

## JESUS, THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD

John 8:12, When Jesus spoke again to the people, he said, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life."

Every morning, when I go down to my basement office, there is one thing I always do first. What do you think it is? I turn on the light switch. There is nothing I can see or do before turning it on. We all know we need this visibility in the physical world. Then, what about our spiritual life? Do we also need visibility in the spiritual world? Yes. In today's key verse, Jesus says, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life." (Jn 8:12) He claims that He is the source of that spiritual visibility. He also promised that if we follow Him we will come out of darkness and live in His light. Ultimately this is possible because Jesus is the Divine God. I pray that God may open our eyes to see God's glory in the Light of Jesus today

### **PART 1: IN THE BEGINNING... WAS THE WORD**

When you read the Bible, you find Jesus has a lot of titles. The most essential one might be the Son of God, the second Person of the Triune God. Coming to John's gospel, in our Seven I-Am series, we are studying the famous seven titles of Jesus. Jesus gave Himself these titles: the bread of life (1<sup>st</sup> title), the light of the world (2<sup>nd</sup> title), the resurrection and the life (5<sup>th</sup> title), and so on. Interestingly though, life, light, and resurrection are not a person, but a thing or an experience. But still John says - the Person of Jesus is all these wonderful things. How? It is possible because *Jesus is the Divine God*. Let's go to the beginning chapter of John. John 1:1a says, "In the beginning was the Word..." Before all these seven titles, the author John also gives Jesus a title, the Word, in the first verse of the book ('title zero'). Here, John claims this Word existed in the beginning. What can exist in the beginning? Only God. So, Jesus, the Word at the beginning must be God.

Then, why did John call Jesus the Word at the beginning, rather than the Divine Son at the beginning? It is important to understand this to unlock Jesus the Light. When we think about the English word, 'word', we all know our words function as the medium through which a person interacts with others. Turn to your neighbor and say, "God bless you. I will buy you lunch." Do you feel that your words carry love and godly influence to the other person? In the same way, *God speaks words to interact with His creation*. Our God speaks words. Then, what was His first word in the Bible to interact with the creation? Let's go to Genesis 1:1,2. "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep..." (Ge 1:1,2a) In the beginning, God began His creation work with His Divine power and will. The first part of creation was the earth. At this point, there was no visibility, and the earth was like a dark empty canvas. Then, in verse 3, God spoke His very first words in the Bible. What are they? "Let there be light!" Immediately, God's first words brought forth light into the dark world, and His brilliant light filled the empty space and expelled darkness. In summary, *God spoke His words, and His words created light. This revealed God's Divine power and brilliance.*

Now, go back to John 1:1a, "In the beginning was the Word..." John's writing mirrors Genesis 1, and it is the author's intention. When John gave this title to Jesus, basically God was saying, "*Through Jesus, I am going to create things for the world, and through Jesus, I am going to interact with the world.*"

*Jesus will reveal the Divine God to the world.”* This Word, Jesus, existed with God before the creation. (Jn 1:2) Indeed, He is the Divine Son. And John 1:14a says, “The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us.” Finally, two thousand years ago, this Word stepped into our world through the Incarnation. Put another way, Jesus the Word was spoken by God into the world. Then, the author John and many others encountered Him.

## **PART 2: THE LIGHT SHINES IN THE DARKNESS**

At the creation moment, God spoke His words - “Let there be light!”, and there was light for the first time in the dark world. God provided the world with the physical visibility and the law of optics. Now, turn to John 1 again. Here, we see the same thing happening in the spiritual realm because Jesus came into the world. Just as there was only darkness before light was created, our humanity had been in deep spiritual darkness before Jesus the Light appeared. Genesis 2 tells us that the first man, Adam enjoyed fellowship with God and lived in God’s glory at the beginning. But sadly, Adam disobeyed and sinned against God and he was kick out of the Garden of Eden in Genesis 3. Sin stripped away the very presence of God in his life. Adam was disconnected from God. Ever since Adam’s Fall, every single person is born into the same destiny (Ro 5:19a). Have you ever seen a baby who naturally knows God without any Christian teaching? We are all born cut off from God due to sin, not aware of the spiritual reality such as heaven and God’s kingdom. Put another way, everyone is born blind spiritually. This is the spiritual darkness in John’s gospel.

In this backdrop, John 1:4 says, “In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.” John says the Word Jesus contains life in Him. *When He came into the world with His life, everyone Jesus touched with His life received light.* This time, the light is mainly spiritual and moral. One moment, a person can be in deep spiritual darkness, not even knowing there is God out there. He might be totally lost, wondering why he should even live. But the next moment, he suddenly opens his spiritual eyes being aware of God and the spiritual world. He can even worship God. What happened? What happened in between is – an encounter with Jesus. As God’s Divine words ‘let there be light’ created light, *encountering Jesus brings spiritual visibility to one’s soul.* As the darkness was expelled by light at the creation, when Jesus says, “I will open your eyes”, there is no way you can keep your eyes closed. The darkness cannot overcome it.

John summarizes his own encounter with the Light this way: “We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth” (Jn 1:14). “No one has ever seen God, but the one and only Son, who is himself God and is in closest relationship with the Father, has made him known” (Jn1:18). Jesus is the Light shining in the dark world. Based on this, Jesus claims in today’s key verse, “I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life” (Jn 8:12). The Light came on earth two thousand years ago, and He can bring forth light into those who receive Him even today.

Jesus as the Light is not just theology but also a concrete reality that numerous people have experienced. That’s why the author filled his book with the stories of people who encountered the Light. At the core of their experiences is this ‘seeing’ experience. First, in Chapter 1, John the Baptist was the intro-man for Jesus the Light. He came as a witness concerning the Light. So, when John saw Jesus, he shouted out in verse 29, “Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!” Then,

two of his own disciples, Andrew and John the author came to Jesus. So, Jesus asked them, “What do you want?”, and He invited them to His place, “Come and you will see” (Jn 1:39). After hearing this, they immediately followed Jesus. Particularly, Andrew found this Jesus as the Christ and he was saved. Soon, he brought his brother Peter to Jesus also. The list of such encounters goes on and on, including Philip and Nathanael.

Finally, Jesus’ secret follower, the famous Nicodemus, came to Jesus in chapter 3. Nicodemus was a Pharisee who worked hard to live a religiously pious life. He was also very successful and became a member of the Sanhedrin, the Jewish ruling council. He probably thought all his effort was going to lead him to spiritual clarity and ultimately to God Himself. But it did not. He remained in deep darkness and confusion. He probably sensed that something was seriously lacking in his religious life. So, one night, he came to Jesus and said, “Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God. For no one could perform the signs you are doing if God were not with him.” It seems he at least knew Jesus came from God. So, here Jesus spoke to him, “Very truly I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God unless they are born again” (Jn3:3). In other words, “My friend Nico, you need to receive my life first. Then, you will be able to see God and His kingdom. I am glad that you came to me tonight.” Do you think Nicodemus saw the kingdom of God in the end? I believe Jesus opened Nico’s eyes.

So far, the author has demonstrated - Jesus being the Light is not just theology but also a concrete reality, through the biblical figures. Now, let me ask you this question – ‘is that reality also your reality?’ As Jesus became the Light to Nicodemus, He still shines His light to our souls today. John 1:4b and 9 say, “that life was the light of all mankind. The true light that gives light to everyone was coming into the world.” Do you believe Jesus can be the Light in your soul? Those who have never experienced God, can you believe meeting Jesus will open your spiritual eyes and lead to a personal relationship with God? Those who have been His followers for a while but have sensed darkness or blindness, do you think the light of Jesus can bring a breakthrough in your soul today? I believe these stories in John are given to us, so that we can also experience what they had experienced. So, at this moment, I will ask God to demonstrate it to you. How? I would like to invite you to a 30 second silent prayer to come to Jesus. You can close your eyes for your soul to look at Jesus the Light. I will stop speaking because God’s one word is better than my thousand words. Let us come to Jesus.

### **PART 3: WHOEVER FOLLOWS ME**

When God created light in the physical world, the light propagated through space freely. The light filled the universe, and the creatures were happy to see the world by light. But turn to John 1, and we will find that the spiritual world is a little more complex than the law of optics. When Jesus the Light came into the world, the Light was often bounced off people. Not everyone received Him. John 1:9-11 say, “The true light that gives light to everyone was coming into the world. ...the world did not recognize him. He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him.” Although Jesus came and shone His light to everyone in the world, not everyone was willing to receive Him. Especially, His own Israelites largely rejected Him. This means many deliberately choose to remain in darkness, and Jesus does not open their eyes. It is *people who make a moral choice, which leads either to their spiritual awareness or darkness*. So, Jesus said in the key verse, “I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life” (Jn 8:12).

Soon after this key verse, the author recorded the story of a blind man in John 9. This story is a perfect case in point in explaining this reality of 'whoever follows me'. The man in the passage was born blind. So, Jesus' disciples thought the blindness was a consequence of someone's sin. But Jesus explained it was rather a situation where God can work and display His glory. Then, He claimed again in John 9:5, "While I am in the world, I am the light of the world." Then, Jesus mixed dirt with His saliva and made some mud on the spot. He put it on the man's eyes, and told him, "Go, wash in the Pool of Siloam" (Jn 9:7). The man remarkably obeyed Jesus, and Jesus' power restored his eyes. After this, the man began to spread this miracle story all around.

There was an interesting spin after this though. The story went into the ears of the Pharisees. We know not all Pharisees were Jesus' friends like Nico. Most of them became His enemies ever since Jesus became popular. So, they were always looking for evidence to condemn Jesus. For this, they brought in the formerly blind man to interrogate him. They forced him to discredit Jesus and give a false testimony, "This man is not from God, for he does not keep the Sabbath" (Jn 9:16). But the blind man boldly stayed with what he believed, "He is a prophet!" (Jn 9:17) He could not deny that Jesus opened his blind eyes. Finally, the story reached its climax when the Pharisees summoned the man a second time. They threatened him to confess what they wanted to hear. "Give glory to God by telling the truth. We know this man is a sinner" (Jn 9:24). But the man stood firm with the truth, saying, "Whether he is a sinner or not, I don't know. One thing I do know. I was blind but now I see!" (Jn 9:25) Soon after this, he was excommunicated from the community. It was costly for him to follow the truth.

But the story does not end with this sad ending. Knowing what had happened to the man, Jesus came and found him. Jesus asked him, "Do you believe in the Son of Man?" (Jn 9:35) The Son of Man here is a Messianic title. Jesus saw the man following the truth, even enduring much pain. Now, He decided to reveal Himself as the Messiah. The man replied, "Who is he, sir? Tell me so that I may believe in him" (Jn 9:36). Jesus said, "You have now seen him; in fact, he is the one speaking with you." And the man cried out, "Lord, I believe!", and worshiped Jesus (Jn 9:37,38). Just several days earlier, the man thought Jesus was a prophet, a holy man from God. Now, he sees Jesus as the holy One from God. When the Divine God is revealed to one's soul, the only proper response is worship. This man really opened his spiritual eyes and saw the Divine God in Jesus. All this was possible because the man desired the light and came to the light. "Whoever follows me..."

While Jesus' light was shining bright on this man, in the Pharisees' camp, people dove deeper into darkness. The whole Pharisees' organization was united to get rid of Jesus, because He was gaining power and popularity. Speaking of them, Jesus said in verse 39, "For judgment I have come into this world, so that the blind will see [the blind man] and those who see will become blind [the Pharisees]." Indeed, the Pharisees "saw God" better than others, and they were closer to God than others. Didn't they endlessly read God's word - the Torah of the Old Testament. Didn't they keep track of Jesus' miracles thoroughly? Then, why did they kill Jesus, the Son of God? There are several reasons. But one reason the author gives us is in John 3:19-20. "This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but people loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil. Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that their deeds will be exposed." Underneath the Pharisees' decision to kill the Light was their sick heart. *The Pharisees' hearts pursued darkness.* Their brains knew they were wrong, but their hearts said, 'let's kill the Light to keep our evil deeds in darkness'. This is a warning to us. We should listen carefully to the voice of our hearts. Do you want to stay in darkness sometimes when you can actually see the Light over there? I suggest – sit down calm

and open your heart to Jesus. Talk to Him, listen to Him, and reason with Him. He will shepherd your heart. "Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness..."

Today's passage on the blind man's story took me back to the memory of my personal conversion in 1999. Back then, I was a college freshman dedicated to studying physics. I did not have much Christian background, and my worldview was 100% built on natural science. I thought if God had existed He might be a supercomputer floating in space, fine-tuning the parameters of physics. But one UBF Bible teacher persistently taught me Genesis and the gospel books. In the same year, I attended a summer Bible conference. There, through a drama portraying the crucifixion of Jesus, I had a personal encounter with Jesus. When I accepted Him, I realized something changed inside me. I opened my spiritual eyes and began to have a personal relationship with God. One clear evidence was - how my perspective on people changed after the conversion. I never forget this even now: going to the conference site, sitting in a train station, the people around me looked tired and mundane. Coming back from the conference site, in the same train station, the same people suddenly looked beautiful, lovely, and precious. Something changed in my soul. When I think about today's life though, I realized I should restore this encounter with the Person of Jesus in my day-to-day life. Going through many tasks weekly and worrying about various issues like the economy, the Covid virus, and ministry, my eyes were not focused on who God is. I pray that, each morning, God may draw me near to the Person of Christ to meet Him through God's word and prayer.

In conclusion, through John's gospel, we met Jesus the Light today. Jesus shines His light on all mankind even at this moment. Each day, we have an opportunity to look at His Light and glory. That's how we follow Him. Then, we will all become little lights glowing everywhere in this dark world. May God richly bless our community to look at His glory and worship together to respond to the Light.