

why we need jesus as our light

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Scripture Passage John 1:1-5, 8:12

Almost every world religion and every cult uses the image or metaphor of light. However, Christianity holds the copyright on the theme and truth about **LIGHT** with the words, **GOD IS LIGHT AND IN HIM THERE IS NO DARKNESS AT ALL**. The Bible uses the theme of light from Genesis, let there be light, all the way through to Revelation.

Let me take you back a long, long time ago in your imagination. We do not really know when. There is no one with a video camera to record the event. Darkness is everywhere. It is a time of chaos. Then at a divine command which no one hears, let there be light. We do not know exactly how that happened. Perhaps it was lightning that zigzagged through the darkness. Perhaps it was blazing embers that fell from heaven and gave birth to shafts of light, or perhaps it was like the first dawn, silently pushing back the dark sky. But however it happened, darkness is pushed back and light is born.

This is what we will call universal or external light, meaning that light is for everyone. Everyone is blest by its arrival. Light is the first act of creation because everything else will need light to grow.

The next act of light is giving light to those who walk in the garden with God. This is what we will call internal light. It is the light that illumines the soul. Think about this: as Adam and Eve face the light of God, any shadows fall behind them and they do not see them and when they sin and turn their backs on God. Think about what happens, now the light is behind them and what they see is their shadow stretched out in front of them and they walk in their own shadow. Sin always leaves its shadow for us to see before us and we walk in its shadow as it falls before us.

The external world is not plunged into darkness, but our internal/our inner world is. This is the inner darkness that creeps into the hearts and lives of people extinguishing their moral sense. This is the inner darkness that drives a man to seek the annihilation of an entire race in the gas chambers of Europe, or the inner darkness of evil that thinks of the attacks on America on Sept 11. Phrase: those who devise evil on their beds, nothing to do with sex, but it describes those who lie and think about bad stuff. They lie and plot evil in their minds. That is inner darkness.

Jesus comes to speak into this inner darkness when he declares in one of the great affirmations of his identity. **I AM THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD**.

John 1 gospel begins:

1In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. 2He was with God in the beginning.

3Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made.

4In him was life, and that life was the light of men. 5The light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not understood[a] it = not able to snuff it out.

Two main passages where Jesus uses this image.

John 8:12

12When Jesus spoke again to the people, he said, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life."

Again in John 12:35

35Then Jesus told them, "You are going to have the light just a little while longer. Walk while you have the light, before darkness overtakes you. The man who walks in the dark does not know where he is going. 36Put your trust in the light while you have it, so that you may become sons of light." When he had finished speaking, Jesus left and hid himself from them.

The profound affirmation of Jesus in John 8. I am the light of the world sets the stage of us.

Every passage in Scripture has a context. The setting where it takes place. We must resist the temptation to take a verse or an idea and wrestle it from its context. Its context is its womb. It is where the idea is born and where we must first see it. So the setting here is crucial.

We know from John 7 the setting of this discussion is the Feast of Tabernacles. John 7 and 8 are set in this context.

This was one of 3 major feasts Jews were to celebrate.

Feast of Passover – freedom from Egypt

Feast of Pentecost – festival of harvest or first fruits

Feast of Tabernacles – held in October.

It recalled the time after Israel had left Egypt. And travelled in the wilderness where people lived in

huts or tents or tabernacles lasted 8 days. People built huts outside their houses, lived in them as a family to recall this time of travel. Rich in ritual, there was a water festival, recalling the time that God supplied water from the rock. Then a light ceremony. Four huge candelabra with huge bowls on the top of each one were lit. It took place in what was called The Court of the Women.

This allowed the women and other non-Jewish men to share in its celebration. It lit up the whole city. Everyone who lived within 15 miles of Jerusalem was required to be there.

It reminded the people of the time that they travelled in the desert. There are no street lights in the desert. No illuminated highway or sign posts. God guided them by a cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night. When the pillar moved, you moved. No matter what you were doing, the word goes down the line, through the camp. The pillar is moving so you started to break camp. You either moved with or you were left in the desert darkness. Alone and without any guidance.

Some great texts were part of their liturgy and worship, sung over and over again.

Psalm 27:11

**The LORD is my light and my salvation
whom shall I fear?**

**The LORD is the stronghold of my life
of whom shall I be afraid?**

Isaiah 60:1

**1 "Arise, shine, for your light has come, and
the glory of the LORD rises upon you.**

It was a huge festival. A great celebration of light.

These huge candelabra were lit for 7 nights, and on the eighth night they were extinguished until the next year, reminding the people of what darkness felt like. The people would have to wait another year before the light returns.

It is on the 8th night when the Tabernacles lights are now extinguished that Jesus says, I am the light of the world. He is not some light that appears once a year, or some temporary light. He is the light that never goes out. He is the light of the world and the light of the cosmos. He is the light that will never be extinguished, will never be snuffed out.

Jesus comes as the light of the world, not just to be the external light, but to be that inner light in each of us. The light that does get snuffed out. The light that does get overwhelmed by the darkness of evil.

Just as the people had to follow the pillar or be left in the cold darkness of the desert, so Jesus says then and now, follow me, keep your eyes on me. I am the light of the world. I am the light of the cosmos.

His claim is this, just as people followed the pillar in the desert and did not get lost, so he says, everyone who follows me as the light of the world will not, will never, end up in darkness.

Let's unpack what that might mean. Some implications for us. Some practical application for our lives.

WHEN WE FOLLOW JESUS AS THE LIGHT, WE WILL NEVER BE IN DARKNESS ABOUT GOD.

Col 1:15 Jesus is the image of the invisible God, invisible. John says no one has ever seen God. Jesus then one and only he has made him known.

The best idea, word photograph being developed in a darkroom. Jesus is the one who goes into the darkroom with an undeveloped photograph of God whom he alone has seen, and what he does in every aspect of his life and ministry. All he says and does is to develop a photograph of God. He holds himself up like a photograph and says, this is what God is like.

Time and time again he says, if you have seen me, you have seen the father. Even when he went to the cross, it was God in Christ. God in human form.

Whether people know it or not, at the very core of our being is a desire. A need to know God. Jesus is the way to know God.

A few years ago, Vancouver new age guru Eckhard Tolle, book, became used in TV book club headed up by Oprah, a phenomenal response to the book. TV seminars and workshops. I bought and read the book, but it does not say anything about the cross. It does not reveal God as the God and father of our lord Jesus Christ.

However, we have 4 tremendous books called the Gospels, which tell us about the life and ministry of Jesus. Did you know that we have more evidence for Jesus as a historical figure than we have for people like Julius Caesar? We need to read and study them with the purpose of seeing the life and ministry of Jesus as the way to know God.

That is what Jesus said he came to do, and if we follow him, we will not walk in darkness about God.

Hebrews 1

1In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, 2but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom he made the universe. 3The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word.

We need to ask, what does Jesus say about God? What does Jesus teach us about God? When we read and follow that, we will not walk in darkness. Jesus knew God intimately as his father, and he wants us to know God as the father.

That's why he teaches us to pray. Our father who lives in heaven hallowed or holy be your name. Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as it is (always) done in heaven.

WHEN WE FOLLOW JESUS AS THE LIGHT, WE WILL NEVER BE LOST ABOUT HOW TO LIVE.

This image of light/darkness is used to describe our lives as followers of Jesus.

Ephesians 4:8

8For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light 9(for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness, righteousness and truth) 10and find out what pleases the Lord.

Live as children of light.

1 Thess 5 same idea

4But you, brothers, are not in darkness so that this day should surprise you like a thief. 5You are all sons of the light and sons of the day. We do not belong to the night or to the darkness. 6So then, let us not be like others, who are asleep, but let us be alert and self-

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controlled. 7For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk, get drunk at night. 8But since we belong to the day, let us be self-controlled, putting on faith and love as a breastplate, and the hope of salvation as a helmet.

It is telling us in no uncertain terms that there are aspects of living in the night that we are to leave behind. There are characteristics of following Jesus in the light that we are to follow.

How does God guide us.

Psalm 119 your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.

All of us would like the next 5 years to be lit up, so that we can see what lies miles and miles ahead of us. We would love to see every twist and turn in the road. God seldom works like that.

Remember when the cloud of fire moved, all you saw was what was immediately ahead. Your only safety lay in following it.

Note what Psalm 119 says, your word is a lamp to my feet. All I see is the pool of light illumining what lies right at my feet. We step into that and the light lets us see the next step.

This is how God has lead Harriet and me. When we have been at major turns in our lives, we ask: what do we do next? Where do we go next? I would love to see 5 years ahead, miles and miles ahead lit up so we can see every turn.

That is not how God seems to work. All we have been able to see is the next step, and the only place of safety is to step into it. And then as we have done that, the light gives us one more step, then one more step.

The other thing we have learned is this: most of us would like the security of knowing what the next step is before we step forward from where we are. We want the security of seeing the next step. That is not how God has usually worked with us. I am not sure about you. It usually works this way. We let go of whatever our present security has been. And then only as we let go, we step out of the darkness and then the next step of walking in the light opens up to us.

I have a thought that flows out of that. Many times we may ask God to open up something to us, reveal some aspect of his will and direction to us. The key to this revelation. This inner light in

us, it is intimately related to our prior decision to obey and follow that truth before we see it.

If we ask God to lead us in some direction, what should I do here? But we are really just gathering information? If his will, his kingdom, is one of several options we are exploring. Then God may chose to withhold that information from us. God will not reveal what we are not willing to use.

Revelation calls for a prerequisite openness of heart and a submission of soul. Light makes a moral demand on us, and unless we are willing to follow, we may find that we are in fact left in darkness. Revelation does not consist of information. It does not depend on our knowledge. Revelation is linked to the heart.

So if you are asking God to give you some direction in some area, ask a better question, what am I willing to do with this light from his Word? We have to answer that first.

So just like these pilgrims in the desert, security and safety lies always and only in walking in the light.

Jesus declares, those who follow me will never walk in the darkness and coldness of being lost.

FOLLOWING JESUS AS THE LIGHT IS THE PREREQUISITE FOR LIVING IN THE WORLD.

Few of us like to walk down a dark unlit street, so we should equally be cautious about walking in the moral and social darkness of the world.

Light does three main things:

1. It exposes darkness. It exposes what is evil.

John 3:19

19This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but men loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil. 20Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that his deeds will be exposed. 21But whoever lives by the truth comes into the light, so that it may be seen plainly that what he has done has been done through God."

Jesus exposed evil just by who he was. Darkness and evil were uncomfortable in his presence and so they scurried away.

As we follow the light of the world, light exposes evil. Not by protest or demonstration. Not with

placards and banners, but just by being light. The purer the light, the more evil is exposed.

2. Walking in the light reveals the glory of the Father

"You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. 15Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. 16In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.

The one who says, I am the light of the world. Then goes on to say, you are the light of the world. This is the missional task of the church in the world, to be light, and so to attract praise and glory to the father.

3. It guides people to the truth

Phil 2:14

14Do everything without complaining or arguing, 15so that you may become blameless and pure, children of God without fault in a crooked and depraved generation, in which you shine like stars in the universe 16as you hold out[a] the word of life—in order that I may boast on the day of Christ that I did not run or labor for nothing

Key idea in that verse, to shine like stars.

Remember stars were used for navigation. They kept you from becoming lost. From shipwreck in Acts.

Acts 27:20

20When neither sun nor stars appeared for many days and the storm continued raging, we finally gave up all hope of being saved.

Detractors of the Christian faith like to say that Christianity has made a mess of things and spawned all kinds of problems. We must agree, but they need to do a better job of their history. The church made its fair share of mistakes, was at times insensitive to culture. Once was a slave ship called the good ship Jesus, but it was Christians who started the hospital movement, ran the welfare programs in Geneva, brought education, fought to protect the rights and the lives of children in the slums of London.

It was a Christian, William Wilberforce, who gave every ounce of energy he had to the abolition of the slave movement in Great Britain. Christian medical and relief workers were fast to get to

Haiti. Christian thinkers have exerted a long, lasting influence on world history, and they saw themselves as navigational lights in a dark world.

God has put us as part of the Christian church in Vancouver for a purpose. As we follow Jesus, it is to be a star, navigational star for people who are lost. It is to bring praise and glory to the father as we reflect his glory in the world.

Ephesians 3:10

10His intent was that now, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms,

Through the church, the manifold wisdom of God is to be made known,.

Idea in that verse is best understood by the word, prism. This simple piece of glass, but it breaks up the light, which we do not see, and it breaks it up into the brilliant colors of the rainbow.

That's what the Christian's job is. That's what the church's job is. To allow the light of God to shine into us, into our lives, relationships, and then through us to break up in the character of this God who is immortal invisible, whom the world and the city cannot see.

But through the rainbow of the church the light of God, his love, justice, righteousness, mercy, his compassion. All of that and more which comes from the father of lights is to be made known.

So just as Jesus came to make the father known, so we are here to make the father known.

The one who declares, I am the light of the world, turns to us and says, you are the light of the world.

It is only possible, only within our grasp as we follow the one who says, I am the light of the world, whoever follows me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life.

We started with the light coming to the darkness of the earth in Genesis. We finish with this affirmation of light in Revelation.

Revelation 21

23The city does not need the sun or the moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and the Lamb is its lamp.24The nations will walk by its light, and the kings of the earth will bring their splendor into it.

25On no day will its gates ever be shut, for there will be no night there.