

# I Am the Light of the World

by John Piper

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*John Piper's sermon emphasizes Jesus as the sole source of light and life, urging believers to follow Him to escape spiritual darkness and receive eternal life.*

**Duration:** 39:57

**Scripture:** John 3:6-8, 2 Corinthians 5:17, Ephesians 1:17

**Topics:** "Jesus Christ", "Salvation Through Faith"

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## Description

This sermon emphasizes Jesus as the light of the world, highlighting the transition from death to life through belief in Him. It explores the significance of following Jesus, having Him as our light, and the connection between light and life. The message delves into the Pharisees' objections, Jesus' relationship with the Father, and the crucial choice between belief leading to salvation or unbelief resulting in death in sins.

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## Transcript

Father, we don't have any greater need than for the light of life. And so I ask that you would come and now make this service and this message an instrument of life-giving, that we might see Christ as our light. Embrace Him, treasure Him, enjoy Him, walk in Him forever.

I ask this in His name, Amen. So when you come to the end of this text now, verses 12 through 30, you see the response, at least one of them, that Jesus got. As He was saying these things, many believed in Him.

And that's really good news, because it says in verse 24, second half of the verse, unless you believe that I am, you will die in your sins. So here we have a picture at the end of this text of people moving from death to life. They're not going to die in their sins.

That's wonderful news. They're going to be forgiven. Their sins won't be held against them because they're believing.

If they don't believe, they die in their sins. And if they do believe, they don't die in their sins. They die in righteousness and they're saved and have eternal life.

So this is a beautiful thing we see here at the end of the text. And my prayer is that the service would end that way. I'm just going to try my best to let Jesus talk.

It is remarkable, isn't it, that He's just talking. He's not doing any miracles here. This faith that happened in so many happened because they were just listening to Him talk.

Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the Word of Christ. And they listened and they saw and they believed and their sins were forgiven. And I'm just going to talk here.

I pray in the power of the Holy Spirit and that life would be imparted and that light would be given and that people would believe and not die in their sins. It can happen here just like it did there. So I'm just going to walk through this text.

We'll linger over the verse 12 a long time and then go quick through the rest of it. But I want to spend most of our time on the main point. So here we are.

Before I unpack verse 12, I do want to give you the big picture of how I see the text structured. It starts with verse 12. I am the light of the world, Jesus is saying.

So, again, Jesus spoke to them saying, I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness but will have the light of life. And then surprisingly, he never mentions light again in the whole chapter.

Nobody mentions light again in the whole chapter. So it looks as though the reactions, first reaction in verse 13 got them off track, got them onto a detour. It's what it looks like.

I don't think it's exactly that way. He is saying, I am the light of the world, and they object to that. And then he starts talking to them about what they have objected to.

At least seven times now in the rest of the verses, 13 to 29, he talks about being from the Father and acting on the authority of the Father and going to the Father and doing nothing on his own. And it seems that whatever happened to I am the light of the world? He's claiming here that there's no merely human authority in him, but that he gets everything from his Father, and he says it over and over. And my sense of how this text works is that he starts by saying, I'm the light of the world.

They object. He goes with what they want to say, and seven times draws attention to the fact that he gets his authority, and he is who he is because of his relationship with the Father. So my conclusion is, we've seen this before.

We saw it in chapter 4, for example, where the woman at the well gets Jesus off the water word onto worship, and he goes with her. And here he goes with them, and what Jesus does on these detours is deal with the detour objection in such a way as to illuminate the origin of the journey and the end of the journey so that you realize at the end, I don't think that was a detour. I think all this talk, all this interaction with the Pharisees, all this interaction with the Jews about from the Father and my relationship with the Father is all about how he is the light of the world.

He isn't an autonomous light. If Jesus is the light of the world, he's the light of the world precisely because of his relationship with the Father. So that's my sense of the bigger picture of what looks like a detour.

I mean, I was frustrated. I wanted to preach on Jesus is the light of the world, and it stops at the end of verse 12. Come on, I want help.

And then the longer I thought about it, the more I realized, no, Jesus wouldn't let that happen. It all relates to the light of the world. So that's the big picture as I see it.

Takes their objection, goes with it, says over and over, he's related to the Father a certain way, comes to the end, great faith, and all of that shedding light back on what it means to be the light of the world. So let's go to verse 12. Again, Jesus spoke to them saying, I am the light of the world.

Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness but will have the light of life. Now, that's a life-changing verse. I hope it has changed your life.

It says, following Jesus is more than tagging along behind. It means following him for who he is, means being so taken, taken with him that you join yourself to him. Notice, when you follow him, you have him.

Do you see that? I am the light, whoever follows will have the light. I am the light, if you follow, you have the light. So to follow him is to have him as your light, not just to kind of tag along behind, but if you follow, you have him, the light of the world.

You have him as your shepherd and sacrifice and living water and bread from heaven and your God and your light. Notice the last phrase. You will have the light of life.

What's the connection between light and life? The answer is given in chapter 1, verse 4, where John said this. In him, that is in Jesus, was life and the life was the light of men. I take that to mean that the life of Jesus imparted to those who believe in him enables them to see light.

Until you have life, that is until Jesus' life is imparted to you, you are dead. Dead people don't see anything. When the life is imparted to you, that is when you are born from above, born again.

Nicodemus, you must be born again. You can't see the kingdom of God until you are born again. So Nicodemus, you need to be born again.

These Pharisees need to be born again. They need to have the life which yields the ability to see Jesus as light. Because they're not seeing it, it's because they're dead and dead people are blind.

So they need life. The eyes of our heart are open. We're going to... We've sung it already.

We're going to sing another version of it at the end. Open my eyes, Lord. I want to see Jesus.

They couldn't. They didn't have life and therefore they didn't have the light of life. What does this phrase, light of the world, mean? Jesus spoke to them saying, I am the light of the world.

What does of the world mean? The whole world is not being lightened while Jesus is there or today. And you can see it in the text. You don't need experience only.

It says, whoever follows me will not walk in darkness. If you don't, you do walk in darkness, which means there's darkness in the world. If you follow me, you won't walk in it.

If you don't follow me, you walk in it. So it's there. So what does light of the world mean? He's not taking away the darkness in the world.

What does light of the world mean? Here's what it means, I think. I'll give you four meanings that I think are true. Number one, Jesus being the light of the world means the world has no other light than him.

If there's going to be light in the world, it will be Jesus. It is Jesus or darkness. There is no third alternative, no other light.

So he's the light of the world in that there is no other light in the world. There's only darkness. Second, it means, therefore, all the world and everyone in it needs Jesus as their light because they're in darkness without him.

Everybody needs Jesus as the light. There isn't any other light. Number three, it means that the world was made for this light.

The light of the world means God made the world for this light. Creation was made for this light to fill it. It's not a foreign light to this world.

It's the light of the owner of the world. When this light comes, to be sure, at first, it makes sin plain. It exposes sin as ugly and foreign to what God had made.

But it also enables us to see everything good in its true light. Without the light of Jesus, you don't see anything the way you should see it. The light of Jesus illumines everything with its proper beauty.

And without the light of Jesus in our hearts and enabling us to see the world that was made for the light, we can't see the world the way it is in God's eyes. Everything is dark. The world was made to be illumined by this light.

The light of Christ is native to the world, not foreign to the world. The world belongs to God. And when he sends his light, he means, and here's the fourth meaning, one day, this world will be filled with the light of Jesus and nothing else.

When this light comes, it not only makes sin plain, but sooner or later, it will take all darkness and banish it out of the world. All the works of darkness will be banished out of the world. All the sons of darkness will be banished out of the world, which is why Jesus calls hell the outer darkness.

There will be no darkness in the world, in the universe. Hell is utterly outside of the creation God has made, except that it's held in being in its unique place, and it's dark, totally dark. And don't get bent out of shape about fire without light.

That's not a problem for God. There are more horrors in hell than you've dreamed of. Darkness, utter darkness.

You don't know where the next blow is coming from. Jesus is the radiance of the Father, and he will fill the world and everything in it with light. He is the light of the world.

So in those four glorious ways, Jesus is the light of the world. And if you follow him now, you will have him as your light. In advance of the great day, when his light fills everything, it's true that he will reveal your sins if you have him as your light.

But that's really good news, like a wonderful, serendipitous, early discovery of cancer so that it can be healed. Feels like bad news at first, and then you realize, we got it early. But do you want not to die in your sins, but to find out, oh, it's fixable? There will come a day when it's not.

That's what die in your sins means. So, yes, it does do that, but it does way, way more than that. It reveals all that is beautiful.

Jesus will be your light where you see God. He'll be the light in which you see redemption. He'll be the light in which you see your salvation.

He'll be the light in which you see mountains and valleys and oceans and rivers and trees and animals and people. Nothing will be the same when you have Jesus as your light. Nothing will be seen the same.

Paul said that in 2 Corinthians 5. The old has passed away, the new has come. Once we knew all people according to the flesh, now we know nobody according to the flesh. We see everybody in a new light, and everything in a new light.

He's become our light. The lamp is in us shining out, and everything takes on a totally different meaning because of its relationship to the light. Yes, even earthquakes and tsunamis and suffering and death.

Until his light fills the earth as the waters cover the sea, until it banishes all sin and sickness and pain and earthquakes to the outer darkness. Until then, now, even now, his light will help you bear the sorrows of darkness. It will be a warm, soft glow to comfort you in the lonely room after the devastating loss.

It will be the lamp on your troubled and trembling path. It will reveal the wise and loving face of God behind every frowning providence. We will all walk through valleys of darkness, but not without light.

So Jesus starts his text in verse 12 with, I am the light of the world. And he offers all of that to you. Here's the way it says it in John 12, 36.

While you have the light, and I think I should say this to you in its own way, while you have the light, believe in the light that you may become sons of light. And so at this midpoint in the message, I'm saying, you have heard something, just a small amount of what it means for Jesus to be the light of the world. And he's saying to you, if you will follow me, you will have me as light.

You'll have my life, and I will open your eyes, and you will see light, and you will never be in darkness again. Verse 13 starts the apparent detour. The Pharisee said to him, you're bearing witness to yourself.

Your testimony is not true. Now, where did that come from? Came from chapter 5, verse 30, where Jesus had said, if I bear witness about myself, my testimony is not true. That's what he said, literally, no words added.

English versions add words here to try to soften it. He just said it. If I bear witness to myself, my testimony is not true.

So he's doing it. There he is. We caught him.

Contradicting himself, can't be the light, he said so. That sets up the next 17 verses. Jesus just goes with it.

He goes with their accusation, and he responds to it, and interacts with them all the rest of the way. So he really did say it. If I bear witness about myself, my testimony is not true.

What did he mean? What did he mean? The word alone is added in the ESV. The word deemed is added in the ESV. I've written to those folks, all my friends who translated this verse, don't do that to me.

I have to preach on this. The fact that he said it the way they said it accounts for their objection in verse 13. If you take out the problem from chapter 5, verse 30, you can't explain the problem that the Pharisees raised in chapter 8, verse 13.

So forgive me for being a little bit here. He said, if I talk about myself, I am not true. And they said, we got you.

And in the context back in 530, what comes clear is that he means something like this. If I testify from myself, if it originates with me, if I am a witness to myself disconnected from the Father, then I'm false, I'm false. The Pharisees did not hear the context.

They didn't wanna hear the context. They just wanted to take a phrase in isolation like you can catch somebody, you could catch me probably, catch others, take a little phrase and see, see, and not hear it the way he intended it. Let me give you an illustration of what I think is going on here to cause you to feel appalled at this moment for the Pharisees.

It's as though you heard me say yesterday in conversation with a British friend, we have some British friends here tonight, suppose I was talking with a British friend and you overheard me say, I don't use the word torch. And today I find you in a tunnel, trapped, very dark, needing help to get out, not knowing where to turn. And I have in my hand a bright burning torch.

And I say to you, I have a torch for you. This will get you out. And you look right past the torch and say, you use the word torch.

Yesterday you said you don't use the word torch. So you don't have a torch. What would you say if you were me in that situation? Well, I could do it this way.

I could explain. I said, look, we were talking about flashlights. British people call flashlights torches.

I said, I don't use the word torch to mean I don't call flashlights torches. You weren't listening. You took that out of context.

So I'm not contradicting myself. I'm using the word torch because you could do that. Jesus did not do that.

And I think he didn't do it because there's something just so appalling going on here. What you should say is, this is a torch. You need to get out, take the torch.

Forget about the words, take the torch. That's what you'd say. This is absurd.

This is absurd, right? To say, you use the word torch. So you're a contradictor. So you're not offering me a torch.

That's absurd, it is absurd. It is absurd. They're standing in front of the living God, his burning brightness shining for all who are alive to see and plotting his death.

This is absurd. And I hope you're not doing it right now. Their eyes and their hearts were blind.

The light that is Christ, the light of Christ, is not an inference drawn from an argument. It is the brightness of the glory of God shining on the retina of the human soul. You don't infer light, you see light.

Light is not a conclusion at the end of an argument. It is the sun shining in broad day strength. What they needed here was not to go back and clarify the context of, I don't speak of myself.

What they needed was eyes. And amazingly, many of them got them while they were listening. I can see puzzles on some of your faces.

Just hope you hang in there with the gospel of John all the way because this language of seeing the glory of God as the means by which we recognize his truth and are saved is everywhere. And if it's foreign to you, that should be a concern to you. Somebody hasn't helped you like they should.

And I would like to help you recognize perhaps what has happened to you and you just never heard it talked about this way or it never has happened to you and seeing with what the Bible calls in Ephesians 1:17, the eyes of your heart. Seeing with the eyes of your heart so that you apprehend in the gospel, in Christ, the glory, the beauty, which is self-authenticatingly real and you know it. Jesus responds in verse 14.

If I do bear witness about myself, my testimony is true. For I know where I came from and where I'm going, but you do not know where I come from or where I am going. In other words, I come from God.

I am going to God and you don't know God. And therefore you can't see me as the light of the world because the meaning of my being the light of the world is that I am of God. I am here for God, from God, to God, as God.

That is what it means for me to be the light of the world. And you don't know him, where I come from, where I'm going to, you don't know him so you can't see me as light. He goes on, verse 15.

You judge according to the flesh. That's chapter three again. This is Nicodemus all over.

You don't have any life. That which is born of the flesh is flesh. That which is born of the spirit is spirit.

You need to be born of the spirit because all you are is flesh and flesh can't enter the kingdom of God. It can't even see the kingdom of God. He continues, verse 15, middle of verse.

I judge no one, that is, on my own. I don't originate judgments. I echo my father's judgments, verse 16.

Yet even if I do judge, my judgment is true for it is not I alone who judge but I and the father who sent me. In your law, it is written that testimony of two people is true. I am the one who bears witness about myself and my father who sent me bears witness about me.

Verse 19, they said to him, therefore, where's your father? He answered, you know neither me nor my father. If you knew me, you would know my father also. In other words, I and the father are so united that if you knew and loved him, you'd know and love me and if you knew and loved me, you'd know and love him and you don't know and love either, religious though you are.

Now, that language is unbelievably offensive and explosive which is why I think Paul, I mean John, pauses here in verse 20 to say how amazing it is that they aren't stoning him or arresting him. These words he spoke in the treasury as he taught in the temple but no one arrested him because his hour had not yet

come. He will go but he will go in his time and in the father's way and now in verses 21 to 24, he spells out some implications of their blindness.

So, he said to them, I am going away and you will seek me and you will die in your sin. Where I am going, you cannot come. So, the Jews said, will he kill himself? Since he says where I'm going, you cannot come.

He said to them, you are from below, I am from above. You are of this world, I am not of this world. I told you that you would die in your sins for unless you believe that I am, he is added, you will die in your sins.

When Jesus says in verse 21 that he's going away, he means I'm going to die, rise again and return to my father in heaven and when he says you will die in your sins, he means they can't follow him there. They go another direction. I'm going to my father, I'm going away and you can't come because you're gonna die in your sins if you don't repent.

And he holds out hope to them. Verse 24, middle of the verse, unless you believe that I am, you will die in your sins. Believe and you won't die in your sins.

Refuse me and you will die in your sins and if you believe and don't die in your sins, you will go with me. Where I go, you will seek me and you will find me and I'll be with you forever and if you don't believe, you will die in your sins and you won't be able to go with me. Where I go, namely to the father.

Over and over again in this text, he talks about his relationship to the father which is why he's the light of the world. He's from the father, he acts for the father, he represents the father, he is the presence incarnate of the father. Now, things come to a climax and we wrap things up with this.

Things come to a climax in verse 28 where he finally tells them how it is that eventually they're gonna come face to face with the light in such a way that they will know now what they had missed. Verse 28, so Jesus said to them, when you have lifted up the son of man, that means crucified him, lifted him up on a cross. We know that from chapter three where this phrase is used in that context.

When you have lifted up the son of man, then you will know that I am. He is at it. Then you will know that I am.

That doesn't mean that at the crucifixion of Jesus as the Pharisees stood around, they all got saved. They didn't. It means you yourselves unwittingly are going to be the instruments of helping me finish the work I must do to be the effective eternal light of the world.

You're gonna help me finish my work by hanging me on a cross. You're gonna crucify me. And when I'm crucified, my role as a saving, redeeming, creation-filling light of the world will be secured.

No one will be able to undermine it. And I will rise and reign forever and shine forever at my Father's right hand and then on the earth. And the day will come that you will know this.

You will know this. You can know it now, and I say this to you. You can know it now and be saved from your sins and not die in your sins.

Or you can be the ones who crucify me and die in your sins and find out later who I was when it's too late. That's the choice you all have tonight and the choice you have tonight and this morning. As it is with them, so it is with you and me.

We see Him and we receive Him as the light of the world now and we don't die in our sins. Or we die in our sins and it's too late. So my prayer is that God would grant you life.

It comes through hearing. And life awakens your heart to have sight. And like these folks in verse 30, just listening, just listening to Jesus, they concluded, okay.

I'm not resisting anymore, I can't, there He is. The light of the world is in front of me. There's no more battle, I'm done.

My sword is on the ground. My knee is bending. God did it.

I see and I believe. I pray that miracle will happen for you. Let's pray.

So I'd simply ask you, Father, to do for many what you did for those Jewish people in verse 30. They, when they heard Him teaching, they believed. Something happened inside when they listened.

They were granted ears to hear and eyes to see. And they are now confessing in His presence. Jesus is the light of the world, my light forever.

But you do that for all who are listening to me. In Jesus' name, amen.

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