

# Seeing the Light

“Keep your eyes open wide.”

John 8:12-16

*First of the series, IM Jesus: instant messages all about the difference Jesus makes*

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## The One

Just at the time when I thought it didn't matter a coworker at my college dorm grill said it and it just felt wrong. She said, "I guess I believe in God; but that *Son of God* idea just has to be a fairy tale." Then something inside me seemed to gasp and I was troubled: troubled because what she said seemed all-at-once so fundamentally wrong. I was sad: sad because she was rejecting the most important relationship you can be given.

I suppose there are different ways to describe a Christian. You could say that a Christian is truthful and upright. A Christian is someone who is filled with compassion and stands for justice. A Christian is law-abiding and lives life according to moral standards. A Christian is generous. A Christian respects others and prays. And all that would be true.

These things are also true of Hindus, Buddhists, Muslims, and Jews, and followers of dozens of other religions. As important as they are, none of those traits are unique to the Christian faith. In fact the only thing that sets Christians apart from anyone else is:

Jesus.

Who Jesus is shapes us and identifies who we are: what we believe and what we do and how we relate to God. That's what my friend didn't know. Jesus: knowing him is the key to both knowing God and knowing ourselves.

## Light

This is who Jesus is. One day he was teaching in the temple and there was a crowd of people around him. Then a commotion interrupted the lesson. I wonder if you could hear the woman in trouble cry, pleading with the men who forced her with brutal,

condemning hands to the place where Jesus sat. It was a contrast: she with her head lowered in shame, standing as one put on trial; and they in their clean robes, head dresses, and prayer shawls, standing all righteous-like and scowling.

A confrontation now: the scribes and Pharisees put it to Jesus – the woman had been caught in the very act of adultery. And they challenged Jesus: the righteous Law of Moses commanded that she be stoned to death. Do away with the sin that fouls the holy community in its disregard for decency and its attack on the family by doing away with the sinner: that was the way of the Law.

Notice: it was only the woman who was condemned. Where was the married man she'd been with, and why wasn't he also on trial?

It was at her expense; but it was really Jesus they were after: Jesus, who was already known for his twists on Moses' Law and his objections to the way they applied it. They wanted to trap him and silence his threat to their authority. "Now," they asked, "Now, what do you say?" Either he'd say Moses' Law is right and all he taught about compassion and forgiveness would collapse; or he'd say the Law was wrong and he'd be exposed as the blasphemer they said he was.

This is who Jesus is. He didn't say anything. He just bent down and started writing something with his finger on the ground. What he wrote, we've never known. He just wrote while they kept pressing him for an answer until he stood up and said: "Let anyone among you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her."

What must have occurred to them while he waited? If we were in the crowd, what would occur to you and me? What lie? What act of selfishness? What curse made or what jealousy harbored? One-by-one they left until there wasn't anyone left to condemn.

Everyone was guilty of something. Then Jesus did the only thing that can straighten anything out: he forgave. Then he told her to start over and live right. Instead of throwing her away like she was worthless, he rescued her. Instead of death, he gave her life.<sup>1</sup>

That's who Jesus is.

That's what my friend didn't know. If Jesus is the light of the world, she was looking the other way. She was hung up on things like the scientific probability of the virgin birth. She didn't understand that "Son of God" is all about Jesus shining the presence of God into our lives.

It's quite a claim, really. John 8 has one of several passages from the Bible in which Jesus says, "*I am...*" something. "*I am* the light of the world." "*I am* the bread of life." "*I am* the vine and you are the branches." "*I am* the good shepherd." We are going to study some of these claims over the next several weeks. *I AM* is important, because these are the same words God used when Moses asked what God's name was at the burning bush. God answered him, "Tell the people of Israel that *I AM* sent you...this is my name forever..."<sup>2</sup>

And Jesus says, "*I AM...the light of the world.*"

God among us: Jesus is like the pillar of fire giving the Israelites light at night on their way through the wilderness. He is like scripture that revealed the Living God and gave guidance to their living. Jesus is the one in whom we see the light of the present and living God.<sup>3</sup>

Sometime when the scribes and the Pharisees returned, Jesus told them that; he said "*I am* the light of the world." And they probably gasped. The Feast of Tabernacles was their celebration of light of the Law. At the height of the celebration the Temple court was lit by four large lamp stands, throwing off lots of light. People would come dancing before these lights, each of them bearing torches which threw off even more light, illumining even the once-dark corners of the Temple and the city, creating an air of pure joy.

Jesus said, "I am the light of the world" and they knew what he was saying. He was announcing that he is the true fulfillment of the Tabernacle's joy; that as the Tabernacle's light illumined all Jerusalem, he would illumine the entire world.

And wouldn't he be to when he set free a condemned woman with an open and shut case? Wouldn't he be God's joyful light to anyone he reaches with the love of God that forgives everything and gives life?

The scribes and the Pharisees balked at his claim and challenged his authority. Not knowing the story, my friend at the grill did the same.

But light, you see, always speaks for itself. And I wish I did more than feel sad at what she said. I wish I would have told her the story.

### **Brought Out**

A few months ago our Confirmation class happened to attend a Sabbath worship service at a near-by synagogue on Sukkot, which is the Festival of the Tabernacles. We were all invited to take part in part in a part of the service when everyone 13 years old and older held the Torah (the scroll on which the first five books of the Bible is written). The scroll was unrolled as we lined up in a circle. Wearing white gloves we helped hold the long ribbon of parchment, and looked at God's Word, penned by hand in Hebrew, as it encompassed the sanctuary. Then the rabbi led the children around it on the inside of the circle as he named and described the books of the Torah: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy; telling a bit of the story and the lessons of God. The scroll was rolled back, and all was light the music began and there was dancing and singing and unbridled joy.

In Jesus, that joy spills beyond the sanctuary and fills the world. So, may you look to Jesus, that the light of his joy will also fill you.

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<sup>1</sup> John 8:1-11

<sup>2</sup> Exodus 3:13-15

<sup>3</sup> Gail R. O'Day, "The Gospel of John," The New Interpreter's Bible Commentary, vol. IX. Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press © 1995. p 632