

The Light of the World

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Over the next eight weeks, we're looking at the vision of City Life Church *to renew cities socially, spiritually, and culturally with the gospel of Jesus*. We are a gospel-centered, city-renewing church. But, this is something we're all having to relearn. Over the past couple of years, some of us have made issues more central to our lives; drifted from the mission of God, lost touch with the church. So today we're coming back the foundation of whole vision: *the gospel of Jesus*. And we're going to examine it through Jesus claim to be *the light of the world*. At the end of Season 1 of *True Detective*, detectives Rust and Marty reflect on a decades long murder case that took them deep into the occult and systemic abuse. In the final episode, Marty rolls wheelchair bound Rust out of a hospital underneath the dark Louisiana sky. Rust says, I've been thinking it's all just one story, the oldest story: Light versus dark. Marty responds, appears the dark has a lot more territory...Rust says, *you ask me, the light's winning*. How are you seeing things, like Marty? There's a lot of dark territory out there. Or are you hopeful like Rust, the light's winning? Our perspective depends on what the light is. Jesus proclaims, *I am the light of the world, whoever follows me will not walk in darkness but will have the light of life*. What is the light? How do we remain in it and not get sucked into the darkness? Let's look at: *the Light of the World, Following the Light, the Light of Life*.

Light of the World

During the feast of tabernacles, Jesus walked into the temple grounds and began to teach. Many marveled at his words. Some accused him of colluding with demons. Meanwhile religious leaders plotted to eliminate Jesus' threat to their power. His popularity had loosened their religious stranglehold on the masses. They were losing cultural influence, so they sent officers to arrest Jesus. But when the officers arrived, they heard Jesus teaching and were amazed. They returned empty-handed and authorities asked why. The officers replied, "No one ever spoke like this man!" They dismissed their awe saying: [Search the Scriptures and see that no prophet arises from Galilee \(7:52\)](#). They believed the Scriptures didn't support a prophet coming out of that backwater town. And they were right. Instead, Isaiah prophesied that people who walked in darkness would see *a great light*, a light so

strong it would make Galilee a light of the nations (9). Jesus was no prophet; he is that light. Now at this point, it could be very tempting to look down upon the *religious*. But we are at a point in our country where Christianity's religious and cultural power is slowly eroding. And as these liberties are removed, we too have to make a choice. Will we seek to preserve power, to bind Christ to our cultural expectations, *or will we follow the light wherever it goes?* A light that didn't seek to preserve power, a light mocked, arrested, cancelled *but did not go out*. Or perhaps you're like the temple guards, yourself drawn to Jesus's words? Will you continue to walk in darkness or follow the light? Our decision depends on what the light is. In the midst of all this controversy Jesus says, *I am the light of the world* (8:12). What does he mean? There are many layers to this, but let's briefly consider three. First, his light is **exclusive**. He doesn't not say I am *a* light. He says I am *the* light of the world. The light is not Biden or Trump, democracy or socialism, standing up to government or complying with government. *Christ is the light*. The light is not the church or the state, racial justice or evangelism, family commitment or individual liberty. *Christ is the light of the world, an utterly exclusive claim. A claim we must accept or reject. Jesus leaves no middle ground*. What then gives him the right to make such a claim? When Jesus says I AM the light, he makes the first of seven I AM statements in the Gospel of John. In each statement Jesus deliberately aligns himself with the sacred name of God, I AM/YHWH. What's he saying? I am **divine** light, very light of very light, possessing all the power and attributes of the Creator I AM himself. Greater than humans, greater than cultures, greater than angels, *and that should floor us like it did the soldiers*. Last week I flew to NYC to spend five days at the US Open. I saw what commentators have described as the greatest tennis of the Open. During the Brooksby Djokovic match I sat in my seat, leaned in, and watched the ball, observed muscle movements, contemplated strategies. Everything else faded away, the hype, the lights, the noise. I was mesmerized. How much more should we be mesmerized by the exclusive, divine light of Christ. Going out of our way to get in front of him, pulling up a seat, sitting down to observe his words, linger over his movements, to respond to him in prayer and shouts of praise. But to enjoy the light, its rays must also be **redemptive**. Because like those people in Isaiah 9, we walk in darkness, like cockroaches we flee from the light. Jesus turns to those around him and says, *I told you that you would die in your sins, for unless you believe that I am he you will die in your sins.*" (Jn 8:24). Then within

days Jesus exchanged his life for our death, our darkness for his light. And as he rose from the death, his glorious light chased darkness away. Christ is the light: exclusive, divine, redemptive glory. He is more urgent than anything else in your feed, and is worthy of our entire devotion, which is just what Jesus requires.

Follow the Light

Next Jesus says, [Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness](#). The key to not walking darkness is to follow the light. How do you do that? The word follow means to come behind, to comply with, *obey*. It is not enough to agree with the light, believe Jesus is the light, we must *yield* to the light. Think about the people you follow: experts in your field, authors, social media personalities. People you podcast. You look to them for direction and obey their advice: flawed, finite humans. How much more should we yield to Christ! Jesus says whoever follows *me* will not walk in darkness, not whoever follows their trusted news source, politician, pundit, author, or friend. To follow Jesus is to obey him. Are you yielding to Jesus? The word follow is also a present active verb, which means we must follow Jesus *continually* to avoid the darkness. Which rules out reducing your faith to a couple meetings a week: one on Sunday and one on Wednesday night. It means yielding to Jesus when we are online and when we are offended, when we are at work and when we are out, in class or in line. Following Jesus obediently and continually is impossible when we aren't spending focused time marveling at the light. It's like a good marriage. When I spend focused time with just my wife, I find myself more prone to think about her when she's not around. I'm inclined to love her continually not just occasionally. So it is with Jesus, if we don't spend focused time with him, we won't follow him continually. And where the storms really begin to build in life, and the atmosphere is charged with controversial issues, and lightning strikes, we'll freak out, lose hope, freeze up, lash out. *But when you're following Jesus on the ground, you'll love the people right beside you*. You'll listen, trust, encourage, pursue. Don't let meta media issues zap your love for the local church. Follow Jesus. *He* is the light of the world. Read a Gospel and follow his words obediently and continually and you will not walk in darkness.

Light of Life

Finally Jesus says, [Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.](#) When we yield to the exclusive, divine, redemptive light of Christ, we gain the light of life. This phrase implies the light is not merely aesthetic; not just lovely to look at, but that it causes growth, warmth, vitality. Is that descriptive of your character? It even hints at a kind of life that will last forever. But people who walk in the light of Christ emit this pure lovely generative life now not just when they get to heaven. As they mature and soften. Are considerate of others. Why? They've discovered the light of life. They don't need to squeeze others for life. Do you see what Jesus is offering here? Entire novels, albums, philosophies, and religions are constructed in search of the light of life. People scale mountains, bury themselves in books, devote themselves to great acts of service, all in pursuit of this light. Jesus just hands it to us. Here, it's yours. Give me your darkness and I'll give you the light. We'd be fools not to follow him. Indian scholar Jay Kanagaraj comments: [This is the universal cry which Jesus claims to fulfill. He is not the one who holds a light, or even leads to the light. He himself IS the light of the world.](#)" When my son was two years old, his first word was "Light." For months it was the only word he said. Whenever, he woke up in the morning the first thing he would do was point to a lamp and say "light, light." Passing neon signs from his car seat he would declare: "Light!" He saw and savored the light incessantly. May it be so with us. Mesmerized by the exclusive, divine, redeeming light of Christ, following him obediently and continually, and therefore enjoying the light of life. If we do, as we'll see next week, we'll radiate that light into the world.