

John – I Am
Part 2
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As last week, I am going to speak to you personally in this service and then we are going to have the main message on the screen in the second and third service.

When I talked to my cardiologist earlier this week, on Monday, he called me to see how I had got on. And I told him what we had done. He said, “Good.”

I said, “We are going to do that for about a month.”

He said, “No, you must do that until the end of the year, and then you must review it.”

So that’s why I am live now. I am not dead exactly, but non-live in the second – though I will be here in each of those services.

I am going to read from John’s Gospel Chapter 8, if you have a Bible with you. And then a few verses from 1 John Chapter 1.

I am going to read also the last verse of John Chapter 7, which says,

“Then each went to his own home.”

(And that is referring to the celebration of the Feast of Tabernacles that is described for us in Chapter 7 that Jesus had come to Jerusalem to participate in. It ended up to 8 days – everybody has gone home.)

“But Jesus went to the Mount of Olives.

“At dawn he appeared again in the temple courts, where all the people gathered around him, and he sat down to teach them.

“The teachers of the law and the Pharisees brought in a woman caught in adultery. They made her stand before the group and said to Jesus, ‘Teacher, this woman was caught in the act of adultery.

““In the Law Moses commanded us to stone such women. Now what do you say?’

“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.

“When they kept on questioning him, he straightened up and said to them, ‘If any one of you is without sin, let him be the first to throw a stone at her.’

“Again he stooped down and wrote on the ground.

“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.

“Jesus straightened up and asked her, ‘Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?’

“‘No one, sir,’ she said.

“‘Then neither do I condemn you,’ Jesus declared. ‘Go now and leave your life of sin.’”

“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.’”

And then turn over to 1 John and Chapter 1. And I am going to read a few relevant verses here – Verse 5 to 7, and we will go to these verses later on as well.

1 John 1:5-7:

“This is the message we have heard from him and declare to you: God is light; in him there is no darkness at all.

“If we claim to have fellowship with him and yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live by the truth.

“But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin.”

The particular verse and text I want to talk about today is in Verse 12 of John 8:

“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.’”

And this is one of the great “I Am” statements of Jesus that we began to look at last week. And I pointed out then that each of these statements of Jesus requires a response.

When He says, “I am the bread of life,” a loaf of bread sitting in a bakery is of no use to you on the shelf. You can look through the window and enjoy the aroma of it maybe, but it is of no value unless you take it and eat it. To be the bread of life means we must know how to participate and eat and consume the bread of life.

If He says, “I am the light of the world,” we must know what it means to walk in the light that He is.

If He says, “I am the door,” we must know what it is to enter through that door.

If he says, “I am the vine,” we must understand what it means to abide in the vine. Otherwise it is of no value and of no use to us.

And so I am looking in each of these statements at two simple things: first, His provision. I am what?

And then secondly, our participation. So what? What do I have to do to participate and then to enter this?

Today I am going to look at this statement, “I am the light of the world.”

It comes here in John Chapter 8, though it is repeated in John Chapter 9 in another setting.

But it follows here the Feast of Tabernacles, which has taken place in Jerusalem in John Chapter 7.

Jesus, who spent most of His ministry in Galilee, came down to Jerusalem particularly to participate in this feast.

It was the longest festival in the Jewish calendar – lasted for 8 days. People came from all over the country. And it is called the Feast of Tabernacles.

The tabernacle was a place where you lived and they had to build their own little living places out of branches and boughs of trees and so on. It was like a big campsite that the whole of the city was turned into.

And during this festival they remembered the wilderness journey Israel had been through under Moses coming out of Egypt, going through to Canaan. And they also, at the same time, took time to thank God for the harvest.

It was really very much like an American Thanksgiving celebration. The Americans thank God for the Pilgrim Fathers and also for the harvest.

We in Canada, we thank God for the harvest and we thank Him for our forbearers and all the past blessings in general but we don't specify it, we don't have any pilgrim fathers; we just have lots to be grateful for. And so ours is a bit different to the American Thanksgiving.

But this is more like the American Thanksgiving in that they thanked God for the beginning of the nation and also for the recent harvest.

The beginning of that celebration, that festival; one of the events that took place was that four large seven-armed candlesticks were lit in the temple.

According to Jewish oral tradition, the glow of the light of those candles filled the temple to represent the Shekinah glory that filled the temple when Solomon dedicated the first temple. But it could also be seen throughout the whole city for the duration of those days.

The final event of the Feast of Tabernacles was the putting out of the flames of those lamps, and then the festival was over.

It seems to me a little bit like the Olympic Games. When the Olympic Games are declared open, the Olympic flame is lit and it blazes for the whole of the 15 days of the Olympic Games. And when it is declared closed, it is switched off and the flame goes off.

Similar kind of idea. And once that had been switched off the festival is over, the people then go back to their own homes.

But the next morning, after a number of things have taken place, it was when Jesus stood up in the temple courts and said, "I am the light of the world. Not just the light of Jerusalem – I am the light of the world. Whoever follows Me – not just Jewish people – but whoever follows Me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life."

This is a light not just to see but to walk in, He is saying. . And its significance is that it is after the light of the festival of tabernacles has been switched off. But there is another event that makes it particularly pertinent, and it is that aspect I want to look at with you this morning. And it explains this statement in Verse 12.

During the night after the end of the festival everybody packed up and went home. Jesus went up on the Mount of Olives to sleep the night.

But a woman and a man had sneaked off and engaged in an act of adultery. No doubt the festival ended with lots of merrymaking, eating, drinking. They had been living in tents and booths and the whole week had been great fun because it was so different for them. And as it came to its end they created a party atmosphere.

And now it's over. Excitement is high, inhibitions are low. It is a ripe context for acts of sexual immorality. People's guards are down. Opportunities are there. They start to flirt, it grows and the two of them sneak off into the night.

But they were caught. They were found out. There were those who claimed to be eyewitnesses to the event.

The next morning Jesus came back early to the temple courts.

If you go to Jerusalem you will know that the Mount of Olives is only about a 20 minute walk to come down to the Valley of Kidron at the other side and you are in the temple courts – not a long journey – 20 or 30 minutes at the most.

And when He arrived there, He was presented with this woman in a very hostile atmosphere. The Pharisees brought this woman to Jesus along with the scribes and they made her stand before the group and they said to Jesus, “Teacher, this woman was caught in the act of adultery. In the Law of Moses it is commanded for us to stone such a woman. Now what do You say?”

They are not genuinely looking for advice because the next verse, Verse 6, says they were using this question as a trap in order to have a basis for accusing Him because they knew this about Jesus: they knew that Jesus loved people, Jesus was kind to women. They knew He was on the side of the weak, of the poor, of the guilty, of the outcast, of the shamed.

He had been called a friend of tax collectors and sinners in Matthew Chapter 11. And that was not intended to be complimentary. That was saying this man gets Himself dirty by association. He is a friend of tax collectors and sinners. That was not a compliment. It’s part of why they hated Him.

But in contrast to the scribes and Pharisees, Moses was the judge of tax collectors and sinners, not their friend. And they knew the sentence of stoning would put Jesus in a dilemma.

Moses was the rigid law giver whose laws and regulations made the people feel secure. It gave to them a sense of self-righteousness and they could check off all the boxes and say this is what we have done.

And they knew Jesus wasn’t like that and so this is a trap to set Him in opposition to Moses.

But there is something very wrong with this story if you read it carefully. You don’t have to read it carefully – there is something very wrong with this story. It says twice that this woman had been caught in the act of adultery. That begs the question: where was the man? It takes two to tango.

Well they have let him go. Why?

Because the Pharisees have assumed that the girl is responsible in this instance. They were of the mentality that says if she dresses like that, if she flirts like that, then she gets what she deserves. She is responsible. The poor man is the innocent victim, seduced, sucked in by this attractive woman. But she is the one responsible.

But actually that is a complete misreading of the Law of Moses. Twice Moses addresses the issue of adultery apart from in the 7th commandment of the Ten Commandments. And those two occasions are in Luke [Leviticus] 20 and in Deuteronomy 22.

In Luke [Leviticus] 20:10 he says,

“If a man commits adultery with another man’s wife...”

And then he talks about the consequences.

Verse 11:

“If a man sleeps with his father’s wife...”

And then explains the consequence.

In Verse 12:

“If a man sleeps with his daughter-in-law...”

And in all those cases there are consequences for both, but the onus of responsibility is placed clearly on the man. If a man does, if a man does, if a man does this.

You go to Deuteronomy 22:22:

“If a man is found sleeping with another man’s wife...”

And then he explains the consequences.

Verse 23:

“If a man happens to meet in town a virgin pledged to be married and he sleeps with her...”

Then there are consequences.

In Verse 25:

“If out in the country a man happens to meet a girl ...and rapes her, then the man who has done this shall die.”

Both are responsible in a consensual arrangement, but the first responsibility, the onus of responsibility in the Law of Moses is on the man.

Now something has happened. The onus of responsibility has switched to the woman because the scribes and the Pharisees have moved from the Law of Moses. They have half-verses with which they can back up their position but they have moved from the Law of Moses and devalued women, as the Jewish nation very sadly did, and have re-read the Scripture in the light of their own prejudices.

And their own prejudices become sanctioned as being the Law of Moses and therefore the Law of God. But it was not so.

You know, just as a warning here, it is possible to say that something is biblical often enough or band around the idea often enough in Jewish circles (in their case), in Christian circles (in our case) that we end up thinking it is biblical when it may not be.

Now this woman is certainly guilty and in the wrong herself, but so are the scribes and the Pharisees who brought her to Jesus.

And Verse 6 says 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. Now what He wrote it doesn't say. But when they kept on questioning Him in Verse 7,

“He straightened up and said to them, ‘If any one of you is without sin, let him be the first to throw a stone at her.’”

And it seems there was no response, so in Verse 8,

“Again he stooped down and wrote on the ground.”

Now we have one of the most tantalizing events in the life of Jesus. What did He write on the ground? This is the \$64,000 question. If we knew, it would help us understand the story. But we don't know.

But we do know its effect. And the effect of Him writing on the ground is that it utterly changed the situation because in Verse 9,

“At this,”

(When He wrote on the ground the second time)

“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.”

Now what did He write?

Well there have been lots of ideas thrown out about this and when experts differ, fools can have an opinion.

So let me make a suggestion and of course this is only a suggestion; I am always hesitant to do that. But I will make it and I have grounds for making it.

Jesus, the day before in the end of John 7, when the second main event in the Feast of Tabernacles was they poured out every day water taken from the Pool of Siloam (a fresh water supply of Jerusalem) and it was indicating the fresh water that God provided for the people.

And Jesus stood up on the last day of the feast and said, “If anybody is thirsty, come to Me and drink.”

Remember that? John 7:37.

Now back in the book of Jeremiah Chapter 17:13, Jeremiah talks about living water and at the same time he talks about writing a message in the ground, in the dust.

He says, Jeremiah 17:13,

“Those who turn away from you will be written in the dust because they have forsaken the LORD, the spring of living water.”

So he said there are those who will participate in the spring of living water but there are those who will forsake it and their names will be written in the ground.

It's one of these sort of bleak type of statements and prophecies we find in the Old Testament. But could it be in the light of that verse that when Jesus stooped down He began to write the names of the accusers of this woman in the ground?

He looked up and wrote Anan, Benjamin, Caleb, Darius, Elihud, Gamaliel, Philip, Stephen.

At one point it says He straightened up and said to them, “If any one of you is without sin...”

Who is the you? Singular or plural? Is He looking at these men – is he looking at the names on the ground that these men have seen Him write?

“Is any one of you without sin? Throw the first stone.”

And nobody moved, so He stooped down and wrote on the ground again – maybe looked up and saw another face. That's Havilah (wrote it down). That's David (wrote it down). Jude (wrote it down).

This is speculation, but based on the connection in Jeremiah 17, I think it is possible. But look what happened then.

“At this,” (Verse 9) “those who heard began to go away one at a time, the older ones first.”

I wonder why the older ones went first.

There is something interesting about old age. People either grow more kind, more gentle, more understanding, more patient as they grow older. Or they grow more hard, more bitter, more judgemental, more impatient, more angry. But they do not stay the same. None of us stay the same.

It is not without reason it specifies the older ones first. Maybe He named them on the ground first.

We could perhaps be more charitable and say that they had better consciences and they left first.

I will tell you this, in the words of Hebrews 4:13,

“Nothing in all creation is hidden from God’s sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account.”

These men thought she had been laid bare before them. But in fact they were uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of Him to whom we must give an account.

You see these pious, sanctimonious accusers had barrel loads of sin themselves. But one of the best ways of covering it up is to accuse other people.

You know people who judge most are usually hiding the most. Jesus told us that in Matthew Chapter 7 when He said, “Why do you take the speck of dust out of your brother’s eye when there is a big plank in your own eye?”

The very fact that you are judgemental of your brother is indicative – it is a self-defence mechanism. You judge because there is loads of dirt in your own life that you are covering up.

And suddenly these men are laid bare, though they had been picking on the woman and accusing her.

In Chapter 8:10 it says,

“Jesus straightened up and asked her, ‘Woman where are they? Has no one condemned you?’

“‘No one, sir,’ she said

“‘Then neither do I condemn you,’ Jesus declared. ‘Go now and leave your life of sin.’”

He addresses her past. “I do not condemn you.”

He said elsewhere, “I did not come to judge the world; I came to save the world.” That’s His business. “I don’t condemn you.”

You know, is Jesus going soft? Is Jesus getting liberal?

No, Jesus is being Jesus. He didn’t come to condemn. And neither do we.

He came to cleanse and forgive. He dealt with her past and then He deals with her future.

“Go now and leave your life of sin.”

“You have come and I have forgiven you. Go home, but begin to live a life that is different.”

And it would be on the Day of Pentecost – I would love to think this woman was one of those 120 who gathered around and discovered the power to live a holy life that comes with the Holy Spirit.

Now it is the next verse that Jesus stood up and said,

“I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.”

Both to the woman and to the scribes and Pharisees, Jesus would shine the light of truth into their hearts. He would expose them but His purpose would be to liberate them if they would respond to Him because it is the light of the life, it's not the light of condemnation. It is the light of life. This alone will bring them out of darkness into life.

In Job 12:22 Job is speaking and he says of God,

“He reveals the deep things of darkness and brings deep shadows into the light.”

Do you know those deep hidden secret things of darkness are dangerous? Secret sins are the most toxic and most dangerous of all sins.

You cannot conquer your sin in the dark. You cannot say this is a private thing; I am going to conquer this on my own. You cannot and you will not.

You see sins hidden in the dark have no boundaries; there is nothing to contain them because they are in the dark, so they expand. And your secret sins will be worse next year than this year.

Some of you may know this in your own life; there are things you would do today that ten years ago you would never have dared or even dreamt of doing, things that are part of your life.

Why? Because in the secret they have expanded. They have to be brought out into the light.

Moses said in Psalm 90:8,

“You have set our iniquities before you, our secret sins in the light of your presence.”

They have been brought out into the light – “to the light of your presence.” But don't be afraid of that. Don't be afraid of that.

You see God exposes our sin and asks us to expose our sin, not to accuse us, not to humiliate us, not to condemn us, not to rub our noses in the dirt, but always to liberate us, cleanse us and empower us.

Sin has to come out, has to be exposed. We do not deal with our sin by burying it and hoping it will go away.

It's why in 1 John 1:9:

“If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.”

If we confess – the only way sin leaves our body is through the mouth, brought out of the dark, confessed and brought into the light. It's like a poison that has to be drawn out before you can be free of it.

Now that leads me to the second thing: His provision – He is the light of the world. What is our participation? What is the big *so what* about this?

That's why I read 1 John Chapter 1:5-7 because in these verses John applies very specifically what it means that God is light and in Him there is no darkness at all, he says in Verse 5.

And then in Verse 6:

“If we claim to have fellowship with him yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live by the truth.

“But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, His Son, purifies us from all sin.”

Notice he talks here about this being in the light is a walk in the light, it is movement, it is progression. And if we do not walk forward we actually slide backwards. We do not remain in a static state.

If we walk in the dark – as he says, walk in darkness – it will get more dark. If we walk in the light we will be increasingly exposed to the light of truth and the freedom of that.

And these verses involve two things. Very briefly, first, to walk in the light is to walk in fellowship with God. That's what he says.

“If we claim to have fellowship with Him yet walk in darkness, we lie and do not live by the truth.”

But if we walk in the light; to have fellowship with God is the nature and purpose of the Christian life.

Paul writes in Colossians 1:10,

“We pray...that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and may please him in every way: bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God.”

You are growing in your knowledge of God. What you do is secondary to that. It is growing in the knowledge of God and that is growing in fellowship with God where God is increasingly your friend. There is increasing intimacy between you and God.

Now, says John, we can merely claim it. If we claim to have fellowship with God yet walk in darkness, we lie.

We can claim it because it is the vocabulary of Christianity. It is the vocabulary that we use. The fact that we are here on a Sunday, the fact we might read our Bibles, you know, we claim to have fellowship with God.

But we can claim anything we like, but be very careful of claiming what is not experiential, for we deceive ourselves, says John. That's dangerous because when you deceive yourself, you actually don't know you are deceived.

You probably won't deceive those close to you – they will know something is not right. But you will deceive yourself.

And this idea of walking in fellowship with God suggests it is activity, it is progress, it is development, there is perseverance.

You can walk on the spot and congratulate yourself for not sliding backwards, but I am not sure you can do that and not slide backwards. But we are not making progress either.

It is a walk with God; it is a walk to God, in greater intimacy.

And we must never allow ourselves to be content with anything which would not survive being exposed to the light because that will hinder our walk with God; we will be kidding ourselves, we will not have fellowship with God.

But a second thing he says here, which we talk less about, which is here and as important: to walk in the light is a walk in fellowship with others.

Because he goes on to say in Verse 7,

“If we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another.”

With one another – we cannot walk in the light in fellowship with God if we are not in the light in fellowship with others.

Some of us have difficulty in bringing our lives into the open with somebody else for fear of what they will see. It is not what they will see; it is what they do with what they see. That's why you need to open your heart in fellowship with someone who will accept what you see and take it.

I remember saying to a young man once, “I will be your garbage can if you like. Just give it to me and we will just throw it in the garbage can.”

And it was a huge release for him to just talk about some things in his life. Not load, you know, a rifle with it and shoot it back at you.

If we don't confess to one another we will not walk in the light. And I challenge you and I challenge myself, who do you know and trust enough to confess your sins to?

If you don't have someone like that – it might be your spouse, it might be somebody else – if you do not have somebody like that, you are living dangerously because I am not going to be transparent and things can hide.

I once heard John Wimber, who was a preacher – in heaven now. He said when a Christian is caught in a sin that involves other people, be it sexual or financial or relational, his experience was, he said, that they would fall into two categories.

There is one category that says, “I have confessed this to God and God has forgiven me and it is right with Him, so you don't need to get involved.”

Now, said John Wimber, you cannot help a person like that. You cannot help a person who says, “I put it right with God; what are you so fussed about?”

The other category, he said, are those who say, “I have failed, I have fallen and I need your help.”

Those are the kind of people, said John Wimber, who have a future. They can be restored.

And the reality of our restored fellowship with God is evidenced by our fellowship with others, John writes here.

That's why he says,

“If we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin.”

But that walking in the light and having fellowship with God and having fellowship with others is what leads to the purifying of all sin.

Purifying is a much richer word than just cleansing. Cleansing is a good enough word – you get cleaned up. Purifying is digging out all the poison, purifying it.

And that involves if we are going to walk in the light, He is the light of the world. He does shine into the depths of our hearts, but you can keep it secret, you cannot even look and deny His access into your heart, but you can be convicted of your sin and you just deal with it with God.

It doesn't mean we have to tell everybody every little thing in our lives, but there are some things in our lives that begin to grip our lives and become habitual in our lives. You need someone to whom you can say, "Can I share this with you?"

And it's best, you know, when it's mutual, when it's mutual, when there are no secrets and you are able to confess one to another.

By the way, these verses also indicate you cannot live the Christian life alone. You have got to live it in fellowship. That's why many of you are in life groups because in those life groups you are in fellowship with a group of other people, and increasingly as that fellowship grows and deepens, you become more transparent and more honest and more open. That is a wonderful help to growth.

Or to find one person too, that you just meet with once in a while and open your heart to.

I am going to finish with a verse in Psalm 139:23 where David writes,

"Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts.

"See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting."

As last week, I want to lead you for two or three minutes in a response. You have to respond to the truth of God's Word. I am going to put that verse on the screen as a key verse. I would love you to – you were given a sheet of paper when you came in today – maybe note at least the reference rather than writing out all the words at this point. Note the reference and go home, read that whole psalm.

"Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts.

"See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way that is everlasting."

And I am going to ask if you would jot down that reference and we then bow our heads. I want us to pray together. I want us to ask God to search our hearts and to test them, to expose our anxious thoughts, as David wrote, to expose any offensive way in me, then to lead me in the way everlasting.

I suggest we do two things: one, will you confess your sin to God? I know there are people around us – maybe fold that paper in half and maybe on the inside write down the sin that has been one your mind in the last thirty minutes as I have talked about this because it will have come to mind.

We have lots of sins we battle with every day, but there are those things that have a foothold. It could be pride, it could be lust, could be greed, could be self-righteousness, it could be the love of money, it could be anger.

You dare to have the courage to write that down – this is just between you now – got to write it down.

On the other side, will you confess your sin to someone else? Would you write down the name of somebody that you will confess what you have written on the first side? If you don't have anybody that comes to mind that you know you can trust, will you ask God in the course of this week, in the next seven days, to show you someone?

Swallow your pride because this will bring you into the light of life. You will find a new energy in your life you never had before. You will find a transparency that lifts burdens off your shoulders. When our dark secrets are no longer secrets we are on the way to being purified.

Lord Jesus, I pray for every person in this building this morning. Thank You for the light that Jesus is, the light of the world, the light of life, that doesn't just shine widely, but shines deeply where its beam is focused into our hearts.

I pray, Lord Jesus, that we will acknowledge and take seriously and deal with those sins that You have pointed to in our hearts, those hidden Pharisaical sins that need to come to the light. And lead us, we pray, in the way everlasting.