

*John 8:12-30. All Jerusalem could see light radiating from the temple throughout the Feast of Booths. This section takes place after the lighting ceremony on the final night of the feast. Standing before a crowd gazing at the massive torches, He said, "I am the light of the world."*

From flight to space exploration, electricity to integrated circuits, high-rise buildings to skyscrapers, advances never dreamed possible have become reality. Travel, communication, medicine, music, food preparation, investing, entertainment—these are just a few of the areas that have seen revolutionary changes in the last 50 years.

Despite so many advances, there's no consensus on how to improve man. Why is the world still characterized by conflict, even war? Why aren't we living happier lives? What's the secret of contentment and personal peace? We have no idea.

America prospered after WWI. It was the Roaring Twenties, an exciting time to be alive, and yet all wasn't well. T.S. Elliot's, The Wasteland (c. 1922) conveys some of the angst. Within twenty years war would engulf the world again, culminating in the destruction of two bombs that erased entire cities. *We're past all of that now, and the world is much better place.* That may be true for some; not for most.

History illustrates we don't know how to solve ourselves. The arts show it as well. Visit the Art Institute of Chicago, and you'll see the descent of art over the last few centuries. From beauty and order to despair and even anger. More evidence? Consider the songs written by thousands that exalt pain and emptiness.

All of this suggest we aren't improving ourselves. It suggests we're lost in darkness not sure what life is all about or why we even exist. Like men chained in the confines of Plato's cave, the world gropes for answers in the dimness of firelight. And what would happen if One from above came down into our shadowlands to tell of the blazing and beautiful sun?

The Son of God did enter into our darkness, but what happened to Him? He was despised and rejected because "people love the darkness" (John 3:19). They would rather pine away in their sin than turn to the true Light for understanding or to enjoy peace.

*John 1:9-10—"The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world. He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world did not know him."*

Two groups of people are in John 8. Both saw the Light and then rejected it. The first had studied the Law and the Prophets for a lifetime certain they had more light than anyone alive. The second group was commoners at the feast who professed to believe in Jesus (John 8:30). They wanted His light until it actually shone and confronted their sins (John 8:59).

### THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD

Each evening of the feast, massive torches were lit to illumine the temple mount. The Feast of Booths commemorated God's provision while Israel wandered in the wilderness for 40 years. God had led Moses and the nation with a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night (Ex 13:21-22). His leading was symbolized here through the nightly lighting of great torches. All Jerusalem could see the gold of the temple glittering in the night sky.

On the feast's final night, with the glow of the torches behind Him, Jesus said, "I am the light of the world" (John 8:12, 20). The people saw a light that lit Jerusalem, and they celebrated a light that lit the wilderness. But here's Jesus—One who claims to be a light superior enough to illumine not just a city, but the entire world. Stunning.

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**"I BELIEVE IN CHRISTIANITY AS I BELIEVE THAT THE SUN HAS RISEN, NOT ONLY BECAUSE I SEE IT, BUT BECAUSE BY IT I SEE EVERYTHING ELSE."**

**~ C.S. LEWIS**

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Jesus is the light of truth to the darkness of deceit and error. He's the light of wisdom to the darkness of folly. He's the light of holiness to the darkness of sin. He's the light of joy to the darkness of pain and sorrow. He's the light of life to the darkness of death, and He's the light of hope to the darkness of despair. Those who follow Christ in a world of darkness and shadows have the only real and everlasting light. There's none other, for whatever is true, wise, holy, right, just or pure—all that's good or praiseworthy in this life ultimately finds its source in Him (Rom 11:36).

# Piercing the Darkness

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It was an astonishing claim to make at the lighting ceremony. The leaders and the people knew Jesus was claiming to be their messiah (Isa 9:2). What happens next are two heated debates. The Pharisees reacted, and the people seem to believe in Jesus until He tests them. We will look at the first of the two reactions this week.

## SET ON DISBELIEF

*John 8:13—“You bear witness about yourself; your testimony is not true.”*

A man claims to be the messiah, even God in the flesh. The leaders questioned Him, which seems appropriate, but they didn't want the truth. They wanted to discredit Jesus. And why? To keep power, to hold onto their pious careers.

The Law and the Prophets testified of the messiah. John the Baptist heralded His coming, and three years of Jesus' ministry saturated the entire region. He often taught day and night, and He regularly healed the people. The response to all of this: John the Baptist was put to death, and many said Jesus was of the devil (John 7:20, 8:48, 10:20). No one ever denied Jesus' power, but they questioned its source time and again.

The Pharisees tried to stick to the letter of the Law in asking for witnesses (Deut 19:15). How did Jesus respond? He appealed to God the Father as His witness (John 8:16-17).

Jesus' accusers had no intention of weighing His claims. He was a threat, so they wanted to make Him out to be a fool (John 8:19). In fact, when the Lord said He's going away, they mock and say He's suicidal (John 8:21-22). They demolished straw men to discredit Jesus. Sure, some of it was an inability to understand Him; most of it was a hard heart.

Jesus pursued His enemies throughout His ministry, but they would not listen. They hurled insults at Him, slandered and plotted His death in return. Such is one way Proverbs defines a fool—a man who refuses correction (Prov 9:7-8).

Twice at the Feast of Booths, Jesus reminds the people that He would soon leave: “I am going away, and you will seek Me, and you will die in your sins” (John 7:33-34, 8:21). It wasn't a threat. These

words were the final plea of a heavy-hearted messiah. He loved His enemies, even praying for His adversaries while dying on a cross (Lk 23:34).

Within six months of this dialogue, the Lord would be crucified. Though the religious leaders would continue their charade to find the messiah, they would never find Him. He had come. They rejected Him. There would never be another, and sadly, they would die in their sins having rejected the only Light.

## WHY NOT CONSIDER WHAT JESUS SAID?

Some of the most brilliant people reject Christ. As seen with the religious leaders of Jesus' day, unbelief had nothing to do with intellect or education. Unbelief has everything to do with the bent of the heart (Rom 1:18).

The Pharisees weren't neutral seekers of God, eagerly wanting to hear the truth. They maintained the appearance (Matt 23:23-26), but deep down they loved their jobs more than God. They loved the praise of men, the thrill of making important decisions, the respect and esteem of their colleagues. They loved being part of an elite inner circle.

When Messiah came, He threatened all the religious leaders held dear. They couldn't believe in Jesus without losing nearly everything they had spent their lives achieving. Becoming attorneys of the worst kind, they twisted the Law to trap the Messiah. They searched it for technicalities to dismiss the One who wrote it.

If nothing was at stake, no one would've cared what Jesus said, but everything was at stake... and they refused to let anything go. God Himself stood among them, and they couldn't even see it.

We're not so different. All of us have agendas, and following Jesus is dangerous. If you're a lawmaker, it may mean voting against a bill that could cost you dearly in the district. If you're a lobbyist, it might mean you can't accept certain contracts.

A Christian desires to be ruled by Christ, which might be costly to you. If it mattered little, who wouldn't recite a prayer or sign up? But that isn't the case. Following Christ is a complete reorientation of your life from walking in darkness to the light.