

SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 28, 2010

Sunday, February 28, 2010: Jesus the Light of the World

Jesus: The Light of the World
John 8: 12 – 30.

I. Introduction.

You know how men are when it comes to power tools. Every man wants to have a set of power tools he can be proud of.

Several months ago, I had to buy a new drill. I had the same drill for over ten years, and it finally quit taking a charge. I thought about buying a new battery for the drill, until I discovered that a new drill cost about the same as a new battery. So, I went to the hardware store to buy a new power tool.

I'm sure I fell for the marketing gimmicks, because I bought the drill that came with a "free" gift. A drill and a flashlight. Of course, this was no ordinary flashlight. It uses the same rechargeable battery as the drill. In fact, I got a package deal. A drill; a flashlight; a battery charger; two rechargeable batteries; and a handy-dandy carrying case.

Just when I started feeling good about myself, a friend told me about his new flashlight. He bought a Sure Fire flashlight. Have you ever heard of Sure Fire? They are widely heralded as "the world's greatest flashlights." If you look at their website, you will discover that they don't like to refer to their products as flashlights. They call them "illumination tools." They market their "illumination tools" to the U.S. military and to local law enforcement agencies. They make the brightest flashlights on the market. They are designed to temporarily blind an assailant at close range. Some of their flashlights are so bright, they are rumored to blind through closed eyelids! Sure Fire illumination tools range in price from \$69.00 to \$479.00.

All of a sudden, my flashlight doesn't seem so manly! I still like the drill.

You know what flashlights are for, don't you? Hurricanes. Actually, that is not the only time we need flashlights. We also need them for ice storms and for hunting for things in the attic. Actually, we need flashlights any time there is no light.

There is an interesting thing about light. Human being can see light, but we cannot produce light. In order for us to see, we need an external light source. The human eye is an amazing organ. The gift of sight is a wonderful sense. However, the eye and our sense of sight are worthless without external light.

Ancient people knew more about light and darkness than we do today. For example, I rarely find myself in complete darkness. Every room in my house has an overhead light. Most rooms in my house have extra lamps. Some rooms in my house have night lights that plug into the wall and come on automatically when the room is dark. Even when all the lights are turned off in my house and the night lights are unplugged, there is still a glimmer of light peaking through the windows from the street lights outside.

This was not the case in the ancient world. This was not the case in the days before electric lights.

During the day, it was light. At night. It was dark. If it was a cloudy night or if the moon was not high in the sky, it was completely dark. And the human eye and the sense of sight are worthless when it is completely dark. Perhaps it is no surprise that Jesus used light as a religious symbol. It was something everyone could relate to. And, it was a common religious symbol.

Light and Dark are usually considered to be the only Universal Religious Symbols used in exactly the same way in almost EVERY religious system. Dark = Evil...The Personification of Evil...Satan...The Evil Divinity in Pagan Theology. Light = Good...The Personification of Good...God...The Good Divinity in Pagan Theology...

Look at what Jesus had to say about light in John 8...

Read John 8: 12 – 30.

More than likely the background for this passage is the Jewish Feast of Tabernacles. John tells us in chapter seven that Jesus' followers had encouraged him to go to Jerusalem for the Feast of Tabernacles. They wanted him to go and reveal himself publicly. However, Jesus insisted that his time had not yet come. It was not the right time to disclose fully who he really is. So, Jesus' brothers and disciples went to Jerusalem to the feast without him.

The Feast of Tabernacles was one of three important feasts on the Jewish calendar. The Law stated (Deuteronomy 16: 16) that all Jewish men were to travel to Jerusalem to observe all three of these feasts every year in the Temple. Jesus' brothers and disciples were only doing what the Law commanded and expected them as Jewish men. Yet, Jesus would not be forced into revealing himself. He would do this on his own free will and at the time appointed by the Father. Imagine how confused Jesus' followers must have been when they arrived at Jerusalem and found Jesus, teaching in the Temple. Jesus did go to the Feast of Tabernacles, but he did it on his own terms. Not because his followers insisted.

The Feast of Tabernacles actually served two purposes. On one hand, it was a harvest festival. Each Fall, the Jewish people traveled to Jerusalem on a pilgrimage to celebrate the fact that the work of harvesting the crops was complete. The work was done for the agricultural year, and they could take a break. They celebrated with food and wine, giving glory to God as the One who had provided for their physical needs. On the other hand, this was a religious pilgrimage.

The Feast of the Tabernacles was also a time for the Jewish people to remember the forty years their ancestors had wandered in the desert before entering the Promised Land. During the forty years, God's people had lived in tents and had worshipped God in a special tent. We don't usually use the word tent to describe this time period. We use the word "tabernacle," but a tabernacle is actually a tent. It is a temporary dwelling place. God's people lived in tabernacles while they were in the desert, because the desert was not their permanent home. God's people worshipped God in a tabernacle because they had not yet built a permanent Temple.

During the Feast of Tabernacles, the landscape of Jerusalem was filled with tabernacles. One of the ways the Jews remembered their ancestors was by sleeping and eating all their meals in tents. For seven days and seven nights, they lived like the people who had escaped from slavery in Egypt. They remembered by experiencing life as their ancestors experienced the forty years.

Each night of the feast, the people gathered in the courtyards of the Temple for an elaborate candle

lighting ritual. There were candles, torches and four huge Menorahs. The entire Temple was filled with light. More than likely, this served as a reminder of how God was present with his people during their years in the desert. God showed himself to them every day by a pillar of cloud. God showed himself every night with a pillar of fire. The light was a symbolic reminder of the presence of God.

II. Light of the World.

John 8: 20 tells us that Jesus gave this discourse while standing in the Temple treasury. This was the most accessible area of the Temple, often called the Court of the Women. Any and every Jewish person was allowed in this area. It was the place where the financial gifts were received in thirteen trumpets. It was a common area for teachers and preachers to address an audience. It was the place where the Menorahs were lighted each night of the feast.

Since Jesus was at the Temple for the Feast of Tabernacles, we can assume one of two things. Either, this took place on one of the seven feast days. Or, this took place immediately after the feast.

If it was after the feast, then imagine Jesus' words on the back drop of four huge Menorahs that were completely burned out. The wicks of the candles were shriveled up and black. Perhaps they were still smoldering from the seven nights of light.

Jesus did not say, "I am enlightened," or "I have been illumined." Jesus said, "I am the source of light for the world."

The lights in the Temple area had run their course. They had burned for seven nights. They had shone brilliantly...for a time. Their time had come and gone. Now, Jesus tells us that he is the source of a light that cannot be extinguished.

The lights in the Temple had been a reminder of the light in the desert. As long as the pillar of fire was burning, God's people knew that God was present with them. As long as God was present with his people, they did not experience true darkness. They had light...Even in the middle of the darkest night. And, here Jesus assumes that role for himself. Whoever follows Jesus, follows in light. Whoever follows Jesus, follows in the presence of God himself.

This is an amazing claim. Jesus claims light and the presence of God for himself. Jesus is claiming to be One with God.

Jesus' words caused something of a controversy with the Pharisees. After making such a bold proclamation about his own character and Oneness with God, we might expect the Pharisees to challenge Jesus. However, we don't expect them to react the way they did. The Pharisees did not say, "How dare you claim to be light and the presence of God." Instead, they challenged Jesus on a legal technicality: "You don't have enough witnesses."

The Law did not allow for someone to witness for themselves. Every witness needed to be corroborated by at least two witnesses. Jesus has another witness: His Father. God himself has testified that Jesus really is who he claims to be. That witness is written throughout the Law, the Prophets and the Writings of the Old Testament. The witness of the Father is available to anyone who will hear.

Again, the Pharisees challenge Jesus. They don't challenge his claim to be light of the world. They

catch him on another technicality. They ask him “Where is your father?” Perhaps this is a snide remark about Jesus’ birth. Perhaps they are accusing Jesus of not actually knowing who his father really is. After all, Jesus’ mother conceived him before she was married. Perhaps Jesus’ father is Joseph the carpenter. Perhaps Jesus’ father is another man altogether.

The Pharisees have really done the very best they can do. They tried to catch Jesus in a legal technicality. They tried to challenge his birth. They really can’t challenge his claim to be the light of the world. That is because, light cannot be challenged. Light is either light or it is nothing at all.

When we turn the lights on in a dark room, we can’t question the light itself. Either it shines, or it doesn’t shine. Light can be experienced. Light can be judged (adequate or inadequate). But, light cannot be challenged. There are no philosophical arguments about light. Since we cannot produce light for ourselves, all we can do is experience the light and make judgments about the light, based on what the light does for us. Either, it illumines us and our surroundings, or it does not.

The Pharisees could not challenge Jesus’ claim to be the light of the world, because they refused to open their eyes. They refused to allow Jesus to lead them and give them the presence of God.

III. Three “I Am” Statements.

Notice that Jesus used the expression “I am” three different times in John 8: 12 – 30. The first is **John 8: 12, “I am the light of the world...”** The second is **John 8: 24, “I told you that you would die in your sins; if you do not believe that I am, you will indeed die in your sins.”** The third is **John 8: 28, “When you have lifted up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am and that I do nothing on my own but speak just what the Father has taught me.”**

In verses 24 and 28, the New International Version places brackets around the phrase “the one I claim to be.” I think you should take out your pens and mark out that phrase in both verses. The NIV uses brackets to indicate that this phrase does not appear in the Greek New Testament. The phrase is added to help it make sense in English.

The Gospel of John likes to use phrases that carry multiple meanings. I believe this is one of those cases. But, if we add the phrase “the one I claim to be,” we are choosing one meaning and discarding the others. I see four possible meanings...

1. I am the one I claim to be...Jesus claimed to be “from above” and said the Pharisees are “from below.” Therefore, they are not willing and able to comprehend who he really is...
2. I am the One sent from the Father...This is a claim to be the promised Messiah. However, Jesus refused to use this language in describing himself. The last time he fulfilled a Messianic prophesy (providing bread from heaven) the crowds tried to make him their king. Jesus did not come to fulfill the political hopes of Israel. Jesus came to fulfill the spiritual hopes—forgiveness of sins, relationship with God, eternal salvation and life...
3. I am the light of the world...The original claim Jesus made in this context. When all other sources of light have run out and been extinguished, Jesus is the only light that still shines. Jesus is the source of all religious “enlightenment” and the only source for the presence of God...
4. I am...This is the language of God from the Old Testament. This is the divine name, offered to

Moses in answer to his questioning at the burning bush. Moses asked God, “Who are you? And, whom shall I say has sent me?” God answered, “I am.”

IV. Conclusion.

Anyone who refuses to acknowledge that Jesus is “I am,” will die in their sins—without forgiveness, separated from God.

The only way to recognize that Jesus is who he claims to be is look to the cross. When you see the Son of Man “lifted up” on the cross, then you will know. Jesus is who he claimed to be. Jesus claimed to be God himself.