

Do You Need Jesus Yet?

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This morning we have celebrated that Jesus Christ is the cornerstone. He is that which all of our life is to be build upon. We've celebrated that and in just a moment we're going to be challenged by the word of God to make that a reality not just in this place but in every space of our life. Every day that we wake up, we are encouraged by a world that wants us to build our life on something other than Jesus Christ and we're going to see today what does it look like, what does it actually look like if Jesus Christ is the cornerstone of your life. And so I want us to pray that as we come to the word of God, that it will be more than just a celebration of the fact but will embrace the challenge that his word has for us.

Let's pray.

Lord, as we come to this time where we open your word not to hear the opinion of the latest poll or the voice of the latest trend but, Lord, you're timeless infallible word, Lord, I pray that this would be more than letters on the page, that you would take these words and somehow as only your Holy Spirit can do, you would supernaturally not just apply them to our lives but you would burn them into our lives so that we can truly say and we can truly live that Jesus Christ is our cornerstone, that which every aspect of our life is built upon. Lord, we recognize you're going to challenge us. Now Lord, I pray as we open your word we would embrace the challenge. It is in the name of Jesus Christ we pray. Amen.

This morning I want to encourage you to either open or turn on your Bible to the Gospel of John 8, and as you turn to John 8, for those of you that are guests with us today, many of you who are just embracing the new fall semester at a university somewhere in our neighborhood, or maybe you haven't been with us in a while, we are very slowly and systematically walking through the Gospel of John but we have a destination, we have a goal, and that goal is John 15 where Jesus makes this statement, he says, "I am the vine and you are the branches. He who abides in me and I in him shall bear much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing." And we're very systematically making our way toward John 15 to embrace and to understand what does that really mean in our lives.

Today we come to John 8 and it's not a passage that is in isolation. In fact, what we're going to see in John 8:12 is there is a context that must be dealt with for, in fact, if you begin in chapter 7 of the Gospel of John, Jesus makes his way to the Feast of Tabernacles, a time period of celebration in his culture's context where all of the families

would have been gathered, all of the men would have been gathered, but Jesus was not welcomed. In fact, there are many that were there setting a trap for him, not just a trap of his words but the trap of his life. And there is turmoil and there is debate and there is discussion all the way through the Feast of Tabernacles and there is kind of this climax at the end of chapter 7 where a man of the Sanhedrin, a man by the name of Nicodemus, the one who came to Jesus by night in chapter 3, even offers up the idea that even though Jesus is speaking that which is so different than they've heard for years, maybe he ought to be heard out. And his cohorts and those that were among him, began to even question where his allegiance lie.

Then we move into the story of the woman who was caught in the very act of adultery and those who despised Jesus and those that wanted him written out of their culture, they tried to pin him into the corner: does he obey the law of Moses, does he obey the law of Caesar? When you come to chapter 8, beginning in verse 12 of the Gospel of John, there is this discussion that takes place and Jesus is beginning to expound on who he is and those that are in attendance, they're arguing with him, they're debating with him, because in the context of everything, the question ultimately is this: who is Jesus and how do we properly respond to him?

Today in chapter 8 of the Gospel of John, I just want to read one very simple verse. In fact, many of you may have it memorized. I hope that you do. It's the second of the seven famous "I am" statements in the Gospel of John. In the midst of all this, in verse 12 it says,

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

Some years ago, I had the opportunity, in fact I had the privilege, I found myself on the other side of the globe. I found myself in a situation where I was working among a people who socioeconomically very different than our culture today. I found myself in a situation where desperation and being destitute were probably some of the best adjectives of the culture. And as I began to work with these individuals on the other side, one of the things that I discovered is when it came to the things of God's word, when it came to the person of Jesus Christ, I saw something in them that I don't see very often in our culture. I saw desperation, I saw those that were destitute, I saw families that would walk for hours just to hear the word of God. I saw individuals that were willing to give up the comforts of their life, willing to give up even their jobs for the sake of the person of Jesus Christ. I remember as I was there and I was taking all this in, there was a pastor that I was working with and he had been to the states and I asked him, I said, "Sir, we don't see this very often in our culture. We don't see people so desperate for the things of God they'll allow everything else to go by the wayside." I said, "I wish I could see that where I'm from. Why is it so prevalent here? Why do you have people that are willing to give up anything and everything for the sake of Jesus? And we have a hard time getting people just to give up 30 minutes to an hour? What's the difference? What can happen? How do I take what's here and it is transferred there?" I'll never forget what this pastor shared with

me. He said, "Jeff, I've been to where you live. I've been into those areas." He said, "Let me tell you what I think." He said, "I think the difference lies in this: where you live you want Jesus, where I live, we need him."

What an indictment of our faith. What an indictment of our faith because let's be honest with each other today: most of us, Jesus is the icing on our cake. We've got life planned out. We know where things are headed and we pretty much have an idea of where we want to be and what we want to do and where we want to go, and it would sure be great if Jesus would throw a little blessing on top of that. But yet what he was sharing is that desperation came with the fact that Jesus wasn't just what they wanted, it was who they needed. So I want to ask you somewhat of a rhetorical question: when you look at the world today, when you look at your life, when you look at our culture, I want you to ask yourself this question, do you need Jesus yet? Because what we're beginning to see in our culture is the erosion thereof, and the days have long gone by where we can just make Jesus the icing on our cake. What we need an infusion of in our life today is Jesus doesn't need to be that which we throw on top of our life, he needs to be everything to our life.

When he comes in John 8 to these people who have all kinds of issues, he makes this simple statement, "I am the light of the world. He that follows me shall not walk in darkness but have the light of life." How do we take that simple yet profound statement and how does that get infused into our world? I think the first thing we need to understand is that Jesus' world was not much different than ours. In fact, one of the things I'll share with you, it was a powder keg of a culture. In fact, what you saw was tension that was in the air. You saw animosity running rampant. It was a culture that could be marked by division. They were divided according to rule.

Think about this: Rome ruled the day. There was that which was located in Rome, a man by the name of Caesar. Not only did he rule the entire geographical world, but he believed that he was of a deity characteristic. He was a god, so to speak. He believed in his divinity and all roads led to Rome. And when you make your way to what we know as the Promised Land or the place of Israel or Canaan, that place that we talk about so often in this context, it wasn't the fact that Caesar was so far removed, but there were other individuals such as Herod and Pilate who had the stamp of Rome all on the territory. But on the other side, there was this division because this was the Promised Land. This was the place where the Jewish people had come after 40 years of wilderness. This was the place that God said would be their home and they had a leadership structure and Rome had a leadership structure and you kind of see this come to a head in the Gospel of John when Pilate stands before these rulers and says, "I find no fault in him." And what did the rulers of the Jewish people say? "Crucify him! Crucify him!"

There was this division between the Jewish people and the Roman law but it even went further than that. It wasn't just a division of rule, it was also a division of religion. You know, when you begin to read through particularly the Gospel accounts, there are two names that rise to the surface: we have the Pharisees and we have the Sadducees. These were the individuals who were the ruling body of Jesus' day. They made a part of a group

known as the Sanhedrin, 72 men who would make the decision for the Jewish people, not only politically but religiously.

Now, I want you to see if this sounds familiar to our world today. A group of 72 men, 36 on each side that so violently disagreed with each other they got absolutely nothing done. Does that sound familiar? You see, our world is not a whole lot different than Jesus' world when he made this statement. In fact, the Pharisees and Sadducees had such a division because the Pharisees believed that there was a resurrection unto life. The Pharisees believed that there was more to life after you breathed your last breath on earth, but the Sadducees believed that the years that you got, that was all there was. So can you see how much difference there would be in the decisions that were made: one of them is making a decision for the afterlife, the other one is making the decision for just this life.

So whether the division was between the Jewish people and Rome or among the Jewish leaders themselves, it was a culture, it was a powder keg of tension. But today, let's be honest with ourselves, not just in the world of politics, not just in the world of religion, Jesus' world was also a world that was divided by race. You see, the Jewish people believed that they held the card of supremacy. They believed that everybody who was of a different shade, everybody that was of a different color, everybody that was of a different background, was somehow, some way, substandard to them. In fact, so much so that when Jesus would entertain folks such as Zaccheus, I don't know why I'm partial to him, just look up and you'll understand why. But there's Zaccheus coming out of the sycamore tree, a man who had stolen from his community, was the right arm of this Roman government, Jesus goes into his house and what did the religious people say? "Why would you eat with sinners?" Let me put that in our language, "Why would you have a meal with somebody from the other side of the tracks?"

You see, they were divided more than just the religious ideology, they were divided by their skin color, they were divided by their backgrounds. They despised the Gentiles but they hated the Samaritans. You see, the Samaritans, that was an individual who had one parent as a Gentile, one as a Jewish person, and they were what we would call a hybrid, so to speak. And they hated them, they despised them. Why? They saw them as the agents of compromise. So Jesus tells a parable known as the parable of the Good Samaritan. I'm sure you know it well. He tells the story of a man who is robbed and left for dead. He needs physical attention. He most likely needs economic attention and, yes, even spiritual attention. Jesus tells the story of a priest, one who was religious, most likely would have been connected to the Sanhedrin, the one who had the law of Moses at his fingertips. What does Jesus say? That he walks to him, sees him in his condition, so despises him for his background, his culture and who he is, not only will he not help him, he walks to the other side of the road so as to avoid him.

You see, the word is not there in Scripture but it's in our culture today, it's this word that we use called supremacy. Oh, it was there. You see, they were a culture that believed that everybody was under them and they were supreme to everybody else. What did Jesus do? Jesus shows up on the scene and he says, "I am the light of the world." And what he's doing, he's demonstrating the power that he has in this powder keg of a culture that we so

desperately need to be a part of our lives today. What does that mean when he says, "I am the light of the world"? Well, the first thing, he's revealing the source. He says, "I am." What Jesus is doing, he is invoking a title that's reserved for God and God alone. Seven times in the Gospel of John, seven times he says, "I am." He is the light of the world. He says he's the resurrection and the life. Seven different times but when you hear that statement, we've got to go back to the book of Exodus, we've got to go back to when Moses was wandering in the wilderness. By the way, not wandering with the Israelites, wandering by himself.

He had been cast out of Egypt. He had murdered a man and run from the consequences. He is on the backside of nowhere tending the flocks of his father-in-law when all of a sudden he comes upon this bush that is burning but it is not being consumed. The Lord communicates to him not just to take his shoes off because it's holy ground, but that 400 years of slavery is about to come to an end, 400 years of bondage is about to be removed. He says, "Moses, I've enlisted you to do it."

Well, over the course of discussion, eventually Moses says, "Whoa, whoa, whoa, God, hold on. When I show up and tell them this plan you've got, I don't even know to tell them who sent me. What do I say?" Remember what he says? He says, "Tell them I AM THAT I AM sent you."

On the other side of the equation in John 18:5, Jesus is in the garden of Gethsemane just hours before his crucifixion. He's there praying and according to Matthew 26, three times he goes into the garden and Peter, James and John are commissioned to pray with him but they get tired. They're by the wayside. So after three times of prayer, the Bible records that 500 individuals show up, 500. They've got swords. They've got staves. It's a militia, so to speak. They arrive and Judas Iscariot is their leader. You know about that famous kiss of betrayal. When they come up to him they say, "Are you Jesus of Nazareth?" Do you remember what he says? "I am." Do you remember the response? All 500 of them fall backwards on that hill.

So whether it's in Exodus 3 that at the name of the Lord himself, 400 years of bondage and slavery will be removed, or at the name, 500 people are instantly taken back, here in John 8 when Jesus says, "I am the light of the world," he's invoking his deity, his source, that he is God in flesh and that he is capable, he is able, he has the ability to do more than all the powers of the world combined.

He not only demonstrates the power of his source, of his deity, but also his substance. Listen, he says, "I am the light of the world." Think about that. Back in Genesis, the third verse of your Bible and God said, "Let there be light and the light shined out of the darkness." You go to the last chapter of your Bible and it says in that famous place known as New Jerusalem there is no need for the sun because Jesus is the light thereof.

Think about the qualities and the aspect of what light does. Light exposes what is actually there and it dismisses the darkness that is present. Even in the darkest of rooms when you shine the faintest of light, over the course of time it will expose the entire space to the

light. Yet when Jesus says, "I am the light of the world," think about it, when we begin to take a light and we concentrate its power. You know, you can go to the store today and you can buy a spotlight and it's interesting how we qualify those spotlights: a million candle watt power. I've seen two million candle watt power. And I know there's an algorithm and I know there's a formula to that, but have you ever thought what it would actually look like if they actually took a million candles and lit them all? What would it actually look like? But that's what they claim because when you take that light and you concentrate it in an area such as that, the intensity illuminates through the midst of the darkness. What is Jesus saying? He's saying not only, "I am, I'm God in flesh, I'm the light of the world." Jesus is saying that he exposes all that is everywhere. He dismisses the darkness.

You know, the scientific world today will tell us that they are able to take light and concentrate it in such a form that that light has the capacity to cut, that light has the capacity to heal, in some cases that light has the capacity to do so much when it's concentrated and so when we discover Jesus Christ is the light of our life, when he is concentrated in our life, when he is consecrated in our family, when he's concentrated in our community, what do we see? We see not only darkness exposed but we see it dismissed.

And he says, "I am the light," listen to this, "of the world." Think about the scope there. Jesus didn't say, "I'm the light of the Jews." He didn't say, "I'm the light of the Gentiles. I'm the light of the Samaritans." He said, "I'm the light of the world." And so what Jesus was sharing and what we need to hear today is he says he came to light those who stole like Zaccheus. He came to light those who had been improper like the woman caught in adultery. He came to light those who had gotten caught up in religion like Nicodemus. That he came not just for us or for them but he came for the world.

You know, one of the questions I get asked so much as a pastor, particularly in a church such as this, I have individuals come up to me and they mean well and I don't mean any ill by this, just hear me out: people will come to me and they'll say, "Well, pastor, I don't know about becoming a part of such a big church. You know, I'm from a small church and I like a small church. I just don't know. How am I going to like a big church?" And one of the things I say is, "Well, if you're not going to like a big church, you're really not going to like heaven." I mean, think about that for just a moment. When we get there, I mean, there's going to be a lot of people and it's going to be a really big church.

But then sometimes I have these conversations, sometimes people will come to me and say, "Do you know what? Pastor, I know this isn't right but I just need to share my heart. I just don't like going to church with them. Or I don't like going to church with those people." You know, I've got some bad news for most of us in this room. Do you realize that one day when you step foot into the place the Bible calls heaven, the majority of the people who believed on Jesus are not white. And there went the crickets. You do realize that? And the majority of the people who step into heaven, their first language on earth was not English. And so when Jesus says, "I came to be the light of the world," how dare we say, "I don't want to be with them." How dare we say, "I don't want to be with those

people." Why? Because Jesus said, "I'm the light of the world." I've got news for those of you who look like me on earth, when we show up to heaven, we now become the definite minority of what we were on earth.

And Jesus says, aren't you grateful Jesus didn't say, "I came to be the light just for them?" Aren't you grateful Jesus didn't say, "I came to be the light for those." Jesus said, "I came to be the light of the world." That means you and that means me and it doesn't matter what our background is, it doesn't matter what our color is, it doesn't matter what anything is. He says, "Hey, if you're living and you're breathing, I have come to be your light." Notice the scope of that. Not only is he God in flesh illuminating and dismissing but he came for you and he came for me and he came for everybody. So none of us have the right to say, "Well, I am better than or supreme or more than," because Jesus said, "I came to be the light of the world."

Then he makes us a promise. I want you to notice the last half of this verse. Actually he makes promises. "He who follows me shall not walk in darkness but shall have the light of life." Now notice the promises of Jesus are conditional. He says, "He who follows me." Now I grew up in a home that at least professionally speaking was made up of two professions. I grew up in a home with a lifelong educator, schoolteacher and eventual college professor, and the home of a pharmacist. Now, those of you that are new and haven't heard this, allow me to introduce you to my background. When I grew up in the home of a teacher and a pharmacist, you know, we were of the understanding that every problem known to man could either be solved with a pill or a program. I mean, seriously, we got it covered there. But Jesus says the cure to the problem isn't a pill, the cure to the problem isn't a program, he says, "but he who follows me," and the thing that we need to make very clear today is this: that no matter what the problem is, no matter what the struggle is, no matter what the tension is, no matter what the darkness of our world is whether it's a personal addiction, a struggle, or if it's a community wide cultural war, that the solution and the answer is no more or no less than Jesus Christ himself.

He says, "He who follows me," because, you see, when you come to the understanding that you are a sinful depraved creature, when you come to the understanding that in your sin you not only deserve but, yes, you deserve death but that Jesus in his love commended his love toward us that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us, we understand, we grasp the idea that when we acknowledge our sinfulness and when we acknowledge our need for Jesus, then not only does the sin problem get forgiven and taken care of, but all the other issues begin to crumble under his grace and his mercy.

You see, he promises, "He who follows me." Jesus made it very clear to a culture that was divided, a culture that was struggling with politics, a culture that as struggling with religion, a culture that was struggling with race, he said, "The answer is not them and the answer is not those and the answer is not this and the answer is not that," he said, "the answer is whoever follows me will walk in light and not in darkness."

So his promise is conditional that he is the answer and the solution but we also see that change is going to happen because it says whoever follows him, whoever walks in his

way, will not walk in darkness. In other words, the darkness and the sin and the depravity of humanity both individually and corporately will be just as light in a room, it will be dismissed and eradicated.

You know, my wife and I, our first dwelling that we had as a married couple, typical first dwelling, very meager, very humble. It was a duplex and so we shared a common wall with a neighboring family and we became friends with them and vice versa. It was a wonderful situation. But one day the neighbor came and he said, "Jeff, we've got kind of an issue happening that I think you need to be aware of," because our kitchens backed up to each other. His sink backed up to my sink, etc. etc. And he said, "We're having an issue with some bugs." And I said, "What do you mean we're having an issue with some bugs? Are we having ants? I mean, what are we having here?" He said, "No," and you know what's coming, right? The only bug to survive the Ice Age, we've got some cockroaches. Now, I'm from the state of Texas and those boys wore saddles out there. We're talking some big old things, alright? And he said, "Jeff, we've got them. I'm hoping they won't come to your side but I just want you to know."

A couple of nights later, I made my way into the kitchen and I heard the sound, do you know what that sound is? If you've never heard that sound, then you've never been poor and newly married and living in a house like this. But I heard that sound and I heard the little...oh, it's awful because you know what it is. And I knew, I just couldn't imagine what it was going to look like and I went over to the wall in the middle of the night and I flipped the switch. Do you know what happened when the light came on in the kitchen? Gone. I mean, everything...I mean, they were at the Meyers family buffet. I mean, they were like, "Man, we've got all the food we need here. We're good." They were just hanging out enjoying themselves until the light came on and when the light came on, they were dismissed.

I've got news for you: when Jesus said he is the light of the world, he that follows him shall not walk in darkness, do you realize that's the only way that addiction really gets removed from our lives is when Jesus is the light of our life? That's the way the struggles and the tensions and the discord in our lives and our community get eradicated because when the light of Jesus Christ enters into the situation, listen, the darkness must flee. What does he say? "He that follows me shall not walk in darkness but have the light of life."

You know, when Jesus not just in our lives but in our community, in our culture, when we allow him to have the preeminence, when we allow him to be the focus, when we allow him not just to be the icing on our cake, not only does he bring change in our life as the darkness is dismissed from our life but the culture changes as well. Notice Jesus says, "the light of life." You and I who live in a culture that has as its undercurrent a culture of death, think about the television shows, think about the movies, think about the commercials in between, the death of human life, the death of dreams, the death of hope, the death of ambition. Everywhere we turn, there is this undergirding concept and theme of death but what does Jesus say? I've come to bring them life. In fact, in two chapters, life that we may have it more abundantly. In a world that is increasingly becoming more

and more dark and obsessed with death, Jesus says, "If you allow me to be the light of your world, the darkness will be dismissed and the culture of death will be replaced by the culture of life."

So again, I want to revisit that question I began the message with: do you need Jesus yet? Because a lot of us in this room and some of us in this room believe that if we just get a little smarter, or we get a little more creative, or maybe if we just take it from a different approach, all those things have been tried. What we need in our lives, what we need in our culture, what we need in our communities is we don't need another program, we don't need another this or another that, what we need is Jesus to be the light of our lives and to be the light of all of our lives because when he is the light of the world, the darkness flees and the culture rather than becoming one of death becomes one of life.

Let's pray.

With our heads bowed and our eyes closed, you know, maybe you're that person today, maybe you're seated here for the first time or you've been here a thousand times, and maybe today you realize that though you thought everything was headed in the right direction, your life can best be described as being dark and you realize today that all the creative planning and all the ideas just produce different shades of darkness and what you really understand today is you need Jesus to be the light of your life. I've got some great news for you. You don't have to sign up for a program. You don't have to take a bunch of classes. You just need to have a real serious conversation with God. Oftentimes we call this prayer. You don't have to say it out loud, you don't even have to have this conversation with the same words or the same way that I would, but if I were you today and I was in that situation, my conversation with God might sound a little something like this. "God, I just want to admit, I just want to confess that though it had all the appearances of something else, I've been walking in darkness. I've been living a life of darkness but I understand today and I believe today that Jesus can be the light of my life. God, I believe today that Jesus loved me so much that he was willing to be born on my behalf; that Jesus loved me so much he was willing to live a sinless life on my behalf; Jesus loved me so much he was willing to take on the punishment of the cross on my behalf; and Jesus loved me so much that three days later he rose from the dead so I could be forgiven and I could be saved. God, today I don't know all the answers to all the world's problems but I do know that Jesus is the answer to my sin problem. In the best way I know how, I'm asking you to forgive me, I'm asking you to save me. I just want to turn my life over to you."

With our heads still bowed and our eyes still closed, maybe today is the day you had that conversation. We'd love the opportunity to celebrate with you. Or maybe today is the day you recognize that you've been a believer in Jesus for a long time but you've allowed the darkness to creep in, the ideas of the world to creep in, the perspectives of the world to creep in, and you need the light of Jesus to be brighter and more concentrated than it's ever been. Wherever you are today, we just want to celebrate with what God is doing in your life. We just want to have that conversation with you and so we invite you not to a time of condemnation but to a time of celebration.

Lord, as we come to this time in our service, we recognize very clearly that your word says it doesn't return void and so every one of us grasp that there are areas of darkness in our life and so, Lord, I pray that whatever those areas are, those areas of rebellion, those areas in our life that have no business being there, God, I pray that this would be the time that we would turn that over to you, that we would yield to your sovereignty in our life and not ourselves or anyone else. Help us, O God, to respond to you and you alone. It is in the name of Jesus Christ we pray. Amen.