

Series: I AM...

Part 1: I Am...The Light of the World Jn. 8:12

Daniel Hickinbotham / February 25th, 2018

- We pull the 7 “I Am” statements out of the Gospel of John..
- John started his gospel by writing this magnificent prelude to the whole story in Chapter 1,
 - A theological Synopsis of who Jesus is.
 - It’s kind of like a thesis for his entire book:
 - John then goes through and proves his thesis by the primary witness of:
 - Seven of Jesus’s own statements about Himself.
 - Seven miraculous works through which Jesus validates His claims about Himself
 - Why did John write this particular account of the life of Christ in this particular way?
 - He tells us in Chapter 20: **30 Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; 31 but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.**
- We are going to dive into these 7 identity statements so that we can go deeper into the truth that Jesus is the Christ and more deeply experience the life that we have in His name!
- So lets dive in John 8:12-20:
 - **12 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.” 13 So the Pharisees said to him, “You are bearing witness about yourself; your testimony is not true.” 14 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. 15 You judge according to the flesh; I judge no one. 16 Yet even if I do judge, my judgment is true, for it is not I alone who judge, but I and the Father[a] who sent me. 17 In your Law it is written that the testimony of two people is true. 18 I am the one who bears witness about myself, and the Father who sent me bears witness about me.” 19 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.” 20 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.**
- Throughout scripture, God connects the supernatural... His character, His work and His will... with all kinds of natural phenomena: metaphors of sheep and shepherds, trees and water, bread, oil and wine...
 - One of the most prominent usages of these natural terms is the imagery of light and dark.
 - In the Old Testament light is used to describe a laundry list of things:
 - *Joy, Hope, Wisdom, Purity, Peace*
 - It is used to describe things that God provides to His people like *Freedom, Enlightenment, Restoration, and Salvation.*
 - Light is used as depiction of fundamental aspects of God’s character and Kingdom: *righteousness, justice, and holiness.*
 - And it’s ultimately used to describe the radiance of God Himself.

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- Darkness, in contrast, is used to represent the opposite of all these things.
- He uses these accessible images because He is communicating His infinite message through, and to, finite creatures...
- *That illuminates something fundamental about God's nature and His desire for relationship with people.*
 - He doesn't owe us any explanation of who He is and what He is doing...
 - Rather, this act of condescension is an expression of His kindness and winsomeness:
 - That he would reveal Himself in lesser terms so that we finite creatures might be able to catch a glimpse of His glory.
 - We see it with Moses in the old Testament: <RECAP that story>
 - This willingness to reveal Himself is ultimately revealed in Jesus, the transcendent deity coming into the world as a man, to be the accessible revelation of the Father to us.
 - *So when Jesus says, "I am the Light of the World" He is not saying that He is a portion of the electromagnetic radiation spectrum, or that He is a ball of hydrogen fusing in the vacuum of space, or even that He is some wise sage bringing the illumination of knowledge to the darkness of ignorance.*
 - **He is communicating a limitless supernatural truth about Himself within the confines of limited natural terms... because He WANTS to be known.**
 - **In this declaration, Jesus is proclaiming Himself to us as both Messiah and God.**
 - BUT... His claim immediately creates conflict with the Pharisees, who are the embodiment of the self-righteousness of fallen humanity.
 - There is something inherently inflammatory about an exclusive statement like this...
 - So let's explore why you and I might be conflicted when engaging with a statement like "I am the Light of the World" ...
- In our immediate context, we have tremendous conflict in trying to embrace this truth, for two specific reasons:
 - **#1 We are a civilization that is entirely disconnected from natural darkness.**
 - We walk into a room and flip a switch and IMMEDIATELY the room is illuminated. Our halls are illuminated by night lights and our streets are illuminated by street lamps.
 - At night, living where we did in Southern California, we not only had the immediate light pollution of the 300,000 people around us, but we could see the glow of light pouring over the hills from Los Angeles.
 - How often have you experienced an entire night completely awake and enveloped in darkness?
 - Even when we are camping, we have headlamps, flashlights and campfires.

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- Very few of us have sat through a cold, dark, miserable night and found our hearts and hopes leaping as the first light of dawn begins to break in the east.
- **Because we have such an abundance of light, the immediate impact of Christ's claim is diminished!**
- **#2 Our cultural and religious context unintentionally devalues the profound nature of Christ's claim.**
 - Most of us have grown up knowing that Jesus described Himself as the Light of the World.
 - It is one of the first things we learn in Sunday School
 - We sing songs to death that include references to His being the light of the world.
 - I begged Eli not to sing "Light of the World, You stepped down into darkness..."
 - I've sung it too many times at too many summer camps...
 - Until just recently, because of the significant influence of Christianity on the culture of our Country, most Americans, even unbelievers, would have been familiar with Christ's claim to be the Light of the World...
 - But have you ever heard the phrase: "familiarity breeds contempt."
 - We are so "familiar" with His claim, that it stops overwhelming us with the reality of its mystery and power.
 - It's like the purchasing power of our dollars: the more dollars that get printed the less impact those dollars have.
 - **The more times we repeat "Jesus is the Light of the World" without stopping to drink it in and wonder over it, the more it loses its punch.**
- But there is a third, more tragic, reason we have conflict in embracing Christ's claim. And it is perfectly revealed in the Pharisees' response to Jesus...
- What would the people in Jesus day have heard when He said "I am the Light of the World"? Why does He use this particular imagery at this moment in the story?
 - Jesus makes this statement in the middle of an on-going public debate with the religious elites. The debate is centered around the identity of the Messiah, and He likely said it right in the middle of the Feast of Tabernacles.
 - The Feast of Tabernacles, or the Feast of Ingathering, was a GIANT agricultural and historical celebration. It not only marked the end of the harvest year, but it was also a God ordained remembrance of the Lord bringing the Israelites out of Egypt and into the land of abundance.
 - Over the years it developed into a HUGE party, with super detailed and intricate rituals, dancing, singing, blowing of trumpets, and daily religious ceremonies.
 - At dusk each day, these GIANT 75 foot tall lamps were ignited around the temple, each burning upwards of 17 gallons of oil a piece.

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- The religious observers would then light torches and dance through the streets of Jerusalem long into the night!
 - It is said that this would light up the city of Jerusalem like day, and the Mishna tells us that it was such a joyous event, that if someone had not experienced it they had not experienced true joy!
- So what, specifically, were they celebrating with the lighting of these torches? <ASK THE CONGREGATION>
 - The presence of God leading them through the wilderness as a pillar of fire!
 - Also, in Deuteronomy 9, God describes Himself as a consuming fire that would go above and before the Israelites to drive the Canaanites out of the Promised Land.
- *So put yourself there in the midst of this moment. The temple complex and surrounding city is filled with the light of these giant fires burning, the streets are filled with the sound of pounding drums, blowing trumpets, and torch-bearing dancers losing their minds in celebration!*
 - Every sense is being bombarded by the remembrance of who God is and what He has done for them,
 - *Hearts are filled with hope that God will reestablish Israel as a light to the nations!*
 - *As a people occupied by a foreign government there is an undercurrent of revolutionary fervor!*
 - If God led us to freedom before, He could lead us again!
 - Now imagine.... right before they ignite these lamps.... right before they start the music... right before everyone starts pouring into the streets for a torch-lit dance-party... Jesus call out into the tension: "I am the Light of the World!"
 - Do you think you would understand the point that Jesus was trying to communicate about Who and What He is?
 - **Jesus is overtly proclaiming Himself as both their long awaited Messiah and the full revelation of the glory of God.**
- So what was the immediate response of the religious elites?
 - Rejoicing? Worship? Adoration and praise that their Messiah... their deliverer... their God was in their midst?
 - No.... They instantly attacked His claim. They called Him a liar. They denied the legitimacy of His testimony.
 - They used their religiosity to try and discredit Him before the crowd.
 - Rather than rejoicing over Him, they rejected Him as an immediate threat to their position, power, and privilege.
 - In their own minds, because of their "perfect keeping" of the law, THEY were walking in the light... moreover that they WERE the light that people should follow.

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- But Jesus flips the real light on and exposes that they are walking in darkness.
- *Do you know what happens when I have just woken up and my wife turns the light on without warning me?*
 - *Rage... deep-seeded, thundering rage wells up in my heart... I slam my eyes shut, jolt like I have just been punched in the face, and get all grumpy.*
 - *Why? Because I was doing just fine in the dark, thank you very much. I could see all that I needed to at that moment. Just because she needs the light so she can take care of everything around the house (like she does so well), doesn't mean that I need or want it. She should have let things be.*
 - *I am not kidding, the house could be burning down, and I would still be mad that she blindsided me with the light... once we were safely out of the house.*
- So, Jesus has just flipped the light on directly in the faces of those walking in darkness... and they are angry... so they go after Him... and He proceeds to whoop them again and again and again!
 - *Go home and read the entire chapter from verse 12 on, and you will see it is just a beat down of the religious elites.*
 - *They attack His identity and He comes back even stronger to prove Himself, and puts them on blast as lovers of darkness, going so far as to say they are sons of the devil!*
 - By the end of their fight they are picking up stones to murder Him, using their own religiosity to justify it.
- Which brings us to point number three as to why we have conflict in embracing Christ's claim:
 - **Fallen humanity is not only disconnected from the light and wandering in spiritual darkness... we actually love the darkness.**
 - Jesus states this explicitly in John 3:19...
 - **And this is the judgment: the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil.**
- And it gets worse:
 - Like the Pharisees, we begin to see our darkness *as light* and call other people to walk in it.
 - In Romans 1, Paul paints a harrowing picture of Humanity's love affair with darkness. That love affair culminates in people applauding those who commit

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themselves to the works of darkness.

- Don't we see this same conflict with Christ's claims clearly in our culture today?
 - People see it as noble and virtuous to unapologetically pursue each selfish desire of the heart, to explore and adopt an array of various pagan practices, or to stand strong a full rejection of the reality of God.
 - "Follow your heart", "Pursue your passion", "Be true to yourself", "You deserve what makes you happy" are the catch phrases of the day.
 - But sit across from a stranger at a coffee shop or someone at work and make a claim like the Christ of the bible is the one true "Light of the World" and that only those who follow Him will never walk in darkness, and see how that goes.
 - Tell someone that God's standard for sexuality is the light by which we should walk as sexual creatures, and watch what happens.
 - Like a light going on in a dark room, people frequently recoil in frustration and anger.
 - ...but not everyone...
- Throughout John 8 we see that, even though Jesus is in conflict with the darkness, embodied by the Pharisees, that many in the crowd come to believe in Him.
 - The story that follows in John 9 is a perfect depiction of what this looks like in us spiritually.
 - (BE QUICK) The disciples see a man who was blind from birth...
 - So Jesus heals Him... He illuminates this man's eyes so He can see the world around him.
 - But his new sight starts to hurt him immediately...
 - He gets interrogated by the religious elites
 - He gets thrown under the bus by his parents
 - Ultimately he gets booted from the synagogue.
 - He goes from being a social outcast because of his blindness to being a social outcast because of his sight.
 - But all the while he is striving to understand who this man is who healed him. He is trying to capture the image of WHO Jesus is *even in the midst of his new trial*. And finally Jesus heals his spiritual blindness by revealing Himself as the Messiah, and what does this man do? He worships....
 - Do you know what happens when my little 9 month old daughter Clementine has just woken up and I go in to get her and accidentally flip the lights on without warning?
 - At first she slams her eyes shut, and then she usually sneezes a bunch of times, which is ridiculously cute.... But then she starts to fight to open her little eyes and see.... At first her eyes are closed 95% of the time... but with every glimpse that she catches of me she starts

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to smile... then she starts to fight harder to get her eyes open so that she can look at me and the world around her!

- This is how Jesus wants us to be when He suddenly exposes the darkness we are walking in.
- He knows the light is going to be blinding for a moment.
- He knows it is going to frustrate us and cause us discomfort.
- But instead of rejecting the light, He invites us to fight to let our spiritual eyes adjust so that we can see Him, and the world around us, more clearly!
 - Like Clementine trying to open her eyes and rejoicing as she sees her daddy, we are to be a people who press into the light for the purpose of delighting in our great God.

SO WHAT IS A PROPER RESPONSE TO JESUS' CLAIM TO BE THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD?

Response:

- 1) **Check your heart:** It was not the irreligious that are depicted as rejecting Christ as the Light... it is the religious... those who know all the right things... the ones who go to church... the ones who have the shiniest exteriors...
 - a. When Jesus exposes darkness in your own life, whether simple wrong belief or outright rebellion, how do you respond? Do you trust Him and respond in new obedience? Or do you seek to discredit Him in the confrontation by hardening your heart, or finding ways to justify that Jesus couldn't possibly mean what He said right there, or that it doesn't apply to you?
 - i. Share personal story... <non-violence>
 - ii. It's super uncomfortable... But that struggle is important... that heart check is important...
- 2) **Check your light:** Whose light are you walking by? There are a 1000 different sources peddling their darkness as the light to walk by. Are you daily seeking the Lord in His word, walking in the companionship of His spirit, and fighting to drag your darkness-loving-self out into the Light of Christ... or do you heed the worldly voices offering false illumination because it promotes your position, power, comfort... or even your sin?
 - a. I justified a lot of evil deeds that I KNEW were darkness in college with the worldly expectation: "It's college... that what college students do..."
 - i. Because of the deceitfulness of my heart, it is still my tendency to justify my own evil with the wisdom of the world.
 1. I must daily be going to the Lord and specifically asking Him to lead me, to illuminate my way... to empower me to follow Him, that I might not walk in darkness...

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- 3) **Rejoice and Worship!** This sermon has been a little heavy, but here is the Good News! Jesus has come to do away with the darkness itself, the consequences of darkness, and with your love of darkness. No matter the intensity of your conflict with the Light, whether you are totally lost and wandering or just have those little dark corners in your heart that creep in... Jesus is more powerful than it's grip on you. John 1:5 states clearly "The light shines in the darkness yet the darkness did not overcome it!!"
- a. Light ALWAYS wins over darkness. When you flip a light switch on in a room, the darkness doesn't get to choose whether or not it stays... it is abolished, banished, by the power of the light! Jesus can and will overcome the darkness in you if you seek Him! This is how God completes all of human history, with the world awash in the light of Christ and all things existing in a perfect state of worship...
 - i. When we enter in to worship, to behold and respond to the beauty of the Lord's glory, we are not like Moses being hidden in the cleft of the rock... as Paul says in 2 Corinthians, we are beholding the glory of God with an unveiled face. Our darkness is conquered by turning full face into the light of Christ... let's do that now in worship...