John 8 — I Am the Light of the World

Bible Study · August 10, 2024

Who Art Thou? — John 8's Particular Answer

Each chapter of John's Gospel supplies a particular answer to the question of who the Lord Jesus is. John 5 displays His omnipotence. John 6 reveals His omniscience. John 7 declares His omnipresence — the people seek to find Him and cannot, because He is everywhere; He is not limited to where they look. And John 8 gives the answer that belongs especially to this chapter: I am the light of the world.

This is not merely a claim the Lord makes about Himself in passing. The whole chapter turns on it. The scribes and Pharisees bring a woman taken in adultery into the temple to trap Him. The men who come in against the light are shown to be living in moral darkness. The woman who remains in the light is sent out with the light. The lawgiver writes in the ground with His finger, just as the law was written by the finger of God. And at verse 12, the chapter declares its great theme: I am the light of the world — he that follows me shall not walk in darkness but shall have the light of life.

The Temple, the Woman, and the Trap

Early in the morning He came again into the temple. It is worth pausing on that word morning. The chapter has told us He is the light, and the Lord comes in the morning — for when He comes, it is morning. That is the moral meaning behind the plain word. He sat down and taught the people who came to Him.

Into that scene the scribes and Pharisees inject a woman caught in adultery. Their purpose was not justice. The text says plainly: they said this proving him, that

they might have something to accuse him of. They cared nothing for the woman. They cared nothing for the law they cited. They wanted to trap Him between two impossibilities: condemn her and He appears harsh and unmerciful; release her and He appears to overturn Moses. Either answer they could use against Him.

What they brought was a black sin — one of the explicit violations of the Ten Commandments. They brought darkness into the presence of the light. And the darkness did not comprehend it. They could not understand what they were in the presence of. In the Old Testament, Belshazzar's feast saw a hand writing on a wall — weighed in the balances and found wanting. Here the lawgiver Himself stooped down and wrote with His finger in the ground. The same finger that inscribed the law at Sinai. And they had no apprehension of it at all.

Neither Do I Condemn Thee — Both Yes and No

The trap was designed to produce a binary answer: kill her, or let her go. Guilty or innocent. Law or mercy. The men who set the trap were convinced those were the only two options. This is a human way of thinking — tell me what the question is and I will tell you the answer must be yes or no.

The Lord's answer was neither yes nor no — it was both. He condemned the sin without condemning the sinner. He did not say: the law requires her death, so stone her. He did not say: ignore the law, let her go free. He stooped down and wrote in the ground, and when they continued pressing Him, He rose and said: let him that is without sin among you first cast the stone at her. The challenge went to their consciences. The elder ones felt it first and went out, and then the younger ones followed, until the Lord was alone with the woman.

Neither do I condemn thee — go and sin no more. In those two sentences He acknowledged her sin, declined to execute its penalty, and sent her out with the light of His word to walk in from that day forward. What she had done before was sin — He said so. What she was to do from that moment was sin no more.

He had condemned the sin and covered the sinner. Who else but Himself could have done that? It was not a yes and it was not a no. It was the answer that only the light of the world could give.

> *Neither do I condemn thee. Go and sin no more. — John 8:11*

Cockroaches and the Conscience

The scribes and Pharisees went out one by one because the light was too strong for them. There is a domestic analogy: in an apartment infested with cockroaches, turn on the light and they scatter instantly. They cannot tolerate the light. That is the scribes and Pharisees in John 8. They went out one by one because the presence of the light exposed what they were, and they could not stand it.

And yet they each had a conscience. Every man has received from God a conscience — the scripture speaks of a seared conscience, one that has been overridden so often it no longer functions well, like meat put on the grill until it is half-cooked and no longer responds to heat. Their consciences were not gone. They were uncomfortable. They were exposed. But instead of doing what discomfort in the presence of the light is meant to produce — turning toward the light — they went out into moral darkness. They left the light behind and walked into the dark.

The contrast with Judas in John 13 is precise. In chapter 13, after the Lord tells Judas to do quickly what he had determined to do, it says: he went out immediately — and it was night. In John 8 the Pharisees went out, and it was also night. In each case the person left the presence of the light and went into darkness. And in John 8 the progression within the chapter is also a declension: in chapter 7 the people could not find Him because He was everywhere — a confusion about geography. In chapter 8 they ask whether He will kill Himself — a greater moral darkness, a moral confusion about who He is.

Early in the Morning — and the Lawgiver's Finger

The description of the Lord's arrival in verse 2 — early in the morning He came — is more than chronology. The light comes in the morning. That is the moral texture of those words. And after all the people had come to Him and He sat down and taught them, the scribes and Pharisees came in against that light. They brought darkness into the temple.

What was in the temple? Everything spoke of the Lord Jesus — every offering, every article of furniture, the anointing oil, the incense. He was the reality of it all, sitting there in the middle of all the types that pointed to Him. And in the middle of all of that, they tried to catch Him in a legal trap. The irony is devastating: the lawgiver, the one whose finger wrote the ten commandments in stone, was there among them, stooping down and writing with that same finger in the ground. And they had not the faintest perception of it.

John 8 teaches that God is light and the Lord Jesus Christ is God because He is light. He is not merely a teacher of light, or a reflector of light. He is the light itself. And the man who follows Him shall not walk in darkness but shall have the light of life — not the light of information, not the light of moral improvement, but the light of life, which is what the Lord Jesus is in His own person.

The Testimony of Two — and the Father's Witness

The Pharisees challenge the Lord on the grounds that He is bearing witness to Himself, and therefore His testimony is not valid — citing the requirement of two witnesses. The objection is ironic to the point of blindness. God in Genesis 22 swore by Himself because there was no greater to swear by — the writer of Hebrews makes that point. The Lord Jesus had no need of external corroboration. When the sun is shining, you do not require someone to go outside and confirm that it is.

And yet the Lord does give them the two witnesses: I bear witness of myself, and the Father who sent me bears witness of me. The two witnesses are the Son and the Father. If they had known the Father, they would have known the Son. If they had known the Son, they would have known whence He came and whither He was going. Their ignorance of both was total and wilful — a blindness they had chosen, not one they had suffered.

The chapter closes at verse 30 with a note of grace in the darkness: as He spoke these things, many believed on Him. The light shone in the darkness, and while many went out from it, some received it. That has been true in every generation. The same light still shines. We have the four Gospels and have no excuse for not recognizing who this chapter is about. He is the light of the world — yesterday, today, and forever the same.

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