

“Seeing the Light”

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Continuing a series on the Gospel of John

John 8:12-20

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Again Jesus spoke to them, saying, *“I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life.”*

Then the Pharisees said to him, *“You are testifying on your own behalf; your testimony is not valid.”* Jesus answered, *“Even if I testify on my own behalf, my testimony is valid because I know where I have come from and where I am going, but you do not know where I come from or where I am going. You judge by human standards; I judge no one. Yet even if I do judge, my judgment is valid; for it is not I alone who judge, but I and the Father who sent me. In your law it is written that the testimony of two witnesses is valid. I testify on my own behalf, and the Father who sent me testifies on my behalf.”*

Then they said to him, *“Where is your Father?”* Jesus answered, *“You know neither me nor my Father. If you knew me, you would know my Father also.”*

He spoke these words while he was teaching in the treasury of the temple, but no one arrested him, because his hour had not yet come.

John 8:12-20, New Revised Standard Version

“I am the light of the world!” Light lets us see. It shines, and what was hidden is now revealed. Light ends our fear. It shines, and sends the monsters scurrying away. Light opens our minds. It shines, and the bulb over our head clicks on.

Jesus says, *“I am the light of the world!”* That’s good news then, right!

Not so fast.

“I am *THE* Light,” he says. Not “a light.” Not “one of the lights.” The Light. He, and only he, can open our eyes to see. He, and only he, can drive away all fear. He, and only he, can show us what is true. *“I am THE light of the world.”* That’s very exclusive. Is it good news then?

“The WORLD,” he says. Not just in a corner. Not just for a chosen few. Not just our planet Earth, even. The world. “World” translates the Greek word *kosmos*. Which is everything. Jesus is the Light for everything, everyone, everywhere. No one is too lost. No place is too dark. Jesus shines through every border, every barrier, every limit in our tiny imaginations.

"I am the light of the kosmos." That's very expansive. So it is good news then?

"I AM the light of the kosmos." Is Jesus saying that wherever he is not, there is only darkness? Is Jesus saying that without him there is ignorance, deception, terror and death? Imagine what our tiny Earth would become if the sun stopped shining. A cold, lifeless, frozen rock. Is Jesus saying that is what we are, dead without him?

We could handle Jesus saying something like, *"I am one light among many."* That would be okay. Like, *"I am the light for those who follow me."* That would be fine. Like *"You can follow me if you want, but if you choose not to, no worries."* That would suit us well.

But Jesus says, *"I am the light of the kosmos."* Expansive, exclusive, and the stakes could not be higher. Too good to be true! Too outrageous to be true! Why should we believe him?

"Prove it!" That's their challenge to him. If he is going to say something so exclusive —only he is the light— and something so expansive —he's for the whole kosmos— and something so ultimate —without him, all is deadly darkness— Jesus had better back it up. *"Show us! Give us evidence!"*

"Call your witnesses! Who else will speak on your behalf?" It's a basic legal principle. Don't rely on what a person says about themselves. More evidence than that is required for conviction. *"Jesus, if you are going to convince us about you . . . who else will speak for you?"*

II

Ever notice that when people ask Jesus a question — maybe when you've had a question for Jesus — often he does not answer it? Or his answer questions us.

As the Gospel according to John unfolds, we see Jesus increasingly claiming a divine authority and identity that only belongs to God. So they are preparing a charge of blasphemy. As they keep digging, Jesus keeps adding to their evidence. They keep objecting: *"How can you say that about yourself?"* And he keeps adding: *"Not only do I say that. I say this too!"* He does not back off. He pushes harder.

"Give us your witnesses, Jesus!" He gives them three answers.

First, this: *"What I say about myself is true, because I know who I am. I know where I came from, and where I am going. But you do not know me."* Jesus has this incredible self-

assurance. He knows himself, so he knows he is truthful. Is he arrogant? Is he cocky? Is he insane? . . . Is he right?

Then, this: *"I am my own witness, and God the Father, the One who sent me, is my second witness. But you do not know my Father, because the only way you can know God is by knowing me."* They are demanding Jesus' witnesses, and he calls God to the stand.¹ (Who dares taken on that cross-examination?) Jesus is confident that whenever he speaks, it is the Father speaking through him by the Spirit. So whatever he says about himself, it is not just his word we are hearing.² It's God's!

Except Jesus then says we cannot know God the Father unless we know Jesus. *But that's not fair. You say if I listen to the Father, I'll be convinced about you! But you also say I can't know the Father unless I listen to you! Arrgh!!*

Finally, in the middle of it all, Jesus says this: *"I do not judge. But if I do judge, I judge rightly, because I judge with the Father."*

I know what I say is true, because I know myself, but you don't know me. My Father is my witness, but you don't know him because you don't know me. I don't judge, but my judgement is right because I judge with my Father. Make sense?

III

What is going on here? We've got Jesus, accused of blasphemy, arrogance, exclusivism, and maybe even craziness. We've got his judges: his judges back then, and we who judge him now. And we've got witnesses. (At least, we hope so!) That's how it looks.

Except . . . we've got it wrong. We think we are examining Jesus. No! We are being examined. We think we are the judges, deciding who Jesus is. No! We are being judged, by our reactions to him. And who witnesses to the truth? God the Father, God the Son.³

¹ ". . . he is using an argument from the lesser to the greater: if the testimony of 'two men' is valid in a court of law, how much more then testimony of one man, plus God his Father in heaven — particularly if God the Father has sent him to act on God's behalf?" J. Ramsay Michaels, The Gospel of John (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), 483.

² "Jesus, John's Gospel is claiming, is convinced that whenever Jesus speaks, the Father's Spirit speaks 'a second word' as well, a seconding witness, so that Jesus' Self-Claims are never alone and never just 'self' claims." Frederick Dale Bruner, The Gospel of John, A Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012), 515.

³ "To Jesus himself, of course, it is a matter of establishing not his own innocence, but the guilt of his accusers, and for this purpose two witnesses are quite sufficient. He sees himself not as defendant but (alongside the Father) as Judge (see v.16), and he hands down an immediate verdict: 'You know neither

Let me put it another way. Jesus does not need our approval. He does not need us to believe him. He does not need us to follow him. He wants us to believe, to trust him. He wants us to follow, to give ourselves to him. He deeply desires this because he is life for us, and he loves us. But him being who he is does not depend on us.

Does the sun in the sky need our approval to shine? Does the sun in the sky adjust its brilliance to fit our preferences? We can shake our fists at it, shield our eyes from it, draw the drapes and burrow into the ground. But the sun still shines.

We used to think the sun revolved around us. We now know, we revolve around it.

Jesus is Jesus, not matter what we think of him. He knows who he is. He knows who sent him. He knows where he is going.

And he invites you: *Follow me!* Don't judge him. Follow him. Don't demand of him. Receive from him. Don't put him under magnifying glass. Let him shine on you.

IV

If you had wanted to check that the sun had come up this morning, what would you have done? Gone outside with a flashlight, to examine the sky? Or would you have just looked toward the sun? We don't judge Jesus to find out who he is. He shows us.

I am the light of the world.

How do you know the Light is shining? Because you look toward him, and are dazzled such that you can see nothing else but him. You are awed and overwhelmed by his presence.

How do you know the Light is shining? Because by him, you can see everything else more clearly. The kosmos opens to you in ways you have never imagined before.

Even when the clouds are thick, and storms without and within shroud the sky . . . how do you know the Light is shining? Because you've been following him. So you know nothing will ever snuff him out.

Jesus, the Light of the world. Follow him, and he lights your way to life. Amen.