

## ***The Church of the Servant King***

### **Survey of the Bible Series – The Gospel of John (SB\_JN8B\_Jesus is the Light of the World)**

#### **Background**

Jesus taught in the Temple treasury in an area known as the Court of the Women. This area, along with the Court of the Gentiles, was the most public part of the temple and within earshot of Jesus' enemies. Just the day prior, Jesus had compared Himself to the water provided to the Jews during the Exodus and He had used the water libations associated with the Feast of Tabernacles as His backdrop.<sup>1</sup> The area of the Temple in which we now find Jesus contained two giant golden candelabra, fifty cubits high and intricately crafted.<sup>2</sup> Every night, these lights were lit and could be seen throughout the city. The people would gather in the glow of the lights at night and sing festive songs and dance. The memories of the previous night were perhaps still fresh in the minds of Jesus' listeners this early morning.

The treasury, of course, was the area where people made their offerings which contributed to its public nature also. Usually, the Sanhedrin conducted their business in a room between this Court of the Women and the Inner Court. This made Jesus' teaching within hearing range of His greatest enemies.

#### **The Light of the World (8:12)**

Jesus proclaims Himself to be the light of the world (v. 12) using the clear analogy of the light provided by the candelabra and the festivities surrounding the Feast of Tabernacles.<sup>3</sup> These light related ceremonies and festivities were in remembrance of the time when Israel left Egypt at night and the cloud shined with brilliance to show them the way (Ex 13:21-22). The gift of God's light during this period of Israel's history is mentioned repeatedly in the Old Testament (Psa 78:14; 105:39).

Jesus' statement in verse 12 provides the basis for a discourse to follow that consists of three sections. First, in verses 12-20, Jesus reveals Himself as the light of the world. As such, He provides illumination to those who seek the truth in a spiritually dark world. Second, Jesus speaks of His departure to heaven (vv. 21-30) and those who choose not to follow the light can expect eternal consequences. Third, He reveals Himself as the source of freedom (vv. 31-59) and He compares Abraham's slave son to his other true and free son. In each section, Jesus is interrupted by His audience and John records the effect of Jesus' teaching upon His hearers.

*"I am the light of the world"* – Notice that in order to experience the benefits of the light that Jesus provides requires one to make a choice to follow Jesus (cf. 1 Jn 1:5-7). To do so is to

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<sup>1</sup> Jesus had already compared Himself to the temple and to the bronze snake (Jn 3). He had also referred to Himself as the bread from heaven (Jn 6). In John 7, He reveals Himself as the Rock that, when pierced, gives forth the living water of eternal life (Ex 17:6 cf Num 20:8, 11; Deut 32:30, 31, 37; 1 Co 10:4). In John 7:37-38, Jesus pulls together the water libation ritual of the Feast of Tabernacles and connects it to the spiritual blessing of the Holy Spirit's ministry in the Messianic kingdom.

<sup>2</sup> J. W. Shepard, *The Christ in the Gospels* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1946) 352 quoted in J. Dwight Pentecost, *The Words and Works of Jesus Christ* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1981), 284.

<sup>3</sup> See Pentecost, 285 for a description of the festivities associated with the lights during the Feast of Tabernacles.

consciously decide to leave the darkness of procrastination, uncertainty, doubt and indecision. Only then can one find true meaning and fulfillment in life.

### **The Light of the World Responds to Darkened Minds (8:13-20)**

In this section of John 8, we find Jesus responding to the interruptions from Jewish unbelievers whose minds were spiritually darkened by unbelief (cf. Eph 5:17-18). They serve as a stark contrast to Jesus' statement that He is the light of the world.

*The first interruption (v. 13)* – The Pharisees attempt to discredit Jesus' witness by claiming that Jesus' testimony was not valid since Jesus testified about Himself. They tried to use Jesus' own argument against Him that he used to forgive the woman. (All of her accusers had left, so Jesus gave her permission to leave since the Law required two or more witnesses to validate a crime). The Law required two witnesses for a testimony to be validated. If Jesus testified about Himself, then He was not satisfying the requirements of the Law.

*Jesus replies to the first interruption (vv. 14-18)* – First, Jesus testimony was enough because of His divine origin and position of authority. Second, knowledge (v. 14) and judgment (v. 15) are connected. The Pharisees refused true spiritual knowledge, therefore they couldn't judge. Jesus' opponents judged men by outward appearance as Samuel was first tempted to do (1 Sam 16:7). Finally, God Himself bore witness to Jesus' words. Today, God's greatest witness to His Son is the resurrection and ascension.

*The second interruption (v. 19)* – "Where is Your Father?"

*Jesus' Reply and Warning* – Jesus bluntly told the Pharisees that they had no knowledge of the Father. They had refused the very Savior whose advent they were to proclaim. This was especially serious at this point in Jesus' ministry. After the people returned to their homes, the next festival would be the Passover and He would be the sacrifice.

### **Jesus Warns The Jews of His Departure (8:21-30)**

One can almost see Jesus pause between His response in verse 19 and His statement in verse 21. It is as if Jesus evaluates the non-verbal reaction of His hearers after His statement in verse 19 and concludes that they really haven't comprehended what He said. So to be perfectly clear, Jesus continues with even more stern warnings in verse 21. Jesus knew that this would probably be the last time He would address the multitude which had assembled from all parts of Israel for the Feast of Tabernacles. Jesus knew His fate as the Lamb of God (Psa 22; Isa 53). He thought it necessary to provide a final warning to His hearers of the importance of this opportunity. If they missed this opportunity to hear and believe His words, it might not come again for them.

Of course, the Jewish religious leaders missed Jesus' point and thought that He was referring to suicide. Jesus responds to such spiritual dullness with repetition. In verses 23-24, Jesus reiterates the contrast between their earthly origin and His heavenly origin. They would "die in their sins" in the sense that they refused to appropriate His salvific work on the Cross as their own.

A person who without the Spirit of God attempts to approach the mystery of the person and origin of Jesus with a preconceived attitude of unbelief or pride in one's own intellectual capabilities will fall short. God's thoughts and reasonings are above unaided human comprehension (Isa 55:8-9).

In verses 24 and 28, Jesus uses the phrase "I am" to point to His eternal existence as a member of the Godhead. In both verses, the "He" portion of the phrase is italicized in most translations which is a way of denoting that the pronoun "He" is not in the Greek manuscript. It

was simply added by the translators in an attempt to smooth the text in English. As we have seen in previous studies and as we will see again in the next lesson, the phrase "I am" when used by Jesus is a means of identifying Himself with the pre-existent, eternal God. It identified Jesus with the God of Israel in the Wilderness when Moses asks the Lord for His name and the Lord replies in Exodus 3:13-14 that Moses should just refer to God as "I Am."