

Song: *Lord, let your light, light of your face, shine on us.*

**illus:** In the Fall of 1993, on a crisp October evening, I had an experience that I will never forget. At the time, I was a freshman at Canadian Bible College in Regina; the school has since moved to Calgary and is now called Ambrose University College--it's still a fantastic school.

One evening, 9 or 10 of us piled into a couple of vehicles and headed out towards the Qu'Appelle Valley; our destination was a small town by the name of Lumsden, 31 kilometers northwest of Regina. Have any of you ever heard of Lumsden, Saskatchewan? I had never heard of Lumsden, and there was only one person in our group who had ever been there before. But off we went in search of an old, country church--and we found it.

Apparently, we weren't the only ones who thought this church was worth visiting--with a little searching I was able to find this image on the Web. St. Nicholas Church: it's the oldest remaining church in Saskatchewan, and it's also the most accessible--when we got there the doors were unlocked and we were able to go in and look around; there was seating for maybe 30.

But I don't want to focus my story on the church building, that's why we went, but that's not what made the evening memorable--that night we witnessed a stunning display of light that has left a permanent imprint on my soul.

I'm a B.C. boy, born and raised. I'm a Lower Mainlander--I know mountains, ocean, rain, and the occasional spot of sun. But I didn't know skies until I lived in Saskatchewan, and I didn't know lights

until that evening in Lumsden.

We had brought a pile of blankets with us, and a few baskets of food. We spread the blankets out in the middle of the field and we began to enjoy the food, when all of a sudden the sky began to dance, to pulsate, with light. I had never seen Northern Lights before, and while I knew what they were, no words could describe what I saw and felt.

We all laid back on the blankets, drinking in the magnificence of these lights. And as I stared up in wonder, I thought about God--what a Creative God we have! In 1 Timothy 6:15-16, Paul describes God as "*the blessed and only Ruler, the King of kings and Lord of lords, who alone is immortal and who lives in unapproachable light.*"

In fact, all throughout the Old Testament God is described metaphorically in light-bearing terms. You've already heard the Scriptures that Alana read earlier, here's a few more. 2 Samuel 22:29-30 says, "*You, Lord, are my lamp; the Lord turns my darkness into light. With your help I can advance against a troop; with my God I can scale a wall.*" Psalm 119:105, "*Your word is a **lamp** for my feet, a light on my path.*"

Isaiah 60:19 speaks about the day that is coming, the day when oppression, violence, brokenness, and sin is no more. Isaiah writes, that on that day "*The sun will no more be your light by day, nor will the brightness of the moon shine on you, for the Lord will be your everlasting light, and your God will be your glory.*" 1 John 1:5 tells us that "*God is light; in him there is no darkness at all.*"

This morning, we're going to take a look at the second *I AM* statement that Jesus made. He said, "**I AM THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD.** *Whoever FOLLOWS me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.*" This declaration can be found in John 8:12, and I'd like to invite you to turn their with me now (page 1662 in the Blue Bible in front of you).

As you're turning there, let me set the stage for you a little bit. You may notice that your Bible has a brief note right before chapter 8; it will say something to the effect that many of the earliest manuscripts of John's record do not include John 7:53-8:11. Biblical scholars aren't sure what to do about that anomaly, and so they include the note.

Just before this note, in John 7, we encounter Jesus in the Temple Courts during the Feast of Tabernacles. John 8:12, in the original Greek language, begins with a word that we translate "again": "*when Jesus spoke again to the people.*" It appears likely from this beginning, and from reference to the temple courts in chapter 8 vs. 20, that Jesus is still in the temple courts and the context is still the Feast of Tabernacles. Let me explain why this is significant.

Every year, God asked that all Jews descend upon Jerusalem to celebrate three sacred feasts: (a) the Feast of Unleavened Bread (Passover), (b) the Feast of Weeks (Pentecost), and (c) the Feast of Tabernacles (Ingathering, or Booths). The Feast of Tabernacles was celebrated at the end of the harvest season; during this Feast, the worshippers would recount how the Lord provided and cared for Israel during her 40 years in the wilderness.

Those who came to Jerusalem would set up mini-tabernacles (tent-like-structures) in which to live for the week long festival, and they would engage in a number of different ceremonies. One such ceremony was centered around water. When you live in a desert, water is a matter of life and death; Israel knew this well. Following the harvest, people would begin to pray for rain, for living water, to sustain them and their crops in the coming year.

In this water ceremony, the high priest would hold aloft a golden bowl to show that it was empty, and the people would begin to shout "*Mayim Chayim*"-- *God, send us living water.* The high priest would then make his way down to the pool of Siloam with a pitcher, fill it, and then return to the temple courts.

The high priest would then walk around the altar seven times, while the people continued to shout "*Mayim Chayim*". Then the high priest would raise the pitcher and pour the water into the bowl--it was both a prayer and a sign: a prayer for God to send the water they need for life, and a sign that God would be faithful to provide. The Jewish historian Josephus writes that when the high priest poured the water into the bowl, such a shout went up among the people that the sound could be heard in Bethlehem (a few miles away).

Picture it, thousands of people gathered around, the high priest circling the altar, picture raised high, everyone shouting "*Mayim Chayim*,"--*God, send us living water*-- and then just before the priest empties the pitcher--silence. Some people are holding their breath, parents are shushing young children. And in that moment Jesus steps out from the crowd. John 7:37 says that "*On the last and greatest day of the festival, Jesus stood and said in a loud voice, "Let anyone who*

*is thirsty come to me and drink. 38 Whoever believes in me, as Scripture has said, rivers of living water will flow from within them.*”

Some people talk about Jesus like He was a wimp--meek, mild, timid--that's not the picture Scripture paints: **Jesus was bold.** John 8:12 begins with the word “*again*,” once again, during the Feast of Tabernacles, Jesus spoke to the people and it's likely that He made another declaration in light of another Jewish ceremony.

In the Mishnah--a Jewish, non-biblical writing that contains the oral traditions of Judaism--there are some detailed descriptions of both the water ceremony and a lighting ceremony that took place during the Feast of Tabernacles.

In the temple court, four large elevated stands were set up (which required ladders to reach), each of which contained four bowls.<sup>1</sup> These 16 bowls were filled with oil and lit, signifying that God would lead them, lighting the way, just as He had done in their desert wandering. Gary Burge writes, “When they were lit at night (so the rabbis said), all Jerusalem was illumined. In a world that did not have public lighting after dusk, this light shining from Jerusalem's yellow limestone walls must have been spectacular.”<sup>2</sup>

Can you picture it? Wouldn't it be just like Jesus to stand in the light of these sixteen large bowls, and declare: **I AM THE LIGHT OF THE**

**WORLD**, *whoever follows me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life.*” Jesus had some serious guts, He had what Jews might term “*chutzpah*”.

This is the second of Jesus' *I AM* statements, and it's important that we hear what Jesus did not say. Jesus did not say “*God is the light of the world*”--people would have likely nodded their heads and gone about their business. Instead, Jesus said “*I am the light of the world*”--He took a metaphor that had been exclusively applied to God and He applied it indiscriminately to Himself. When you do that, people sit up and take notice.

It's interesting, Jesus makes His declaration, “**I AM THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD**,” but He didn't get very far when it came to explaining what He meant by the metaphor. As I was studying this week, one author made an interesting comment. He noted that while those listening to Jesus clearly didn't understand what He was saying, they didn't ask, “*what do you mean?*,” they asked the more fundamental question: “*who are you?*”<sup>3</sup>

This is the most important question any of us will ever hear--*who is Jesus?* You might think this is an interesting question, perhaps even worth investigating--if you didn't, you probably wouldn't be here. But the Bible holds that how we answer this question is a matter of

<sup>1</sup> Most likely this took place in the second court, the Court of Women, which was available to female and male Jews. This is also the place where the temple offerings were collected (c.f. John 8:20).

<sup>2</sup> Gary M. Burge, *The NIV Application Commentary: John*, 255-256.

<sup>3</sup> Burge, 258.

life and death: *who is Jesus?* In the time remaining, I'm going to do two things: (a) first, I'm going to follow the text where it leads us, to another earth-shattering declaration straight from Jesus' lips; and (b) then, I'm going to explore what it means that Jesus is the "light" when it comes to living our lives.

A) AN EARTH-SHATTERING DECLARATION. So let's start with the declaration that nearly got Jesus killed. Jesus declares that He is the light of the world, and the religious leaders begin to challenge Him. Look at vs. 13--*you can claim to be the King of France Jesus, but you saying it doesn't make it so--that's a Peter's paraphrase.* According to Jewish Law, a valid testimony needed at least one witness. So Jesus says, vs. 18, "*No problem--my Father is my witness.*" And this is where the conversation really gets going.

"Where is your Father?," they ask (vs. 19). "*You wouldn't get it if I told you,*" says Jesus, "*you don't know Me and you certainly don't know Him.*" "In fact," Jesus says in vs. 28, "*you're not going to understand Me, or my Father, until after I have been lifted up.*" By this Jesus meant a number of things: being lifted up on the cross--*crucifixion*, being lifted out of the grave--*resurrection*, and being lifted into heaven--*ascension*. Jesus is being intentionally vague because He knows they won't receive what He has to say.

Jesus tells his antagonists, vs. 24, that "*if you do not believe that I am He, you will indeed die in your sins.*" Which begs the question they have been asking, "*who are you?*" But Jesus keeps going--lets pick up in vs. 31. Jesus said, "*If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. 32 Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.*" 33 They answered him, "*We are Abraham's descendants and have never been slaves of anyone. How can you say that we shall*

*be set free?*"

34 Jesus replied, "*Very truly I tell you, everyone who sins is a slave to sin. 35 Now a slave has no permanent place in the family, but a son belongs to it forever. 36 So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed. 37 I know that you are Abraham's descendants. Yet you are looking for a way to kill me, because you have no room for my word. 38 I am telling you what I have seen in the Father's presence, and you are doing what you have heard from your father.*"

And with all this talk about "fathers," Jesus' antagonists pick up on the language and refer to Abraham as their father. Abraham was considered to be the Father of the Jews; it was from his family that Israel traced it's ancestry. Now we all know the difference between telling someone about our ancestry and bragging about it so as to make ourself seem superior. *We know who our father is, Abraham, but we're not so sure about yours.*

So after a little more dialogue, in vs. 56, Jesus made a decision to lay His identity on the line. Jesus said, "*Your father Abraham rejoiced at the thought of seeing my day; he saw it and was glad.*" At this point, Jesus' listeners had had enough, and they let Him know: "*Abraham rejoiced at the thought of seeing your day? What are you talking about? Abraham died a few thousand years ago and you're not even 50...just who do think you are?*

They thought Jesus was out of His mind, what He was saying didn't make any sense--it was nonsense. And that's when Jesus dropped the proverbially bomb: *You want to know how I know Abraham personally? You want to know who I really am? Listen carefully and*

*I'll tell you: vs. 58* “before Abraham was born, I AM!” I AM--Jesus took God’s Divine Name (Yahweh, I AM), claiming that He had existed from eternity past as God. His challengers would have been less shocked if Jesus had punched them right in the face.

Those who tell you that Jesus never claimed to be God--that it was a later invention of His disciples--really don’t know what they are talking about; they certainly don’t know the rhythm and meaning of Biblical language. The 1st century crowd knew it inside and out, and when Jesus identified Himself as I AM they immediately bent down and picked up rocks--they intended to kill Jesus for blasphemy.

*Who do you say Jesus is? What will you decide? Will you come to Him, put your trust in Him, and follow where He leads?* There’s no way around Jesus’ exclusive claims; there’s no middle ground when it comes to Jesus. We can ignore Him, we can shake our fist at Him and walk away, or, we can fall down in worship and then get back up and begin to follow Him. *Which will it be?*

A long time ago I made my choice to follow; I’d make the same choice all over again. In fact, you and I are confronted with that very choice every day, every hour, every minute--*who are we living for?*--we can choose to follow Him or we can choose to walk our own path. As I wrap up, let’s take a look at what it means to walk in the LIGHT of Jesus.

B) WALKING IN THE LIGHT OF JESUS: Jesus said, “I AM THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD, *whoever follows me will never walk in darkness*

*but will have the light of life.*” Light illuminates, it brightens, it pushes back darkness--it can attract or repel. JESUS IS LIGHT TO SEE BY. He is light to see the truth about God, and light to see the truth about ourselves. *Light reveals.*

Back in the 4th century, a Christian thinker, writer, and Bishop by the name Augustine wrote about something that he termed “double-knowledge”: knowledge of God and knowledge of self. What Augustine noted was that there is an interconnectivity between the two; when we step into the circumference of God’s light, we see ourselves as we truly are.

Remember the prophet Isaiah? Isaiah had a vision in which he saw the Lord, “*high and exalted, seated on a throne; and the train of his robe filled the temple.*” Isaiah recounts that above the throne were angelic beings, seraphs he calls them (literally--*burning ones*) and they were calling out to one another “*Holy, holy, holy is the Lord Almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory.*” In response to their worship, the temple shook, and the room filled with smoke.

When Isaiah saw the Lord (**knowledge of God**) knowledge of self followed quickly behind: “*Woe to me!*,” Isaiah said, “*I am ruined!...my eyes have seen the King, the Lord Almighty.*” When God’s holiness is in front of us, we don’t fall blindly into the ditch of self-congratulation (*God sure is lucky to have me!*). All of us stand before God in rags--in the light of His holiness, Revelation 3 describes each of us as *wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked.*<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> c.f. Revelation 3:17-18.

**JESUS IS LIGHT TO SEE BY:** in Jesus we see God's perfection and holiness, but in Jesus we also see God's gracious love. John writes, "*This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. 10 This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.*"

When we keep God's love in front of us we don't fall blindly into the ditch of self-castigation (*I am pond scum...God would never embrace someone like me.*). On the Cross, God demonstrated the full extent of His love by dying for us: no one is beyond God's love, everyone is invited to put their trust in Jesus' perfect sacrifice.

*Jesus is Light to see God and Light to see ourselves-- He is light to live by.* But we need to **follow** Jesus in order to remain in the light. God's Word and the inner witness of the Holy Spirit is the light we need, it is light to live by, but it only functions as light when we live by it.

Can I have all the lights turned off and the spotlight turned on? Think about the nature of light--every source of light casts a circumference. A match, a candle, a flashlight, they push back darkness so far but no further. As long as we remain within the circumference of the light, our path is well lit--we can see where our ankles might be turned, we can avoid the ditches.

But all too often we choose to live in the shadows--we step away from Jesus in thought, word, and deed, but then complain that we don't have enough light to live by. As the saying goes, *we want to have our cake and eat it too.* We want to live in the shadows but still have God's wisdom for pressing decisions. We want to live in the

shadows but still have strength to face difficulty. Sisters and brothers, this is not how God has designed light to work.

Let me illustrate by way of an ancient story, a story many of you know well. In the book Judges we read about a man known as Samson. Before Samson's parents became parents, they were infertile and unable to conceive. But an angelic messenger came to them with a message from God: *you will give birth to a son, and he is to be set apart to me from birth; he will deliver Israel from Philistine rule.*

When their son was born, they gave him the name "Samson" which means "*like the sun*". Israel had been enslaved by the Philistines for 40 years, and so God sent *light*, a deliverer, Samson, but throughout Samson's story we can see that he consistently lived in the shadows. God said that Samson was to be set apart, that is, he was to be a Nazirite. A Nazirite had three vows by which they were bound: they were to refrain from (a) drinking alcohol, (b) touching a dead body, and (c) shaving one's hair.

But as the story unfolds, Samson walks further and further into the shadows. During his wedding festivities he breaks his first and second vow. And later, after his marriage falls apart, Samson gave his heart away to someone who didn't honour God; her name was Delilah.

Does anyone want to guess what Delilah's name means? *Darkness.* Before long, Delilah got Samson's secret out of him: his mighty strength was tied to the Nazirite vow he had made to God. When Delilah shaved off seven braids of Samson's hair, his only remaining vow was broken; Samson's strength left him and he was captured by the Philistines.

The one who was called to be “*like the sun*” fell in love with the “*darkness*”; Samson stepped outside the circumference of the light he was given and the results speak for themselves. Our eyes become dull when we live in the shadows; not only do we stop seeing clearly, but light actually becomes painful. When we stop looking to Jesus, listening to Jesus, following Jesus, our vision becomes cloudy.

The promise is not that Jesus will give us our own supply of light to use as we see fit; we never become self-contained-lights. As we follow Jesus, who is the light, we remain in the light--everywhere Jesus goes darkness is dispelled, but we must go with Him. Jesus said, “**I AM THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD.** *Whoever FOLLOWS me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.*”

In Jesus’ words we find both declaration and invitation. He offers light that gives life, light that is life, light that *illuminates* a life that is truly worth living. Thomas a Kempis, a 14th century, Christian monk writes, “It is vanity to wish for a long life and to care little for a life well spent.” A life lived with and for Jesus, a life lived in His light, is the well-spent kind of life that I want to live.

**The Lord’s Supper:** This morning as we move from Jesus Words to the Lord’s Supper, I invite you to come to Jesus, the One who is our Light.

The Cross of Christ offers both light and life, does it not? When we look to the cross of Christ we see God clearly. Jesus is God with us, He is God for us. And when we look to the cross of Christ, we see ourselves clearly. We see the depths of our need, completely unable to make ourselves acceptable to God--destined for death and separation from Him. Jesus is God with us, He is God for us, and He is also God

instead of us. Jesus died in our place for our sin. Jesus is Light that we may see and know God, He is Light that we might see and know ourselves--He is Light to live by.

This morning I invite you to come and partake of this holy meal, but I want to remind you that I am not this meal’s true host. Jesus is present among us, not merely in memory, but by the Spirit; Jesus is the One who hosts us at His meal. On His behalf, I welcome you for this is the table of the Lord, not the table of NSAC-- if your desire is to come to Jesus, to place your faith in Him, to receive what He offers freely, then you are welcome to come.

If you’ve frequented churches for many years, then perhaps you’re not sure if you really are welcome at this table. Perhaps along the way, you’ve heard someone say something like this-- *if there is any sin in your life, then please do not participate.* While well-meaning, these words aren’t helpful. If anything, those of us who have a deep sense of sin in our lives need to be first in line because participation in this meal communicates the undeserved mercy of God.

This table, brothers and sisters, is the table of grace, and by it we are reminded that Jesus offers forgiveness and love. If you sense your need is particularly great today then you have my permission to push and shove your way to the front of the line--this meal is for you.

On the night Jesus was betrayed, *Jesus took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to his disciples, saying, “Take*

*and eat; this is my body.” In the same way, after supper, Jesus “took a cup, and when he had given thanks, he gave it to them, saying, “Drink from it, all of you. This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.”<sup>5</sup> Jesus urged us to eat this bread and drink this cup until He comes again; even so, come Lord Jesus.<sup>6</sup>*

**Prayer**  
**Worship**

**Benediction:** All morning we have been talking about Jesus being the Light, and He is, but He invites us to participate in His life and light. In Matthew 5, Jesus said ““*You are the light of the world...let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.*”<sup>7</sup>

In John 20, Jesus said “*As the Father has sent Me, so I am sending you. And with that He breathed on them and said, ‘Receive the Holy Spirit.’*” Sisters and Brothers, as the Father sent Jesus, so He is sending us to be the light, that is, that our well-lit-lives might point to the One who is Light. *Receive the Holy Spirit*--as you go, lets go be the church.

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<sup>5</sup> Matthew 26:26-28.

<sup>6</sup> Revelation 22:15. The Hebrew word, *maranatha*, communicates this prayer: *Come, Lord Jesus.*

<sup>7</sup> Matthew 5:14, 16.