

Home Group Leaders Discussion Guide

I AM the Light of the World—John 8:12

While Jesus' statement/claim that He is the Light of the World is found in John 8:12, it would probably be best to begin reading at the beginning of John chapter 7. Here we find that Jesus was intentionally staying away from Judea because tensions were high, and intentions toward Him were hostile. Yet, the Feast of Tabernacles was approaching...a festival that any devout Jew would observe by making the pilgrimage down to Jerusalem (in Judea) to celebrate. So would Jesus go to the Feast or not? This even became a point of contention between Jesus and his brothers, who at this point didn't believe in Him, and didn't seem to understand or know what to do with their brother's growing fame. (For you Bible trivia nerds out there, this is the only specific reference to the Feast of Tabernacles in the New Testament.)

Something to note about Jesus, thus God, is that His timing is perfect. Jesus knew what He was doing, and when He was going to do it. When it came to when He would make an appearance at the Feast, where He would make an appearance, and what He would say when He did, was all with impeccable timing.

Also, from chapter 7 of John we see there was quite a bit of interaction and dialogue going on: between Jesus and the Jewish leaders (who is whom John typically simply calls "the Jews"); between the leaders amongst one another; and between people who made up the crowds. "Who is this guy?"...is essentially the topic of conversation—some from a point of derision ("Who does this guy think he is?) and some from a point of hope and expectation ("Do you think he could be the Messiah?") All that to say, we want/need to understand the context in which the statement "I am the light of the world." was spoken.

It should also be noted that John 7:53-8:11 was probably not part of John's original work, but likely a later add on...as most versions of the Bible note. From a flow perspective, it's probably best to read 8:12 from 7:52.

Back to the idea of perfect timing, in all likelihood Jesus said, *"If anyone is thirsty, let him come to Me and drink. Whoever believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him"* (7:37b-38) at the key moment in the celebration when the priests were pouring out water on the altar in the temple. Technically, Jesus didn't say, "I am the Living Water"...but He may as well have. It's not "officially" one of the "I AM..." statements in John, but it has much of the same flavor. Each day during the Feast of Tabernacles there was a procession by the priests who drew water from the pool of Siloam, then proceeded to the temple where they circled the altar then poured out the water as part of the morning sacrifice. On *"the last and greatest day of the feast"* (7:37a) they would circle the altar 7 times before pouring it out. Many scholars believe it was at this point that Jesus proclaimed, *"If anyone is thirsty, let him come to Me..."* Again, His timing was perfect. I suppose when you're the Creator of the universe, a flair for the dramatic comes rather naturally.

Water plays an interesting role in the Gospel of John. Jesus' first recorded miracle according to John was turning water into wine (ch. 2). In Jesus' conversation with Nicodemus Jesus spoke of new birth of water and the Spirit (ch. 3). In chapter 4 we see Jesus again talking about living water when talking to the Samaritan woman at the well. We see Jesus perform a miracle by the pool at Bethesda in chapter 5. Jesus walked on water in chapter 6. Then, of course, there's what He said here in chapter 7. Most significantly, in Jeremiah 2:13, God refers to Himself as the spring of living water. So there goes Jesus again, alluding to Himself as God. Eschatologically speaking, the image of water flowing from the temple that becomes a river that brings life is seen in Ezekiel 47, and in Revelation 22 we see the image of the river of the water of life flowing from the throne of God. For desert-dwellers like the Israelites, the picture of water as a source of life is powerful, relevant, and effective. But not only is Jesus stating that He is the source of life, but that this life is readily available in Him.

The two metaphors of water and light work nicely together. Water is the source of life, and light is the source of illumination. Light helps us see things clearly. It helps us to see/find what we're looking for (and what we need to avoid). Water is what we need. Jesus is both what we need, and what we need to find what we need. He is the end and the means. In Revelation 22, we again see the pairing of water and light. Not only is the aforementioned river of the water of life flowing from the throne of God, we're also told that there will be no lamp or sun because God will be our light. Not only do we see water and light coupled in the final chapter of the Bible, we see them together in the first chapter of the Bible: "Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters. And God said, 'Let there be light...'" (Genesis 1:2-3a) God designed things in such a way that we need light and water as a vital, necessary, and available in our environment in order to thrive. God provided both of those things, and Jesus claims to be both those things. We NEED Jesus.

We are meant to "live in the light" (see the letter of I John). We are at our best, as God intended, when we have nothing to hide. Another way of saying that is that we are meant to live with Jesus. As we do, He makes us aware of what needs to change, but also helps us to make that change.

Sometimes people describe learning or discovering something (be it about life, or about ourselves) as a light bulb turning on in their mind. Other times the learning process can be more like the sunrise, of things gradually going from dark to light over the course of time. Regardless of what the process is like (quick or gradual) the metaphor of light is universally understood as a picture of bringing illumination/understanding. By Jesus claiming to be the light of the world He was claiming by/through Him life makes sense (the implication being that without Him life will not make sense; we'll be in the dark), and that with Him we can become the best versions of ourselves.

Not only is Jesus the Light of the World, He also said that WE are the light of the world (Matthew 5:14). What is true of Jesus is true of His followers. As we follow Jesus, we illuminate the world in regards to what is true, right, and good. This is why it's so important for us to obey Jesus. For just as we can be used to point people in the direction of God, but when we disobey

or are inconsistent with the way of Jesus, it darkens people's understanding, it confuses people, and it dishonors God.

Just as people were offended by Jesus for claiming to be the Light of the World, they will be offended by use making such a claim as well. Later in John 10 said (and I'll paraphrase), "even if you have trouble believing what I'm telling you, believe the works I am doing, what your eyes actually see." I think that's a good posture for us to take as well. What we DO ought to provide the credibility to what we say.

These discourses in John are so rich and deep. We could go on and on. We'll stop for now, because the next "I AM..." statement comes a latter part of the same discourse started here.

- Q. Jesus' brothers misunderstood Him, the religious leaders misunderstood Him, the crowds clearly misunderstood Him (the disciples didn't understand Him half the time). Describe a time when you misunderstood Jesus. Describe a time when you were misunderstood.**

- Q. Something light does is illuminate its surroundings. That's a good picture of going from not understanding to understanding, from not comprehending something to actually grasping it. Describe how your journey of faith has been a process of illumination—going from things not making sense, to making sense; from things being unclear, to things being understood. What aspects of it has been quick like a light suddenly turning on, and what aspects have been more gradual like the dawn?**

- Q. Describe a time when you were really thirsty.**

- Q. What are some of the ways you have you seen people search for Life (satisfaction/fulfillment, meaning/purpose). What do they look for it in? What about you...how have you tried to find life apart from Jesus?**

- Q. Describe a time when you were "in the dark" (figuratively or literally)...be it a situation, a season, or a state of being.**

- Q. Do you/we live with the constant and conscious awareness of our NEED for Jesus, and His AVAILABILITY/ACCESSABILITY to us? How do we (or how can we) cultivate that awareness?**

- Q. As we go about the normal routines of our live, are we consciously aware that we are the light of the world. What do you think about that responsibility?**

- Q. The Jews (both the religious leader and the crowd) had trouble believing the great claims Jesus made. But Jesus was able to point in the direction of His works for credibility. What can we, as Christians/the Church, point to in order to establish credibility? (What is God's plan in this regard?)**

Q. Is there anything about your life you don't want brought into the light? How might Jesus be inviting you to bring it to Him?