

John 47 – The Light of the World

03/09/2025

Scripture 1: (Jn. 8:12-30 ESV)

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."

So the Pharisees said to him, "You are bearing witness about yourself; your testimony is not true."

Jesus answered, "Even if I do bear witness about myself, my testimony is true, for I know where I came from and where I am going, but you do not know where I come from or where I am going. You judge according to the flesh; I judge no one. Yet even if I do judge, my judgment is true, 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 people is true. I am the one who bears witness about myself, and the Father who sent me bears witness about me."

They said to him therefore, "Where is your Father?"

Jesus answered, "You know neither me nor my Father. If you knew me, you would know my Father also."

These words he spoke in the treasury, as he taught in the temple; but no one arrested him, because his hour had not yet come. So he said to them again, "I am going away, and you will seek me, and you will die in your sin. Where I am going, you cannot come."

So the Jews said, "Will he kill himself, since he says, 'Where I am going, you cannot come'?"

He said to them, "You are from below; I am from above. You are of this world; I am not of this world. I told you that you would die in your sins, for unless you believe that I am he you will die in your sins."

So they said to him, "Who are you?"

Jesus said to them, "Just what I have been telling you from the beginning. I have much to say about you and much to judge, but he who sent me is true, and I declare to the world what I have heard from him."

They did not understand that he had been speaking to them about the Father. 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. 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."

As he was saying these things, many believed in him.

Sermon:

Today's passage follows the story about a woman caught allegedly in adultery, a story which may or may not belong at this specific place within the evangelist's narrative. Its presence casts some doubt and creates challenge in understanding precisely when this encounter takes place. Remember, part of John's uniqueness is his specific emphasis and precision concerning timing and chronology within his narrative; therefore, the particular "When" of the this passage, in the longer form of the whole of this recorded discourse (all of chapter 8), may have differing impacts upon our understanding of it.

Thus when John wrote, "*Again Jesus spoke to them...*", we are now uncertain:

- whether this took place immediately after Jesus dismissed the woman, resuming His teaching; picking up from where He had left off; or,
- whether this took place on another, later and different day; or,
- whether this actually took place earlier, back on the "great day", the last day of the Festival.

The principal impact which the "When" effects is in understanding the response of the Pharisees, scribes, and priests; the response of "the Jews" to Jesus. So, we will take note of their response periodically, as relevant, and consider the consequences of the timing's impact on interpreting it.

Irrespective of the "When", John plainly does tell us "Where" this discourse took place at the end of the first part, writing "*These words he spoke in the treasury, as he taught in the temple...*". He notes that the backdrop not simply within the Temple Courts, but noticeably near to the storage place of their religious wealth. Although it is not expressly stated here, John conveys the same message as Matthew and Luke when they quote Jesus saying, "*For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.*" (Matt. 6:21 ESV).

- Therefore, it is important for us to recognize that this whole discourse revolves around the idea of right and wrong worship; between true worship of the only living God or idolatry and the false worship of Satan. It is all about where a person's heart is.

Keeping that context in mind, let us turn to what Jesus has to say, as He makes His second "I AM" declaration.

*"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."**"*

I expect that this verse is familiar to most of us, just on its own merit, but I would also remind us of its literary importance as the foundation for John's prologue, "*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made. **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.***" (Jn. 1:1-5 ESV). This verse is the justification for what the evangelist earlier wrote. Now that we have reached the primary source, we can better understand what John meant, since this verse prompts us to consider several questions:

- What is meant by the world, *kosmos*?
- What is meant by the light, *phos*?
- What is meant by darkness, *skotia*?
- What does Jesus mean by calling Himself the "*light of the world*"?

- What does Jesus mean by the “*light of life*”?

Today, when most people hear the word *kosmos*, they think first of Carl Sagan's book and mini-series¹. Next, they might remember it as a Greek term used for the universe; implying that *kosmos* refers to the totality of everything. However, that is not how John or Scripture uses the term. Moses uses it three times {in Genesis 2:1; Deuteronomy 4:19, 17:3} and it is interpreted as the “host of heaven”; implying the celestial bodies and spiritual entities worshiped by pagan idolaters. Another use in Old Testament Scripture is as {ordinarily} a kind of beautiful ornamentation (Exodus 33:5-6; 2 Samuel 1:24; Proverbs 17:6; Isaiah 3:18-26 {as the sun, moon, and stars would be considered as beautiful ornamentation in the heavens}). Matthew uses it in a more limited sense, where *kosmos*/world refers to the earth, alone (Matthew 4:8, 5:14, 13:35-38, 24:21) likewise, Mark (Mark 8:36, 14:9, 16:15) and Luke (Luke 9:25, 11:50, 12:30). Meanwhile Paul uses it in both a literal sense and in a spiritual sense, similar to John (Romans 1:8, 3:6, 4:13, 11:12; 1 Corinthians 1:20-28; Galatians 4:3, 6:14). John uses *kosmos* the most frequently {78 times in his Gospel, 24 times in his letters and 3 times in Revelation}, and he uses it in a sense that refers to both the physical world that we can see, hear, feel, and smell and its spiritual dominion by Satan on account of our corrupted and sinful nature.

- When John uses *kosmos*, he means the world and all of its inhabitants that exist in opposition to and in rebellion against the LORD's sovereignty, owing fealty to the Devil.
- He means the world that every Christian once belonged to, before the Holy Spirit called us and regenerated us out of it.

Phos and *skotia*, light and darkness are used by Jesus as metaphors representing other absolute binary pairs of opposites, of one absolute and one relative; the complementary pairs of good and evil; of life and death.

- Darkness is the absence or lack of light.
- Death is the absence or lack of life.
- Evil is the absence or lack of goodness.

Since “off-white” is, by definition, not “white”, there is no positive “shade of gray” because there can be no partial form of light, life, or goodness; light is absolute, while dark is relative.

- If something is not wholly light, then it is relatively dark.
- If something is not wholly living, then it must be either dead or dying.
- If something is not wholly good, then it is corrupted, wicked, and evil.

Although each pair is comprised of opposites, they are not equal opposites. One part of each pair is perfect while the other is something less than perfect.

- White is perfectly white, but blackness exists as a spectrum.
- Light is perfectly light, but darkness exists as a spectrum.
- To be alive is to be perfectly and wholly alive yet, because of our sin, we begin dying from the moment of our birth.
- To be good is to be perfectly good, holy, righteous, and just; to be good is to be God, whereas everything else apart from Him is on the spectrum of wickedness, equally deserving the penalty of death for sin.

¹<https://cosmicperspective.com/carl-sagan-cosmos/>

Therefore, Jesus and the evangelist use light and darkness as metaphors to describe the moral quality of good and evil, along with their just consequences of life and death.

So, when Jesus called Himself the “*light of the world*”, there was only one thing that His Jewish hearers could understand Him to mean. He was claiming to be the originating source of life **and** the moral standard of goodness and righteousness. He was claiming to be the LORD God, an assertion intensified by His use of the phrase *ego eimi*: literally translated as “I, I AM”; claiming for Himself the verbal representative of the Divine Name given to Moses in Exodus 3:14, when “*Moses said to God, 'If I come to the people of Israel and say to them, 'The God of your fathers has sent me to you,' and they ask me, 'What is his name?' what shall I say to them?' God said to Moses, 'I AM WHO I AM.'"*” (Exod. 3:13-14 ESV).

We are even more certain and sure that this was a public claim of divinity by Jesus because, when God commanded Moses regarding the construction of the Tabernacle, He instructed that a golden lampstand be made (Exodus 25:31-40) and placed within the holy place (Exodus 26:35). God instructed that the lamps on this lampstand were to be kept burning “regularly” (Leviticus 24:2): meaning always and perpetually; because the light was a symbol of God's perpetual presence (Zechariah 4; Revelation 2:5).

Thus, by saying “*I am the light of the world*” Jesus identified Himself as the LORD's Lampstand, and also claimed the Name of the LORD. Then He claimed to be able to give to His followers the “*light of life*”, which is the perfected, eternal, holy, and righteous life that only the LORD God can give.

Therefore, what Jesus just declared was utter, absolute blasphemy...if, untrue. However, blasphemy was not what the Pharisees took issue with. Their problem was Jesus's self-proclamation; His self-aggrandizement; His self-promotion; His audacity in claiming to have spiritual authority and political status without first asking for their permission and approval!

Once you notice it, this is really surprising that they were not actually concerned with the honor or glory of God. If they were, then they would have been tearing their clothes and weeping (as a sign of mourning), immediately arresting Jesus on the spot. That would have been the faithful Jewish response to hearing His claim. But, instead of being concerned with the substance, they attacked the credibility of His testimony, “*So the Pharisees said to him, 'You are bearing witness about yourself; your testimony is not true.'"*”, suggesting that since Jesus was the one saying this about Himself, then it cannot be true; but their assertion fails the test of logic.

- Deuteronomy 19:15 says that “*Only on the evidence of two witnesses or of three witnesses shall a charge be established.*” (Deut. 19:15 ESV), which has been interpreted to mean that something is proven or accepted as true, so long as there are two or more witnesses (or independent sources of evidence).
- But, “true” Truth is not dependent upon the number of witnesses or the amount of evidence which supports it because Truth is absolute. Something is either true, or it is not.
- Therefore, just because Jesus said it, and even if Jesus was the **only one** saying it at that moment in time, it was not “untrue” or false; it was simply unproven, not disproved.

Jesus answered them, “*Even if I do bear witness about myself, my testimony is true, for I know where I came from and where I am going, but you do not know where I come from or where I am going.*”, asserting the truth about His testimony as He blames their doubt and disbelief on their spiritual ignorance. But the Pharisees did not recognize the truth about Jesus. They did not understand the truth He proclaimed because they did not rightly understand the Scriptures and because their eyes, hearts, and minds had not yet been opened to the truth

by the Holy Spirit in regeneration because they were still {walking in darkness}. They could not recognize the source or origin of His power.

Then Jesus repeats and echoes the argument used back in John 5:31-47 concerning His authority to render judgment, *“You judge according to the flesh; I judge no one. Yet even if I do judge, my judgment is true, 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 people is true. I am the one who bears witness about myself, and the Father who sent me bears witness about me.”*. We will compare this with what Jesus said earlier in John 5 in just a moment, but first, we will consider Jesus' argument for the truth of His testimony.

He cites the same statute of Torah that I just did {although Deuteronomy 17:6 is also applicable} and then announces and identifies the “second witness” who agrees with His testimony, God the Father. Remember, “father” was not considered by 1st Century Jews as an appropriate address or referent for the LORD, which explains the confusion within their response, when they ask Jesus, *“Where is your Father?”*. Regardless, Jesus reminds them that since the *“...testimony of two people is true...”* by counting His assertion of truthfulness as the first “witness” and, by using the Father's confirming testimony of the powerful “signs and wonders” that Jesus had thus far done: changing water into wine, His powerful Word of command, healing the paralyzed man, feeding the multitude, and walking upon the waters; as His second affirming “witness” (John 10:38); then, the truthfulness of His testimony is proven and believable because Scripture never suggests that a person cannot be a witness for themselves. Although four out of those five Signs happened in Galilee and only one of them in Jerusalem, we know from the other Gospels that countless other and similar examples (both recorded and unrecorded by the evangelists) surrounded Jesus' ministry; so, surely there was enough widespread human evidence to support the truth of His miracles.

Yet back to the Pharisee's actual problem; their failure to judge rightly. Jesus accuses them, in contrast to Himself, *“You judge according to the flesh; I judge no one.”*, of judging according to the Greek word *sarx*, which we translate as *“the flesh”*.

When we encounter this expression in the New Testament, we usually find it written by the Apostle Paul and he almost universally used *sarx* spiritually, in reference to our fallen, sinful nature rather than in the physical sense of our human form: as in the “meat on our bones”. John uses it similar to Paul here, to mean our sinful human inclination. Jesus accuses these Pharisees with judging the situation and with judging Him according to human standards of morality, righteousness, and preference rather than by God's standard as presented in Scripture.

But declaring *“I judge no one.”* was not actually a denial of Him judging, but a denial of Him judging according to their same standard. We understand this because He continues, saying *“Yet even if I do judge, my judgment is true, for it is not I alone who judge, but I and the Father who sent me.”*, so Jesus does not contradict what He said earlier in John 5.

- For the Father judges no one, but has given all judgment to the Son, that all may honor the Son, just as they honor the Father. Whoever does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent him. (Jn. 5:22-23 ESV)
- For as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son also to have life in himself. And he has given him authority to execute judgment, because he is the Son of Man. (Jn. 5:26-27 ESV)
- “I can do nothing on my own. As I hear, I judge, and my judgment is just, because I seek not my own will but the will of him who sent me. (Jn. 5:30 ESV)

Remember, especially in matters of morality and righteousness, since we are not Jesus, we do not judge (or at least, we should not judge); instead, it is Scripture, God's Holy Word, that actually does the judging because it is the absolute defined standard for right judgment. Scripture is the **measure** by which all things and all people are judged.

- If you measure the height of a child or you step on a scale, is it you who judges as you read the height and weight, or are you just simply reading the judgment of the ruler and scale? You are merely observing and reporting the judgment that has already been made by the standard.

What Jesus is really saying about judgment is that neither He nor the Father are making arbitrary, “on the spot” judgments; instead Scripture, God's Word is the judge: the Word, who is Jesus Christ, the only begotten of the Father who was with the Father in the beginning. Therefore, the standard for judgment was set long ago by the *Logos* who is *Theos*, and therefore, the judgment is already decided.

Jesus affirms that He does not judge arbitrarily, according to human standards, but that He is reporting the judgment of God, according to the divine standard of Scripture.

Now just think about that for a moment and think about what that means for us as individuals, as a church, as a culture, as humanity. Have you ever heard someone say something like, “Only God can judge me.”? That is true, but not in the way that many people think.

- God's decision is not swayed and He will not be impressed by the things that you do or do not do.
- God will not weigh your good and bad, looking to see whether you are just a little more good than bad. Your “good” cannot outweigh your sin because even your “best good” is still bad.
- God, God the Son, Jesus Christ will be and is the absolute and righteous judge and we are all judged according to the standard of His eternal and unchanging Word.
 - According to that standard; according to Scripture, “*None is righteous, no, not one; no one understands; no one seeks for God. All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one.*” (Rom. 3:10-12 ESV; Psalm 14, 53), therefore, apart from God's justifying grace, given by faith in Jesus Christ, no one can or will be declared righteous.

God will judge you because He is the only Sovereign LORD, and because He alone decreed the absolute standard of righteousness, and because He alone has the power, authority, and ability to enforce justice. So,

- If a person wants to know how they deserve to be judged, then they need to take this up (the Bible) and read it.
- If a person wants to know how to avoid being judged as they deserve, then they need to take this up (the Bible) and read it.
- Then they need to do what it commands. They need to repent of their sin, and they need to believe in and trust in Jesus Christ, alone, and then they need to live sanctified and holy lives in response to God's grace.

Finally, the Pharisees prove their confusion and their lack of understanding concerning who Jesus **really is** by asking Him, “*Where is your Father?*”. The tone and tenor of their question implies that they expected Him to call up His “natural” or “biological” Father; as if they expected Jesus to direct them to His adoptive father, Joseph of Nazareth, who they may or may not have known, and who may or may not (but probably was) have been deceased by this point. This prompted Jesus to retort, “*You know neither me nor my Father. If you knew*

me, you would know my Father also.” because, if they were regenerate and if they actually understood and knew who Jesus is: God the Son, the *Logos* who is *Theos* and *Andros*; then they would also have understood and known that Jesus's Father is the LORD God Almighty. But they just did not understand.

Their failure and inability to understand and know “colored”, corrupted, and tainted all of their judgments. It prevented them from judging rightly, especially about Jesus. We were, and we are no different from them unless we are *anotthen*, unless we have been “born again” and are regenerated by the Holy Spirit. Regardless, not knowing and not understanding is not a valid excuse for them or us. We all still will be held accountable for our actions and decisions.

Now, while all of this should be very interesting to us, even if John seems somewhat repetitive with reminding everyone about the right standard for judgment and further demonstrating how wrong the Pharisees were about Jesus, both points are closely connect to this new thing which Jesus said; the way in which He proclaimed His deity, “*I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.*”, but “How”, “Why”, and “How does it apply?”.

Ever since time began, there has been a struggle against the sovereign LORD. Scripture tells us that at some point before human history began, Satan and his angels fell into rebellion and evil (Matthew 25:41; Luke 10:18; 2 Peter 2:4; Revelation 12:9). Then Satan deceived Eve and led her and Adam into their sinful rebellion against God, thereby corrupting our originally pure human nature. This conflict is between evil against the good and, despite the side of evil often seeming to be the stronger, seeming to be more powerful, and seeming to be in ascension, it has **never** overcome the good. Never! Even on the cross, when Satan appeared to triumph over God the Son, Jesus only seemed to be overcome because He had chosen to humbly submit Himself to suffer as our perfect and righteous substitute.

By proclaiming Himself as “*the light of the world*”, Jesus invokes this age-old moral and spiritual conflict {but remember, this conflict is not eternal because it had a beginning (in Satan's fall) and it will end (in Satan's final defeat)}, identifying Himself with the LORD's holy and perfect moral attribute of absolute Good, standing firm against the imperfect, ambiguous, and immoral relative spectrum of evil. But how does that help us?

The Law declares “*You shall therefore keep my statutes and my rules; if a person does them, he shall live by them: I am the LORD.*” (Lev. 18:5 ESV; Genesis 2:17; Nehemiah; Luke 10:25-28; Romans 10:5; Galatians 3:12). Therefore, perfect obedience and adherence to God's holy standard is the only thing that will merit someone eternal life. Unfortunately however, no one can measure up to that standard and all of us are therefore, judged against and are condemned. Except for Jesus. Like the light, Jesus is perfect and pure; the only human deserving to live. He possesses the “*light of life*” and, by choosing to go to the cross and die in the place of those of us deserving death, He shared His life to us: He brought us into His light **and** He took away the darkness in which we once walked.

So, now that we have been redeemed, regenerated, and brought into the light; in **response** to the grace of Christ:

- we may now choose to do the good that we ought, although we often won't;
- we may now live righteously and offer mercy to others, although we often won't;
- we may now desire to, and endeavor to keep the LORD's commandments, although we often won't;
- we may now judge things rightly, although we often won't.

But, when we fail and when we do not, our sin will be revealed by His holy light, and we shall be convicted by our sin, and we may be assured that when we {humble ourselves, and pray, and seek His face, and turn from our wicked ways, Christ will hear it in heaven and He shall forgive us and heal us} (paraphrase 2 Chronicles 7:14).

Meanwhile, the clueless Pharisees and all those who do not understand or have faith in Christ Jesus remain within the darkness of death. They **cannot** know the “light of life”, and they **will not** see the “light of life”, because they **do not want** to be in the “light of life”.

- If people truly understood who Jesus is and what He offers, no reasonable person would choose to not believe and to not obey Him.

They prefer the darkness to the light. Even when we try to bring the light closer to them, they simply close their eyes tight against it, or they try to flee far away from it, because they hate its brilliant, purifying glare.

So, what does this teach us? It teaches us how we may know (1 John 5:13) whether we are walking in the light or walking in the darkness. It teaches us how we may know whether we possess the “light of life” or if we are doomed to the darkness of death. It teaches us and reminds us that our only hope for goodness and eternal life is found by living within and united to the “*light of the world*”, Jesus Christ: our savior and redeemer.

AMEN