

CHURCH OF THE REDEEMER

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Series:	Scripture Memory		Pastor/Teacher
Number:	52		Gary L.W. Johnson
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THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD

Nightmares are something we experience at a very young age. Gary Larson, in his Far Side single-panel comic strip that ran from 1980 to 1995, captured a common fear that most people have – being caught in public without clothes on. In this particular cartoon, he has a medieval knight caught naked in a sword battle! Then there are nightmares that are scary and leave us waking up in a cold sweat. *Psychology Today* notes: “Sometimes a nightmare is just a bad dream – isolated and disagreeable imagery with little emotional response from the dreamer. However, a nightmare can lead the individual to feel fear, terror, and anxiety; awakening the individual and causing disturbing emotional response, including insomnia or other difficulties in the sleep cycle, or even daytime distress. Fever can also bring on nightmares, as can ill health and poor diet.”¹ Like nightmares, darkness is also something we associate with fear. In the Bible darkness is a metaphor for the dark nature of sin. Jesus’ claim to be the light of the world is the second of the seven great *I am* sayings that are a unique feature of John’s gospel. Philip Bliss, in his well-known hymn *The Light of the World is Jesus*, captures this glorious theme.

The whole world was lost in the darkness of sin;

The Light of the world is Jesus;

Like sunshine at noonday His glory shone in;

The Light of the world is Jesus,

[Refrain]

Come to the Light, ‘tis shining for thee;

Sweetly the light has dawned upon me;

Once I was blind, but now I can see;

The Light of the world is Jesus.²

- I. **THE BACKGROUND.** “Jesus already has been described as light in John’s Gospel. In the opening chapter John wrote, *In him was life, and that life was the light of men* (v. 4). He spoke of the light six times in that context. In chapter 3 there is a similar reference. John said, *This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but men loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil* (v. 19). This verse and those immediately following refer to light five times in reference to Jesus. In each of these cases the image is in John’s words only, however. So we read these verses and, if we have not read further, we find ourselves asking, ‘But why does John refer to Jesus in this way? Where did he get this image? How did he develop this idea?’ It is only when we get to our present text that we discover the answer. John refers to Jesus as the light because Jesus referred to himself as the light. Indeed, John obviously remembered this and so developed the images even further in this Gospel and in 1 John.”³ “In John’s original writing, this verse immediately follows 7:52. The intervening passage, 7:53-8:11, known as the pericope of the adulteress (see comments on this passage in the previous section), interrupts the true narrative continuity from the end of chapter 7 to the beginning of chapter 8. Both these chapters record the dialogues Jesus had with the Jewish leaders in Jerusalem during the Feast of Tabernacles.

During this feast, the Jews would customarily pour water over a rock (in commemoration of the water supply coming from the smitten rock in the wilderness) and light lamps in the temple (in commemoration of the pillar of light that accompanied the Israelites in their wilderness journey). With reference to these two ritualistic enactments, Jesus presented himself as the true source of living water (7:37-39) and as the true Light to be followed (8:12). John 8:12 contains a response – even though indirect – to John 7:52. In John 8:12ff, Jesus was speaking to the Pharisees, who had boldly told Nicodemus that the Scriptures make no mention of even a prophet (much less the Christ) being raised up in Galilee. With respect to this assertion, Jesus made a declaration in which he implied that the Scriptures did speak of the Christ coming from Galilee. The statement in 8:12 was probably drawn from Isaiah 9:1-2, which contains parallel images. Both speak about the light, walking in darkness and the shadow of death versus the Light of Life. Thus, 8:12 parallels Isaiah 9:1-2 and thereby provides a reproof to the Pharisees' declaration in 7:52. In declaring himself 'the light of the world,' Jesus was making a claim for his unique position as the one true luminary source for all mankind. The expression 'the light of life' can mean 'the light which gives life' or 'the light which is life' or 'the light which springs from life' or 'the light which illuminates life' (Morris). The Greek construction emphasizes this reading: 'I and I alone and no other am the light.'"⁴

II. JESUS' EXCLUSIVE CLAIM. Peterson points out, "Christ's saying, *I am the light of the world* has the same meaning as *I am the truth*. Bright lights shone in the temple in the Court of the Women during the Feast of Tabernacles in Jerusalem. At the end of the feast, the lights were extinguished. Against this background of darkness Jesus claims, *I am the light of the world* (John 8:12). When Jesus repeats this 'I am' saying in 9:5, he backs up his claim by healing a man born blind (9:6-7). By performing the physical miracle he demonstrates that he has the ability to grant spiritual sight. Later the blind man comes to believe in Jesus, the light of the world (v. 38). By contrast, the Pharisees refuse to see by Jesus' light; they claim that they understand spiritual things apart from him and his revelation from God. As a result Jesus' light blinds them, and they remain in their sins (vv. 39-42)."⁵

CONCLUSION: It is not enough that we gaze upon or study or discuss the Light. Our response, our answer, is to irrevocably follow that Light. He who follows Christ shall no longer live in ignorance and darkness, but shall have spiritual light on his pathway, now and in the world to come. To follow Christ is to be delivered from darkness and have a guide through all the perplexities of life. We need not stumble, because we do not walk in darkness when we walk with him. How gentle and loving is that guidance! How wise and sure that light. Spurgeon has said, 'Jesus is too good to do me wrong. He is too wise to make a mistake. So even though my eye cannot immediately see his way, my heart will trust his guidance.' The word *follows*, as used by Christ in 8:12, has a rich and full meaning. The word in Greek could be used in at least five different ways, all interrelated.

"1. A soldier following his captain – on long marches or campaigns in strange lands, or merely completing boring details in camp. The Christian is like a faithful, loyal soldier following Christ in the battles of life.

"2. A slave accompanying his master – faithful by accompanying and serving in excellence. The Christian follows Christ best when his greatest joy is in selflessly serving the Lord Jesus.

"3. A person following a wise counselor's guidance – be it legal advice or financial counsel or some other needed guidance. The Christian is the person for whom Christ is counselor and expert in the insurmountables of life.

"4. A citizen following the laws of the state – the Christian is a citizen of heaven, and he endeavors to follow the laws set down in the Word of God.

"5. A person following the gist of a line of reasoning – the believer is the person who has understood the meaning of the teachings of Jesus. He not only understands, but accepts the truth and follows in happy obedience the ways of Christ. To do so is to walk in the light."⁶

Finally, listen to the words of that great hymn writer/theologian John Newton: “The honours he claims from us afford a further argument for his proper Divinity. He challenges our supreme love, obedience, trust, and worship: *Ye believe in God, believe also in me. Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink his blood, ye have no life in you. That all men should honour the Son as they honour the Father. My sheep know my voice, and I know them, and they follow me; and I give unto them eternal life. I am the light of the world. I am the resurrection and the life.* If we could suppose an apostle or an angel speaking of himself in terms like these, requiring our unlimited dependence, and directing our hope and love to centre wholly on him, we might justly reject him as a blasphemer. How the Apostles understood these expressions, and that they did not mistake our Lord’s meaning, is evident from the behavior of Thomas. He saluted his risen Saviour, *My Lord, and my God.* Had his transport of joy carried him too far in giving this ascription to Jesus, he would doubtless have corrected him, and provided us with a caution against committing the like fault: for who that has tasted his love, and been made a partaker of the power of his resurrection, can avoid adoring him with the utmost homage their words can express, or their hearts conceive?”⁷

ENDNOTES

¹ <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/conditions/nightmares>.

² This is found on p. 476 in the *Trinity Hymnal*.

³ J. M. Boice, *The Gospel of John: An Expository Commentary II* (Baker, 1999), p. 614.

⁴ P. W. Comfort and W. C. Hawley, *Opening The Gospel of John* (Tyndale, 1994), p. 140.

⁵ R. A. Peterson, *Getting to Know John’s Gospel* (P&R, 1989), p. 27.

⁶ Comfort and Hawley, p. 139.

⁷ *The Works of John Newton II* (rpt. Banner of Truth, 1985), p. 423.