evaluating how they spend their money when they show up in a shiny new car or talk about the purchases that they make. We either think or actually say, "You're spending money on that??" We look at parents, trying to refrain from saying something, but we've formed an opinion of how they should be parenting. We see what people are eating and tell them what their diet should be. I still remember specifically a random person at Smith's chiding me for buying Mountain Dew – and that was like 3 or more years ago. We look at how a lawn is cared for or how a wall is painted and we feel it's our duty expose what's wrong with it.

Some of these things – diet, money management, parenting, lawn care, painting – are subjective and not universally right or wrong. But there are other things that are. Sometimes we have to shine the light on the wrong things people are doing because it is harmful to themselves and others and we want to help them, protect them, prosper them.

Then the light shines on you. Someone points out that you're doing something wrong, and you know your instant reaction. "You're telling me that what I'm doing is wrong? Why don't you mind your own business? If I want to buy Mountain Dew and put that sugary, caffeinated beverage into my body, that's my choice, not yours." "Who do you think you are, anyway? You think you know better? Well, then here you go. You can do it!" "Nope. I'm not doing this wrong; you're wrong!" And if you don't react defensively or with anger or some degree of loathing, you're probably reacting as a defeated person, resigned to being a failure unable to do anything right.

Jesus says, "I am the light of the world." (verse 12a) The Apostle John has been building this concept since the first couple of sentences of his Gospel account: "In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it." (John 1:4-5) He is light for all mankind. No one is exempt from it. He shines on all, scattering the darkness, revealing what was once unseen. And what's the result? "This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but people loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil. Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that their deeds will be exposed. But whoever lives by the truth comes into the light, so that it may be seen plainly that what they have done has been done in the sight of God." (John 3:19-21)

Jesus' light exposes everything of everyone. His light shines on you. Everything you have ever done wrong comes to light with him: every shameful deed you've done in the cover of darkness, everything you've ever tried to hide, every dark thought you've ever had. You know the dark deeds you have done, and Jesus sees them all.

Imagine if everyone could see what the Light of the world sees. What would people think of you if they saw all those things? Would they be okay with them? Would they be disgusted? Would they leave you, want nothing to do with you ever again? Who would even want to live with you if they knew everything that you've tried to hide, everything that you've done in the veil of darkness? You know, this whole light exposing things done in darkness wasn't so bad when we were shining the light on others instead of on to ourselves.

But Jesus is not the Light of the world for the sole purpose of showing us all how bad we really are. Instead, he did what only light can do: dispel darkness and get rid of it. Darkness cannot change itself. The only way darkness changes is if light enters the picture. And whenever light enters, darkness has no choice but to scatter and go away.

Jesus has not just exposed your sins, your deeds of darkness, but he has also pointed us to the only one who can and does take away our darkness. Only the Great I AM, only God, could live perfectly for us who live in darkness and fear that our deeds will be exposed because only the Great I AM is one who cannot be overcome with darkness. Since he is Light, there is not even a hint of darkness in him. The darkness of sin had no chance to stand up against his Light of perfection lived for us. Only the Great I AM could then take that perfect life and sacrifice it to pay for all those deeds of darkness we have done and apply it to all people for all time. Because he is the Light of the world, we see clearly that he is the only one as God who can save us. He doesn't just illuminate the path we are to walk but shows us that he walked it for us. As the Light of the world, he keeps us out of darkness and instead brings us the light of life, eternal life with him. Jesus said, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life." (verse 12) The Light of the world, Jesus, shows us clearly the certainty of our heavenly home that he gives us.

Jesus is the Light of the world, the light that no darkness can overcome. How will you use this light? His light has exposed your deeds of darkness but has also shown you your Savior, himself, the Great I AM. This darkness is not anything that any person can ever make go away on their own. Instead, we all need his Light. We need the Light of the world. So, we shine Jesus on people, exposing their deeds of darkness. Why? Not to feel superior or to rub it in their faces, but to show them that there is only one who dispels all those deeds of darkness and saves us from them. We shine Jesus so that people will be brought out of darkness and into his wonderful Light, that they will never be condemned since Jesus is the Light for the whole world. We do this with all the empathy that we ourselves need when our deeds of darkness were exposed before God. We do this so that everyone in the world may have the Light of life and not be lost in the darkness of our own sins.

People will try to avoid the light, but that doesn't stop it from shining. No one can escape the Light of the world because he is the Great I AM. All deeds will be exposed before him. When that happens, will you then see your Savior or just try to hide in the darkness again?

Shine the Light of the world. Shine Jesus so that our deeds of darkness are brought to light and, more importantly, that the only one, the Great I AM, who dispels our spiritual darkness is also seen. Jesus scatters all our darkness because he is the Light of the world. Amen.