

Lesson Eleven

(John 8:12-30)

The Greek word *phos*, meaning a light or radiance, is used 21 times in the gospel of John. And each time it refers to Jesus, the Son of God, who is the true Light of the world.

Jesus the Light of the World

(John 8:12-20)

¹²Jesus spoke to the Pharisees again. "I am the light of the world," he said. "Whoever follows me will have the light of life and will never walk in darkness."

¹³The Pharisees said to him, "Now you are testifying on your own behalf; what you say proves nothing."

¹⁴"No," Jesus answered, "even though I do testify on my own behalf, what I say is true, because I know where I came from and where I am going. You do not know where I came from or where I am going. ¹⁵You make judgments in a purely human way; I pass judgment on no one. ¹⁶But if I were to do so, my judgment would be true, because I am not alone in this; the Father who sent me is

with me. ¹⁷It is written in your Law that when two witnesses agree, what they say is true. ¹⁸I testify on my own behalf, and the Father who sent me also testifies on my behalf."

¹⁹"Where is your father?" they asked him.

"You know neither me nor my Father," Jesus answered. "If you knew me, you would know my Father also."

²⁰Jesus said all this as he taught in the Temple, in the room where the offering boxes were placed. And no one arrested him, because his hour had not come.

From 3100 to 2600 B.C. the Egyptians had stressed their belief that each of their pharaohs was actually a divine son of the sun-god Horus and was, therefore, a mediator between the people and the gods. After 2600 A.D. each pharaoh also received the title, "the son of Re (or Ra)" after the sun-god which became more popular than Horus. The common people continued to accept the pharaoh as the embodiment of the sun-god. So the pharaohs used this superstition to their own advantage by centralizing the government and unifying the people.

By 1500 A.D. the Egyptians worshiped not only the chief sun-god, Re, but also Kheprer (god of the rising sun) and Atum (god of the sunset). John B. Noss states that "the sun was also a bird and, again, a beetle. As bird he was Horus, the high-flying falcon swiftly spanning the sky. (Indeed, the symbol most often used in all Egypt was simply the widespread wings of the mounting falcon, clearest sign of the rising sun.) More usual was the identification of the sun-god with the scarab or sacred dung-beetle. Here the Egyptian peasant with nimble imagination transferred to the sky his observation of the diligent scarab rolling along the ground the ball of dung in which it was placing its eggs; he thought of the sun as a huge ball rolled along by a mighty sky-beetle, whose name was Kheprer (or Khopri). It was common in later days for the figure of the scarab to be incised on seals, shown in amulets, or placed on the foreheads of the statues of kings; there was life and protection in it, and by it the power of death and darkness was held at bay" (*Man's Religions*, 5th ed., N.Y.: Macmillan Publishing Co., 1974, p. 39).

The ancient Hebrews, surrounded by such sun worshipers, nevertheless avoided those superstitions. But the concept of light remained important, for "in the beginning when God created the universe, the earth was formless and desolate. The raging ocean that covered everything was engulfed in total darkness, and the power of God was moving over the water. Then God

commanded, 'Let there be light' — and light appeared. God was pleased with what he saw. Then he separated the light from the darkness, and he named the light 'Day' and the darkness 'Night.' Evening passed and morning came — that was the first day" (Genesis 1:1-5). Physical light, then, is a gift of God. "You are the source of all life and because of your light we see the light" (Psalm 36:9).

Similarly, spiritual light is a gift from God. "No longer will the sun be your light by day or the moon be your light by night; I, the Lord, will be your eternal light; the light of my glory will shine on you" (Isaiah 60:19-20). That prophecy was fulfilled when Jesus became a human and lived among men. Jesus further clarifies his statements here in 8:12-16 when he later says, "I have come into the world as light, so that everyone who believes in me should not remain in the darkness. If anyone hears my message and does not obey it, I will not judge him. I came, not to judge the world, but to save it. Whoever rejects me and does not accept my message has one who will judge him. The words I have spoken will be his judge on the last day!" (12:46-48).

Instead of asking "Where is your father?" the Jews might just as well ask, "Who is your father?" For Jesus leaves no doubt that they do not really know God, although they appear to be worshiping and serving him in their ceremonies. But any ritual is meaningless unless one understands its symbolism and unless one is in tune with God himself.

In 8:20 John mentions where this discussion takes place. We know that the offering boxes were located in the Court of the Women (between the Court of the Gentiles and the Court of the Priests). The thirteen large offering boxes were called "The Trumpets," because they looked somewhat like the ancient trumpets (narrow at the top and spreading out at the bottom). The temple tax went into the first two boxes. An offering related to purification went into the third and fourth boxes. Offerings for the cost of wood for the altar fire went into the fifth box. Donations for the cost of the incense went into the sixth box. Offerings to help with the upkeep of the golden vessels were placed in the seventh box. And they placed any remaining donations into any of the other six collection boxes.

There are a few churches today in evangelical circles which have an offering box in the foyer or at some other convenient spot. This eliminates the time, noise, and bother of passing collection plates among the congregation.

Many Believe in Him

(John 8:21-30)

²¹Again Jesus said to them, "I will go away; you will look for me, but you will die in your sins. You cannot go where I am going."

²²So the Jewish authorities said, "He says that we cannot go where he is going. Does this mean that he will kill himself?"

²³Jesus answered, "You belong to this world here below, but I come from above. You are from this world, but I am not from this world. ²⁴That is why I told you that you will die in your sins. And you will die in your sins if you do not believe that 'I Am Who I Am'."

²⁵"Who are you?" they asked him.

Jesus answered, "What I have told you from the very beginning. ²⁶I have much to say about you, much to condemn you for. The one who sent me, however, is truthful, and I tell the world only what I have heard from him."

²⁷They did not understand that Jesus was talking to them about the Father. ²⁸So he said to them, "When you lift up the Son of Man, you will know that I do nothing on my own authority, but I say only what the Father has instructed me to say. ²⁹And he who sent me is with me; he has not left me alone, because I always do what pleases him."

³⁰Many who heard Jesus say these things believed in him.

Paul Butler says, "In verse 21 the Lord looks forward to His 'exodus' from this world and His return to the right hand of the Father. There will come a time when many of the Jews now standing about Him will cry out in the hour of their death for the Messiah and the prophesied deliverance of the Messiah. Such a time actually came in 70 A.D. at the destruction of Jerusalem by the Roman legions. Millions of Jews were besieged within the walls of that city at Passover-time and suffered indescribable torments. Josephus, a Jewish general then captive of the Roman army, wrote a history of this terrible conflict, and said the lamentations of the people within the city exceeded even the noise of the battle! He also relates that there were many false Christs in the city at that time. People followed them in desperation, hoping until the terrible end for a Messiah to deliver them from the Romans. But many thousands died 'in their sin.' His words would be applicable, of course, to any of these Jews who, having come by any manner or at any time to their hour of death seeking the Messiah, had rejected Jesus as the Christ. Christ's warning here is for all mankind. There is only one end for

men who deny Christ. They shall die in their sin" (*The Gospel of John*, II, 49).

The Jewish authorities mistakenly guess that Jesus is speaking of committing suicide (8:21-22). Those who are intent on taking their own lives will probably not allow the scriptures to stand in their way, but we should realize that there is no "approved example" anywhere in the New Testament of any apostle or any disciple taking his own life. Judas committed suicide, but the Bible paints that as a tragic climax to an evil man. There is not the slightest hint in the New Testament that we have the right to end our own earthly life, no matter how difficult the circumstances.

In 8:23-24 Jesus informs them of his heavenly origin. Jesus only lived upon our planet about 33 years. Prior to his miraculous birth to Mary at Bethlehem, he "already existed; he was with God, and he was the same as God. From the very beginning the Word was with God. Through him God made all things; not one thing in all creation was made without him. The Word was the source of life, and this life brought light to mankind. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has never put it out" (1:1-5).

Jesus' listeners are still in a mental fog. "Who are you?" they ask (8:25). And the Lord, who knows the motives of every heart and the deeds of every life, tells them that he has been telling them who he is right from the start of his ministry. And because of their continual rejection of him, they are in deep spiritual trouble (8:26).

In the latter part of 8:26, Jesus states a principle which needs to be branded upon the minds of every preacher and every Bible teacher. "The one who sent me . . . is truthful, and I tell the world only what I have heard from him." We must see ourselves as faithful messengers of the written Word, not as inventors or creators of some new message. We must repeat the message without changing it (Ga. 1:6-9; 1 Cor. 2:1-5).

That, however, is not always the case. Someone has defined a "text" as that which a minister preaches from, and often very far from! Too many are like the verbose, self-centered young preacher who came home from seminary and tried to impress the home folks. He later asked one of the elders what he thought of his message. The elder said, "Well, sir, I'll put it in sort of a parable. I remember my first deer hunt, back when I was a boy. I followed the deer all right, but I followed it all day in the wrong direction."

In a time-conscious society like our own, there is no excuse for spending ten minutes telling jokes to warm up an audience and fifteen minutes telling them stories from "Dear Abby" or *Psychology Today*, with a few scriptures thrown in to make it sound "sermonish". Lots of preachers have lost the "thread" of the gospel by looking for "pearls of speech" to put on it. But we want to be like Jesus, who was a faithful messenger.

8:28 reminds us that a crude cross, erected in a spot where such deaths were common, became both a symbol of man's deepest shame and of man's greatest hope. "God has shown us how much he loves us — it was while we were still sinners that Christ died for us!" (Romans 5:8).

So many of the people in this audience believe in Jesus. But what is the depth of that belief? If we are saved, as some assert, by "faith only" then these people are headed for heaven in spite of the fact that they shortly accuse Jesus of having a demon (8:48) and try to stone him to death (8:59). Jesus says, "If you obey my teaching, you are really my disciples . . ." (8:31).

Thought Stimulators on John 8:12-30

1. What does Jesus mean by saying that his followers "will never walk in darkness"?
2. What was different enough about Jesus' own testimony to make it acceptable?
3. What is meant by making judgments "in a purely human way" (8:15-18)?
4. When and by whom was physical light created?
5. What was the primary reason for Jesus coming to earth?
6. What elements are necessary for any ritual to be meaningful?
7. Describe the offering boxes and where they were located.
8. What does it mean to "die in your sins" (8:21)?
9. Is suicide a valid option for a Christian? Why?
10. What is the fundamental responsibility of a preacher or Bible teacher?
11. What was the date of the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans?
12. Where was Jesus before his birth to Mary?
13. What does the symbol of the cross mean to you?
14. What is the true test of whether a person is saved?