

SERIES: Gospel of John: Seeing is Believing?
 SERMON: *Light of the World*
 SCRIPTURE: John 8:12
 SPEAKER: Pastor Josh Black
 DATE: December 18, 2011

John 8:12 (ESV)

¹²*Again Jesus spoke to them, saying, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life."*

What does it mean that Jesus is the light of the world and why does it matter? Jeremy did a good job last week of answering these questions in the context of John 8. But the conflict that follows in the rest of the chapter can cloud our view of the significance of this claim. Because this is such a significant claim, this verse itself warrants a further look, especially as it relates to the larger storyline of the Bible.

In order to answer these questions I'd like to tell the Bible's whole story with specific attention to the way light is used throughout. I'll tell the story following eight major epochs in the Bible: The Pattern of the Kingdom (Creation), The Perished Kingdom (Fall), The Promised Kingdom (Abraham), The Partial Kingdom (Moses and David), The Prophesied Kingdom, The Present Kingdom (Jesus), The Proclaimed Kingdom (Acts until now), and The Perfected Kingdom (Not Yet).¹

Originally some of you may have wondered why we were only covering one verse this morning. Now you may be wondering if we're biting off more than we can chew this morning. Well, maybe, but that's kind of my style and I think it is worth it. Also, it's important to note that God is the *one* author of this *one* book that tells *one* story of redemption which finds its center in God's *one* Son, Jesus (cf. Jn. 3:16).² As we look at the larger storyline, I think you'll understand better the significance of who Jesus claims to be in John 8:12.

I have five daughters. And my oldest two, who have long hair, love to have their hair braided. And they especially love it when someone will put a French braid in their hair. The problem is nobody in our house is very good at doing a French braid. So when our friend Christine Lightner visits us from Garden City the girls always have her French braid their hair. A French braid is beautiful, but it is difficult. Not only do you have to keep the three strands together in your hand; you are constantly picking up new strands of hair as you move down the head. And you have to keep all of those strands in your hands until you're finished. But if you can keep them all together tightly, in the end it looks beautiful.

As we trace through these eight epochs in the biblical storyline we'll pick up a lot of strands along the way, related to light and darkness (ten total). Do your best to keep them all in your hand (maybe taking notes will help) and I'll do my best to show you how they all come together beautifully in Jesus. Or in other words I'll try to show you what it means that Jesus is the light of the world and why it matters.

¹ This outline comes from Vaughan Roberts, *God's Big Picture*.

² Cf. Graeme Goldsworthy, *Preaching the Whole Bible As Christian Scripture*, chp. 2.

1ST EPOCH: PATTERN OF THE KINGDOM (Creation)

Turn in your Bibles to Genesis 1.

Genesis 1:1–5 (ESV)

¹*In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. ²The earth was without form and void, and darkness was over the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters.*

³*And God said, “Let there be light,” and there was light. ⁴And God saw that the light was good. And God separated the light from the darkness. ⁵God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And there was evening and there was morning, the first day.*

1st Strand: Light is connected with the revelation.

God creates the world by his Word. God is a personal, talking God.³ God creates in order to be known by his creation. And so, it is no surprise that the first act in creation is to create light, for throughout the Bible light is connected with revelation and the knowledge of God;⁴ light is seen as a means of God revealing himself, manifesting his glory, and making himself known. In fact the Bible tells us in many places that God himself is light.⁵

2nd Strand: Light is connected with life.

God is clearly the source of light in Genesis 1:3-4. God is also the source of *life* in Genesis 1. Throughout the Bible light is connected with life.⁶ John 1:3-4 is the most obvious. “*All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made. In him was life, and the life was the light of men.*”

3rd Strand: Light is connected with God’s presence.

In addition to God making himself known, God is also with his people. This is clear in Genesis 1-2. God places his people in his special place, the garden, where he can be present with his people and walk in relationship with them. Throughout the Bible light is connected with God’s presence among his people.⁷

4th Strand: Light is connected with moral purity.

In chapter 2 God gives Adam a command. Don’t eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil or you will die (Gen. 2:16). And because God is holy he calls the people that he is present with to also be holy (Lev. 20:26; 1 Pt. 1:16) and to obey his commands. In creation all things were good; God declared them good. Then we are told at the end of chapter 2 that the man and the woman were naked and they felt no shame (v. 25). There was purity in the garden.

³ Don Carson, *The God Who is There*, 20.

⁴ The Word of God is also described in terms of light. Cf. 2 Pt. 1:19

⁵ Pss. 4:6; 104:2; Is. 60:19; Hab. 3:4; Dan 2:22; Ez. 1; 1 Tim. 6:16; 1 John 1:5; Jas. 1:17

⁶ Job 3:30; 33:28, 30; Pss. 27:1; 36:9; 56:13; Pr. 6:23; 16:15; Jn. 1:4; 8:12; 2 Tim. 1:10.

⁷ Ex. 13:21; 25:37; 2 Chron. 5:13-14

Throughout the Bible light is connected with moral purity and darkness is connected with sin.⁸ And that brings us to our 2nd epoch in the Biblical storyline.⁹

2ND EPOCH: PERISHED KINGDOM (Fall)

5th Strand: Darkness is connected with sin (vs. purity).

In Genesis 3 we're told that instead of living under God's rule and obeying his commandment, Adam and Eve rebelled against God's rule and commandments; they sinned; they ate the fruit (3:6); and they became impure (3:7). Verse 7 says, "*Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked...*"

Throughout the Bible darkness is connected with sin.¹⁰ In John 3:19 we are told that "*people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil.*"

6th Strand: Darkness is connected with banishment (vs. presence).

But not only is darkness connected with sin, it is connected with the consequences of sin. First of all banishment is a consequence of sin. In Genesis 3, following God's pronouncement of judgment, we are told in verses 23-24 that "*the LORD God sent him out of the garden of Eden...He drove out the man...*"

Darkness is connected with banishment in the Bible.¹¹

7th Strand: Darkness is connected with death (vs. life).

The second related consequence of sin is death. God told Adam and Eve that if they ate of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil that they would die (Gen 2:16-17).¹² Following Adam and Eve's rebellion we are told in verse 24 that after they were banished from the garden, "[God] *placed the cherubim and a flaming sword that turned every way to guard the way to the tree of life.*"

They were cut off from the light of life.¹³ In many places in the Bible darkness is connected with death.¹⁴

8th Strand: Darkness is connected with blindness (vs. revelation).

The third consequence of sin is blindness. God's purpose in creation was to reveal himself to his creation and to be known by his people. But in our sin we are blind. We live in darkness. In many places in the Bible darkness is connected with blindness.¹⁵

⁸ Job 33:28-30; Rom. 13:12; Eph. 5:8-9.

⁹ Light is also associated with blessing. E.g. Esther 8:16; Ps. 97:11; 112:4; Prov. 4:18; Job. 29:3

¹⁰ Job 24:13-17; Jn. 3:19-20

¹¹ Matt. 8:12; 22:13; 25:30

¹² cf. Rom. 6:23

¹³ NB. The death that follows in chapters 4 & 5.

¹⁴ Job 17:13-14; 33:28-30; Ps. 49:19; Rev. 16:10; 20:14-15

It is important to note that darkness has no existence by itself; it is defined simply as an absence of light.¹⁵ So for our purposes, darkness is an absence of God. In the Bible darkness or the absence of light was intended to communicate terror because it represented an absence of God – his life, his glory, his presence.

I find it interesting that there is almost a universal fear of the dark. What child is not afraid of the dark? And who blames them; it's scary. Even adults are afraid of the dark to some degree. Who here thinks it is wise to go out on a walk alone at night in certain parts of town? I don't even like to drive at night. There is a healthy fear of the dark even in adults.

Yet at the same time while there is a sense in which there is a universal fear of the dark, there is also a sense in which we can't truly understand the threat of darkness in our technologically advanced society. We can so easily manufacture light. All we have to do is flip a switch. There was a time when people wouldn't travel at night. It was too dangerous. But now we have headlights. There was a time when people didn't work at night. But now we run three shifts in most manufacturing companies. Even road crews work at night. The darkness is not as much of a threat to us as it used to be. We don't feel the weight of darkness the way a first century Jew would have. In fact we've become quite comfortable with living in the darkness. But not just in a literal sense; we've become quite comfortable with living in darkness in a metaphorical sense as well.

We live in a day where there is darkness all around. Have we become conditioned to live in the darkness? Could it be said that we're no longer scared of the dark; rather we're entertained by the dark? Could it be said that we love darkness rather than light?

Sexual promiscuity is everywhere. It has always been a problem, but it is no longer done in secret; it is paraded everywhere. Violence is everywhere too, even in the video games people play for fun. When we see violence on the news we are heartbroken, but I must confess it is easy to become desensitized to it all. We also see injustice everywhere; we see it on the global scene, but right here in America as well. And greed and pride are the air we breathe. They are no longer seen as sin, but almost as virtue; lifestyles of the rich and famous are what people aspire to.

Have we been conditioned to not feel the weight of darkness? I hope not because the moral darkness we've just spoken of (sin) will result in the consequences of darkness (sin) as well. And this doesn't only apply to the world out there. There is evidence of darkness in each of our lives. We've all sinned and fallen short of God's glorious and holy light (Rom 3:23). And as a result of our moral darkness we deserve the consequences of darkness – banishment and death. We need to feel the terror of darkness. It is the absence of light – the light of life, revelation, God's presence, and holiness. Without the light we have nothing!

¹⁵ Jn. 9; 2 Pt. 1:19; 1 Jn. 1:6; 2:11

¹⁶ "Darkness," *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery*.

As we become aware of the weight of darkness, we see our need for light. And there is good news in the Bible for those of us who have walked in darkness, been banished into darkness, and are destined to eternal darkness. And that brings us to the 3rd epoch in the Biblical storyline.

3RD EPOCH: PROMISED KINGDOM (Abrahamic Covenant)

Listen to what God says to Satan after the fall. Genesis 3:15. *“I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel.”* In other words, there will be a struggle between light and darkness.

9th Strand: God promises to deal with the problem of darkness.

But the darkness will not overcome the light (Jn. 1:4). The offspring of the woman will crush the head of Satan (3:15). God promises to deal with the problem of death and darkness.

Later in Genesis God calls Abraham and gives him a promise (Gen 12:1ff). There was a promise of land. God promised to deal with the problem of banishment and bring people into the Promised Land. And there was a promise of many descendants. Through Abraham’s offspring the nations would be blessed. In other words, Israel was called to be a light for the nations.¹⁷ And ultimately, Abraham’s offspring would crush the head of the serpent.¹⁸ God promised to deal with the problem of death and darkness. Well how did this promise work itself out? Let’s look to the next part in the storyline.

4TH EPOCH: PARTIAL KINGDOM (Mosaic and Davidic Covenants)

At first, the promise seemed like a long shot. While the descendants of Abraham did grow in number, they grew while they were in slavery in Egypt for 400 years. But God delivered his people out of banishment in Egypt and led them to the Promised Land. And how did he lead them? He led them by a pillar of light. The pillar was a cloud by day and a fire by night (Ex. 13:21-22).¹⁹

10th Strand: The light is for guidance.

The pillar in the wilderness was for guidance;²⁰ it stayed with them all the way into the Promised Land. But the pillar wasn’t the only thing given for guidance. The Word of God, or the Law, was given at Mt. Sinai while the Israelites were in the wilderness. It was also for guidance. Throughout the Bible, the Word of the Lord is referred to as a light. Psalm 119:105 calls it a *“lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path.”*²¹

¹⁷ Ps. 67

¹⁸ Rom. 16:20; Heb. 2:14; Gal. 3:16.

¹⁹ This is the main thing that John 8:12 is pointing to according to Boice.

²⁰ This pillar in the wilderness was for protection. It served as a barrier between the Israelites and the Egyptians (Ex. 14:24). It shaded them from the heat of the sun by day and kept them warm in the cold nights. NB. The 3 marks of a shepherd, according to Timothy Laniak, are to protect, provide, and guide. The provision of manna and water were also a part of the wilderness years. This marks God as Shepherd. John touches on this in chapters 6-7. The light ref. in chapter 8 is an obvious allusion to the wilderness. Then in chapter 10 we’re told that Jesus is the good shepherd.

²¹ Pss. 119:130; 43:3; 19:8; Pr. 6:23; cf. 2 Pt. 1:19.

The light is connected with God's presence.

We have already stated that light is connected with God's presence in creation (3rd strand). The *pillar* represented God's presence with his people as well (Ex 13:22). This is seen most clearly in the tabernacle. The pillar rested on the tabernacle (Ex. 40:38); God was with his people in the wilderness. Then when God's people came to settle in Jerusalem and the temple was built the cloud filled the temple (1 Kg 8:10-11); the light of God's presence and glory stayed in Jerusalem. But then what happened? Let's look at the next epoch in the story.

5TH EPOCH: PROPHESED KINGDOM

Moses gave the Israelites the Law (a light for their path) as they were getting ready to go into the land. And one of the first things in the books of Moses was Genesis 1:3, "*And God said, 'Let there be light,' and there was light.*" Then in verse 14 we are told that God created the sun, moon, and stars, on the 4th day.

Idol Factories

One of the main reasons there is a creation account in the Law is that the people of God needed a proper worldview as they entered the Land because in the Land there would be people who had a very different worldview.²² In the Land there would be idol worshipers; people who worshiped the sun, moon, and stars instead of the God who made the sun, moon, and stars. The people of God were called to worship God alone – the true light and source of all light!

As long as the Israelites stayed faithful to God's Law they could enjoy life in his light; in his presence and blessing in the Land. But if they went the way of the Canaanites in the Land and began to worship idols (the created) rather than the Creator they would be banished again into darkness (Dt. 28, especially vv. 36ff.).

But the Israelites were, like us, sinful by nature. John Calvin calls our hearts idol factories.²³ The Israelites ran after false gods; they fell into idolatry. Throughout the prophetic writings in the Old Testament the prophets continue to call God's people back to faithfulness and worship of the one true God. And they warn the people that if they do not repent they will be banished again. But the people didn't listen and so the prophets announced imminent exile and banishment. Ezekiel describes the presence and glory of God leaving the temple in the form of a cloud (Ez. 10). The light of God's presence which had been with God's people since they left Egypt now left God's people; they were eventually sent into exile out of God's presence and blessing, into darkness.

But the prophets don't just predict gloom; they also look forward to a new light. Consider Isaiah 9:1-2. "*But there will be no gloom for her who was in anguish. ...he has made glorious the way of the sea, the land beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the nations. The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness, on them has light shined.*"

²² K.L. Younger, Pentateuch and Historical Books, Class Notes.

²³ Calvin, *Institutes*, Book 1, Section 11.

The people waited 700 years for this prophecy to be fulfilled, but it was fulfilled. And that brings us to the 6th epoch in the biblical storyline.

6TH EPOCH: PRESENT KINGDOM (Jesus)

I'm going to read our text again this morning, but before I do, let me ask if you have all of the strands tightly in your hand?

1. Light is connected with revelation.
2. Light is connected with life.
3. Light is connected with God's presence.
4. Light is connected with moral purity.
5. Darkness is connected with sin (vs. purity).
6. Darkness is connected with banishment (vs. presence).
7. Darkness is connected with death (vs. life).
8. Darkness is connected with blindness (vs. revelation).
9. God promises to deal with darkness.
10. Light is connected with guidance.

John 8:12 (ESV)

"Again Jesus spoke to them, saying, I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life."

What does this mean and why does it matter?

Jesus is the revelation of God. "No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father's side, he has made him known" (Jn. 1:18). "...we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth" (Jn. 1:14). Jesus is able to show us God because he is God; the Word of God. And not only is Jesus able to show us God, he is able to open the eyes of the blind (Jn. 9) so that all who believe can see the kingdom of God (Jn. 3:3). He is the light of the world. That's why we celebrate the coming of our Savior at Christmas.

Jesus is the life. "All things were made through him, and without him was not anything made that was made. In him was life, and the life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it" (Jn. 1:3-5). Jesus is the creator who comes into his creation that is full of darkness to give new life to all who believe (1 Jn. 5:11-12). 2 Corinthians 4:6 summarizes it best, "For God, who said, 'Let light shine out of darkness,' [in creation] has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ [in recreation]." ²⁴ Jesus is the light of the world. That's why we celebrate the coming of our Savior at Christmas.

Jesus is God present with us. He is Immanuel (Mt. 1:23). "The Word became flesh and dwelt among us" (Jn. 1:14). ²⁵ But not only is he the light present with us, he is also able to guide those

²⁴ "Light," *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery*. "Here is the link between creation and the new creation, between OT and NT, between the physical reality and the spiritual symbol."

²⁵ Literally, "tabernacled among us."

who have been banished from God's presence in darkness. He's like the pillar in the wilderness. Jesus is the light of the world. That's why we celebrate the coming of our Savior at Christmas.

Jesus is pure. Simon Peter said, "...you are the Holy One of God" (Jn. 6:69). But not only is Jesus pure and holy, he's able to make pure those who believe in him (cf. Jn. 3:21). He is able to forgive sin (cf. Jn. 8:24). He is the light of the world. That is why we celebrate the coming of our Savior at Christmas.

Jesus is the fulfillment of the promises. The Scriptures bear witness about him (Jn. 5:39). He is the fulfillment of the promise made to Abraham. He is the offspring of Abraham who is the source of blessing to the nations – a light to the whole world, not just Israel. He is the Savior of the world.

Jesus is also the fulfillment of the promise made to Adam and Eve. He is offspring of Eve who has crushed the head of Satan.

Jesus is also the fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy.²⁶ He is the long-expected Messiah, the Christ. Jesus is the light of the world. That is why we celebrate the coming of our Savior at Christmas.

So that's what it means that Jesus is the light of the world and hopefully you've seen in part why it matters. But I want to ask another question. How should you respond? And that brings us to the 7th epoch in the biblical storyline.

7TH EPOCH: PROCLAIMED KINGDOM (Acts until Now)

In John 8:12 we are told that whoever follows Jesus will not walk in darkness. In John 12:46 it says whoever believes in Jesus will not remain in darkness. To follow and believe are essentially the same thing in John. We're called to believe that Jesus is the light. Jeremy drove home so well last week the point that we can't just believe anything we like about Jesus. We need to believe he is who he said he is. That's why I've spent so much time developing the significance of light in the Bible. When Jesus says he's the light of the world we are called to believe all that is behind that statement.

And if we believe that Jesus is the light we have eternal life. We have the light of Christ. 1 Peter 2:9 says God's people have been called out of darkness into his marvelous light. John 12:36 tells us that if we believe Jesus is the light of the world we will become sons of light.²⁷ But we cannot simply leave it at that. If we are children of light we need to let our light shine bright.

Sermon in a sentence: If Jesus is the light who gives life we should believe and let our light shine bright.

We're called to be lighthouses. A lighthouse is not the light. A light house "houses" light and it funnels light into a beam that can be seen for miles.

²⁶ Mt. 4:15-16

²⁷ cf. Jn. 1:12; Col 1:12-13; 1 Thess. 5:5

In the same way we are not the light – Christ is the light, but we are called to “house” the light of Christ. Or to use biblical language, we’re called to *walk in the light*.

Ephesians 5:8-9 says it this way. “*For at one time you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of the light (for the fruit of light is found in all that is good and right and true).*”

1 John 1:5-7 says it this way. “*...God is light, and in him is no darkness at all. If we say we have fellowship with him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin.*”

As children of light who have the light and life of Christ in us we need to cultivate a relationship with God (have fellowship with him). We need to let the light abide in us – to let it get deep in us. And as we do there will be fruit – there will be evidence of the new life and light that is in us. And part of that evidence will be loving relationships with other Christians (fellowship with other believers). The world will know we are children of light by our love for one another.

But as lighthouses we’re not only called to “house” the light of Christ. We’re also called to funnel that light into a dark world. A lighthouse reflects light. We too are to reflect Christ. And when we do Christ is seen and God is glorified.

Philippians 2:15 says we’re to shine like stars in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation. Matthew 5:14 says we’re to be a city on a hill; not to hide our lamp under a basket. Acts 13:47 says that we were made to be a light to the nations.

In the same way that Israel was called to be a light to the nations we are called now to proclaim to the world that Jesus is the light of the world. We cannot keep this good news to ourselves. Even as the Father sent the Son, he is sending us (Jn. 20:21). At Christmas we don’t just receive gifts; we also give gifts. We need to go tell it on the mountain that Jesus is the light of the world! We need to be bold in our witness for Jesus Christ.

As the light gets deeper in us; it comes out of us. As lighthouses we are called to house the light and to project the light until he returns. Let’s look quickly at the last epoch in the biblical storyline.

8TH EPOCH: PERFECTED KINGDOM (Not Yet)

Revelation 21 speaks of the new heaven and the new earth and the new Jerusalem. And in that perfected kingdom Jesus will “*wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain any more...*” (v. 4). And in the new Jerusalem John tells us “*the city has no need of sun or moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and its lamp is the Lamb*” (vv. 22-23).²⁸

And then in chapter 22 we are told that “*night will be no more. They will need no light of lamp or sun, for the Lord God will be their light, and they will reign forever and ever*” (v. 5).

²⁸ Cf. Isa 60:19

Jesus is the light of the world. If we believe he is the light of the world then he has turned on the lights in our hearts; he has given us life. But we still live in a world of darkness. One day there will be no more darkness. But until that day we're called to be a light in the darkness. If Jesus is the light who gives life, we should believe and let our light shine bright.

Benediction²⁹

Numbers 6:24-26 (ESV)

The LORD bless you and keep you; the LORD make his face to shine upon you and be gracious to you; the LORD lift up his countenance upon you and give you peace.

²⁹ Light is also connected with blessing in the context of God's face shining on someone. Cf. Ps 31:16; 67:1; 80:3, 19; 119:35; 2 Cor. 4:6

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