

January 27, 2013  
Light!

*I am the Light!*  
John 8:2-20

### **Opening words:**

Last week, I began a four part sermon series on *Light!* Once completed, we will have looked at four familiar scriptures that deal with light. Last week, we examined Genesis 1:3, "*God said, 'Let there be light and there was light.'*" I hope you remember these two things: First, light is a requirement for life itself. Second, light offers us security.

This week we are going to examine 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.'*" In other words, Jesus must be influencing our priorities and our behavior. May God give you ears to hear this morning's Gospel lesson, John 8:12-20. Let me call this message *I am the Light!*

---

### **John 8:2-20**

2 At dawn he appeared again in the temple courts, where all the people gathered around him, and he sat down to teach them. 3 The teachers of the law and the Pharisees brought in a woman caught in adultery. They made her stand before the group 4 and said to Jesus, "Teacher, this woman was caught in the act of adultery. 5 In the Law Moses commanded us to stone such women. Now what do you say?" 6 They were using this question as a trap, in order to have a basis for accusing him. But Jesus bent down and started to write on the ground with his finger. 7 When they kept on questioning him, he straightened up and said to them, "Let any one of you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her." 8 Again he stooped down and wrote on the ground. 9 At this, those who heard began to go away one at a time, the older ones first, until only Jesus was left, with the woman still standing there. 10 Jesus straightened up and asked her, "Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?" 11 "No one, sir," she said. "Then neither do I condemn you," Jesus declared. "Go now and leave your life of sin." 12 Then 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." 13 The Pharisees challenged him, "Here you are, appearing as your own witness; your testimony is not valid." 14 Jesus answered, "Even if I testify on my own behalf, my testimony is valid, for I know where I came from and where I am going. But you have no idea where I come from or where I am going. 15 You judge by human standards; I pass judgment on no one. 16 But if I do judge, my decisions are true, because I am not alone. I stand with the Father, who sent me. 17 In your own Law it is written that the testimony of two witnesses is true. 18 I am one who testifies for myself; my other witness is the Father, who sent me." 19 Then they asked him, "Where is your father?" "You do not know me or my Father," Jesus replied. "If you knew me, you would know my Father also."

20 He spoke these words while teaching in the temple courts near the place where the offerings were put. Yet no one seized him, because his hour had not yet come.

---

You know the story. Lance Armstrong dominated the world of cycling for decades. He won the Tour de France seven times. He was the face of the sport. Can you name another cyclist? I can't. For years the UCI, the Union of Cyclists International, suspected Armstrong of taking steroids and doping. For years, Armstrong denied it. Then it happened. He grew tired of the lies and confessed it was true. The first person he told was Oprah Winfrey. I didn't learn anything from the interview I hadn't suspected for years. Lance Armstrong was a doper! Since his confession, he has been stripped of all of his titles and is now facing a mountain of lawsuits from his various sponsors. Many consider Lance Armstrong to be the greatest cheater in the history of professional sports.

Don't be too critical of Lance Armstrong. The world is filled with liars. Our world has always been filled with liars. Do you remember these famous liars? Sinon lied to the Trojans and said the horse was a "gift from the Greeks". It wasn't much of a gift. We remember it now as the Trojan Horse. Benedict Arnold lied to our country and tried to hand West Point over to the British. Do you know any Benedict Arnolds? Every child knows the story of Pinocchio. He lied and caused his nose to grow. After World War One, Charles Ponzi devised a lie that cheated investors out of millions. Lying and politics seem to go hand in hand. Republican President Richard Nixon lied and told the world, "I am not a crook." Democratic President Bill Clinton lied about his relationship with a young intern.

Have you ever stopped to consider how many liars are found in the Bible? The Bible itself is filled with liars. Do you remember these stories? The serpent lied to Adam and Eve. He said when they ate the apple they would become like God. They didn't. Rehab lied to the king of Jericho about hiding the Hebrew spies. She was a Benedict Arnold. Delilah accused Samson of lying to her about the source of his strength. That is why he never got a haircut. Abraham instructed his wife, Sarah, to lie about their relationship. She was his wife, not his sister.

Having said all this, let me ask you these two questions.

**First, do you know of any liars?**

**Second, have you ever lied to yourself?**

The answer to the second question is, "Yes!" People lie to themselves all the time. We lie to ourselves to justify our incorrect priorities and our poor behavior. When was the last time you lied to yourself? If this makes you think, say, "**Amen!**" Let us look at this morning's scripture lesson.

We are in the eighth chapter of the gospel of John. Jesus is in the temple in Jerusalem. To be exact, he is in the temple courts.

That was the place where rabbis taught their students. It is early in the morning, but a crowd has already gathered for another lesson. In that crowd were some of Jesus' enemies. They must have been shocked when Jesus uttered verse twelve, *"I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will walk in darkness, but will have the light of life."* With those words, a debate begins over authority. The Master won the debate because he knew where he had come from and he knew where he was going. The Pharisees knew neither. Standing next to the Light of the World, the imperfections of the Pharisees become clear. For just a moment, use your sanctified imagination. Imagine you are standing next to Jesus. How many of your imperfections would be exposed? How many lies would you be forced to admit?

There is no other way to say it. This is going to sound harsh. It is hard to say. It is going to be hard to hear. Within the heart of many contemporaries is a Pharisee. They refuse to accept the authority of Jesus. That fact changes everything. Without Jesus as your ultimate authority, your theology is wrong. Without Jesus as your ultimate authority, your priorities are confused. Without Jesus as your ultimate authority, your behavior is inappropriate. Stop lying to yourself and accept the truth. We are more like the Pharisees than we like to admit. We use Jesus as a flag to wave to promote our cause. We discard Jesus when he gets in the way. The scripture lesson for today challenges us to look at our relationship with Jesus. Have you surrendered to Jesus' authority? How much of a difference has Jesus made in your life? Jesus had no influence on the Pharisees. I hope the same is not true of you. So if you are ready to begin say, **"Amen!"** It all begins with a correct theology.

### **Your Theology**

Standing next to Jesus, the Light of the World, challenges your theology. The Pharisees stood next to Jesus with their bad theology intact. They were preoccupied with the law. They only believed in the law that God gave to Moses. Those who followed those laws were rewarded in the afterlife. Those who did not follow the law were punished. In other words, they believed one could earn their own salvation. Do you know of anyone who thinks they can earn their own salvation? That person is lying to themselves. Do you know what that person needs to do? That person needs to stand next to Jesus and learn the truth. Jesus is our only hope of salvation.

George Lee is the pastor of the West Austintown United Methodist Church. Years ago, he told this illustration and I never forgot it. A woman in one of his churches did everything in the church that was humanly possible. She sang in the choir, served on all the committees and never missed worship. She worked in the kitchen. She had a certain assigned job in the kitchen. She peeled the potatoes. She peeled the potatoes for years. She peeled more potatoes than anyone in the history of that congregation. One day, George was told she had cancer. She fought the disease with a positive attitude. Unfortunately, the disease was winning. One night, George was called because the end was near. He went to the hospital to be with her. When he arrived he found her in a weakened state. She looked up at him and said, "George, have I peeled enough potatoes to get into heaven?" George said his heart broke.

She played a large role in every part of the church, but she missed the main message. Our only hope of salvation is Jesus! Do you know of anyone who has accepted the lie? Do you know of anyone who is still trying to earn their salvation? There just aren't enough potatoes. Jesus is our only hope of salvation. We are all sinners who are saved by grace and by grace alone. And all of God's people said, **"Amen!"**

### **Your Priorities**

Standing next to Jesus, the Light of the World, challenges your priorities. As the Pharisees stood next to Jesus, they discovered their priorities were all wrong. They were more interested in the law than they were people. No story illustrates this point more than the story of the adulterous woman. You know the story. The last time I checked, it took two people to commit adultery. The man is not mentioned in the story. However, the woman is in the middle of the spotlight. She is pronounced guilty and is readied for execution. When the Pharisees looked at the woman, they saw a sinner; when Jesus looked at the woman, he saw a child of God. It is all a matter of priority. Are you more interested in the laws and rules? Are you more interested in people? Don't accept the lie. Through the eyes of God, rules don't matter. Through the eyes of God, the only thing that really matters is people.

I don't want to shock anyone, but I am not a big rule person. In some churches, (certainly not here), there are a lot of rules or laws that are designed to protect property. Those rules are counterproductive to the life of the church. For that reason, I couldn't care less about who didn't wash their coffee mug in the kitchen. I couldn't care less about who left their peanut butter and jelly sandwich in the refrigerator. I couldn't care less who didn't turn off the light or lock the door. I couldn't care less about what people wear to church. Just come to church. I couldn't care less, because those rules are designed to protect things. Those laws or rules are designed by people who are simply trying to rule the church. However, I am not saying I am against all laws. I am for laws that protect people. For example, I am against smoking because it leads to cancer. I am against drinking and driving because it is a deadly combination. I am against adultery because people get hurt, especially the young. I am against truancy because it is important that children get an education. Let me ask you this question: What is more important to you, property or people?

In a tenement district in New York City, a boy in ragged clothes was seen with a small piece of broken mirror in his hand. Holding it high in the air, he moved it slowly back and forth, watching the narrow slit of a window above him as he did so. "What are you doing?" a man suddenly demanded as he shook the youngster roughly by the shoulder. "Like most boys in this neighborhood, you're probably up to some mischief, aren't you?" The boy looked up into the stern face of his accuser and said, "See that window up there? Well, I have a little brother who has a room on that floor. He's disabled. The only sunlight he ever sees is what I shine up to him with my mirror!" The point is clear. Your priorities affect your behavior. Don't accept the lie. Through the eyes of God, the only thing that matters is people. If that makes you think say, **"Amen! "**

By now you know the story. It is the weirdest story I have heard in a long time. Manti Te'o was a standout linebacker at Notre Dame and he will go high in the NFL draft. He had a dream year. He helped lead the Fighting Irish to the National Championship Game against Alabama. He was second runner-up to college football's greatest prize, the Heisman Trophy. It was a dream season fueled by the tragic death of his girlfriend, Lennay Kekua, a victim of Leukemia. It was a heart-warming inspirational story, then the truth came out. Manti had never really met his girlfriend. They were only internet friends. I am sure it is a generational thing. In my generation, dating meant something different. It meant spending time together. It meant holding hands. It meant sitting close and embracing. It meant getting a kiss. Those are good things. I still like them. The internet is a powerful tool, but you can't do any of those things on-line. Now, this is where the story gets weird. There never was a girlfriend, so no one ever died. The linebacker got sucked into the hoax. He admitted he never met the girlfriend and he never attended her funeral. During the last week, he has been confessing the truth. This is the one question no one can answer: Why can't the stud football player at Notre Dame get a real girlfriend? He should be fighting them off with a stick. Maybe he should call the Alabama quarterback for a few pointers? He has a real nice girlfriend.

This is the point: Sometimes what is perceived as the truth isn't the truth. Our theology seems sound, until we stand next to the Light of the World, Jesus! He is our only hope of salvation. Our priorities seem to be correct, until we stand next to Jesus, the Light of the World. Through the eyes of God, the only thing that really matters is people. Our behavior may seem to be correct, until we stand next to Jesus, the Light of the World. Jesus loved everyone. It all begins with your theology. It all begins and ends with Jesus. How open are you to change? Plato once said, *"We can easily forgive a child who is afraid of the dark; the real tragedy of life is when men are afraid of the light."* And all of God's people said, **"Amen!"**