

# JOHN 8

## Light and Truth

Coming off a series of controversies in chapter 7, Jesus now confronts his critics head on. At root of the division is the identity of Jesus. Who is he, really? This remains the dividing line throughout the world today. Jesus would not diminish his glory to satisfy hard hearts but insisted on either believing or rejecting who he truly was. In his articulation, John returns to the themes we've seen before.

### The Light

Right from the beginning, the theme of Light manifests itself again. "I am the light of the world" (vs. 12). Throughout John's Gospel, there are numerous "I AM" statements. Although unseen in English, the Greek indicates their significance. When Moses encountered God in the burning bush in Exodus 3, Moses asked God who he was. The answer was a striking, "I am that I am." In Jewish thought, God was the Great I AM. Throughout John's Gospel, Jesus uses such language for himself. That is a claim of divinity.

He is, then, the Great I AM who is Light. By this, he means, "Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life." (vs. 12). Light clearly illuminates. Anyone walking in the dark would benefit from a source of light to illuminate the way forward. In this regard, Nicodemus illustrates one in the literal and spiritual dark who encountered the Light and found the way illuminated.

Light also blinds. Everyone has experienced waking up while it was still dark, turning the light on and being temporarily blinded. It is why we dim our headlights when we drive at night. While illuminating the road, the same light can blind passersby's. In chapters 7-8 we see how the Light of the World is blinding hardhearted sinners. Consider the clarity of his message, "I told you that you would die in your sins, for unless you believe that I am he you will die in your sins." (vs. 24)

Even more, he points the blind to the cross which demonstrates he is light. "So Jesus said to them, 'When you have lifted up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am he, and that I do nothing on my own authority, but speak just as the Father taught me.'<sup>29</sup> And he who sent me is with me. He has not left me alone, for I always do the things that are pleasing to him.'" (vs. 28-29)

Jesus is light and either we will see and follow him, or we will become blind and crucify him (see chapter 9 where this theme continues).

## The Truth

Although John has four major themes throughout his Gospel (Logos, Life, Light, Lamb), there are other themes that appear frequently (consider Missiology, the Spirit, Lordship, etc.). Among them is Truth. More specifically, Jesus is the Truth. “You will know the truth,” Jesus announced, “and the truth will set you free.” (vs. 32)

Yet just as light can both illuminate and blind, so too truth will either inform or cloud. Those who see Jesus as the truth find freedom. For those who reject him, the truth becomes a cloudy mess. Sound familiar? We have access to boundless truth and yet, somehow, we seem less sure of what is true. The great lie of postmodernity was that nothing is true. What we’re left with is the sense that everything must be true.

Regardless, the Jews debate with Jesus over his identity. To them, their birthright was the people of God. All that is required is obedience to God’s Law. Jesus, on the other, threatens such tribal certainty. “We are the people of God,” they claim, “therefore we are not slaves” (vs. 33). Jesus responds with “Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who practices sin is a slave to sin” (vs. 34). This spiritual truth is hard to accept for those blinded by sin. Sin enslaves. The gospel liberates.

This back-and-forth climaxes at the end of the chapter. After accusing each other, Jesus makes his identity very clear. “Your father Abraham rejoiced that he would see my day. He saw it and was glad.”<sup>57</sup> So the Jews said to him, “You are not yet fifty years old, and have you seen Abraham?”

<sup>58</sup> Jesus said to them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I am.” (vs. 56-57).

The meaning is unmistakable. Jesus claims eternity, an attribute limited to God alone. No wonder, “they picked up stones to throw at him, but Jesus hid himself and went out of the temple” (vs. 59). Clearly the mob chose blindness, unbelief, lies, and death.

Thus, in the end, the line is clearly drawn for John. To choose Christ is to choose truth and life (see John 14:6). To reject him is to choose falsehood and death.