

# THE RADICAL RABBI: A RADICAL LIGHT

## (John 8:12-20)

3.13.22

### INTRODUCTION

About 20 miles east of where we live in River Falls, WI is a wonderful place called Crystal Cave. I highly recommend it. It features an opportunity to take a tour of this truly extraordinary cave and its many features (roughly 70-80 feet underground and just over 1,100 feet of cave to explore). One of the most interesting moments of the tour that Linda and the girls and I took was when the guide taking us through the cave, after letting us know what was about to happen, turned off the lights. Immediately the cave was plunged into total, complete, pure and absolute dark. Never have I experienced a darkness and a blackness like that. After a few moments the lights were turned back on, but that brief encounter with blindness gave me an incredible appreciation of both sight and light.

In our story today, our radical rabbi is going to be using the idea of “light” to describe himself and the wondrous possibilities for all who believe in him. So as we look at this quite illuminating moment in Christ’s ministry, **let’s begin with a moment of prayer.**

### TEXT

Now as we begin, Jesus is still in Jerusalem, where he has been teaching in the temple courts. We pick up the story there: ***When 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” — John 8:12.***

One of the things that the gospel of John is famous for is a series of seven “I Am” statements made by Jesus, spread over John’s gospel, where Christ identifies himself in no uncertain terms, particularly to the Jewish ears surrounding him, as one and the same with God; here are those seven statements:

- 1) ***“I am the bread of life” — John 6:35.***
- 2) ***“I am the light of the world” — John 8:12.***
- 3) ***“I am the gate for the sheep” — John 10:7, 9.***
- 4) ***“I am the good shepherd” — John 10:11, 14.***
- 5) ***“I am the resurrection and the life” — John 11:25.***
- 6) ***“I am the way and the truth and the life” — John 14:6.***
- 7) ***“I am the [true] vine” — John 15:[1], 5.***

And why would “I Am” statements have been such incredible “attention-getters” for his audience? It goes all the way back into their history over 1,500 years, when Moses first heard his call from God at the burning bush, that God was calling him to lead God’s deliverance of his chosen people from Egypt. During the course of that conversation, ***Moses said to God, “Suppose I go to the Israelites and say to them, ‘The God of your fathers has sent me to you,’ and they ask me, ‘What is his name?’ Then what shall I tell them?” God said to Moses, “I AM WHO I AM. This is what you are to say to the Israelites: ‘I AM has sent me to you.’” God also said to Moses, “Say to the Israelites, ‘The Lord, the God of your fathers — the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob — has sent me to you.’ This is my name forever, the name you shall call me from generation to generation” — Exodus 3:13-15.*** This becomes the name that we often hear associated with God, particularly in the OT: Yahweh. And now, which must have driven the leadership crazy, Jesus of Nazareth is using that same terminology, that same wording, to describe himself!

But there’s more: Christ’s allusion to being light would have resonated in Jewish hearts due to light’s place in their Scriptures:

- 1) Their leaving Egypt was facilitated by God, who so faithfully provided for them: ***By day the Lord went ahead of them in a pillar of cloud to guide them on their way and by night in a***

*pillar of fire to give them light, so that they could travel by day or night. Neither the pillar of cloud by day nor the pillar of fire by night left its place in front of the people — Exodus 13:21-22.*

- 2) Their great king David had written: *The Lord is my light and my salvation — whom shall I fear? — David, Psalm 27:1a.*
- 3) And certainly there were Messianic overtones to the idea of “light,” as the prophet Isaiah had predicted: *The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of deep darkness a light has dawned — Isaiah 9:2.*

Now John the disciple, the human author of this gospel, did a masterful job of setting the stage for this particular “I Am” statement of Jesus in the introduction to his gospel. He wrote: *In him [referring to Christ] was life, and that life was the light of all mankind. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it — John 1:4-5.* And John’s identifying Jesus as the “Word” earlier in that same introduction to his gospel would have further cemented Christ and his impact in the world with the words of the psalmist where he wrote: *Your word is a lamp for my feet, a light on my path — Psalm 119:105.*

But now, in addition to all that heritage of Scripture, just try and imagine this scene: It had become the custom during the first night of the Festival of Tabernacles, if not every night, to observe a ritual called “The Illumination of the Temple.” This involved the lighting of 4-8 huge golden menorahs (approximately 75 feet tall) in the “court of the women” (an open area in the back half of the Temple compound) to remind the people of God’s faithful grace to them in the wilderness (as described by those words of Exodus). According to witnesses of the time, the light from those menorahs would light up the entire city of Jerusalem. In the evening, the holiest men of Israel would dance and sing psalms of praise to God. So picture it: all that Scripture running through your mind, and the magnificence of being in Jerusalem and seeing those huge menorahs lit, producing most likely the brightest, strongest light you’ve ever seen in your life. And just then, with the memories of all of that so fresh in your mind, to hear this radical rabbi announce to all those gathered listening to him: *“I am the light of the world” — Jesus Christ, John 8:12a.* Wow!

So naturally — *The Pharisees challenged him, “Here you are, appearing as your own witness; your testimony is not valid” — John 8:13.*

The Pharisees are trying to make a legal point based on their own law in an attempt to discredit Christ’s words. Moses had specifically said: *One witness is not enough to convict anyone accused of any crime or offense they may have committed. A matter must be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses — Deuteronomy 19:15.* But Jesus will have none of that. He has another witness, for which he quickly replies.

*“Even if I testify on my own behalf, my testimony is valid, for I know where I came from and where I am going. But you have no idea where I come from or where I am going. You judge by human standards; I pass judgment on no one. But if I do judge, my decisions are true, because I am not alone. I stand with the Father, who sent me. In your own Law it is written that the testimony of two witnesses is true. I am one who testifies for myself; my other witness is the Father, who sent me” — Jesus Christ, John 8:14-18.*

So why does Jesus think his testimony is valid? He needs another witness — at least according to the Pharisees. But Jesus has another witness — his Father. When he says, *“I know where I came from and where I am going,”* he is referencing both knowing and coming from his Father in heaven. And when he says, *“[Y]ou have no idea where I come from or where I am going,”* he is likewise referencing the Pharisees’ lack of knowing his Father in heaven. His intimacy with his Father validates his being Christ’s other witness.

And beyond that, Christ is also referencing the fact that their Scriptures — from Genesis to Malachi — spoke of him. So to say that they didn't know him also is saying that they didn't recognize him through the Scriptures, that they did not know the Scriptures well enough to see the portrait they were so clearly painting of him. They were in denial of the very Scriptures that they had spent their entire lives so diligently studying and memorizing; as Jesus himself had pointed out: ***“[T]he Father who sent me has himself testified concerning me. You have never heard his voice nor seen his form, nor does his word dwell in you, for you do not believe the one he sent. You study the Scriptures diligently because you think that in them you have eternal life. These are the very Scriptures that testify about me, yet you refuse to come to me to have life” — Jesus Christ, John 5:37-40.***

Christ then points out how they judge — not as God judges, but by strictly *human standards*. But when Jesus says that he passes ***judgment on no one***, he means to say that he does not judge as they do. He adheres to a higher standard — his Father's standard. So, as everything about him is connected to and reflective of, as he said, ***“the Father, who sent me,”*** both his testimony and his judgments are true and validated by the truth in witness and judgment of his Father.

***Then they asked him, “Where is your father?” “You do not know me or my Father,” Jesus replied. “If you knew me, you would know my Father also” — John 8:19.***

The fact that they had to ask Jesus where his Father was very vividly betrayed the fact that they do not know either the Father or the person standing right in front of him. And Jesus' reply to them echoes what he would tell both them — ***“I and the Father are one” — Jesus Christ, John 10:30*** — and his disciples — ***“Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father” — Jesus Christ, John 14:9b.***

***He spoke these words while teaching in the temple courts near the place where the offerings were put. Yet no one seized him, because his hour had not yet come — John 8:20.***

Jesus would in fact acknowledge when his hour had come — several times:

- 1) In Jerusalem, shortly after his triumphal entry, in responding to a request from Andrew and Philip: ***“The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. . . . Now my soul is troubled, and what shall I say? ‘Father, save me from this hour’? No, it was for this very reason I came to this hour” — Jesus Christ, John 12:23, 27.***
- 2) As he prepared for what we know as the Last Supper, according to John, ***just before the Passover Festival, Jesus knew that the hour had come for him to leave this world and go to the Father — John 13:1a.***
- 3) And, in the Garden of Gethsemane, as he began what came to be called his “high priestly” prayer, he started with these words: ***“Father, the hour has come. Glorify your Son, that your Son may glorify you” — Jesus Christ, John 17:1b.***

All these are a wonderful picture of God's sovereignty. His plans cannot be rushed or surprised or superseded by anything human beings do. His plans unfold perfectly, in exactly the right time and at exactly the right place — all for exactly the right purpose. God is always completely in charge — of events, of details and of timing. So, in the meantime, Jesus would have no hands seizing him.

And it's also an unbelievably amazing picture of the love at play here, that all the horrific things that were so soon to play out — arrest, beating, flogging, humiliation, crucifixion — were also totally being done on a timeframe that eventually, completely for our sakes, was going to be put into place. When the time was right in God's sovereignty, all those unbelievably pain-filled moments were going to be allowed to happen. So — not now, not now . . . now! Game on!

## **APPLICATION**

So far in our journey with this radical rabbi, we have heard Jesus express himself in the context of “I Am” one other time, which was shortly after the miraculous feeding of the 5,000, when Jesus said: ***“I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never go hungry, and whoever believes in me will***

*never be thirsty. . . . I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats this bread will live forever. This bread is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world” — Jesus Christ, John 6:35, 51.* Jesus was letting those crowds know that he is the only source of satisfaction and fulfillment their lives will ever need. And now, in his words today — *I am the light of the world* — he is letting them know that he is the only light, the only guide, the only clarity, their lives will ever need.

Now there are two incredible conclusions that come flying to mind as we contemplate these amazing statements:

First, the declaration of who Jesus is: “I AM!” That is a clear declaration of his absolute equality with God. He is using the same name as did his Father in identifying himself to Moses. This is not a great philosopher or a great teacher or a great ethicist or a great organizer or a great religious leader or any of the other things that people who do not know him have claimed for him to be. And all of those ideas are suppositions and theories that can be dismissed, and they all assume the same thing — that Jesus of Nazareth was a man. To which Jesus of Nazareth gives his answer: No! He is God in human form. He is God’s Scriptures in human form. He is God’s perfection in human form. He is God’s love, and God’s grace, and God’s faithfulness, and everything else about God — in human form. But that said, make no mistake about it: Jesus Christ IS God! Which means he holds the same power, he claims the same standards, he extends the same passion for us as does his Father. Declaring Jesus Christ to be anything less than God is sin, and wrong! Jesus Christ is God — period!

And second, the proclamation of the place his life can have in our lives. His saying “I AM” is not just an ID of who he is. It is an invitation — of the Savior we can know and the profound impact he can have in our lives. He can be the complete fulfillment for all our spiritual needs. And he can be our complete light, that we can see his guiding us and keeping us through any and all of life’s different situations. That means that we can know a life of complete spiritual fulfillment and perfect spiritual sight — not because of us, but rather because of all that is being provided to us through Christ. Jesus offers us all that when our lives become surrendered to him. What an amazing way to live!

## **CONCLUSION**

And because of all that Jesus Christ offers, that’s why we do invitations. That’s why we give people opportunities to surrender their lives to Christ. That’s why we preach God’s word — to present the truth as to all that life can be when we are found to be in Jesus.

And if your life has been surrendered to God through Christ, that’s why we ask: How has Jesus been the “bread of life” in your life? How has Jesus been the “light” of your world? How does your life reflect Christ in those ways? It’s knowing the answers to those questions that becomes the witness you can have to those around you who need to come into relationship with God through his Son. That’s why we’re here. That’s our mission. Let’s pray!