

**John 8:12-20 (NIV)**

<sup>12</sup> 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."**

<sup>13</sup> The Pharisees challenged him, "Here you are, appearing as your own witness; your testimony is not valid."

<sup>14</sup> Jesus answered, "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. <sup>15</sup> You judge by human standards; I pass judgment on no one. <sup>16</sup> But if I do judge, my decisions are true, because I am not alone. I stand with the Father, who sent me. <sup>17</sup> In your own Law it is written that the testimony of two witnesses is true. <sup>18</sup> I am one who testifies for myself; my other witness is the Father, who sent me."

<sup>19</sup> 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." <sup>20</sup> 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.

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**Outlandish.**

What does it mean – the word outlandish?

One dictionary says, "strikingly out of the ordinary – even bizarre, exceeding proper or reasonable limits or standards."

The fact is, even if we can't easily define it, we know it when we hear it, don't we? We know when something sounds outlandish.

We've actually heard a lot of outlandish things this year – unbelievable, beyond reasonable limits.

Here are a few from recent years that caught people's attention:

Do you remember who said, "There have been times that I've had to go to the hospital because my brain is too big for my skull."

Who said that? Kanye West.

How about the statement, "I'm not an alien, but I used to be one."

That was Elon Musk, the founder of Tesla motors.

How about, "I think I am actually humble. I think I'm much more humble than you would understand."

That was Donald Trump.

Or this statement, "Poor kids are just as bright and just as talented as white kids."

Yes, that was Joe Biden.

Do you remember who made the statement, "I won't be happy until I'm as famous as God."

Madonna said that.

How about, "In this world, I call the shots and I think I know best."

That was Mariah Carey.

And then, this outlandish statement from a while ago, "We are more popular than Jesus."

John Lennon said that, speaking, of course, of the Beatles.

Now, these are certainly all outlandish statements. To our ears, they all exceed proper or reasonable limits.

But none of these even come close to *this* outlandish statement – made by Jesus – there in John 8, verse 12, where He declares: **"I am the light of the world."** And he even went further. **"Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life."**

"I am the light of the world."

Think about that. Think about saying that. Think about declaring that.

What would our society do with a person who stood up in a prominent place and declared that they were "the light of the world"?

We'd either relegate them to the loony bin – or send them to Hollywood and exploit them for our entertainment.

Or – maybe we'd make them president.

But that is just what Jesus did.

It was in the middle of the Feast of Tabernacles, we see from back in chapter 7, a hugely symbolic feast of the Jews.

And it was most likely at night or at dusk and in the outer court of women, because at night in that court there were four huge columns, so tall the priests needed ladders to reach the top of them.

And on top of each of them was a great golden bowl full of oil. At dusk, wicks were put into these, and they were lit. The light they gave off was so bright – especially since this all took place on the temple mount, the highest point in the city – that they cast their light over the whole city of Jerusalem.

It was very likely there and then that Jesus made this outlandish statement that He Himself is, not just the light of Jerusalem, but the light of the world.

And, of course, if that statement seems outlandish to us today, imagine how it sounded in every Jewish ear that heard Him say that on that night, because light, to the Jew, meant – and stood for – so much more than it typically does to us. We think about light, we flip the switch, and the light comes on, and that's pretty much all we think about. But, to the Jew, it meant much, much more than that.

All through the Old Testament – all through Hebrew history – light is nothing less than the very symbol of God, and even more than that, the very *presence* of God.

For example, in Exodus 13, it was the light of God – the *Shekinah Glory*, the pillar of cloud by day and fire by night – that led the Israelites through the desert in the night. So light, to them, to the Jewish mind and heart, was the symbol of God's guidance and protection.

Genesis 15 tells us about the blazing torch that passed between the pieces of Abram's sacrifice. This light was the guarantee of God's sure presence and His commitment to Abram and to those who would come after him. That light spoke of God's faithfulness.

To the Jew, light was understood as the symbol of God's salvation, as King David wrote in Psalm 27, verse 1, "The Lord is my light and my salvation - whom shall I fear?"

God's deliverance was represented by light. Joshua 7 talks about the torches given to all the men who, with Gideon, would rout the Midianite armies.

Light was symbolic of God's word, as Psalm 119 says, "Your word, oh God, is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path." It's the way God speaks to us.

And then, of course, light is the symbol for God's people themselves. God promises His people, through the prophet Isaiah, "I will make you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring my salvation to the ends of the earth."<sup>1</sup>

You see, all those Jews there in the temple that night in the middle of one of the greatest events of the Jewish calendar, every one of them had in their minds that light means God's guidance, God's protection, His presence, God's faithfulness, God's salvation, God's deliverance, God's word, and God's people. They all knew that.

And then, here is Jesus, saying - proclaiming, announcing - that He, Himself, is the light of the world.

They were right to question Him - to challenge His right to say it and to claim it.

As Joe Dongell says, "Those words, spoken without authority, constituted foolish self-promotion at the least and blasphemous assault on God at the most."

But to anyone who was truly seeking God - who was aware of the prophecies and who was open to God working in their world - Jesus' defense proved sound. The evidence really was on His side.

So those there had to decide whether or not to believe. To believe Him. To trust Him. To follow Him.

They had to decide if Jesus was, as C. S. Lewis proposed in his book, *Mere Christianity*, a liar, a lunatic or, if He was, in fact, the light of the world - if He was the very Lord God He claimed to be.

This is the decision that we all face - the very same decision those Jews faced that night at the Feast of Tabernacles.

Will we believe that Jesus is who He says He is - the light of the world?

It's the decision that every person throughout history who has encountered Jesus has to wrestle with.

Was He lying on that day? Was Jesus trying to pull a fast one on all those people there at the temple?

The question, of course, would be, "Why?" Why would He lie? What possible motive did He have in making up something like that - in trying to sell a story like that?

I mean, look at where it got Him. He would have had to know that it would come to that.

Why would He lie? Was Jesus a liar. That's one option.

Or, according to Lewis' argument, was He a lunatic? Was He insane? Was he just making up things, left and right? Was he just saying that?

If you look at the rest of His life, there is nothing that would indicate that. To look at His life, to hear His words, one could hardly believe He was crazy. Just the opposite, actually. To know His life would suggest that He was maybe the sanest person who ever lived - a person with a truly healthy perspective, whose goals were noble and whose motives were pure.

But if Jesus wasn't lying and if He wasn't insane, well then that could only mean that He was telling the truth: that He really was who He said He was.

If Jesus was the light of the world, then He was - He is - the very *presence* of God.

That means that He is the embodiment of God's guidance and protection.

He is the guarantee of God's sure presence and commitment to His people.

If Jesus is the light of the world, then He is the means of God's salvation.

In fact, it means that He is God's very word to our world. You want to hear God's voice? You want to know what God thinks? Just listen to what Jesus says.

And, if Jesus is the light of the world, He is the leader of all people who truly belong to God.

That's what Jesus was claiming there at the Temple at the Feast.

And He claims the very same thing today - here and now.

That's why His followers celebrate His coming - His birth - with light: lights on our homes, lights in our windows, lights on our trees. And a special sort of light in our eyes.

Because we know that Jesus is the light of the world, and He's coming to bring His light and all that means to our darkness.

I'm tempted to say something like, "If ever our world needed assurance of light, it's today," but you know, our world and nations of our world have been through so many, many dark days since Jesus first made this statement.

Wars, diseases, tyrants, global threats. We really don't know our history very well, and we have short memories. We think our troubles are the world's worst and our days are the world's darkest, but in truth, that's not really so.

There have been dark days before. People have felt hopeless or trapped or vulnerable before - time and again, actually, through the centuries.

And in all of those dark days, Jesus assures all who will hear Him - all who will listen to Him - with the sure promise, "I am the light of the world.

"I am God's guidance, I am God's protection, I am His presence, His faithfulness, His salvation, His deliverance, and His word - and I am the King of His people.

"Will you believe that, and will you trust me enough to follow me - and live in peace?"

That was His invitation to those Jews at the Temple, and it's been His invitation ever since.

<sup>1</sup> Isaiah 49:6

It's His invitation today to you and me.

Don't be overwhelmed with the darkness.

Jesus is the light – He is already here. And, at the same time, we celebrate that He is coming soon.

The whole world was lost – and so much of the world is still lost in darkness.

But all who know Jesus – we don't live in darkness.

We walk in the light as we follow our guide.

We have no reason to fear, to stumble, to wander aimlessly, to be confused or to remain bound or chained.

Because Jesus is the light – the light of the world!

Closing Prayer:

Jesus, show us this Advent season – show us in these days of darkness, show us in ways we can understand, in

powerful ways that we can grip and hold on to – show us what it means that you really are the Light of the World.

In Your name we pray. Amen.

Closing Song: *The Light of the World is Jesus*

Benediction:

As we prepare for His birth this year, I hope that every time you see a light – a light fixture, a porch light, a streetlight, a headlight, and certainly all the special lights of Christmas – I hope you'll say to yourself, "I have no reason to fear. I have no reason to be anxious. I have no reason to worry – because Jesus is the light of the world." The Lord bless you and keep you. Amen.