

Snapshots of a Savior: The Light of the World

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[0 : 00] Please be seated. This morning, we're going to look at John 8. This is the second installment in a series that's looking at Jesus and these brief little moments where he makes these big grand statements, and they start out with, I am. So we looked at Jesus' statement in John 6, where he said, I am the light of the world, or sorry, I am the bread of life. And now we're looking at Jesus' statement where he says, I am the light of the world. So if you have a Bible, turn with me to John 8. We're going to start reading at verse 12, and then we're going to go on to verse 20. So you can look in the bulletin, or you can look in your Bible. But turn with me as we give attention to God's word. This is John 8. 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. And Jesus answered, even if I do bear witness about myself, my testimony is true. For I know where I came from and where I'm going, but you don't know where I come from or where I'm 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? And 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. Let's pray. Lord, we thank you for these statements that Jesus makes in the gospel of John about who he is. Help us to see Jesus as he truly is. And this morning, may we see him as the light of the world. In Christ's name we pray. Amen. I have to admit, I'm a little bit nervous about what I'm about to tell you. And if I get shaky, the reason is because it brings back so many memories as a kid. Because none of you will know the name Judy Bundy. And if you do know Judy Bundy or Miss Ms. Bundy, you don't know the Judy Bundy. At the mention of her name, I still go into like a panic and cold sweat, and I have flashbacks of forgetting my lab report, or me answering a question and not knowing the answer and trying to get out of it and escape. And the Ms. Judy Bundy just crushing my spirit. And everyone in class laughing at me. The Ms. Judy Bundy, and that's how she referred to herself often, was the most feared biology teacher in all of Raleigh, North Carolina. I'm convinced of it. I don't care what high school you went to, I don't care if you ever took her in a class, because if you said her name in the hallway, she would just appear. The Ms. Judy Bundy was feared and fearsome. She cut no slack. She was demanding. She loved science, but more than that, she loved the scientific method. And why did she like it? Because it was a way for her to teach us how to think. I'm convinced of that. I haven't asked her this.

[4 : 07] Maybe I will one day. But she loves Sir Francis Bacon and his rules for observation, because she could challenge something a student said. And if it wasn't well-founded, again, she would make you look pretty stinking silly in class. Obviously, my memory of her has something to do with authority. Both her as a figure, but in class as well. She prized authority, and she didn't need to demand it. It just came out of her. And whenever you spoke, you better be sure you knew what you were talking about.

If you made a claim, you better be able to back it up with her beloved scientific method. Because if you made a claim, it needed to have authority. And because you are ninth grader in biology class, you don't have much authority. But if you could observe something and show her what you saw, and you could prove it, you had authority. If you claim something, it needed to come with authority. That same dynamic is at play here in a story like John 8, where Jesus makes this big claim, right? I am the light of the world. But then there's this question of authority, and it almost gets derailed.

In fact, it does get derailed with all of these questions over authority. And those are the two headings that we're going to look at this morning. Jesus' claim, and then the authority with which he speaks, with which he answers. So, as we look at this text, I want to remind us of something that I said last time when we looked at when Jesus said, I am the bread of life. He is talking about himself, right? And throughout this time, he is pointing us to himself. Now, you might say, I want a lot less talk and a lot more actions. Don't actions speak for themselves. They do. But remember, Jesus has done that over and over, and there's still confusion about who he is and what he's saying.

And so, when we look at these I am statements, it's almost like we're giving a microphone. I've heard it said like this. We're giving a microphone to Jesus and saying, who are you? Who is it that you say you are? And he's declaring very boldly and very simply the answer to that question. But he gives us an answer that's kind of weird, if we're honest. He says, I am the light of the world. And so, in cutting through this confusion, he answers, I am the light of the world. But what does that mean? What does that mean for us? And why the light of the world? That seems odd. We get the bread of life part.

[6:54] I need him to eat and live and move and have my being. I need to be sustained. But why the light of the world? Why light at all? Let's look together at verse 12. Simple enough. I'm the light of the world. Do we even need to read it again? We do. Why? Because we need to unearth, why is he using this image of light? If you remember in John's gospel, it's not as if each new paragraph is a new day.

There's some paragraphs and some pages of scripture that are going through, and it's one single day, maybe even one single conversation, but they're different topics. And if you look back in chapter seven of John's gospel, at chapter seven, verse 37, it tells us that this time where it's happening is at the festival of the booze. Now, that was a time when all of Israel went up to Jerusalem to worship, went up to make merry. One commentator calls it the time when the Levitical orchestra cuts loose. I would like to see the day when our music team, you know, comes up to worship and cuts loose for a week or so. That sounds pretty awesome. So as Israel was coming to worship and celebrate and do all these things and cut loose and make merry, they were literally going up. It's not like I'm just going down the street. Everywhere around could see this area because it was a gain in elevation.

And so as there were lights about worship in the evening, you could see it for miles and miles around. And so that's why in the gospels we see when they talk about going to Jerusalem, they're going up to Jerusalem. They were literally going up as well as giving their hearts and going up. And so they're doing this on the heels of this event, maybe even on the last day. Jesus is saying, you see all those lights up there? Or you see all these lights? And as you're coming up, I am the light of the world. So it's in that context he uses light. It's unobstructed for everyone to see in the land. And Jesus is saying, see me.

I am the light of the world. But why light? It's not just the immediate context or the events of what's going on. But light and darkness have a long history in the Christian gospel, in the message of Christianity, and in the history of Israel. Think about the beginning of John's gospel. It starts something like this. In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God. And the Word was God.

He was in the beginning with God. And all things were made through him, and without him was not anything 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. If that sounds really similar to what we read earlier in the Old Testament reading, that's intentional on John's part. He's trying to show and draw through and show his readers that, hey, you know this really familiar story in Genesis 1? That is talking about something far grander than you could imagine. In fact, it's talking about this event. The Word coming into the world. The Word making all things. But in that, there's something as well. When we see those days and nights, we see a disparity. We see light and darkness. Because day can't be night, and night can't be day.

[10:32] Darkness can't be light, and light can't be darkness. They're as far away from each other as they can be. There's no mixing. There's no gray. It's day and night. But there's also something really important when we talk about light. Oftentimes, in the Old Testament, light means God in the midst of darkness.

I think we all get that as people that read the scriptures. Darkness is sin, and light is God or goodness. But it's not just light that comes from God's Word. God himself is described as light. Psalm 27 1 says this, the Lord is my light and my salvation. So we get all these pictures of light and darkness. But when it comes to light, light is never evil. Light is never bad. Light is always God, goodness, justice, and truth. And so even when we talk about those attributes as being light, his Word revealing his character, it's all pointing back to God.

Light is more than just the immediate context of the festival of booze. Light is more than just the beginning of the gospel of John. But light is pointing back to God himself.

So that's why when Jesus makes this claim, I am the light of the world, it's startling to those he's speaking to. It should be startling to us. He is pulling forth all these images and all of these pictures and saying, that's who I am. Who is Jesus? I am light. I am God. And when he's doing that, he is challenging them, not with just the idea of who he is, but there's a charge to them. We see that in the second half of that verse. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life. It's not as if Jesus is just leading them, stumbling through the darkness, wondering where they're going. If you've ever been in the dark at night following somebody who has the one flashlight, you know that feeling. Where are we going? When are we going to get there? I can't see that tree root.

[12:46] Spider webs in my face. That's not what's going on here. Jesus is saying that he is the light, and darkness is as different as him as can be. It's not day and night mixed together. No, it's day and night, light and darkness. There's a contrast at work. And the audacity of this claim is something that the Pharisees who he's talking to here really struggle with. You see, it's really easy, and it's not really challenging to say that, hey, light brings comfort. That doesn't really challenge their worldview. That doesn't make them mad. It's really easy to say, oh, light brings hope. That's true, but that's not what Jesus is saying. It's really easy to say light brings comfort because I'm scared of the dark. That's not what Jesus is saying either. He's saying that I am the light of the world.

That's very different. It's a picture of contrast, not just of a warm security blanket. I am the light of the world. Now, remember, this event is happening on the same day in chapter 7, where he says, if anybody's thirsty, come to me and drink, and you will be satisfied.

If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink. Now, Jesus is making this great claim, just like when he said the bread of life. He kind of mixed his metaphors. He's doing the same thing here. He is showing that that light is satisfying because it's not darkness. It's so different. Visually, it's different, but it's also morally different. It's different in every category, and it cannot be confused. So who is Jesus? That's that perennial question that I asked us to consider as we're looking at these statements because John is answering that question, and Jesus is answering that question with his words. Who is Jesus? He is saying that he is God. He's the light of the world, and whoever follows him will not walk in darkness. This claim from Jesus obviously has a polarizing effect. On the here's then, on us now, the dividing line of humanity, the dividing light, if you will, is not what we think it would be. It's not whether you're a Pharisee or a scribe. It's not whether you are a Jew or Gentile. It's not whether you went to a good school or didn't go to school at all.

[15:34] It's not whether you loved Miss Bundy or you hated Miss Bundy. It's not whether you're black or white, if you're from America, if you pay your taxes, or you don't.

The dividing line of humanity is the person of Christ. That's really hard for them to hear because in their minds, they don't know about Jesus.

They're unsure. They know something is different, and they don't want to commit to him. But the dividing line of humanity for them and for us is the person of Jesus, and that's polarizing.

You either follow him in light or you continue in darkness. It's that different, light and dark. Now, if you're not a Christian here this morning, we're glad you're here.

There's other ways that you could spend your Sunday morning. But this is really important, and Jesus is challenging you. You might not have known it when you walked in this morning, but he's challenging you and saying, will you follow me?

[16:43] You might not know who I am fully, but he's saying, I am God. I will give up my life for your sins. Follow me. That's divisive in our day and age.

But if you're a Christian this morning, he's also calling you to step out of the darkness, out of all the struggles that you have that might be hidden from those who view you, and bring those things into the light, those things that we secretly struggle with, that sin that won't go away.

He's saying, bring that into the light of confession. Bring it before me. Now, I'm not saying don't be a weirdo, okay? I'm not saying get a billboard on I-25 and say, hey, I'm Andy.

I cheat on my taxes. You know, I might not pick up dog poop as I walk around the neighborhood or anything like that, right? One of those is true, and one of them is not.

But he is saying this. Don't be weird like that. But as there's occasion, and as we struggle through this Christian life, Christian, come into the light.

[17 : 58] Don't bring those sins into the light. Bring them before the Lord. Confess them there. Just don't do it the first time you meet somebody. If you're a Christian, you're weird enough in society.

Let the gospel be the weird part. But Christian, bring those things into the light because there's a thing about darkness where we think that it's hidden, and we think we don't have to deal with it, or it'll just go away.

But the reality is that's not true. It's already been paid for by Christ. Bring them into the light. The Christian should have no part in darkness, but that's hard because as a follower of Christ, we know that we sin.

We know that we need a Savior, but it's already been paid for. That's the claim that Jesus is making both for the Christian and for the non-Christian.

If you've considered the claims of Christ, or you haven't, he's saying, I am the light of the world.

Follow me in all aspects, in all parts of your life, in all of those dark corners, in all those parts where you think no one can see.

[19 : 14] Follow me. Now, that's a claim that Jesus is making. That's really easy for us to see. But what's much more difficult and what's much harder to understand is everything that follows after that.

If you've been in a meeting, whether it's in the corporate world, whether it's a church meeting, hopefully that doesn't happen here, whether it's a meeting with your spouse, where you're going over schedules or something like that, the stated purpose of this meeting in the corporate world is going to be, we're going to review this project, this presentation.

We're going to slap the table and go forward. But you come into that meeting or you have that discussion with your spouse or even a child is even better. You realize really quickly, we came wanting to talk about this, but my meeting got hijacked and we're going this way when we should have been going this way.

The presentation was supposed to be, the pitch, the big business pitch was supposed to happen, but clearly we're still in the planning conference phase. Clearly we're planning our summer vacation and now we're talking about who spilled chocolate syrup on the floor.

Or if you're talking with a kid, you wanted to talk about grades and now we're talking about unicorns. Your meeting has been hijacked. That's what's happening to Jesus here.

[20 : 34] He's talking about following after him, him being the light of the world. And what did the Pharisees say to him? Hey, how can you say those things? What authority do you have?

Wait, I thought there was supposed to be a witness here. This can't be true. His interaction with the Pharisees is hijacked. And it doesn't happen just in corporate America or the ancient Near East or when you're talking with a toddler.

It happens even with things that are ultimate, that are cosmic, that are really stinking important. It's hijacked with this question of authority.

How do we know that? Look with me at verse 13. It starts like this. So the Pharisees said to him, you are bearing witness about yourself.

Your testimony is not true. And Jesus answered, even if I do bear witness about myself, my testimony is true. For I know where I came from and where I'm going.

[21 : 33] But you do not know where I come from or where I'm going. It's kind of interesting. This question of authority centers around three kind of big buckets or categories.

The first one is this idea of testimony. At this point, when we hear the Pharisees' response, we should kind of all collectively groan and say, gosh, that question, if you remember back when we talked about John, John saying that, or Jesus saying that, I am the bread of life, that question that my friend kept asking me is, why don't they get it?

Here, it seems like, again, the Pharisees just don't get it. What are they doing? What are they thinking? Why are they asking him this? They don't get it.

And they're challenging him on something they've already challenged him on. If you flip back to John 5, a few chapters earlier, Jesus says this about witnessing and his testimony.

He says, if I alone bear witness about myself, my testimony is not deemed true. There's another who bears witness about me, and I know that the testimony he bears about me is true.

[22 : 51] You sent John. And then he'll go on a little bit further and say, but the testimony I have is greater than that of John. for the works that the Father has given me to accomplish, the very works I'm doing, bear witness about me that the Father has sent me.

And the Father who sent me has he himself borne witness about me. This is kind of a continuation of that conversation. This matter should have already been settled, but the Pharisees are trying to play a trick on him.

He said, if I bear witness about myself, then it's not true. You see, this conversation is taking place against the backdrop of Deuteronomy 19.

It's something that we kind of have in our own legal system where it says, if you have a witness, you've got to have more than one because those witnesses could conflict. Their testimonies could not corroborate each other.

But the Pharisees are asking this question. They're saying, and we'll see if they're doing this intentionally to trap him or if they're doing it out of like actually wondering who Jesus is, they're saying, Jesus, you can't witness about yourself.

[24 : 06] You even said this. So are they asking out of true curiosity or are they asking because they're trying to trap him? Well, it's the Pharisees, right?

This isn't their first rodeo. This isn't the first time we've seen them interact with Jesus. They're trying to trap him and they're trying to get him to understand that they remember what he said and we're going to use it against you later.

And Jesus says, oh, no, no, no. You didn't understand what I meant. He's saying, back in chapter 5, I can offer true testimony because of those things.

If I speak in conformity with the Father, I can. In fact, there's more than one witness that's here. Both myself and the Father, which we'll get to in a minute.

But he's saying here, you can't pass judgment on me because you don't know where I came from and you don't know where I'm going. That seems kind of odd when we consider it.

[25 : 08] But he is saying to them, you don't understand the landscape of what's going on. You have no idea. You think it's about this, but it's really about these ultimate things, these ultimate questions.

That's the part one to this challenge of authority. The second one, that second big topic, is about judgment. And we see those in verses like 15 and 16.

Judgment's confusing because it's Jesus. He says here in verse 15, you judge according to the flesh, I judge no one. Okay.

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 is Jesus not judging because he was sent here as a Savior?

That's not exactly what he's saying. Some people take that position. He's saying here, I don't judge like you do. I don't judge according to appearances, which is what you see earlier in the Gospels.

[26 : 15] I don't judge according to the flesh. In fact, my judgment is perfect because I do it with the Father. And it gets back to this ultimate thing that they are missing, that Jesus is related to the Father, that Jesus is God himself.

He's part of the Trinity. Jesus judges, he just doesn't do it alone, and he doesn't do it like the Pharisees do it. And that kind of makes them mad.

Now, I'm not going to commend this author by any stretch, and I'm pretty sure, maybe not Miss Bundy, but a seminary professor is going to come smack me in the face. But, this author, Rudolf Bolt,!

Rudolf Boltmann, I don't commend anything that he wrote. It's not normally helpful. But even him, even the guy who questions everything about the Christian faith, says about these verses, about the Pharisees, that Jesus is making a mockery of Jewish legalism.

He can see that in this text. Because in it, he's showing them that they're so concerned about the testimony of witnesses, they're so concerned about judging, but they miss that it's all about God, that God is at the center of it.

[27 : 34] Even that guy can see it's about God. The third kind of bend about authority, the topic that we need to talk about is relationship.

We see that by the Pharisees missing, that it's about God himself. Now, what I didn't tell you about Miss Bundy, and the reason she had so much power and authority, wasn't because she was my science teacher.

It was who she knew. She knew Dr. Nina Page. And who is Dr. Nina Page? It's my grandmother. So, Dr. Nina Page and Miss Judy, the Miss Judy Bundy, both love science, and they were in the same Bible study.

So, if I performed poorly in school, I would hear about it from my grandmother, not just my parents, but it would come to me with much more authority and much more, honestly, anger at underperforming.

And I would even see Miss Bundy outside of school. You know, when you see your teacher and you realize they're a normal human being too, and she knew my grandmother, man, I was in trouble because her power wasn't limited just to the classroom.

[28 : 49] I couldn't escape it. It was everywhere because her authority, her power, was based on this relationship to my grandmother. The same is true here.

What the Pharisees and the scribes miss is that the authority and power with which Jesus speaks comes from his relationship to the Father.

Not only do they miss that the law is pointing to Christ, but they miss that Jesus is saying he is God. The Pharisees failed. They failed to understand this whole thing.

It's why they questioned Jesus' authority in the first place. And then they circle around to it, or Jesus circles around to it again in 17 and 18. 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. The relationship there. The relationship is the part that they miss both about the law and about who Jesus is saying himself.

[29 : 59] He's saying, I am God. Who is Jesus? He answers that question for them. But why do they miss it?

They miss the authority with which Jesus speaks and they misunderstand. There's kind of a hint of this when he says, your law, isn't it Jesus' law?

but he's saying to them, he's pointing out to them that you have messed with the law, you've missed the whole point of it, and so your law is your understanding of it.

You missed the crucial component that all of this is pointing to me. And you missed it. And you missed it real big.

You missed it when it comes to the law, and you missed it when it comes to me as I stand before you. You did not understand that. They memorized the law.

[30 : 59] They used it. And that's why they struggle so much when Jesus comes and he doesn't do what they want him to do.

He doesn't join their club. Instead, he dines with people that they use the law to put down. He doesn't fit into their box.

For to know Jesus is to know the Father. That's what Jesus is saying to them. And that makes them mad. That angers them.

The actions, the signs, the clear statements, all of that is pointing to this fact that Jesus is the light of the world. And even he says it to them, they should be considering that statement, but instead, they're doing something very different.

They're getting really technical and asking questions about do you have the authority to be a witness or not. They miss the Savior that stands before them. Jesus' words here challenge those who don't follow Jesus.

[32 : 06] The Pharisees saw with their own eyes, they heard him, but they couldn't recognize Jesus. What about your neighbor? He doesn't see Jesus.

He doesn't talk to him. Yes, he has creation. There's some small glimpse of that. But it shows us that in the work of my neighbor or the guy I work with or the person I share a cubicle with or teach with in the classroom, they need to hear from Christ.

Christ. They need the light that is opposed to darkness. They need Christ and they need you to bring it to him.

They need you because God uses people like us to share the gospel, the light in the darkness. darkness. We heard from Jonathan all these practical things of how to do that. This is the theology behind that, that the light shines in the darkness and you need to shine it in the hearts of people around you.

[33 : 20] rather, we've become experts in the law about witness and testimony and we in our own hearts have kind of removed God from the picture.

We think that we know but we miss Jesus often. If we really believe that Jesus is the light of the world and it dispels darkness, we cannot sit idly by as people stumble through the darkness. We need to think about that because often the way we live shows that we truly believe that light and darkness are not in as big a contrast as Jesus says.

We need to be the light in the darkness and do we live like we believe or are we majoring on the minors instead using God's word like the Pharisees to put people down and not holding forth the words of life as we see in the scriptures.

Wherever that finds us this morning, Jesus is calling each of us in this claim with real authority to follow him, to follow after Christ because he is the light of the world that shines in the darkness.

[34 : 49] Let's pray. Lord, we are thankful this morning for you showing us who you are in your word.

May you use your spirit to show us that you make these grand claims of being light in the darkness and may we delight in it.

May we be prompted to bring our sin before you out of the darkness into the light. And Father, may we extend that light into the dark corners of this world.

We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Amen.