
Truth Believed

John 8:12-30

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Last weekend was a time of lots of celebrations – fireworks, food, fun. It was a national holiday in which we were celebrating our freedom. Celebrations like this are an important part of a people's identity.

This was true in Israel. In the early harvest time, they had a celebration known as the feast of Tabernacles. For it, Israelites gathered from all over the nation, built small booths to "tent" in and had a week-long festival of praise and worship. Music, trumpets, religious rituals of water and light, shouts, singing, prayers and fellowship.

So here we are at the end of that week. Now, I want to spend a moment simply reading some verses that come before our text this morning so that you can get a sense of this dramatic moment.

John 6:48–51

I am the bread of life. Your fathers ate the manna in the wilderness, and they died. This is the bread that comes down from heaven, so that one may eat of it and not die. I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. And the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh."

John 7:37 – 8:23 (Omitting the spurious paragraph 7:53-8:12)

On the last day of the feast, the great day, Jesus stood up and cried out, "If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, 'Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.'" Now this he said about the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were to receive, for as yet the Spirit had not been given, because Jesus was not yet glorified.

When they heard these words, some of the people said, "This really is the Prophet." Others said, "This is the Christ." But some said, "Is the Christ to come from Galilee? Has not the Scripture said that the Christ comes from the offspring of David, and comes from Bethlehem, the village where David was?" So there was a division among the people over him. Some of them wanted to arrest him, but no one laid hands on him.

The officers then came to the chief priests and Pharisees, who said to them, "Why did you not bring him?" The officers answered, "No one ever spoke like this man!" The Pharisees answered them, "Have you also been deceived? Have any of the authorities or the Pharisees believed in him? But this crowd that does not know the law is accursed." Nicodemus, who had gone to him before, and who was one of them, said to them, "Does our law judge a man without first giving him a hearing and learning what he does?" They replied, "Are you from Galilee too? Search and see that no prophet arises from Galilee."

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 bear-

ing 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.

Why is it important? Jesus claims to be all that the Old Testament promises and prophesies.

He is the true manna, the bread from heaven...

He is the true water from rock...

He is the true light...

There were two great ceremonies during the Feast of Tabernacles. The first was the pouring out of the water. The other was called the illumination of the temple; it took place in the treasury at the beginning of the feast. It was a spectacular celebration.

In the center of the treasury of the Temple, four great torches were set up. Some say they were as high as the highest walls of the temple. On the top of these golden candelabra were great bowls holding sixty-five liters of oil. Each evening, using ladders leaning against the walls, priests would carry the oil up to the top. There, they would light the protruding wicks. The great flames that leapt out of these torches illumined the whole temple and much of Jerusalem. It was spectacular! These torches had been burning through the whole week.

Now Jesus points to them and to Himself. If truth is to be believed, then people must respond to three key issues about the Lord Jesus.

To Jesus' Word

(v. 12)

John gives us Jesus' word. Here is His claim about who He is.

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."

The Marvelous Reality

The marvelous reality has multiple fulfillments:

He is the true CREATION LIGHT. He is the reality of which light is symbol, a type.

He is the fulfillment of the WILDERNESS PILLAR. God manifested Himself in a pillar of light called the Shekinah Glory. It stood between the Egyptians and the Israelites so that there was light for Israel and darkness for the Egyptians (Exodus 14:19-20). It rested on the tabernacle and led the way through the wilderness.

He is true Temple menorah. The ornate lampstand in the holy place of the tabernacle and Temple lit the table of bread and the altar of incense. He is the true light of the dwelling place of God where God's people are fed and prayers arise to heaven.

He is the Gentile's illumination, the light of nations. He brings light to the Gentiles so that we may attend to His words, walk in His ways and worship at His gates.

He is Eternity's sun. There will be no dark in the coming new heavens and new earth for Jesus will be its light.

Jesus truly is the light of the world. (If you want more, check out the quote from D.A. Carson in the appendix.)

The Transforming Results

But this marvelous reality has transforming results. It is limited in its scope. It is only for those who follow Christ, who believe and become His disciples. The horizon between light and darkness in the spiritual realm is belief. So only those who believe experience the reality of spiritual light.

It will be our experience in this present age for we do not walk in darkness. Spiritual darkness in the Bible is not merely the absence of light but is the presence of sin. To those who believe, we will not walk in spiritual darkness, sin, chaos and judgment. Even in darkness of this fallen world, we do not walk in darkness.

It will be our experience in the age to come for we *have* the light of life. Why is it put this way? John is reminding us of what he wrote earlier (John 1:4-5): *4 In him was life, and the life was the light of men. 5 The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.* Light and life unite in Christ. Those who have His life will have His light. All that is represented by light in the Bible and fulfilled in Christ will become the experience of those who believe. It begins now but will reach its full consummation in the New Heavens and New Earth.

To Jesus' Witness**(v. 13-20)**

Jesus' word is denied by attacking the trustworthiness of His witness. The unbelief of the religious leaders is put on display.

¹³ So the Pharisees said to him, "You are bearing witness about yourself; your testimony is not true."

The Snide Attack**(v. 13)**

They deny what Jesus has said on a perceived religious technicality. They are rejecting Jesus' claim to deity. His word of testimony is not true unless there is another witness to it. That would be so if He were not God. If He were a mere human making these claims with no other witness, then He should be charged and stoned for claiming to be God.

The Scriptural Response**(v. 14-19)**

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 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."

Jesus' words are true because of His heavenly origins (v. 14-15). His testimony is true because He is not from this world. He does not judge, assess, discern according to the standards of this present age. He is not in darkness because He is from the light. They are of and from this world thus are in darkness. Because they operate according to the flesh, they cannot know Him, where He is from nor where He is going. They are disqualified and incapable to ascertain the truth of His words and witness.

Jesus' words are true because of His heavenly Father (v. 16-19). They want to get technical? They want to pull out their Law and hold Him to it? His heavenly Father has sent Him. His heavenly Father has affirmed Him.

As many religious arguments often do, it becomes personal. This is an attack on His parentage. Where is your father? You were conceived before your physical parents were married. Jesus's response is simply another claim to deity and exposure of their unbelief. To know Jesus is to know His Father.

The Significant Place**(v. 20)**

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.

These words are spoken surrounded by the torches of flickering earthly light. The grand torches illuminate the room. Yet they are but candles in the brightness of heaven's light. The milling crowds around him are filled with angry eyes and plotting hearts. They want to arrest him, but it is not yet time to die.

To Jesus' Warning

(v. 21-30)

Jesus warnings direct His challenge to those who don't believe. Listen carefully to what Jesus says through this text to you.

Believe while you can

²¹ 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." ²² So the Jews said, "Will he kill himself, since he says, 'Where I am going, you cannot come?'" ²³ He said to them, "You are from below; I am from above. You are of this world; I am not of this world.

The Pharisees taught that anyone who committed suicide went to hell. They snidely accuse Jesus of planning to commit suicide and thus going to hell. They of course are not going to hell. But Jesus is going away. This is their opportunity. Jesus' warning here is that you do not have forever. There will come a time when you do not have the opportunity to believe. So, believe while you can.

Believe unless you die in your sins

²⁴ I told you that you would die in your sins, for unless you believe that I am he you will die in your sins."

Jesus warns of the consequences of unbelief. You will die in your sins. If you die in your sins, you will go to hell. We are not just talking about earthly consequences. What is at stake is eternal judgment. Believe unless you die in your sins.

Believe what Jesus says about Himself

²⁵ So they said to him, "Who are you?" Jesus said to them, "Just what I have been telling you from the beginning. ²⁶ 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." ²⁷ They did not understand that he had been speaking to them about the Father.

Here is the fundamental question that is answered by saving belief, "Who is Jesus." He is all that He says He is. This is not just from the beginning of His earthly life, or from the beginning of His earthly ministry. From the beginning of time the writers of the Scripture have been telling us who Jesus is.

What Jesus is claiming not only has earthly import but has heavenly support. Jesus declares, Jesus teaches, Jesus preaches what His Father spoke to Him. Jesus is the Word, the words of the Father. Jesus is mouthpiece of the Father. Jesus is the Father speaking. Believe all that the Bible says about Jesus.

Believe that the cross pleases the Father

²⁸ 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. ²⁹ 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."

This phrase "to lift up" was a nice way in Roman society to refer to the cross. The cross was the means that Romans used to execute criminals and rebels. But John has also

used it to connect Jesus' death with the lifting up of the serpent in the wilderness. At the end of the day, the cross is final authentication of who Jesus claims to be. Contrary to all that the religious leaders taught and the people expected, the Messiah had to be "lifted up."

So, yes, Jesus is going to die. But He is not going to commit suicide. He is going to be executed at the request of the Jews by the hand of the Romans. But that is only how it will appear to happen. On the cross, it will please the Father, for the sake of those who believe, to pour out His wrath on His Son. So, Jesus is always being, saying and doing what is pleasing to the Father.

Believe that the cross pleases God the Father.

What is the result?

³⁰ As he was saying these things, many believed in him.

Jesus is the light of the world. The conclusion - many believed in Him... Do you? Will you?

Appendix

The light metaphor is steeped in Old Testament allusions. The glory of the very presence of God in the cloud led the people to the Promised Land (Ex. 13:21-22) and protected them from those who would destroy them (Ex. 14:19-25). The Israelites were trained to sing, 'The LORD is my light and my salvation' (Ps. 27:1). The word of God, the law of God, is a light to guide the path of those who cherish instruction (Ps. 119:105; Pr. 6:23); God's light is shed abroad in revelation (Ezk. 1:4, 13, 26-28) and salvation (Hab. 3:3-4). 'Light is Yahweh in action, (Ps. 44:3)'.¹² Isaiah tells us that the servant of the LORD was appointed as a light to the Gentiles, that he might bring God's salvation to the ends of the earth (Is. 49:6). The coming eschatological age would be a time when the LORD himself would be the light for his people (Is. 60:19-22; cf. Rev. 21:23-24). Then we will have the promise fulfilled of continual light, followed by the promise of living waters flowing from Jerusalem (Zechariah 14:5b-7) In this age of an inaugurated but not yet consummated kingdom, however, the light is still in mortal combat with darkness (1:4, 9; 3:19-21). (Adapted from D.A. Carson, *The Pillar Commentary: John*, p.337-338)

¹² H. Conzelmann, *TDNT* 9, 320).