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“I Am the Light of the World” (John 8:12)

On a lovely summer Monday in 1990, Gary Lutes took his two sons caving in New Trout Cave in Pendleton County. Although an experienced spelunker, Lutes broke almost every caving rule, with nearly tragic results. They were traveling through on vacation, and he told no one they were caving or what time he expected to be finished. He alone carried a pack with alternate light sources, food, and water. A ways in to the cave, he set it down to explore. After a short time, their carbide lamps began to flicker and one by one go out. Without light, they were lost in utter and complete darkness. Lutes knew they were in real trouble as they sat down to wait. After three days a local resident reported the car which had not been moved. As authorities attempted to track him down, it was Friday before it was determined he was indeed caving. A rescue was organized, but there were four caves in the area to search. Meanwhile, Gary and his sons were in serious condition. Weak from hunger and dehydration, they huddled together, quoted scripture and prayed, believing they were about to die. Finally, after 5 days, Gary and his sons saw lights and heard the voices of the rescuers. Though seriously dehydrated, they were ok and quickly helped out of the cave. We can only imagine the joy they experience when they saw those lights after so long in such a dark place!

Gary Lutes and his sons were in a desperate situation. Lost in complete darkness in a long maze of passages. Helpless. Hopeless. I can think of no better account that illustrates our dire condition without Christ. Paul describes us as dead in our sins, separate from Christ, without hope and without God in this world (Eph. 2)

It is to this condition Jesus speaks when He makes the remarkable claim:

“I am the light of the world. He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness, but have the light of life.” (John 8:12)

It is as if, recognizing our dire condition – lost, helpless, and hopeless in finding our way to God – we see His light and hear the voice of Christ calling out to us.

The Claim

“I am the light of the world...”

Jesus’ message is taking place in the temple near the end of the Feast of Tabernacles (See John 7). One of the rituals of this feast was the lighting of large candlesticks in the temple courtyard which illuminated the entire area. It is thought that Jesus may well have been referring to these candlesticks as the illustration of His statement. These candlesticks represented Israel’s time in the wilderness when God showed His presence and led them “in a cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night” (Exodus 13). Several of His “I Am” claims

referred back to events in the wilderness. Once again Jesus is clearly identifying Himself as the God of the Old Testament.

When considering the meaning of Jesus’ claim to be the “light of the world” we should go back to John’s introduction of his gospel:

In Him was life, and the life was the light of men. And the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it. There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. This man came for a witness, to bear witness of the Light, that all through him might believe. He was not that Light, but was sent to bear witness of that Light. That was the true Light which gives light to every man coming into the world. John 1:4-9

We must remember that Jesus is primarily talking about His identity as the Messiah, the Savior, the one who gives eternal life. Jesus is not just a light to guide the way; He **is** the light, **the** way of salvation. Again, Christ was claiming to be God, for **“God is light and in Him is no darkness at all”** (1 John 1:5).

The Condition

“He who follows me...”

Jesus lays out a condition for those who would possess and experience His light in their lives. When Jesus calls individuals to follow Him, it is a call to salvation. It is a call to believe in Christ, Who He is, and what He has done for us. The rest of chapter 8 is Jesus’ challenging message to those who do not believe in Him and do not follow Him. It is in verse 24 He makes clear, “...**Unless you believe that I am He, you will die in your sins**”. As unbelievers, we follow Satan, the world, and our own sinful natures. At salvation, we turn from following those things as we choose to believe in Christ and follow Him. Lost in a cave without light, Gary Lutes and his sons faced physical death. Lost in this world without Christ, each of us faces spiritual, eternal death because of our sin.

The Contrast

“...Shall not walk in darkness, but have the light of life.”

According to Jesus there is a clear contrast between those who “walk in darkness” and those who “have the light of life”. One of the most vivid descriptions in scripture of someone who does not know Christ is that of being “in the darkness”. Unbelievers are said to be “lost” and “blind”. John writes more of this contrast in chapter three:

And this is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. For everyone practicing evil hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed. But he who does the truth comes to the light, that his deeds may be clearly seen, that they have been done in God.”

John 3:19-21

To “walk in darkness” means we are lost spiritually and cannot find the way of salvation. To “walk in darkness” means we live in darkness in our daily lives.

To “have the light of life” means we know the way of salvation through faith in Jesus Christ and His suffering and death on the cross. To “have the light of life” means we have the presence of Christ in our lives that shows us and empowers us to live a life that is pleasing to Him.

When we choose to follow Christ we are delivered from darkness to light. Paul writes of this change in Ephesians 5:8: “**For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord**” and in 1 Thessalonians 5:5 where he writes we are “...**Sons of light and sons of the day. We are not of the night nor of darkness.**” Peter wrote of this change as well in 1 Peter 2:9 when

he wrote that we “...**May proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light...**” These are just a few of the passages that speak of the contrast between spiritual light and darkness.

Walking in the Light

There is also a practical sense in which we as believers choose to follow Christ and His word on a daily basis. As we see in Psalm 119:105, “**Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path**”. Christ is the Light of the World. It is His Word that reveals Him to us, tells us what He has done for us, and shows us how He wants us to live. It is up to us to study and follow His word and in doing so, experience the guidance of His light in our lives.

As we study Jesus’ claim to be “the light of the world”, we need to consider another statement He makes in Matthew 5:16 as He spoke to His disciples:

“You are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do they light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven.

Since Jesus has returned to heaven and is no longer bodily present on earth, He has left His believers behind to serve as His light to the world. Jesus is the light, and as His followers we have His presence in us and we reflect His glory and His holiness to those around us.

It is vital for us to realize that Jesus calls us to live our lives in such a way so people will see how we live and how we act. By doing so, they will see the light of Christ in us!

Conclusion

Have you chosen to follow Christ so that you do not “walk in darkness”?

Are you seeking to follow the light of God’s word in your daily life?

Is your life a light for Christ and the Gospel to those around you as you serve in the Capitol Community?

BIBLE STUDIES

Thursdays,

8:00 AM Governor’s Conference Room (Sec. of State’s Ofc)

12:00 Noon Treasurer’s Conference Room (EB54,
Basement of East Wing)