“I AM THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD”

There are seven “I AM” statements in the Gospel of John – “I am the bread of life” (Jn 6); “I am the light of the world” (Jn 8); “I am the door of the sheep” (Jn 10); “I am the good shepherd” (Jn 10); “I am the resurrection and the life” (Jn 11); “I am the way, and the truth, and the life” (Jn 14); “I am the true vine” (Jn 15). In all seven of these statements Jesus uses metaphors to describe His saving relationship to the world. His choice of the phrase “I am” is intentional. It, of course, refers to Exo 3:14 where God reveals His name to Moses – I AM (***Yahweh*** is Hebrew for “He is”). By using this phrase Jesus is, in essence, claiming to be the Yahweh of the O.T. (we know this from what Jesus claims later in John 8:58). Today we will take a look at one of these “I AM” statements – “I am the light of the world.”

The setting for today’s lesson is the Temple in Jerusalem. That’s where Jesus has been teaching the crowds at the annual Feast of Tabernacles. Jesus’ public ministry has been going on now for about 3 years. For the first 2 and a half years Jesus’ popularity steadily increased. More and more people followed Him wherever He went in order to see Him perform miracles. Others were drawn to His authoritative teaching. However, for the last several months leading up to the Feast of Tabernacles Jesus’ popularity had begun to wane, really ever since the end of John Chapter 6. As we pick up the narrative in John Ch 8, we see Jesus again teaching at the Feast of Tabernacles (where He was in John Ch 7). In just six more months Jesus will go to the cross.

The people are split as to their opinions of Jesus. Some believe that He IS their long-awaited Messiah and they base this on the signs that He has been performing and on His claim to be the Son of God. However, most of the people don’t believe Jesus. They have undoubtedly been influenced by their religious leaders, the scribes and Pharisees, who don’t believe Jesus’ claims (there is 1 notable exception, Nicodemus). The Pharisees as a whole have made their opinion of Jesus clear. They reject Jesus’s claims and believe that He is a dangerous false teacher. They’ve even accused Him of being demon-possessed (Mark 3:22). They can’t argue with the power that Jesus has displayed in performing all those signs and miracles, healing all sorts of sick people, raising the dead, casting out demons, etc. But they dismiss all of those signs as proof of His deity, attributing them to the power of Satan. Their animosity toward Jesus is continuing to build. They’ve attempted to have Jesus arrested during this feast, but as we’ve noted, God’s hand is protecting Jesus and preventing any harm from coming to Him. The bottom line is that it is not yet Jesus’ time, His time to fulfill His divine mission of redemption, His time to die for the sins of the world. It’s not His time yet. That is still 6 months away.

In John’s original writing (earliest manuscripts) verse 52 of Ch 7 is followed immediately by Verse 12 of Ch 8. There is no break. So while we know Jesus has been teaching on the last day of the Feast of Tabernacles (per 7:37), we can safely assume, as we come to verse 12, that He still is.

So as we continue our study of the Gospel of John here in Ch 8, please be aware of the growing hatred by the Jewish leadership toward Jesus and the uncertainty of the people about Jesus and His claims.

READ John 8:12-13

“Them” in v 12 refers to the same “they” of v 52, namely, the Pharisees. And this intense confrontation, this back and forth between Jesus and the Pharisees will continue all the way to the end of Ch 8. Notice Jesus statement to them, v 12 – “I am the light of the world.” Any good Jew who had been studying his O.T. could tell you that Jesus’ statement here is a direct claim to be the Messiah. Isaiah 42 refers to the Messiah as God’s chosen servant, one whom God will send to His people. This servant will bring the blessing of salvation and will be “a light for the nations to open the eyes that are blind, to bring out the prisoners from the dungeon, from the prison those who sit in darkness.” (42:6-7) This description is repeated later in Isaiah 49 when the Lord God declares that His servant will be “a light for the nations that My salvation may reach to the end of the earth.” (49:6) Isaiah Chapters 50, 51, 58, 59 and 60 are filled with the imagery of light with the message of salvation that God will send to Israel and the nations. Light represents salvation. There is the promise that the Lord will be their “everlasting light.”

READ Isaiah 50:10

That’s Isaiah. Now, in light of that passage (no pun intended) listen to what Jesus says here in John 8…

READ John 8:12 again

Jesus obviously has Isaiah 50 in mind. He is saying, “I am the servant of God that Isaiah was talking about.” Anyone who knows his O.T. would understand exactly what Jesus is saying here. The Pharisees understand. And what’s their reaction to it?

"You are bearing witness about yourself; your testimony is not true." In essence what they’re saying to Jesus is, “You can’t do that. You’re making an invalid claim because you’re making it about Yourself. You’re just boasting. Why should we believe you? There are no witnesses to confirm what You’re claiming.” And that IS what the Mosaic Law required. Jesus will later acknowledge this, v 17, when He says, “In your Law it is written that the testimony of two people is true.” So the Pharisees reject Jesus’ claim to be the light of the world, to be the Savior of the world, the Messiah, on the basis that there are not at least two witnesses who can confirm the validity of what He’s saying.

Just a side note here – this is the way that unbelief operates. Unbelief can never have enough proof. Jesus’ words alone should have been enough to convince them. They had heard enough of His teaching to know that He spoke like no other person ever spoke (the testimony of the Temple police who they had sent to arrest Him). His many works of healing, His power over disease, demons, death, and nature should have been enough proof. Not even raising someone from the dead was enough proof. By the time we come to John Ch 8 Jesus has already raised two people from the dead that we know of (the widow’s son at Nain, Luke 7, and Jairus’ daughter, Matt 9). No, unbelief never has enough proof! But Jesus has already rebuked them for this back in John 7:17 – “If anyone’s will is to do God’s will, he will know whether the teaching is from God or whether I am speaking on my own authority.” In other words Jesus has already told the Pharisees, “If you had been truly seeking God’s will then you would know that what I am saying was true. But you’re not. You are spiritually blind.” And as a result nothing Jesus says or does is going to convince them. And as we go thru Chap 8 there is this back and forth dialogue between Jesus and the Pharisees where Jesus says something and they argue with Him – all the way thru to the end of the chapter.

READ John 8:14-18

There is a lot to unpack here. Let me simplify it for you. Jesus gives the Pharisees two reasons why His claim to be the light of the world, the Savior, the Messiah, IS true. First of all because of WHO He is. Well, who is Jesus? The Pharisees seem to think that Jesus is merely a man from Galilee. But Jesus says, “You don’t know me at all!” “I know where I came from and I know where I am going, but you don’t!” Where did Jesus come from? He came from heaven. He’s God, right? That’s the basic premise that the Apostle John makes in his Gospel… right from the very beginning. John 1:1, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God”…of course John is speaking of Jesus. So Jesus came from heaven where He had existed in perfect fellowship with His heavenly Father. Then John goes on to tell us in Ch 1 that John the Baptist bore witness about the light. He says “The true light, which gives light to everyone, was coming into the world.” Again John is talking about Jesus. “And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen His glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.”

So Jesus came from heaven. He’s God the Son. And where is it that Jesus is going? Well, He’s going to go to the cross where He will die physically. Then He will be buried in a new tomb. Then on the third day He will be resurrected back to life. Then 40 days later He will head up with His disciples to the Mount of Olives where He will ascend, according to Acts 1:11 “into heaven.” So, Jesus came from heaven and He will return back to heaven. His testimony is true because of WHO He is. He is the transcendent God, part of the eternal Godhead, God the Son who came to earth and manifested Himself in human flesh. That’s who He is.

But Jesus gives the Pharisees a second reason why His claim to be the light of the world is true, and that is, because of the testimony of His Father. In v 18 Jesus says, “I am the one who bears witness about Myself, and the Father who sent Me bears witness about Me.” So, when do we have record that the Father bore witness, gave testimony about Jesus? Matt 3:16-17, “And when Jesus was baptized, immediately He went up from the water, and behold, the heavens were opened to Him, and He saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and coming to rest on Him; and behold, a voice from heaven said, ‘This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased.’” Mark 9:2-7, “And after six days Jesus took with Him Peter and James and John, and led them up a high mountain by themselves. And He was transfigured before them, and his clothes became radiant, intensely white… And there appeared to them Elijah with Moses, and they were talking with Jesus…*[Peter suggests they make 3 tents]*… And a cloud overshadowed them, and a voice came out of the cloud, ‘This is my beloved Son; listen to Him.’” Both of these events occurred prior to John Ch 8. What this means is that God the Father has previously given, with an audible voice, testimony to the fact that Jesus is indeed God’s Son and there are many witnesses who heard it and can corroborate it.

In v 15-17 Jesus makes the point that the Pharisees judge according to the flesh. Back in John 7:24 Jesus had told the people, “Do not judge by appearances, but judge with right judgment.” (This per the Law of Moses, Lev 19:15, which taught that one was to judge fairly and rightly). So the Pharisees are NOT operating according to the will of God. It’s no wonder, then, that they reject Jesus. Not a surprise at all! Isaiah 53 actually foretells this rejection. It says, “He (God’s servant, the Messiah) was despised and rejected by men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief; and as one from whom men hide their faces He was despised, and we esteemed Him not.” (Isa 53:3)

READ John 8:19-20

Jesus says, “You don’t know me. You don’t know my Father. You wouldn’t know God if he came up to you. You don’t know Him. You don’t know Me.” Back in chapter 5, v 23 He said similar words: “Whoever does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent Him.” Later in John 14:9 Jesus will tell His disciples, “Whoever has seen Me has seen the Father.” But here in this passage is the final insult. The Pharisees pride themselves on knowing God. They know God better than anyone. And yet Jesus tells them, point blank, “You don’t know Him at all!”

They’re now quite angry at Jesus. They want so badly to seize Him, to kill Him. But they can’t. They’ve tried three times in Ch 7 unsuccessfully. They can’t because, v 20, His hour has not yet come. He’s on a divine schedule. They can’t do a thing to Him.

READ John 8:21

Their willful rejection of Jesus will condemn them ultimately to Hell. This is such a sad commentary by our Lord on the lost state of these Jewish religious leaders. Hell is a place where a person finally knows who they need, but can never receive. That’s why it is described as a place where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth. Jesus says, “Where I am going, you cannot come. You will die in your sin.” And what sin is that? The sin of rejecting Him.

Application for us: As Christmas approaches I’ve been reflecting on that tremendous scene on the hillside outside of Bethlehem recorded in Luke’s Gospel. “And in the same region there were shepherds out in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. And an angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were filled with great fear. And the angel said to them, ‘Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. And this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger.’ And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying, ‘Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!’ (the KJV says, “and on earth peace, good will toward men”) When the angels went away from them into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, ‘Let us go over to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has made known to us.’”

A lot of people misunderstand the message of the heavenly host. You see, Jesus didn’t come to bring an end to wars and peace and brotherhood. He had another reason for coming. He came to be the Savior of the world. Jesus Himself said, Matt 10:34, “Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I have not come to bring peace, but a sword.” Then Jesus goes on to explain what He means by a sword – division and conflict. He says, “For I have come to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law.” Families will be divided when one member comes to Christ while the others reject Him. Jesus came and disrupted His world. He upset the religious establishment. He came to save the world from darkness, from their evil, fallen state. That was Jesus message throughout the Gospels and especially in John. So what did those angels mean by “peace on earth, good will toward men”? In Ephesians 2:14 Paul gives us the answer to that question: “For He Himself (Jesus) is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in His flesh the dividing wall of hostility.” Paul goes on to say that Jesus Christ “reconciled us to God” in His death on the cross. He made the way to salvation, to peace between fallen man and a holy God. That’s what the angels meant.

You cannot read John and believe Jesus was just a good moral teacher. His claims at being the Son of God, the Messiah – you either believe them or you reject them. There is no middle ground. So this Christmas season I ask you, “Who is Jesus?” He is the light of the world!