



John 8:12-30



In 1988, Democratic nominee Michael Dukakis rode in an Abrams Tank on a campaign stop in Dearborn, Michigan. Every reporter laughed at him, including Sam Donaldson. It was supposed to be high political theater but it spelled the end of his campaign against George HW Bush.

To be politically even-handed I should include a Republican. George Bush Jr. attempted similar theatrics when he declared Mission Accomplished



from the deck of the USS Abraham Lincoln. He got a lot of flak for this but at least he did not lose the presidency over it.

These are both classic examples of political theatrics. They are staged events whose sole purpose was to make a big impact on the viewers. Last week the

Pharisees tried to stage a sort of political theater when they dragged the woman caught in adultery and dumped her at the feet of Jesus. This time it was Jesus' turn. The first thing he said in this passage was "I am the light of the world." But it wasn't just what he said but where he said it that had a bigger impact.

First, let me read the passage and then I'll set the scene for you.

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." 13 So the Pharisees said to him, "You are

bearing witness about yourself; your testimony is not true.” 14 Jesus answered, “Even if I do bear witness about myself, my testimony is true, for I know where I came from and where I am going, but you do not know where I come from or where I am going. 15 You judge according to the flesh; I judge no one. 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. 17 In your Law it is written that the testimony of two people is true. 18 I am the one who bears witness about myself, and the Father who sent me bears witness about me.” 19 They said to him therefore, “Where is your Father?” Jesus answered, “You know neither me nor my Father. If you knew me, you would know my Father also.” 20 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.

21 So he said to them again, “I am going away, and you will seek me, and you will die in your sin. Where I am going, you cannot come.” 22 So the Jews said, “Will he kill himself, since he says, ‘Where I am going, you cannot come?’” 23 He said to them, “You are from below; I am from above. You are of this world; I am not of this world. 24 I told you that you would 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 said to them, “Just what I have been telling you from the beginning.

26 I have much to say about you and much to judge, but he who sent me is true, and I declare to the world what I have heard from him.” 27 They did not understand that he had been speaking to them about the Father. 28 So Jesus said to them, “When you have lifted up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am he, and that I do nothing on my own authority, but speak just as the Father taught me. 29 And he who sent me is with me. He has not left me alone, for I always do the things that are pleasing to him.” 30 As he was saying these things, many believed in him.

“I am the light of the world.” It’s one of the most famous statements that Jesus ever said but where and when he said it would have had a greater impact on his listeners. Here’s how the scene was set up.

We need to establish when Jesus said this and for that we need to go back to John 7:2—*Now the Jews' Feast of Booths was at hand*. The Feast of Booths also known as the Feast of Tabernacles was one of the three most important Old Testament feasts which celebrated the 40 years of wandering in the wilderness.

Now why did I go all the way back to the beginning of chapter seven to figure out the timing? If you were here last Sunday you learned that John 7:53-8:11 is not supposed to be in the Bible. It really happened and we learn from it but it does not belong here. If you have any questions about it you can read last Sunday’s message or else ask me about it. But in terms of flow of the text, if we remove 7:53-8:11 you see that the events starting in 8:12 flow smoothly from what was happening at the end of chapter seven. In other words, chapter eight takes place during the Feast of Tabernacles.

Now why is that so important? If you were a good Jew, you would have built a small booth, like a little leaf hut on the roof of your house and you would have lived in this during the seven days of the feast. But this didn't take place on the roof of a house. The "when" is the Feast of



Tabernacles and the where is told to us in verse 20. *These words he spoke in the treasury, as he taught in the temple.* Jesus was in the treasury. Big deal, right? What's the treasury? The treasury was in the Court of Women. In this reproduction you can see the Holy Place which is the tallest structure. In front of the Holy Place stood the altar and right through the archway was the large court of women.

The treasury was a dedicated area in the Court of Women where worshippers would bring their gifts to the Lord. Remember the poor widow who gave her two copper pennies? That happened at the treasury. They vessels had a large trumpet-shaped top where you would place your money. This is why Jesus said, "Thus, when you give to the needy, sound no trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may be praised by others." When you threw your money into the top of the trumpet, you were "sounding your trumpet" and letting everyone know that you had just given money to the poor. And the more you gave the louder and longer the trumpet sounded. Jesus spoke out against this form and arrogance.

So that was all in the Court of Women which is where Jesus was standing when he taught the events of chapter seven and chapter eight. Let me tell you what else was in the Court of Women and then you'll start to see everything come together. It's not easy to see but you can make out four large lamps in each corner of the court. It was said that these lamps were about 75 feet high and each one had four separate bowls of oil in them. During the Feast of Tabernacles the priests would light the lamps and they would burn throughout the feast. Especially at night the light from these 16 individual bowls would light not only the entire court but it could be seen from quote a distance away since the temple was the highest point in Jerusalem.

So this is the scene in which Jesus announced to the crowds, "I am the light of the world." It wasn't political theater on the order of Michael Dukakis or George Bush but it would have been an unmistakable to Jesus listeners. He was the light that illuminated the Temple of God.

So the timing and the location of announcing that he was the light of the world had a huge impact. But if you are familiar with your Bible, we quickly realize that this was just the beginning of the significance of what he said. Light has significance all throughout the Old Testament. You know where we need to start, don't you?

In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was without form and void, and darkness was over the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters. And God said, "Let there be light," and there was light (Genesis 1:1-3).

God created light out of the darkness. Jesus added, *Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.* Darkness is always the domain of unbelief and suffering and Jesus was the light leading out of darkness and unbelief.

Moving forward throughout Scripture we get to the Tabernacle. Remember, the Feast of Tabernacles celebrated the forty years of wandering in the wilderness. All 2-3 million Israelites encamped around the Tabernacle. And how were they guided during those forty years? During the day the Lord appeared in a pillar of cloud and at night he appeared in a pillar of fire. Like this painting, that pillar of fire may have illuminated the entire Israelite camp. “I am the light of the world.”



As we walk our way forward we come to the Psalms.

Psalm 27:1—The Lord is my light and my salvation

Psalm 119:105—Your word is a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path.

Isaiah chimes in on the subject of light of God’s glory.

Isaiah 60:19—The sun shall be no more your light by day, nor for brightness shall the moon give you light; but the LORD will be your everlasting light, and your God will be your glory.

Isaiah was surely pointing forward to our future heavenly reward.

Revelation 22:5—And night will be no more. They will need no light of lamp or sun, for the Lord God will be their light, and they will reign forever and ever.

John himself introduced Jesus as light in chapter one.

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made. In him was life, and the life was the light of men (John 1:1-4).

It was all of this historical and Biblical backdrop and with the blazing lights in the court of the Temple when Jesus announced “*I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.*”

But there was even more significance and power to his words for the Lord Jesus did not say, I am a light of the world he said I am **the** light of the world, just like all of the other “I am” passages in the gospel of John.

- “I am the bread of life; he who comes to Me shall not hunger.” John 6:35
- “I am the gate; if anyone enters through Me, he shall be saved, and shall go in and out, and find pasture.” John 10:9
- “I am the good shepherd; the good shepherd lays down His life for His sheep.” John 10:11
- “I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in Me shall live even if he dies.” John 11:25
- “I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father, but through Me.” John 14:6
- “I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser.” John 15:1

But there was still more in that one phrase, “I am the light of the world.” Did you see it? It’s the simple phrase “I am.” You may know that this phrase also has its own rich history in the Scriptures. We see it three times in the section we read this morning. Its first appearance was at the burning bush.

Then Moses said to God, “If I come to the people of Israel and say to them, ‘The God of your fathers has sent me to you,’ and they ask me, ‘What is his name?’ what shall I say to them?” 14 God said to Moses, “I AM WHO I AM.” And he said, “Say this to the people of Israel, ‘I AM has sent me to you.’ ” (Exodus 3:13-14)

“I am” was the name that the Lord told Moses to use. I am is a term of self-existence. I am who I am. “I am” is a being verb. I am hungry. I am tired. I am the light of the world. It is a being verb which describes what you are. But when God called himself “I am who I am” or simply “I am,” our first reaction should be to ask, “You are what?” Do you see, if I said to you “I am...” you naturally would be waiting for the completion of that sentence, right? You would wonder, “What are you, Maurer? Are you excited? Are you sad? Are you 5’7””? What are you? When we use a being verb like I am, it always has more to it. But when God declares that he is “I am” that’s all you need. He just is. He is preexistent and self-existent. Among other things, it was to distinguish the Lord from all other false gods. But once again we can walk through the Bible and see its multiple uses.

Who has performed and done this,
calling the generations from the beginning?
I, the LORD, the first,
and with the last; I am he. (Isaiah 41:4)

‘See now that I, even I, am he,
and there is no god beside me;
I kill and I make alive;
I wound and I heal;
and there is none that can deliver out of my hand. (Deut. 32:39)

“You are my witnesses,” declares the LORD,
“and my servant whom I have chosen,

that you may know and believe me
and understand that I am he. (Isaiah 43:10)

These are not only statements of God's absolute power and self-existence, but they are also prophecies about Christ. In the Greek, the phrase "I am" is an intensive form of the being verb. There are two words which make up this phrase: ego eimi. Ego means I and eimi means I am.

ego eimi
I I am

When you put them together you get an awkward sounding phrase, I, I am. It sounds awkward in English but in Greek it is an intensive form of "I am." So when Jesus said "I am the light of the world," he declared that:

- He is the pre-existent, self-existent God.
- He is the Creator of light
- He is the Light of the Feast of Tabernacles
- Outside of him is only darkness
- Unless you believe in him you will die in your sins

Jesus also used this title later twice later in the passage, in verse 24 and 28.

*24 I told you that you would die in your sins, for unless you believe that **I am he** you will die in your sins."*

*28 So Jesus said to them, "When you have lifted up the Son of Man, then you will know that **I am he**."*

When was the Son of Man "lifted up"? He was lifted up onto the cross. But how did that result in people knowing that he was the "I am," that he was God? Do you recall the centurion standing at the foot of the cross when Jesus died? Did you know there was a whole group of soldiers who placed their faith in Jesus, not just that one centurion?

51 And behold, the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. And the earth shook, and the rocks were split. **52** The tombs also were opened. And many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised, **53** and coming out of the tombs after his resurrection they went into the holy city and appeared to many. **54** When **the centurion and those who were with him**, keeping watch over Jesus, saw the earthquake and what took place, **they** were filled with awe and said, "Truly this was the Son of God!" (Matthew 27:51-54)

Had you ever seen that before? There was a whole group who believed in Jesus when he was lifted up, just as Jesus said they would. But let me explain what "The Light of the World" does for you. He is the Creator of light. He is pre-existent, self-existent, prophesied and exalted Savior, but do you know what he did for you? In verse 12 he said, *Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness*, but there's even more to it than that. For the fuller explanation, we need to jump over to Ephesians 5:8.

...for at one time you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord.

Without Christ, you not only walk in darkness, you and I were darkness. Do you see the being verb? You were darkness. It defines who you were. You didn't just walk blindly in the darkness, you were darkness. But the Light of the World changed us. "But now you are light in the Lord." Once again, notice the being verse. You are not just walking in the light, you are light. Your very being has changed. Jesus is the light of the world and every believer is light in the Lord.

Then Paul added, "walk as children of light." In other words, live in such a way that it looks like the Light of the World lives in you.

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June 19, 2016