

A few weeks ago, I was captivated by a heavenly display from my front porch.

It was a beautiful evening under a nearly full moon.

A couple of planets were also visible, along with several constellations.

A compelling aspect of light that impresses me when I gaze at the night sky is its power to pierce through the darkness.

That is, we do not see pinpoints of darkness in the daytime sky, but we can see pinpoints of light in the nighttime sky.

I also reflected on the fact that, while stars produce their own light, the moon and planets would not be visible apart from our solar system star, the sun.

If not for the sun, I would not be able to see the moon and the planets.

But what made this evening especially dramatic was there were thunderstorms in the distance that provided an additional glorious display of God's creative power.

The frequent lighting pulsed through the towering clouds, illuminating what would have been otherwise difficult to see.

The very presence and shape of the clouds were exposed because of the light in their midst.

I sat in awe for over an hour, marveling at the contrast between light and darkness in the night sky.

This lesson is full of contrast, especially between light and darkness, but there are also contrasts between truth and lies, freedom and slavery, life and death.

These contrasts are related to light and darkness highlighted in this passage.

This is not the first time we have encountered light imagery in John's gospel, nor will it be the last.

What stands out about the image of light in John 8 is its connection to freedom, specifically spiritual freedom, and we will learn that Jesus light frees us from the darkness of sin.

We will explore this passage in two divisions, light and darkness, verses 1 to 30, and freedom in light, verses 31 to 59, light and darkness, verses 1 to 30, and freedom in light, verses 31 to 59.

So let's get started as we consider light and darkness and how it penetrates and clarifies.

Open your Bible or Bible app to John 8, and we will first look at how light and darkness penetrates in verses 1 to 11.

This account of a woman brought before Jesus may appear in italics in your translation.

This is because some ancient manuscripts do not include the story at this point in John's gospel.

However, church leaders referred to this passage as far back as 100 AD, and it seems to be a genuine experience in Jesus' earthly ministry.

Its placement fits here in the context of light and freedom.

Jesus had been teaching in the temple courts at the Feast of Tabernacles, and opposition to him continued to mount among the religious leaders.

At the end of the festival, chapter 8 notes that Jesus went to the Mount of Olives.

And then beginning in verse 2 it says, 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.

As we begin exploration of light imagery in this passage, it is very fitting that Jesus appeared at dawn in the temple courts.

The light of all mankind was about to shed light on a dark situation.

It seems that before Jesus could even begin teaching that day the teachers of the law and the Pharisees tried to trap him, so they had grounds for accusing him in an effort to silence and disempower him.

And how did they hope to trap Jesus?

They asked him about stoning the woman, and they figured there was no way for him to respond that would not impune his character or put him at odds with either the Roman authorities or the Mosaic Law.

Now imagine what it was like for this woman to be paraded in front of all these people, probably feeling humiliated and helpless and possibly even frustrated for why wasn't the man in this situation also brought forward.

The religious leaders, however, did not care about her or what was going on in her heart.

She was merely a pawn in their game.

In a fascinating display of Jesus' omniscience, compassion and righteousness, Jesus responded to their questions about stoning this woman in a way that exposed the sin in their own hearts.

He started writing on the ground, although scripture does not tell us what he wrote.

Jesus paused his writing, told the religious leaders that any one of them without sin should be the first to throw a stone at the woman and continued writing.

And then, one by one, the religious leaders went away, leaving only Jesus and the woman.

Jesus knew what sin lurked in the shadows of the religious leaders' hearts, and he knew just how to expose what was beneath their self-righteous exterior.

His penetrating light revealed the darkness within them, and one by one these men found themselves defenseless in the face of Jesus' piercing words.

But what about the woman?

Well, Jesus' light penetrated her situation, too.

He did not excuse her adultery.

He allowed it to remain out in the open, exposed for the sin that it was.

But then, he offered hope.

He didn't condemn her, and he encouraged her to turn from her life of sin.

We must pause here and take note of this beautiful facet of Jesus' penetrating light.

He shines into the darkness of sin in our hearts, not to condemn us, but to show us what is there, so we might turn from our sin.

Now, it may not feel comfortable when Jesus exposes my sin or yours in this way, and we may resist.

It's kind of like when someone flips on a bright light in a dark room.

It's shocking, and our first reaction is to shield our eyes from that light.

But that light is necessary to see in the dark.

We cannot address something we aren't aware of.

Jesus penetrates our hearts to deal with the sin that lies within.

His light reveals so that we might repent and experience redemption and renewed life.

What areas of sin might Jesus be exposing in you and me today?

How will we respond to his beautiful penetrating light?

As we move on in this passage, we see how Jesus' light clarifies in verses 12 to 30.

Not only does Jesus' light penetrate darkness, but it brings clarity when there are questions or where there is confusion.

These verses begin with a bold statement by Jesus in verse 12.

When Jesus spoke again to the people, he said, I am the light of the world.

Whatever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.

Consider the impact of this declaration against the backdrop of the Feast of Tabernacles that had recently concluded.

There was an illumination of the temple ceremony during the feast in which four very large oil fed candelabras were lit and filled the temple with light.

Others say these candelabras may have been as tall as 75 feet or almost 23 meters.

Light symbolizes God's presence throughout Scripture.

The brilliant light was meant to remind the Jewish people of God's abiding presence in a shining cloud and a pillar of fire during the Israelites' 40-year wilderness journey.

So imagine what the people were thinking when Jesus declared, I am the light of the world.

He was essentially saying, I am God in your midst.

This I Am statement was a clear declaration of His divinity.

Jesus added that those who follow Him, who walk in His light as opposed to darkness, will experience life.

Here Jesus is speaking metaphorically.

Jesus' contrasting spiritual light and spiritual darkness.

Spiritual light brings true eternal life and that is only found in Jesus, the light of the world.

Not surprisingly, the declaration riled the Pharisees and they challenged Jesus.

In Jewish law, valid testimony required two witnesses.

The Pharisees said Jesus' claim about Himself was invalid without a second witness.

Jesus, as God, did not need validation.

But He clarified His testimony nonetheless and pointed to His Father as the second witness.

The Pharisees, however, did not understand that Jesus was referring to His Heavenly Father, not His earthly Father.

Their refusal to recognize Jesus as the Son of God indicated they really did not know the Father they claimed to serve and worship.

Now did you notice some interesting details in verse 20?

It says Jesus spoke these words in the temple where people put their offerings.

This would have been in the court of women, which is as far as women could proceed in the temple.

And it was a busy place, so many people would have heard Jesus.

This verse also says no one seized Him for His hour had not come.

This indicates that these temple teachings and interactions were happening on God's timetable alone.

After Jesus provided clarity about His testimony, He offered clarity about His identity beginning in verse 21.

Let's turn to these verses.

Once more Jesus said to them, I am going away and you will look for me and you will die in your sin.

Where I go, you cannot come.

This made the Jews ask, will He kill Himself?

Is that why He says where I go?

You cannot come.

But He continued, you are from below.

I am from above.

You are of this world.

I am not of this world.

I told you, you would die in your sins.

If you do not believe that I am He, you will indeed die in your sins.

In these verses Jesus once again affirmed His deity by identifying with God the Father.

As before He emphasized this reality with an I am statement when He said, I am He.

He clarified that as God He had heavenly origins, unlike the Pharisees whose origin was earthly.

Jesus continued declarations of divinity angered these proud Pharisees and ultimately drove them to seek His murder.

There is an important phrase Jesus repeated in this exchange with the Pharisees.

He talked about dying in sin and if they did not believe Jesus was who He said He was, they would die in their sins.

What did He mean?

Well scripture teaches that ever since sin entered the world through Adam and Eve, all people are born with a sinful nature.

Sin is in our spiritual DNA.

We are all sinners.

Do you find that hard to accept?

Does that truth unsettle you like it does me?

This is so counter to the way the world thinks.

It's not surprising we might chafe against this truth.

The Bible also teaches that the wages of sin is death and not merely physical death but spiritual death which is eternal separation from God.

Death is the penalty for our sins.

There is nothing we can do to escape this sentence.

But the good news is that Jesus has done something about this.

He paid our sin debt on the cross and when we receive Jesus' payment on our behalf through faith in Him, we are saved from the penalty of death.

However, like the Pharisees, if we do not believe in Jesus, we too will die in our sins.

Jesus went on to explain how all of this would be even clearer when the Son of Man was lifted up which referred to his crucifixion.

His death, resurrection and ascension would clarify his identity and mission.

Who is Jesus and what is his mission?

He is the Son of God sent by his Father to save sinners from spiritual death.

He is the light of the world who exposes our sin so that we might repent and turn to Him for salvation.

So here is a key truth from this division.

Jesus' light exposes the sin in our hearts.

The principle, Jesus' light exposes the sin in our hearts.

His light penetrates and clarifies so that we might recognize and turn from our sin and receive Him as Lord and Savior.

You see, buried deep within every heart is the sin of pride.

In our pride, we think all of the good things we do make us good enough to stand in the presence of a holy God.

But Jesus' penetrating light shines right through the facade of our goodness to reveal the sin of pride deep within.

Though we may try to hide our sin, Jesus sees it clearly.

He longs for us to admit our sin and seek His forgiveness.

Why is this?

Because Jesus longs to be with us forever.

And when we confess and repent and believe Jesus is the Son of God and our Savior, we will be with Him forever.



The religious leaders and the woman caught in adultery experienced Jesus' light in the midst of their spiritual darkness.

Their sins were exposed and they were given opportunities to respond to Jesus' light.

What is Jesus exposing in your heart and mind?

What sins are lurking in the shadows?

Self-righteousness?

Infidelity?

Unbelief?

Maybe like me, you sometimes say, Lord, I'm not trying to hide anything from you.

I just can't think of any sin I'm not aware of right now.

And to that, Scripture responds in 1 John.

If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us.

Ouch.

Will you ask Jesus to shine His light into the corners of your life you're trying to hide?

Maybe you are already allowing His light to penetrate your heart.

Will you thank Jesus for exposing your sin so you can turn from it and turn toward Him?

Will you follow Him into His glorious light for all eternity?

As we move into our second division, we will gain more insight into the freedom found in the light of Jesus and that this freedom comes through truth and is freedom from death.

So let's first look at freedom through truth in verses 31 to 47.

Jesus addressed the Jews beginning with another bold statement.

To the Jews who I believed in Him, Jesus said, If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples.

Then you will know the truth and this truth will set you free.

They answered Him, We are Abraham's ascendants and have never been slaves of anyone.

How can you say that we shall be set free?

We are going to continue to see Jesus' light penetrate and clarify in this division as He addresses the issues and questions the Jews raise.

It seems from verse 31 that some of these people have professed faith in Jesus as a result of His teaching.

Jesus probed their hearts, however, to reveal the depth of their commitment.

He said that the true test of discipleship or following after Him is holding to His teaching.

Genuine faith clings to Jesus and obeys His word.

And those who hold the Jesus teaching will know the truth and experience freedom.

At this, the Jews raised the objection that they were Abraham's ascendants and had never been slaves.

Now, wait a minute, did you read that statement and think they must have had amnesia?

What about their ancestor's slavery in Egypt or their exile to Assyria in Babylon and their oppression under other foreign powers since then, including their current oppressor, the Roman Empire?

It is easy to judge their selected memory from our vantage point.

But sometimes we do the same when defending our positions, don't we?

We pick and choose what we will remember according to what will best support our arguments.

They also misunderstood what kind of slavery Jesus was talking about, so he clarified what he meant in verses 34 to 36.

Jesus replied, very truly I tell you, everyone who sins is a slave to sin.

Now a slave has no permanent place in the family, but a son belongs to it forever.

So, if the son sets you free, you will be free indeed.

Maybe you are asking, what does it mean to be a slave to sin?

Well, not only does our sin carry a death sentence, but it also puts a stranglehold on our life right now.

Sin entraps us by giving us instant pleasure, but ultimately leaving us wanting more.

Sin leads to another, and another, sucking us into a dark pit we cannot crawl out of without help.

Sin's power over us makes it impossible in our own strength not to sin.

But here again, there is good news.

In dying on the cross, Jesus defeated the power of sin.

Those who cling to him for salvation and live as his disciples experience freedom from slavery to sin.

Brothers in Jesus are given spiritual power to resist the temptation to sin and instead live as God intended.

As one commentator stated, freedom is not the liberty to do as we please, but the ability to do what we ought.

True freedom is found within the gracious boundaries of God's plans and purposes through his son, Jesus Christ.

The conversation between Jesus and the Jews continued, and Jesus' light revealed more truth about them.

He knew how important proof of descendency from Abraham was to the Jews, and he was not arguing about their physical descendency.

Rather, he was speaking about spiritual descendency and began to set up a contrast between his father and their father, in between truth and lies.

First, the question of fatherhood.

In verses 39 to 42, Jesus connected Abraham and his true children with God's true children.

In verse 39, he said, if they were Abraham's children, they would do what Abraham did.

And what did Abraham do?

Hebrews 11 said, he put his faith in God his father by obeying him and trusting in his promises.

And Romans 4 says that Abraham's faith in God was credited to him as righteousness.

In verse 42, Jesus said, children of God love his son and believe he was sent by God.

So, what matters in both cases is belief in God and his word.

That is what determines whether one is a child of God the father.

Friends, this is a hard truth.

While all people have been created by God, only those who believe in Jesus, the word of God and the light of the world, are counted as God's children.

There is no middle ground.

We are either God's children because we believe in Jesus or we are not.

Any response other than putting your faith in Jesus results in remaining outside of God's family.

How does this reality land on you?

This truth compels me to pray regularly for members of my earthly family who do not believe in Jesus and are not part of God's family.

How I longed for them to receive Jesus as Lord and Savior so that they too might be with him forever.

And the truth gets harder.

Jesus went on to say that not only were these unbelieving Jews not children of God the father, but their father was actually the devil.

Jesus' light exposed that they belonged to the devil, not to God.

And this set up the contrast between truth and lies in verses 44 to 45.

Jesus clarified that he only speaks the truth while the devil only speaks lies.

They could not understand the truth Jesus spoke while they were listening to the lies of their father.

This is sobering for us to consider.

In difference to or rejection of Jesus equals influence by and reception of the devil.

It means the difference between the light of truth and the darkness of lies.

Again, there is no middle ground.

Jesus gave this strong warning to the Jews and to us because their response and ours has an eternal consequence.

These are difficult words for us to hear and they were difficult for the Jews too as we will see in the remaining verses of this chapter.

In verses 48 to 59, Jesus talks about freedom from death through the light he brings.

I can understand the defensiveness that rose in the Jews when Jesus said they do not belong to God in the previous verses.

So it is no wonder they lashed out and insulted him by calling him a hated Samaritan and demon possessed.

Jesus, however, steadfastly maintained his position and contrasted how he honored his father and how they dishonored him.

He honored his father by obeying him and speaking the truth he received from his father.

The Jews, on the other hand, totally rejected Jesus and his message.

In verse 51, Jesus took another opportunity to speak about freedom from death when he said, very truly I tell you, whoever obeys my word will never see death.

He mercifully gave these Jews another chance to receive the truth about how to escape the eternal consequences of sin.

As I mentioned earlier, we are all born sinners and come out of the womb with a death sentence hanging over our heads.

In other words, when we are physically born, we are actually already spiritually dead.

We face physical death and remain spiritually dead apart from the saving grace of our Lord Jesus Christ.

When we believe in Jesus and become his disciples, our death sentence is lifted.

While believers still experience physical death as part of this fallen world, unless Jesus returns before they die, they will not experience the spiritual darkness of eternal separation from God.

Rather, when we follow the light of the world as believers, we will experience the light of eternal life in God's presence.

Tragically, these unbelieving Jews continued to reject Jesus and his claims and remain stubbornly entrenched in their opposition to him.

They accused him of elevating himself over their great patriarch Abraham.

They continued to be blind to their true heart condition.

Jesus responded that he was not trying to elevate or glorify himself in any way.

Rather, God, his father, would glorify him.

He added that even Abraham looked forward to the day of Jesus, the Redeemer and Messiah promised long ago.

Abraham did not totally understand the salvation to come, but he put his faith in God and his promises and rejoiced in what was to come.

Finally, Jesus made one more bold declaration of his divinity in verse 58 when he says, Before Abraham was born, I AM.

This was the last straw for the Jews.

In the fury that blinded them, they tried to stone Jesus, but he hid himself and slipped away from the temple grounds.

Scripture does not record him returning to the temple to teach after this, so I can just imagine how his final words I AM lingered in their ears in the days that followed when his glory and deity were further revealed in his death and resurrection.

Is your heart heavy as you ponder the contentious conversation between Jesus and these Jews?

Have Jesus' words stirred up some resistance in your own heart?

Jesus spoke forth sobering truths, to be sure.

But let us hang on to the powerful hope that is the key truth for this division.

Jesus' light offers freedom from spiritual death.

The principle, Jesus' light offers freedom from spiritual death.

Our fate does not have to be the spiritual death sentence that hangs over humanity.

Jesus, the light of the world, experienced the darkness of spiritual death so that we might enjoy the light of eternal life.

What has been your response to his offer of true freedom?

Are you still enslaved by sin and sitting on death row?

Or like a blossom unfolding in response to the sun, have you opened your heart to Jesus and received pardon for your sins and spiritual freedom for all eternity?

We live in a world that is steeped in darkness.

As long as sin is present, it will wield its enslaving power and demand its deadly wages, casting its long, deep shadows over humanity.

But there is a bright hope.

Just as the moon stars and planets punctuate the night sky, illuminating the darkness with their glorious display, and just as lightning illuminates a thunderhead, Jesus, the light of the world, illuminates this dark world.

His light exposes our sin so we can turn away from it, turn to him, and be freed from the overwhelming darkness of sin.

What might this look like for you?

For me, it means asking Jesus to show me the sin I can't see because of the pride that clouds my vision.

Without his penetrating light, I will remain hopelessly in the dark.

Jesus, the light of the world, is our only hope.

What is holding you back from stepping into his glorious light and experiencing spiritual freedom now and forever?