

John 8:12-30

Compelling Arguments for Following Christ

Then spake Jesus again unto them, saying, I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life. – v. 12

Recall if you will that Jesus' previous discourse with the Pharisees took place at the time of the Feast of Tabernacles. So in Jn 7:37 we read: *In the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried, saying, If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink.* You may recall when we studied that verse that I pointed out how commentators suggest that the timing of that announcement by Christ very likely corresponded to the ritual of that day which called for the priest to go to the pool of Siloam, fill his vessel with water, and then proceed back to the altar where he would pour out the water from his vessel. It would seem that Jesus utilized that visual aid in order to give added emphasis to the words He spoke when He invited those in attendance at the feast to come to Him and drink.

It's also quite possible that Jesus borrowed from the imagery of the Feast of Tabernacles when He made the bold announcement that He was the light of the world. The first night of that feast, you see, a number of candles were lit. One modern day NT scholar has suggested that these lit candles would not have been just any candles but they would have resembled candle chandeliers. And during the night of that week the temple would have been lit up in a magnificent way.

Now we know from the narrative in Jn. 8 that the Feast of Tabernacles was over. It was on the last day of that feast that Jesus had invited the crowd to come to Him and drink. And in Jn. 8:2 we're told that it was early in the morning that Jesus came again to the temple and taught them. So even though the Feast of Tabernacles had passed, the imagery of the candles having been lit throughout the previous week would have been fresh in the minds of Christ's hearers when He said *I am the light of the world.*

That's one way of looking at the historical setting for Christ's words. He may well have been referencing those lights when He announced Himself to be *the* light of the world. Another way to view the setting would be to simply note how Christ came to the temple early in the morning, according to v. 2. It may have been that Christ was referencing the sun which perhaps had just risen out of the East and broke the darkness with the light of day that Christ made the second of His seven *I am* statements and announced Himself to be the light of the world.

We know, of course, that His morning lesson had been interrupted by the episode of the woman taken in the act of adultery and was brought into his presence in order that the Jews might trap Christ and have grounds for accusing Him of either breaking the Roman law by calling for her execution or breaking the law of Moses by not calling for her execution. Those who participated in this attempt to trap Christ found themselves convicted of their own sins by Christ's word to them *He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her* (v. 7).

And after Christ speaks gracious words to this sinful woman by assuring her that He would not condemn her, the narrative picks up again in v. 12 which tells us that *Jesus spake again unto them*. How much later this speaking by Christ took place we cannot say for sure but it's quite possible that we're still in the relative time table of the Feast of Tabernacles, shortly after that feast had ended.

So Christ by making reference to the brightly lit temple of the previous week or making reference to the day light of the recently risen sun announces now that not only is He the bread of life to satisfy the hunger of needy souls (6:35), and not only is He the source from which thirsty souls can drink and quench the deep thirst of their souls, (7:37) but now He announces that He is the light of the world (Jn. 8:12).

And with this announcement there comes a promise. *He that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life*. Do you begin to see and appreciate what bold claims Christ makes concerning Himself? It's pretty hard to miss His claims to deity when you look at these claims. The Pharisees, true to the form that seems to characterize them every time they speak to Christ, again contend with Him about the inadequacy and the veracity of His claim. They at first contend with Him about the inadequacy of His claim by stating in v. 13 *Thou bearest record of thyself*. But then they go a step further by saying that not only is His claim inadequate because it's not corroborated, but they go so far as to say that His claim is also false.

It's one thing to say that a statement is unsubstantiated, in which case, the truth or falseness of it can't be determined, but their prejudice against Christ rings loud and clear when they prejudge His claim to be the light of the world and call it false. And so in the verses that follow we find yet another heated discussion between Christ and the Pharisees.

What I'd like to do this morning is make the focal point of our study the promise that Christ gives which is based on His claim to being the light of the world. *He that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life*. In the heated discussion that follows I want to show you how Christ's initial statement about being the light of the world as well as His subsequent statements that He uses to answer the objections of the Pharisees all become compelling arguments for following Christ. The title of this message is:

Compelling Arguments for Following Christ

I want to compel you follow Christ today – and not just to follow Him, but to follow Him whole-heartedly, rather than afar off, and to follow Him wherever He leads you. We ought to be willing to follow Him anywhere and at any price. Let's look at the arguments, then, for why we should follow Christ. The first argument is the most prominent and obvious one. We should follow Christ:

I. Because He is the Light of the World

Hear again the words of v. 12 *then spake Jesus again unto them, saying, I am the light of the world; he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life.*

Now John, as the author of this gospel has already made this claim about Christ. So we read in John's prologue to his gospel in 1:4 *In him was life; and the life was the light of men.* And in vv. 6-9 we read of John the Baptist: *There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. The same came for a witness, to bear witness of the Light, that all men through him might believe. He was not that Light, but was sent to bear witness of that Light. That was the true Light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world.*

This designation of Christ as the Light seems to have been a favorite of John. He stresses this truth in his first epistle as well. It may very well have been with Christ's words in mind that John wrote in 1Jn. 1:5 *This then is the message which we have heard of him, and declare unto you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all.* And the most wonderful and gracious application of this truth is made two verses later when John writes in v. 7 *But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin.*

Now there are a couple of ways to see Christ, as the Light of the world and both ways become compelling reasons to follow Him. It's true to say that Christ is the Light of the world in the sense that He's the source from which all light comes. *That was the true Light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world* (Jn. 1:4). Paul picks up on this truth by writing to the Colossians that Christ is the Creator of the world and that the creation of the world was for Christ. Col. 1:16,17 *For by him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by him, and for him: 17 And he is before all things, and by him all things consist.*

The author of Hebrews as well in Heb. 1:1-3 speaks of Christ, the Creator and Upholder of the world: *God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, 2 Hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds; 3 Who being the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person, and upholding all things by the word of his power...*

Why, then should you follow Christ? Very simply – you were created by Christ and you were created for Christ. You can't possibly attain the purpose for which you were created apart from following Christ. To reject Him or to fail to follow Him is tantamount to saying that you must exist for the purpose of magnifying the justice of His condemnation for your failure to follow Him. He, after all, is the One who's given you the life that you now know in this present evil world. He's the One who gives you your next breath and He's the One that gives you your next heart beat. He's the One that has given you your physical sight that enables you to see that the whole Creation testifies to His existence. The heavens declare His glory, the Psalmist says in Ps. 19:1.

The mountains, we could add, declare His majestic splendor. And the oceans declare His immeasurable vastness. The fertile valleys and plains as well as the rivers and streams declare His gracious provision for everything needed to sustain you and the thunder and storms in their severity remind us that the justice of His judgment is very real.

So this is one aspect of Christ, being the Light of the world. And when you see Him high and lifted up the way He's lifted up in Isaiah's vision of His brightness, a brightness that causes the angles of heaven to cover their faces in His presence, then it becomes too easy to conclude with John that *He is light, and in Him is no darkness at all*. But there's another way to view Christ as the Light of the world and this second way that I have in mind now, I think is precisely what Christ had in mind when He declared Himself to be the Light of the world.

He is, you see, not only the Creator of the natural world, and the source of all light within the natural world, but He's also the One who brings spiritual light out of the darkness of this world. When He says, you see, that He is the Light of the world *and he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life*. You do well to ask – what kind of darkness is Christ referencing here? He's not referencing the darkness of nature because the sun would continue to shine even though the Jews would reject Him. Oh, there would come a 3 hour period of darkness during which time He would suffer the wrath of His Father, but apart from that climactic period of His sufferings the sun would rise and the world would be lightened again.

This is one of the factors, you know, that prevents men from knowing that they're in the dark. The sun still shines and even the moon and the stars illuminate the night. And by common grace men have continued since the time of Christ to make great advancements in knowledge. How, a lost soul may argue, can you say we're in the dark when we've made so many discoveries in terms of fighting diseases and we've built so many things in terms of tall buildings, and cars and planes that can go long distances in short periods of time. How can you suggest that man is in the dark?

When we get into the next chapter which zooms in on the single miracle of Christ healing a blind man, the Pharisees will ask at the end of that chapter *Are we blind also?* And Christ will answer *If ye were blind, ye should have no sin: but now ye say, We see; therefore your sin remaineth*. They couldn't and they wouldn't see their sin. They viewed man the same way that atheists and Christ-deniers view man today – he's enlightened. He sees. And because they couldn't see their sin, their spiritual blindness remained and they were in darkness, in spite of the light of nature shining all around them and in spite of the presence of Christ in their midst.

This is the kind of darkness that Christ delivers you from. It's the darkness of sin, the darkness of pride, the darkness of sin's dominion and sin's guilt. It's the darkness of not seeing your true condition before God. And it's this kind of darkness that keeps you from seeing the beauty and glory and provision of Christ's atoning death. I wonder this morning – have you come to see your true spiritual condition before God? Have you seen the guilt

of your sin? The Jews that visited Jerusalem on the Day of Pentecost would come to see their spiritual condition, and the evidence that they saw their sin was manifested by the way they cried out *men and brethren what shall we do?* (Acts 2:37). There's the cry of a people who have seen the light. And not only do they see the light that reveals their sin but they see the light of Christ's atoning death. Now all of a sudden, that death is much more than just another tragic crucifixion. Now they see that this tragic crucifixion of Christ was, in fact, the plan of the ages. Now they see Christ as their substitute. Now they see salvation in Christ and in Christ alone. This is what it means to see the Light.

Have you seen that light? Have you seen your sins and have you seen Christ as the Savior of sinners? When people see this light then they follow Christ and they gain deliverance from the darkness of sinful man's pride and guilt. *He that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life.* He'll have the light of eternal life. He'll have the light of sins forgiven. He'll have the light of assurance of heaven. Have you seen that light? The evidence for a man seeing that light is that such a man finds himself compelled to follow Christ.

I love the way this is illustrated in Mt. 10 where you have the account of Christ healing a blind man. Listen to these words from Mt. 10:51,52 *And Jesus answered and said unto him, What wilt thou that I should do unto thee? The blind man said unto him, Lord, that I might receive my sight. 52 And Jesus said unto him, Go thy way; thy faith hath made thee whole. And immediately he received his sight, and followed Jesus in the way.* Are you compelled to follow Him? Have you received the Light of Life from Him?

So this is the first compelling reason to follow Christ – He is the Light of the world. As I pointed out earlier, however, the Pharisees rejected Him and viewed His claim not only as uncorroborated but also as false. And another heated argument takes place during which Christ substantiates His claim to being the Light of the world. And in the process He gives more compelling arguments for following Him. So we see next that we should follow Him:

II. Because His Record of Himself is Substantiated

Verse 13 records for us the Pharisees objection to Christ's statement of being the Light of the world. Look at what it says: *The Pharisees therefore said unto him, Thou bearest record of thyself; thy record is not true.* This was not the first time the Pharisees had challenged Christ this way.

You may recall from our study of chp. 5 where we have the account of Christ healing the man who had been paralyzed for 38 years that Christ substantiated His claim to deity with a reasoning process that resembled a court room setting. Christ calls forth, as it were, 4 additional witnesses to His claim to be equal with God. There was the witness of John the Baptist; There was the witness of His supernatural works; There was the witness of His Father, whose voice they had heard at His baptism; And there was the witness of Scripture.

Now in His defense He notes that He alone is qualified to bear witness of Himself. Note the words of v. 14: *Though I bear record of myself, yet my record is true: for I know whence I came, and whither I go; but ye cannot tell whence I come, and whither I go.* This is another point that John makes in his prologue to his gospel. Jn. 1:18 *No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him.* The word *declared* means literally *to exegete*. Christ alone can explain God.

There's a sense, then, in which those that were judging Christ were totally unqualified to judge Him. This is the point Christ makes when He says *for I know whence I came, and whither I go but ye cannot tell whence I come, and whither I go.* Christ knows His Father. Christ alone has that first-hand knowledge of God that enables Him to make the claim that He's the Light of the world.

But then Christ goes even further by drawing from the law of Moses that required more than just Christ's single voice making His claim. The Mosaic law called for 2 witnesses and so Christ on this occasion draws from the argument He'd used earlier back in chp. 5 by making reference again to His Father. *I am one that bear witness of myself, and the Father that sent me beareth witness of me* (8:18).

The Pharisees then again demonstrated that they couldn't see and reason beyond this present evil world. They had no spiritual capacity to understand what Christ meant. Their blindness is made apparent when they ask Christ in v. 19 *Where is thy Father?* I'm reminded by this question of the distress of the Psalmist in Psalm 42. Ps. 42:3 *My tears have been my meat day and night, while they continually say unto me, Where is thy God?* This is the kind of spirit the Pharisees were demonstrating when asked Christ *Where is thy Father.* They had no knowledge of Christ or of His Father so neither Christ or His Father's witness of His Son carried any weight with the Pharisees.

Here, then, we add weight to the sense of compulsion we should have to follow Christ. He has firsthand knowledge of God because it was His Father in heaven who sent Him. And His detractors are obviously governed by their prejudice against Him. Don't we find this to be the case in our day? His rejecters are prejudiced against Him. We don't, of course, expect them to admit this. Many of them think they're open minded and objective. We know better. We know better because the Bible tells us that *the carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be* (Rom. 8:7). And *the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned* (1Cor. 2:14).

So the Pharisees, and the modern skeptics and Christ-rejecters of our day share something in common. Actually they share a couple of things in common. They're unqualified to judge Christ and they're biased against Christ. Do you see how this adds to the weight of the argument that you should follow Christ? He is the Light of the world and He alone is qualified to make that claim. And His claim is validated by His works, by the witness of John the Baptist, by His Father, and by the Scriptures. Don't you find yourself compelled to follow Him with all your heart this morning?

There is one more compelling argument for following Christ found in His dispute with the Pharisees. We should follow Christ:

III. Because of the Terrible Consequences of Our Failure to Follow Him

The words of v. 21 are very solemn and they present a serious warning to us all but especially to the person who refuses to follow Christ. *Then said Jesus again unto them, I go my way, and ye shall seek me, and shall die in your sins: whither I go, ye cannot come.* When you add v. 24 to this verse you see what a strong emphasis Christ places on this warning: *I said therefore unto you, that ye shall die in your sins: for if ye believe not that I am he, ye shall die in your sins.*

I don't know if there's a more heart-rending phrase in all the Bible than the phrase *die in your sins*. To die in your sins, you see, is to bear the guilt of your sins. It will take all eternity for you to bear that guilt. Indeed, bearing that guilt will become your everlasting portion. But not only will you bear the guilt of your sins but you'll continue forever under sin's dominion. To die in your sins, you see, means that you're left in your sins.

This to me is one of the most frightful things about hell. Hell is a place of torment and punishment. It is a place of darkness. It's described as a lake of fire. And that picture is indeed a terrible picture. But even while you're here in this present evil world, God keeps restraints on sin. This world, as bad as it is, is not as bad as it could be. Indeed, there are things that may still be enjoyed in this present world. But in hell, you could say that sin reaches its full potential. There is no restraining grace in hell.

This is one of the reasons why hell is forever, you see. We sometimes have the mistaken notion that in hell sin stops and punishment begins. Were that the case one might hope that after so long a time man could pay the penalty for his own sins even if it took hundreds or thousands of years. But one of the reasons that hell is forever is because sin is forever. To die in your sins, you see, is not to gain deliverance from your sins through death. Oh no – you continue in your sins – you're given over to your sins – you must continue under sin's dominion since you chose that dominion over Christ.

And the irony of such a place that's described as *outer darkness* is the irony of having the light so close, and yet that light is rejected. Here is Christ announcing that He's the Light of the world. Here is Christ graciously communicating the promise that those who follow Him can be delivered from the darkness and can have the light of life.

So how will it be for you this morning men and women and boys and girls? Do you find yourself compelled to follow Christ? You have every reason to feel that compelling force. He is the Light of the world. His claims have been substantiated by His life and death and resurrection. The failure to follow Him will only lead to dying in your sins.

The contrast couldn't be greater – you can have the light of life or you can die in your sins. Isn't the right choice obvious? The Lord through the prophet Ezekiel asks *Why will ye die, O house of Israel.* I'd raise that question to each one here this morning – why will you die, when you can have the light of life? It's right before you and is offered to you. Oh

may you hear the gracious words of Christ spoken to your own soul - *I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life.*