

Gospel of John #13  
**Light and Dark**

**John 8:13-59**

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LIGHT and DARK in Scripture reminds me of an experience I had as a child at a family camp in Mexico located in the middle of nowhere in the desert with no electricity. There was a generator that provided our basic needs but after 9 p.m. it would go out and it was SO DARK when there was no moon. You couldn't see your hand in front of your face. Once, we took our camp mattresses outside and looked at the stars; it was so awesome and beautiful. But with no moon, we could not find our way back to the cabin. We had plastic battery flashlights that shone 5 feet in front of us but we still couldn't be sure where we were going. This is what I think about when I think of light and dark .

**12 Then Jesus spoke out again, "I am the light of the world! The one who follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life."**

This passage was spoken during the Feast of Tabernacles where people traveled far and slept in temporary structures for many days. In the midst of their fires, Jesus stood up and said he was the light of the world. He also said he was the bread of life which he talked about a few weeks ago. When Jesus says he is the light of the world, it almost sounds New Agey...but it means so much more than that. John 1 is the thesis statement for his whole gospel:

**John 1:1-5, 9-13a**

**1** In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. **2** He was with God in the beginning. **3** Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. **4** In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind. **5** The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

**9** The true light that gives light to everyone was coming into the world. **10** He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him. **11** He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. **12** Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God— **13** children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God.

John 8 is basically summarized in these verses above. Let's also focus on the light of creation in Genesis:

## Gen1:1-5

**1** In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. **2** Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters.

**3** And God said, “Let there be light,” and there was light. **4** God saw that the light was good, and he separated the light from the darkness. **5** God called the light “day,” and the darkness he called “night.” And there was evening, and there was morning—the first day.

Jesus was there at the beginning. The *practical reality* of everything that we see comes from the light in our world. Practically, light is needed to grow and live. But then there is the *beauty* of light: everything you see is because of the light. Jesus was there at the beginning when the word was spoken.

## John 8:13b-20

So the Pharisees objected, “You testify about yourself; your testimony is not true!” **14** Jesus answered, “Even if I testify about myself, my testimony is true, because I know where I came from and where I am going. But you people do not know where I came from or where I am going. **15** You people judge by outward appearances; I do not judge anyone. **16** But if I judge, my evaluation is accurate, because I am not alone when I judge, but I and the Father who sent me do so together. **17** It is written in your law that *the testimony of two men is true*. **18** I testify about myself and the Father who sent me testifies about me.”

**19** Then they began asking him, “Who is your father?” Jesus answered, “You do not know either me or my Father. If you knew me you would know my Father too.” **20** (Jesus spoke these words near the offering box while he was teaching in the temple courts. No one seized him because his time had not yet come.)

Jesus says he has a true testimony because he was there at the beginning. The people don't know him because they don't know his father. This comes right after the woman who was caught in adultery. Just before that, Nicodemus points out to his fellow Pharisees that they haven't listened yet to Jesus. They don't think he could possibly be the light because he doesn't have a witness.

Let's go back to Exodus when God guided the Israelites:

**Exodus 13:20** After leaving Sukkoth they camped at Etham on the edge of the desert. **21** 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. **22** Neither the pillar of cloud by day nor the pillar of fire by night left its place in front of the people.

Sukkoth was the first temporary stop after the people left Egypt. A pillar of light guided them at night; I would have liked this kind of guidance when I was at the camp as a child. God walks alongside his people to guide them.

Jesus goes on to say that he is going away and that they will die in their sins; where he is going, they cannot come.

### **John 8:21-30**

Then Jesus said to them again, “I am going away, and you will look for me but will die in your sin. Where I am going you cannot come.” **22** So the Jewish leaders began to say, “Perhaps he is going to kill himself, because he says, ‘Where I am going you cannot come.’” **23** Jesus replied, “You people are from below; I am from above. You people are from this world; I am not from this world. **24** Thus I told you that you will die in your sins. For unless you believe that I am he, you will die in your sins.” **25** So they said to him, “Who are you?” Jesus replied,] “What I have told you from the beginning. **26** I have many things to say and to judge about you, but the Father] who sent me is truthful, and the things I have heard from him I speak to the world.”**27** (They did not understand that he was telling them about his Father.)

**28** Then Jesus said, “When you lift up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am he, and I do nothing on my own initiative, but I speak just what the Father taught me. **29** And the one who sent me is with me. He has not left me alone, because I always do those things that please him.” **30** While he was saying these things, many people believed in him.

The idea of sin has come up: the people look to Jesus because he is teaching and performing miracles. Yet, they want something more. Jesus says they are dead in their sin and unwilling to be guided by his light. When Israel is wandering in the desert, they receive the Law which will help the people be in relationship with God. Yet, they keep wandering.

In the books of wisdom, the Psalmist often reflects on the Law.

### **Psalm 19:7-9**

**7** The law of the LORD is perfect, refreshing the soul. The statutes of the LORD are trustworthy, making wise the simple. **8** The precepts of the LORD are right, giving joy to the heart. The commands of the LORD are radiant, giving light to the eyes. **9** The fear of the LORD is pure, enduring forever. The decrees of the LORD are firm, and all of them are righteous.

## Prov 4:18-19

**18** The path of the righteous is like the first gleam of dawn, shining ever brighter till the full light of day. **19** But the way of the wicked is like deep darkness; they do not know what makes them stumble.

This reminds me of being in the desert in the darkness; even though I had been down the same path before, I tripped over the smallest rocks because I couldn't see. There is something about the light beginning to shine at dawn when the world turns gray and then the sun peaks over the horizon: in the right situation, a path of light shines across the world. This is what it's like to walk in the light with Jesus. We see it peak over the horizon and then it brightens to let us see things *as they really are*. At night, things look like dim shapes but in the morning you see things as they are.

**John 8:31** Then Jesus said to those Judeans who had believed him, "If you continue to follow my teaching, you are really my disciples **32** and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."

This is one of the most misquoted verses: *the truth will set you free*. People sometimes mean if you speak the truth, you will be free from your guilty conscience. But this is not just about telling the truth: it's holding to Jesus's teaching and being his disciples. To know the truth is to see things as they are. If you don't have this, you cannot see the truth. You don't know because you aren't in the light.

**33** "We are descendants of Abraham," they replied, "and have never been anyone's slaves! How can you say, 'You will become free'?"

This isn't really true since they were slaves once and are currently under Roman rule.

**34** Jesus answered them, "I tell you the solemn truth, everyone who practices sin is a slave of sin. **35** The slave does not remain in the family forever, but the son remains forever. **36** So if the son sets you free, you will be really free.

This is not about physical slavery: it's about your sin that enslaves you.

**37** I know that you are Abraham's descendants. But you want to kill me, because my teaching makes no progress among you. **38** I am telling you the things I have seen while with the Father; as for you, practice the things you have heard from the Father!" **39** They answered him, "Abraham is our father!" Jesus replied, "If you are Abraham's children, you would be doing the deeds of Abraham. **40** But now you are trying to kill me, a man who has told you the truth I heard from God. Abraham did not do this! **41** You people are doing the deeds of your father."

They say they are not Abraham's children: this is different from being his offspring. Yes, their DNA is the same as Abraham's. But the word for children is "in the family," someone who will participate in the inheritance, a loved part of the family. You have Abraham's DNA but you are trying to kill Jesus: you are not his children, his family. You haven't followed the law, you don't know the father, you aren't walking in the light. You don't live as Abraham lived who obeyed God when he told him to leave his home. Abraham believed and it was credited to him as righteousness. This means he had a right relationship with God. The same word "righteousness" is used in Proverbs: to walk with Jesus, to recognize him, to be in the light.

Then they said to Jesus, "We were not born as a result of immorality! We have only one Father, God himself." **42** Jesus replied, "If God were your Father, you would love me, for I have come from God and am now here.] I have not come on my own initiative, but he sent me. **43** Why don't you understand what I am saying? It is because you cannot accept my teaching. **44** You people are from your father the devil, and you want to do what your father desires. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not uphold the truth, because there is no truth in him. Whenever he lies, he speaks according to his own nature, because he is a liar and the father of lies. **45** But because I am telling you the truth, you do not believe me. **46** Who among you can prove me guilty of any sin? If I am telling you the truth, why don't you believe me? **47** The one who belongs to God listens and responds to God's words. You don't listen and respond, because you don't belong to God."

This is harsh and it makes the listeners mad. The light that guides and orders our lives and brings us into righteousness is the light of the world. Yet, Isaiah says:

#### **Isaiah 50: 10-11**

**10** Who among you fears the LORD and obeys the voice of his servant?

Let him who walks in darkness and has no light  
trust in the name of the LORD and rely on his God.

**11** Behold, all you who kindle a fire, who equip yourselves with burning torches!

Walk by the light of your fire, and by the torches that you have kindled!

This you have from my hand: you shall lie down in torment.

If you walk in darkness, you have no light but must rely on yourself: lighting your own fire and torches. This is like my plastic flashlight that only shone five feet in front of me: this is what the people of God often do: find our own way in the dark by lighting our own fires.

**48** The Judeans[ replied, "Aren't we correct in saying that you are a Samaritan and are possessed by a demon?"

Everyone knows these things aren't true

**49** Jesus answered, “I am not possessed by a demon, but I honor my Father—and yet you dishonor me. **50** I am not trying to get praise for myself. There is one who demands it, and he also judges. **51** I tell you the solemn truth, if anyone obeys my teaching, he will never see death.”

**52** Then the Judeans responded, “Now we know you’re possessed by a demon! Both Abraham and the prophets died, and yet you say, ‘If anyone obeys my teaching, he will never experience death.’ **53** You aren’t greater than our father Abraham who died, are you? And the prophets died too! Who do you claim to be?” **54** Jesus replied, “If I glorify myself, my glory is worthless. The one who glorifies me is my Father, about whom you people say, ‘He is our God.’ **55** Yet you do not know him, but I know him. If I were to say that I do not know him, I would be a liar like you. But I do know him, and I obey his teaching. **56** Your father Abraham was overjoyed to see my day, and he saw it and was glad.”

**57** Then the Judeans replied, “You are not yet fifty years old! Have you seen Abraham?” **58** Jesus said to them, “I tell you the solemn truth, before Abraham came into existence, I am!” **59** Then they picked up stones to throw at him, but Jesus was hidden from them and went out from the temple area.

Jesus ends with this statement about who he is: **I AM**. This is how God introduced himself in Exodus to his people. These people are walking in lies, following their own light. We do the same: we make our own light, walk in darkness, and find our own ways. We could talk about Moses and the burning bush, Psalms, Elijah calling fire, the refining fire in Malachi. Let's go to II Cor 4.

### **II Cor 4: 3-6**

**3** And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing. **4** The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel that displays the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. **5** For what we preach is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus’ sake. **6** For God, who said, “Let light shine out of darkness,” made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of God’s glory displayed in the face of Christ.

We are invited to the light and acknowledge Jesus as the light of the world. What resonates with you?

## **Jesus is the:**

- Light of creation
- Light that guides us
- Light that orders our lives

## Questions to ponder:

- What pulls on you as you consider Jesus as the light?
- Where in your life do you try to find your own light? What is your plastic flashlight that cannot shine 5 feet in front of you?