

WBS 11/20/24

John 8:12-59

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Today we will be talking about John 8:12-59. We're going to start by talking about what we're NOT going to be talking about. You may have noticed we skipped verses 1-11. This is a powerful story about a woman who is caught in adultery and the authorities wanted to stone her. Jesus said, "Let him who is without sin among you be the first to throw a stone at her." And everyone slowly left. So why are we skipping it? It is actually not included in the earliest manuscripts of scripture but is present in most of the medieval Greek manuscripts. It also doesn't seem to match the apostle John's style of writing. Commentaries say there is little reason for doubting that the event occurred, but there are very high standards for what is included in Scripture, which I find very reassuring. Also, this section starting with verse 12 follows very logically from the end of chapter 7.

We continue with the same setting as chapter 7 – it was during the Feast of Tabernacles or the Feast of Booths. Chrissy described this last week, but just as a reminder, it's a celebration of God's provision of the harvest and a time of remembering his provision for the Israelites during their 40 years wandering in the desert. They would pour out water to commemorate how God provided water from a rock and they would light torches that would illuminate much of Jerusalem from the top of the hill to remind themselves how, in the middle of the dark desert God led them as a pillar of fire and reassured them of his presence.

As we've heard in previous chapters, Jesus stands in the midst of this feast and makes some extraordinary claims. He says, "I am the Living Water, and whoever drinks of me will never thirst." He claims to be the Bread of life, after providing bread out of thin air for his followers... promising that they will never be spiritually hungry again if they believe in him. He also was reminding them of the manna God made fall from the sky when they had no food in the wilderness. And now ... he claims to be the Light of the world.

Jesus is boldly again and again trying to get across to these people WHO HE IS. Once again, they don't really get it. They take him down various rabbit trails and ask both leading and irrelevant questions. But he knows that who he is, is the most important question that they will ever find the answer to. It is the most crucial thing that they must understand. If they and we do not acknowledge who he is, then we will never be able to have eternal life, or have relationship with him, or experience the abundant life of bread and water and light and life that he wants to give us.

What follows in Chapter 8 is a long and rather confusing conversation where Jesus is talking on one level and the Pharisees are talking on another and at times, they seem to be completely missing each other until the very end where they finally got it... and as a result they picked up stones to kill him. They finally understood that Jesus was saying that he was the Son of God, that he and the Father were One, that he was the great I AM. They knew that if any man claimed to be God, it was considered blasphemy and Old Testament law said they must stone him. What they didn't have eyes to see was the possibility that it actually could be true that Jesus was God, and that God Himself was standing in their midst. We're going to take a closer look at Christ's claims and why the Pharisees responded as they did. And we're going to take a closer look at how those claims, change everything.

The conversation starts with Verse 12, it says,

"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.'"

His listeners, as well-educated Jews, would have been very familiar with all the symbolic and literal uses of light connected with God in the Old Testament. Genesis starts out with God speaking light into existence and separating it from the darkness. The covenant with Abram was sealed by God in the form of a smoking pot and a flaming lamp passing between the halves of the sacrifice while Abram slept, signifying that God would do the whole thing. God appeared to Moses in the form of a burning bush. When the Israelites wandered in the desert for 40 years, as I already mentioned, God guided them with his presence in the form of a cloud by day and a pillar of fire at night. The Psalms are full of verses like, 27:1 "the Lord is my light

and my salvation.” And 119:105, “The word of God, the law of God, is a light to guide the path of those who cherish instruction.” In Isaiah 49 it was prophesied, “I will also make you a light for the Gentiles, that my salvation may reach to the ends of the earth.”

God, Jesus, or his angels appeared to people many times through scripture as a bright shining light. In the New Testament as the shepherds were watching their sheep at night, “an angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified.” We read in John 1 about John the Baptist that, “He himself was not the light; he came only as a witness to the light. The true light that gives light to everyone was coming into the world.”

The Holy Spirit came as tongues of fire on believers before they were sent out to the world, and in Revelation 21 heaven is described as a city that “does not need the sun or the moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and the Lamb is its lamp.” There are so many more examples throughout the Bible that we don’t even have time to touch on but it’s clear that as indescribable as our God is, one way that our human minds can fathom him is through light and fire.

Commentator JC Ryle says that these words of Christ saying that he is the light of the world, “imply that the world needs light and is naturally in a dark condition” he also says that “the Lord Jesus Christ declares himself to be the only remedy.”

John 1:4-5 says, “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.”

So ... what is our relationship with and understanding of light? Light is generally a beautiful thing. We have had so much wonderful sunlight this fall. It makes the colors on the leaves so much brighter. If we had had a cold, dark, rainy fall we would barely have noticed this amazing chemical miracle on the trees. A street in North Philly in the sunlight is totally different than the same street in the darkness of night when the electricity is out. And ask any 6-year-old... monsters only lurk in their bedroom when the lights are out.

So light is a good thing and darkness is a scary thing, but light can actually be a scary thing too. Jen Wilkin in her teaching on this passage pointed out that it's only been in the past 120 years that light in our homes has been a safe thing. Before that for thousands of years light had to come from fire. Fire can be warm and comforting but as we know it can also be terrifying. God created fire in all its beauty and power and chose it as one of the ways to represent his glory. The opposite of light is darkness, and darkness is scary because of the unknown, because we can't see what is around us. So, in contrast, then light is seeing and knowing.

If darkness is where evil is done so it can be hidden, then light is where it is exposed.

And if darkness is where plants can't grow, light is where they flourish.

Let's look at each of these aspects of light. If darkness brings fear because there's so much unknown, Jesus' light helps us see and know through his Word. He gives us understanding and wisdom, and teaches us what is right. Even if I'm struggling and don't understand why things are happening and I FEEL like I'm in the darkness, Jesus is still a light when he offers comfort and reassures us that HE is in control and that He is good and that He is loving. Those facts and His Word can be our light. In his song of deliverance, king David says in 2 Samuel 22, "For you are my lamp, O Lord, and my God lightens my darkness." Not just God's Word but He Himself, His presence, His character, His Holy Spirit can bring light to our darkness. It doesn't say that God's solutions to our problems, his answers to our prayers, or relief from our suffering is the light, it says God himself is the light and that's what he offers us.

Last week our Ukrainian friends, Gorik and Snezhana visited us. He is the pastor of one of our churches in Odessa and he was allowed to leave the country because he turned 60 years old and doesn't have to be available for the military draft anymore. They traveled around the US for a few weeks, visiting churches and talking about the darkness of the war in Ukraine and asking for prayer. As most of you know we have been missionaries and working with the church there for over 25 years. We adopted our son from Kharkiv and our kids grew up there. I've never seen and experienced such evil and darkness as Russia has brought on the people of Ukraine. The relentless and random bombing of cities including hospitals and schools, the torture, rape, starvation, and kidnapping that has occurred in cities that the Russian army have

taken over, and the fear and trauma that everyone experiences on a daily basis. It has been gut-wrenching for us to walk through it with them. It's been hard to see God's light there, but I asked Gorik and Snezhana how they have seen it... At first there was a long pause. I knew this was a hard question. They said war is war is awful, but they think about heaven a lot where they won't have to be afraid anymore and there will be no more suffering and sin. They said the light at the end of the tunnel helps sustain them, the fact that this won't last forever carries them sometimes. Yes, Jesus was talking about this kind of light... he bought us this light by dying for us on the cross. If he hadn't, the curse of sin and death would still rule in our lives and we would not have an advocate to speak for us on judgment day. At the end of the tunnel would be eternal darkness without God and the suffering would go on forever ever. But praise God, for those who have admitted their brokenness and their need for God, they will have eternity in the light, without suffering. Yes, that is most certainly a comfort in the darkness! Gorik and Snezhana also talked about how the Lord gives them grace every day in the midst of the war. Grace can look like a persevering faith that God is hearing their prayers and being able to continue to pray. That is a beautiful light that pushes back the darkness, to continue to believe. It can look like the ability to keep loving and serving and helping the people in their church (and thereby letting Jesus' light shine through them). It can look like being able to focus on work or sermon prep despite the air raid siren going off and being able to get used to some things they never thought they'd be able to get used to. God's grace being sufficient in deep darkness is most definitely a light.

Darkness not only represents suffering but it represents sin. Jesus' light exposes it because of his perfect righteousness. He is holy and we are not. He wants to ONLY bring glory to the Father and we tend to want to glorify ourselves. He loves his enemies and prays for those who annoy him and we just complain and judge. He was willing to suffer torture because of his love for us, but we get bent out of shape when our physical comforts have to be sacrificed for the sake of others. The Holy Spirit is ever so gentle in showing us how our thoughts and actions offend him. Sometimes we are afraid to ask him to show us our sin, but the loving warmth of his light is rarely harsh. As Jesus says in verse 32 of this chapter, "you will know the truth and

the truth will set you free.” What awaits us when we acknowledge our sin and ask for forgiveness is freedom from guilt and shame. We are no longer bound by our sin and slaves to it when we can just repent and be unshackled over and over again. This freedom from sin comes when we become a believer and gain eternal life but also when we daily repent and believe and are freed. The difference between a son and a slave is that the son or the daughter has freedom in their relationship with the master, their daddy. They also have the guarantee that they will inherit everything from their father. In verse 36, Jesus says, “If the Son sets you free, you will be free in deed.” In this way, Jesus’ light brings eternal life, freedom and the right to a relationship with His father.

In chapter 8, in response to Jesus saying he can set them free, the Jews protest that they are offspring of Abraham and have never been enslaved to anyone. We know that they had been slaves in Egypt and had served Assyria, Babylon, and Rome among others, so it is more probable that they are talking about an inward freedom. But we can see from many other passages that they are slaves to the law and the additions that they have made to it, they are ruled by them. They prioritize the law over loving, helping, and even healing people. We have seen over and over again, that the world and people’s hearts will not be changed by forcing laws down people’s throats. Jesus shows us a different way. It involves sacrificial love and abiding or staying close to and studying who God is. In verse 31 Jesus says, “if you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.” We need to be constantly sitting in his word so that we will know the truth. And we need to be reminding ourselves and those around us of the truth so that we can abide and persevere in the truth. There are so many things vying to be truth and light in our world we need to know the truth of God’s Word in order to be discerning.

Let’s go back to this conversation between Jesus and the Pharisees. Throughout the interaction, Jesus is proving his authority to make the claims he is making. When he says he is the light of the world they seem to ignore it or totally miss the point and focus on the legalities of making the claim. The law of Moses in Deuteronomy 17:6 says that you must have more than one witness in capital cases and other criminal proceedings. The Pharisees adopted it to

apply in other legal situations. He answers them in verses 14-18, saying that he doesn't really need another witness because of who he is, but even if he did, he had the witness of the father who sent him. Back in chapter 5 there was a similar conversation with the Jews where he was proving his authority based on his relationship with the father. In 5:19 he says, "the son can do nothing of his own accord, but only what he sees the father doing. Whatever the father does the son does likewise. For the father loves the son and shows him all that he himself is doing."

Again, the Pharisees seem to miss what he is saying but focus in on his mention of the father. They ask him in verse 19, "where is your father?" Jesus doesn't even answer this question but goes right to the root of the problem and says, "you know neither me nor my father. If you knew me, you would know my father also."

Both of these passages show this beautiful back-and-forth relationship of the father and the son. They've been described along with the Holy Spirit in the Trinity like the electrons in an atom, circling around each other and giving each other glory with bright, never-ending energy. If we look at the acts of one, we get to know the others. If only they would listen to and learn from Jesus they would get to know God the Father. He was standing right in front of them. Back then, a person was known by who his father was. Son of Jesse, son of Jacob...

Again, Jesus is trying to get them and us to see is that the answer to the question of WHO HE IS centers on His relationship with His Father. He is the Son of God; His authority comes from God Himself. As with us, our identity and value come from who has claimed us as His children. Jesus perseveres in his conversation with the Pharisees and says "I know that you are offspring of Abraham; yet you seek to kill me because my word finds no place in you. I speak of what I've seen with my father, and you do what you have heard from *your* father." When they again protest that their father is Abraham Jesus says, "if you were Abraham's children you would be doing the works Abraham did, but now you seek to kill me, a man who has told you the truth that I heard from God. This is not what Abraham did." He goes on again to try to get them to see that He is integrally connected to God the Father so if they knew God, they would know him and love him. The only other option, if they are not children of God, is that they are

children of the devil. They lie and don't believe the truth and want to kill him, both of these things also characterize the devil. Jesus says of him, "he was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks out of his own character, for he is a liar and the father of lies." They then accuse him of being a Samaritan and having a demon.

Commentator D.A. Carson about verse 48 says, "when their theological argument fails, Jesus' opponents turn to personal abuse. Jews and Samaritans did not enjoy easy dealings... it is possible that some of Jesus' opponents thought that by [him] casting aspersions on [or attacking] their paternity he was rather traitorously siding with the despised Samaritans."

The conversation continues to escalate and they get closer to really seeing that Jesus is saying that he is God. The chapter ends when Jesus says "truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I AM." I AM is the same unpronounceable word of only consonants in Hebrew, that God uses to describe himself throughout the Bible. Commentator John Stott says about this passage, "with the Mosaic setting for this discourse, it is difficult not to see here an allusion to Exodus 3:14, the self-definition of God: [where He says to Moses,] 'say to the Israelites: I AM has sent me to you.'" The Greek reads, "I AM the One Who Is".

There it is, clear as day, Jesus is saying that he is God. They and we are brought to a point of having to decide: is Jesus God as he says he is, or is he a demon, because anybody making the claims that he has, would have to be crazy if he wasn't right.

C.S. Lewis famously wrote in his book *Mere Christianity*, "A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic—on a level with the man who says he is a poached egg—or else he would be the Devil of Hell. You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God: or else a madman or something worse. You can shut Him up for a fool, you can spit at Him and kill Him as a demon; or you can fall at His feet and call Him Lord and God. But let us not come with any patronizing nonsense about His being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to."

And while I'm quoting CS Lewis I might as well quote Tim Keller. He said about this passage: "Jesus' teaching was totally egocentric but his life was not. Egocentric teachers always have egocentric lives... They abuse people, they are hypocrites, and they are filled with insecurity. But Jesus had tenderness without compromise, strength without harshness, convictions without condescension, and humility without insecurity... We have to decide if he is a demon or if he is divine ... we have to crown him or kill him, there is no in between." End quote.

And if we truly believe that Jesus is God, then the cross changes everything and we can fall on our knees and worship. We can relax and trust him even though we can't see in the darkness, in the same way that the presence of mommy or daddy totally changes everything for the six-year-old in his dark bedroom.

In my times of suffering, I've had so many questions and so many prayers un-answered and have wanted to know why and what God is doing. "God, if you hear my prayers and you are good and loving and in control ... why are you not moving? Where are you? Why will you not still the storms?"

And so many times, like with Job, God brings me back to showing me who he is. And he says "I AM... I AM God and you are not." This is different than when we yell at our kids, "because I said so!" This I AM statement is flooded with love that was willing to die for us and the ever-shining light of heaven where there is no pain and no tears and it is full of the incredible gift of the Holy Spirit that never leaves us. It's all wrapped up in the Lion of Judah when he roars, I AM!