

Small Group Guide The Light of the World

The Church at Brook Hills

October 25-31, 2010

John 8:12

This guide is to help you facilitate discussion with your Small Group. Use it as a resource to lead your group in discovering and owning the truths of God's Word. There may be questions you do not want to use and there may be instances where you just want to focus on a particular point or truth. Some questions may bring out emotions and cause people to dwell on their relationship with God. Your role is to facilitate this experience not to complete the discussion guide. Use this as a flexible teaching tool not a rigid teaching task list.

John 8:12

Today's passage contains the second of several "I am" statements in the Gospel of John. Last week, we discussed what it means for Jesus to be "the bread of life" (6:35). Today we see that Jesus is also "the light of the world." Jesus identifies himself as the light of the world in the context of the Feast of Tabernacles and in the midst of a conflict with Jewish leadership. When Jesus confirms that He is the light of the world, He is making an explicit messianic assertion. The imagery of a person coming as the light of the world has roots in the Old Testament which speak of the Servant of the Lord as the light to the nations (Isaiah 42:6; 49:6; and 51:4). The Pharisees resist Jesus' claim and another debate ensues.

The Guiding Light

Study the Text . . .

The Feast of Tabernacles is one of seven major feasts celebrated in Jerusalem each year. This particular feast is celebrated in commemoration of how God guided Israel during the wilderness wanderings after the Exodus (Lev. 23:42-43). During their journey through the wilderness, God guided Israel as a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night to give the people light (Ex. 13:21-22). As the people of Israel wandered through the dark wilderness, they were led toward the Promise Land by the light of God.

Each night during the Feast of Tabernacles, with the exception of the Sabbath evening, the Jews remembered God's guidance by partaking in a great candle lighting ceremony. The following passage taken from a Jewish source describes the ceremony:

At the close of the first Festival-day of the Feast they went down to the Court of Women where they had made a great amendment. There were golden candlesticks there with four golden bowls on the top of them and four ladders to each candlestick, and four youths of the priestly stock and in their hands jars of oil holding a hundred and twenty logs which they poured into all the bowls. They made wicks from the worn out drawers and girdles of the priests and with them they set the candlesticks alight, and there was not a courtyard in Jerusalem that did not reflect the light of the Beth ha-She'ubah (Sukkah 5:2-3).

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Imagine, then, a dramatic lighting of the city of Jerusalem at the close of each day (other than the Sabbath) in commemoration of a crucial event in redemptive history. Against this backdrop, Jesus says, “I am the light of the world.” What God did for Israel in leading them out of slavery, through the wilderness, and into the Promise Land, He does for the nations in Christ, the light of the world. God in Christ leads the nations out of slavery to sin and death, through the dark wilderness of this world, and ultimately into the promise of life in the New Jerusalem (cr. Rev. 21:1-4). As we journey through this world, we do so as those who no longer walk in the darkness of ignorance under the power of the evil one (cr. 1 Jn. 5:19) but as those who have been “rescued from the dominion of darkness and brought...into the kingdom of the Son. . . .” (Col. 1:13). Christ’s kingdom is an everlasting kingdom of light and life.

- Read and reflect on Exodus 13:17-22
- According to Leviticus 23:42-43, what were the people commanded to do during the Feast of Tabernacles?
- Read John 1:4-13.
- Why does John make such a strong connection between light and life?
- What privilege does John promise to those who receive Jesus? (Jn. 1:12-13)
- Compare your answer to the previous question with the plight of those who do not know Christ described in Ephesians 2:1-3.

Group Discussion

- What does it mean for Jesus to be the *light* of the world? (when asking this question place emphasis on *light*, we will discuss *the world* below)
- What does the imagery of light cause you to think about?
- Why is He qualified to be the *light* of the world? (cr., vv. 14-16)
- What darkness does Jesus dispel?
- What does Jesus save us from?
- What is Jesus saving us to?
- How does Jesus provide guidance today?

The Global Light

Study the Text . . .

Jesus’ identification as “the light of the world” is not only made against the backdrop of the Feast of Tabernacles, but is also rooted in the Servant of the Lord imagery of Isaiah as well as OT promises of the coming light of salvation. The book of Isaiah anticipates the arrival of the Servant of the Lord who will be a light to the nations (Is. 42:6, 49:6, and 51:4). The Servant of the Lord’s ministry would be global in scope. His life and ministry would benefit not just Israel but all the nations of the world.

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The opposition of the Jewish leadership did not anticipate this being a concern of the Messiah they awaited. Instead, they believed he would be a political, militant figure bent on liberating Israel from Roman rule. They erroneously sought liberation from Roman oppression rather than from the bondage of sin and the sentence of death. Not all nations were under Roman oppression, but all nations are slaves of sin and sentenced to death apart from the Messiah's ministry. The Jewish leadership expected a national messiah but not a global messiah, even though their own Scriptures revealed that He would be (cr. 5:39).

The O.T. also contains numerous promises concerning the Messiah's global ambition. Perhaps the most prominent is found in God's initial promise to Abraham in Gn. 12:1-3. God makes His heart for the nations known. He places them front and center of his redemptive purposes. The salvation Christ provides as "the light of the world" extends to the nations.

- Read and reflect on Isaiah 42:6, 9, and 51:4
- Look up other references in John's Gospel to Jesus' concern for the world (i.e. 3:16).
- Look up other references in the Old Testament to God's global concern.
- Make note of connections between Isaiah 9:1-7 and John 8:12.

Group Discussion . . .

- If Jesus is the light of the *world*, then what does that imply for those who have yet to see him as such?
- In what ways might we commit the same error of the Pharisees by fostering a narrow perspective on Jesus' mission, and subsequently, the church's mission?
- How do we agree with God by keeping the nations in view?
- What is the relationship between Jesus' identity as the light of the world and His describing Christians as the light of the world in Matthew 5:14?
- How might we more effectively reflect Jesus' identity as the light of the world and our role as the light of the world in our lives and faith community?
- What is meant by the statement: "The light that shines the farthest shines the brightest at home."