

WEEK 4

DIGGING

What Did Jesus Mean When He Said “I Am the Light of the World?”

Meg Bucher

www.biblestudytools.com

“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

“I am the light of the world,” is rooted in Jesus’ relationship with His Father. John Piper states, “Jesus speaks from God and for God and as God.” Apart from Jesus, we live in darkness. We have limited capacity to understand who we are or what we see in the world. “The beauty of our humanity is still evident,” writes Aimee Joseph, “but ugliness abounds.”

“The light of Christ,” writes John Piper, “is the brightness of God shining on the retina of the human soul.” Life can be wonderful on earth, but not fully complete without Jesus. We are all created to crave the Creator, our Father, and only through a relationship with our Savior Jesus can the dark parts of our hearts brighten. “When I admit I am not enough, I’m freed to run and cling to the God who is.” -Aimee Joseph. The Light of the world paid for our freedom on the cross.

The Biblical Context of the Verse “I Am the Light of the World”

Jesus consistently focused on linking Himself to the Father. The Greek word for light in this verse is *phos*, defined as the light; anything emitting light; light, i.e. brightness. God profoundly states, “I am.” Light is part of who He is. Subtle but powerful.

Each day, the sun rises to warm, illuminate, and provide growth on earth. The moon and stars light the night, serving as navigators long before smartphones. We reach for the light-switch when we enter a dark room, and we depend on our

accumulation of knowledge to shed light on our lives. Light permeates into every crack and crevice of our lives and beings, whether visible, tangible in regard to warmth, or metaphorically enlightening. The origin of *phos* describes how light makes manifest, evident, exposed or clear.



Light is required for any vegetation to grow, and the light clarifies the human spirit. Christ was present at the creation of the world. The Author of Light has the authority to illuminate His creation in its truest form. Jesus saying He is the Light of the world is the outer recognition of His Father's creation and presence, and the inward dwelling of the Holy Spirit, by which we know our Father and walk with Jesus. Jesus is the Light of the world, our world, and in the world. Like God is omnipresent, so Jesus is Light. Through Him and His sacrificial death on the cross, we are exposed to the light and of our sins.

Christ is the Light of the world. God is light, and Christ is the image of the invisible God. One sun enlightens the whole world; so does one Christ, and there needs no more. -Matthew Henry Commentary, Concise

A boat needs navigational lights to avoid running into the shore, aground or into other vessels at night. Light prevents aimless drifting. Captains follow blinking channel markers and lighthouses at night. Now, GPS coordinates steer ships, but the Captain and crew still need to know how to navigate by the stars, buoys and lights in case of an electrical malfunction. A lack of preparation could be deadly.

Just as ships follow lights to ensure safe passage, so we rely on the Light. Jesus's death broke through the darkness, lighting the way for us. God's Word, through the enlightening of the Holy Spirit, helps us understand and remember when we need His wisdom to steer us. Prayer, which serves dually as life boat and lighthouse throughout our everyday lives is an open line of communication not available to Old Testament believers. We learn from the beginning of the book of Genesis and John's Gospel that Jesus was present, and that He is the Word. Everything the light touches, He is a part of.

"While I am in the world, I am the light of the world." -John 9:5

Darkness, in John 8:12, is the Greek word *skotia*, defined as the darkness due to the want of light and used to describe ignorance of divine things. It's associated with wickedness, and the resultant misery in hell. Genesis 1:4 says, "God saw that the light was good, and he separated the light from the darkness." Jesus is the Light of the world, and all who are separate or far from Him live in darkness. Being separate, ignorant, or unaware of the dark leaves us wanting for something we cannot produce on our own. We come to the end of ourselves in frustration, hopelessness, or an aloof sense of happiness and joy, when we traverse through life in darkness. With Christ, we have the absolute fullness of life.

What Happened Before and After?

John was Jesus' best friend on this earth, referring to himself as "the one Jesus loved." He was the only one of the twelve at the cross when Jesus died. How we begin our stories says a lot about what we understand and believe most. John undoubtedly knew who Jesus was, both on earth as his friend and as His God made flesh.

"The true light that gives light to everyone was coming into the world. He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him." -John 1:9-10

The phrase we are studying today is part of Jesus' long debate with the Pharisees (John 2:19; John 3:3). This string of preaching, miracles, and conversion resulted in increased persecution from the Jewish leaders. Before Jesus' testimonial declaration as the Light of the World, John recorded Jesus writing on the ground to scatter a woman's accusers, further fueling the debate. Jesus then heals a blind man, which in turn is investigated by the Pharisees, striking a conversation not just about physical blindness, but spiritual.

Who is Jesus Talking To?

Jesus was talking to a group of Jewish leaders prominently referred to as Pharisees. It's suspected the title originates from a Hebrew word meaning separate or detached. They separated themselves from anything that didn't align with the way they interpreted Levitical (Old Testament covenant) Law. As Jesus spoke, people started to believe Him. Their claims didn't diminish His confidence.

"Notice, it was Jesus's words that God used to bring about the faith. He wasn't doing miracles at this point. He was speaking. In fact, he was going back and forth with the Pharisees and the crowd — those who were blind to what he was saying. And as people listened to his words, they believed. Faith comes by hearing — the word of Christ (Romans 10:17)." -"I Am the Light of the Word," John Piper

More Bible References about Light

* John 1:4 - "In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind."

* 1 John 1:5 - "This is the message we have heard from him and declare to you: God is light; in him there is no darkness at all."

* Matthew 5:14 - "You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden."

* 2 Corinthians 4:6 - "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."

* Philippians 2:15 - "so that you will prove yourselves to be blameless and innocent, children of God above reproach in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you appear as lights in the world,"

* Daniel 12:9 - "He said, 'Go your way, Daniel, for these words are concealed and sealed up until the end time.'"

* 1 Thessalonians 5:5 - "You are all children of the light and children of the day. We do not belong to the night or to the darkness."

* 1 John 1:7 - "But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin."

* Psalm 119:105 - "Your word is a lamp for my feet, a light on my path."

How Jesus is the Light of the World

"For all the positive thinking around us, there sure is a lot of hardship and pain," says Owen Strachan.

Through Christ, we have access to the Father. Our perspective brightens when touched by the Light. Illumined by the Creator, we are able to hang onto the shreds of light that permeate the darkness. "Jesus's works made who he was manifestly clear," writes Jon Bloom, "His works shone, and they still shine." Jesus shines light into the cracks of our hearts that harbor sin. Once revealed, the conviction of the Holy Spirit instructs and guides us to repent. We grow wiser as He sanctifies our hearts to reflect His light.

What was Jesus Trying to Get Across to His Listeners?

"An entire system of spiritual darkness - spearheaded by Satan himself, carried out by hordes of demons, and influencing every corner of earth- rages right below the surface of our everyday lives," writes Marshal Legal in God's Not Afraid of the Dark, "How do we live with any hope while we drown in all of this darkness?"

We are self-centered and self-driven without Jesus. We come to the end of ourselves and our efforts and become overwhelmed by the natural darkness in our hearts. No one has “a good heart” in a natural state. We all fall short. Jesus came so we would experience the power of the Holy Spirit. God’s loving embrace through the wisdom of His word and our relationship with Him shed His light on others living in darkness.

“One reason the darkness around us is so terrifying is that we see so much of ourselves in it - our weaknesses, our fears, our brokenness, our sin,” writes Segal, “for many of us, no darkness is more intimidating than our own.”

What Does it Mean for Christians to View Jesus as the Light of the World?

“In Adam, things to do get better. But in Christ, the future is impossibly bright.” -Owen Strachan

Jesus gives us the vision to see who we are in Him. Only the light of the world can show us who we are and guide us responsibly through life. “Following Jesus is more than tagging along behind him. It means following him for who he is. Being so taken with him that you join yourself to Him.” -John Piper

Light is akin to freedom. We’re wide open to the world when we walk with our Creator. Walking in the light means embracing our individuality when we release our self-centered methods for His definition of love. Consider how He knows all of us before we breathe our first breath on earth. Let the fact that He took each of our names to the cross permeate. The Light of the World knows what we do not. We can be so focused on getting to where we are going that we miss many turns along the road to a full and abundantly bright life.

“His light doesn’t make the darkness any less dark; it just conquers every shadow with something stronger.” -Marshall Segal

Are Christians Also Called to Be the Light of World?

“What makes us shine?” writes Jon Bloom, “Our outward, observable, public works make clear who we are and whose we are manifestly clear.”

Jesus brings light to the far corners of our communities and our world. Matthew 5:14 says, “You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden.” When we live our lives reflecting the Light, it allows others to see His love. We are called to share the gospel, but more importantly than what we say is how we live. “It’s not merely what the shining people do, but why they do it and how they do it,” writes Bloom, “and we’ve found ourselves both drawn to them and unnerved by them, because the light of their humble, word-and-deed love has both warmed our hearts and exposed our selfishness and pride.”

Light affects everything. It permeates truth into every situation. It’s true Love, on earth. Anne Graham-Lotz wrote, “Praise God! The Light of the World is the Light of Heaven!” Only He can empower us to love the people He purposefully places in our lives well, and His love lights up the world. “You are a light in the darkness - a servant of God who is being watched, who gives off light ...a very distinct message with hardly a word being said,” writes Charles Swindoll.

Meg Bucher, freelance writer and blogger at **Sunny&80**, is the author of “Friends with Everyone, Friendship within the Love of Christ,” and “Surface, Unlocking the Gift of Sensitivity,” She writes about everyday life within the love of Christ. Meg earned a Marketing/PR degree from Ashland University but stepped out of the business world to stay at home and raise her two daughters, which led her to pursue her passion to write. She has led a Bible Study for Women and serves as a Youth Ministry leader in her community. Meg, a Cleveland native and lifelong Browns fan, lives by the shore of Lake Erie in Northern Ohio with her husband, two daughters, and golden doodle.