
I AM the Light of the World

DAVE BAST

Light is one of those mysterious things science cannot fully explain. Is it a wave? Is it a particle? From what little I recall of high school physics, I think the answer to both of those is, “Yes,” but the symbolism of light is also mysterious and compelling. Why did Jesus, for example, call Himself the light of the world? What did He mean? Stay tuned.

DAVE BAST

From Words of Hope and ReFrame Media, this is Groundwork, where we dig into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives. I am Dave Bast, and joining me today as our guest co-host is David Den Haan. David is a pastor from Jenison, Michigan; and David, once again it is great to welcome you to Groundwork.

DAVID DEN HAAN

Well, thank you, Dave; it is great to be here. It has been great going through these “I am” statements, beginning with “I am the bread of life,” in our last program, and now going into this one: “I am the light of the world.”

DAVE BAST

“I am the light of the world.” Jesus says that in John – again, these are all coming from the Gospel of John – seven of them; and it is John 8:12, actually, which goes like this:

Jesus said, “I am the light of the world; whoever follows Me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.”

DAVID DEN HAAN

You know, I picture Jesus there in the Temple courts as He is saying this. It is the Feast of Tabernacles and Jesus is standing there in the Temple courts with four immense candelabras burning in the Temple courts, and it is said that the light from those candelabras illuminated almost the entire city of Jerusalem. So, here we have Jesus standing there with these immense lights, and He, on the ground there, says to His disciples: Guess what, guys. I am the light of the world.

DAVE BAST

Right; that is all pointing to me. We mentioned this in the last program in connection with the manna, or bread of life; Jesus claims: I am the bread who came down from heaven like that manna. It is all against the backdrop of the Old Testament story – the great story of salvation – the Exodus; and if you are familiar with those first books of the Bible, you remember the story of Israel’s deliverance from Egypt, and then living in the wilderness – passing through; and Jesus is picking up on all kinds of echoes. In this case, it is the pillar of fire. You remember how God kind of went before the people and led them on the way and told them when to stop and when to go; and during the day it would be this column of cloud and at night this blazing fire...

DAVID DEN HAAN

Yes, can you imagine?

DAVE BAST

If they were going after dark; right, and that is what those lights in the Temple courtyard symbolized. It was to call to mind, because the Feast of Tabernacles, which was the third of the great Jewish feasts: Passover, Pentecost, and Tabernacles – and Tabernacles was when they remembered the wilderness wandering. They would build little shelters and live in them for a week.

DAVID DEN HAAN

Yes, there are all of these connections, aren't there, to the stories in Exodus; and one of the places you could go to as well is at that place in Exodus 3 where God is talking to Moses on the mountain, in the burning bush, and Moses says: So, who should I say is sending me?

DAVE BAST

Yes, what's Your name?

DAVID DEN HAAN

Right...

DAVE BAST

What's Your name, God? I mean, every god has a name, right?

DAVID DEN HAAN

Yes, and God comes up with this kind of weird, hard to figure out, impossible to understand name: I am who I am. And that is so significant because He is really distinguishing Himself from all the gods that the Israelites knew back in Egypt, who had images to relate to themselves, who had pictures – you know, cats and sun, and all kinds of things that you could easily relate to – and now God is saying: I am not like any of that. I am completely different and separate. I am who I am.

DAVE BAST

Jehovah, great I Am, as one old hymn puts it; and so, think about that, and the echoes; so sacred was this name that no devout Jew would ever repeat it, to this day.

DAVID DEN HAAN

They just wrote the consonants.

DAVE BAST

They would write the four letters that make up the consonants; and nobody knows exactly how it was pronounced because they stopped pronouncing it. The best guess is Yahweh, which modern scholars offer, but think about that when Jesus starts saying: I am, I am, I am, I am; and the claim that that involves.

DAVID DEN HAAN

Yes; He is claiming incredible things, of course, but He is kind of filling in the picture that God left unfilled, or mysterious maybe is a better way to put it.

DAVE BAST

That's good, yes, I like that.

DAVID DEN HAAN

You know, He is kind of filling in the lines...

DAVE BAST

He is the image of the invisible God.

DAVID DEN HAAN

Yes.

DAVE BAST

You don't need to make a statue or a picture; just look at Jesus if you want to know what God looks like.

DAVID DEN HAAN

And they were in a world in which lots of people were making images of the various pagan gods, right? So, here comes Jesus saying: Okay, this mystery that we have always had: I am who I am – let Me fill in the picture.

DAVE BAST

Right; so as He fills in these details with metaphors, with pictures, symbolism: I am the bread; I am the light; and later on, as we will see, I am the shepherd; I am the door; I am the resurrection and the life. He is also saying in effect: All those stories are really about Me. I am what all of this was preparing for and pointing to. You know that Exodus that we have always said was God's great act of deliverance of salvation? It is really only a dress rehearsal. The real play – the real drama – is about to be enacted, and it involves Me.

DAVID DEN HAAN

You know, Paul said: All of God's promises are yes in Christ; and it is like Christ is here saying: Yes, and all of God's mysteries are explained in Me, too. You are not going to know all of them, but I am going to show you the most important ones, that you have life in Me.

DAVE BAST

Well, let's unpack that image of light. What is Jesus trying to tell us when He uses this symbol; and I think we have already been touching on it when we talked about: If you want to know what God looks like, look at Me; because it has to do with revelation. I mean, if you think about it, we do not actually see light. Light is the thing by which we see everything else; so, Jesus is saying: I am the one who brings light that enables you to see – to know – to understand – especially who God is.

DAVID DEN HAAN

Right; and it penetrates darkness. Darkness cannot withstand light. There is no amount of darkness that can be collected that would defeat a beam of light – it just does not happen that way.

DAVE BAST

Sure; John Chapter 1: The true light which enlightens everyone was in the world. In Him was life, and the life was the light of all, and the light shines in the darkness and the darkness cannot overcome it.

DAVID DEN HAAN

Right; or there is another translation for that: Cannot overcome or understand it. That is a hard word in the Greek to translate into the English, but both ways it communicates that fact that light overpowers darkness.

DAVE BAST

I think of a wonderful illustration – you know, prior to about 1840 or so, the only way you could know what someone looked like if you were not actually looking at them was by a painting; but then somebody invented this new technology of photography, where they could actually take a picture – and what to call it – what do you call this new thing? So they took two words from Greek: *photos* for light and *graphé*, which means to draw or write, and they said: This is a drawing made with light – of a picture or whatever; and that is what Jesus is. I think if Paul had had that word, he might have used it. Jesus is the photograph of God; He is the drawing a picture of God made with light; and then He is inviting us to look.

DAVID DEN HAAN

Yes; here I am, the light of the world, and I shine into the darkness; the darkness will not overcome it; and I will lead you out of sin; I will lead you out of death; I will lead you away from ignorance and misunderstanding and confusion; all of these things that the light will overcome.

DAVE BAST

If you follow Me; which is what we want to look at next – that is the second part of the verse.

Segment 2

DAVID DEN HAAN

This is Groundwork, where we are digging into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives. I am David Den Haan.

DAVE BAST

And I am Dave Bast, and today we are digging into John Chapter 8 and verse 12 – just a single verse – another of the “I am” sayings, where Jesus says: I am the light of the world; and then He adds this, in effect I guess it is a promise, David: Whoever follows Me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.

DAVID DEN HAAN

It is a magnificent promise for all who are in some kind of darkness, and aren't there many kinds?

DAVE BAST

Boy, that is for sure. I think about the darkness of confusion; of just what is true and what isn't, and is there even any truth these days? It is interesting, I remember years ago visiting Oxford in England, and I had always had this vision of Oxford University; you know, I kind of grew up reading C. S. Lewis, and he taught at Oxford, and I thought: Well, that is really cool; and it is really cool; and all these ancient buildings – beautiful stonework – many of them with the motto of the university inscribed on them: *Dominus Illuminatio Mea*, which I know, I am sure your Latin is good...

DAVID DEN HAAN

Yes, I really brushed up on that.

DAVE BAST

It is actually the first verse of Psalm 27: The Lord is my light. What a motto; but you know, nobody believes that anymore; or almost no one. Our universities have become known for sort of rejecting even belief in God let alone Christian faith.

DAVID DEN HAAN

The search for truth continues, but it does not continue in a God-ward direction. You know, I think about the ancient world on that particular score – I think about the ancient world's search for truth. There were gods who promised that. The god Apollo, for example, and there were oracles to Apollo at Delphi, at Didyma; if you wanted to find out what your life was supposed to look like, you went there and you asked the priests: What would the gods say about this? And then they would confer, you know, back in the back room of the temple there at Delphi or Didyma, and then come to you and say: Here is what the gods say about what your life should look like. The quest for truth is an ancient one.

DAVE BAST

And in contrast to all of that, Jesus says in another “I am” saying that we will look at later in this series: I am the way and the truth and the life; so look to Me if you want to know what truth is.

DAVID DEN HAAN

Right; Jesus delivers not only from confusion but also from the darkness of sin. I have seen so many examples in my life as a pastor of where people have gotten into such messes because of decisions that they make, again out of confusion, but not only out of confusion; there is a moral component to it as well; there is sin drawing us in.

DAVE BAST

Part of the problem that we all face if we are honest, I think, is that at least part of each of us is sort of drawn to the darkness. It is not just that we are kind of innocent, you know, stumbling around; I mean, I just know in my own life – and I am not going to spill my guts here to you, David, let alone everyone who is listening – but there is another verse in John where John says: This is the judgment, that light came into the world, but men loved the darkness rather than the light because their deeds were evil; and you just think about that, how the things that we hide and that we cover up because we do not want them to come to light, you know.

DAVID DEN HAAN

Yes; there are gutters in which we crawl – in our imaginations, in our hearts, in our minds; and the solution to all of that is not going to be a better education system – as wonderful as that would be – it is not going to be a program from the government with lots of resources – again, as wonderful as that might be; but it is going to be Jesus Christ and the life that He gives.

DAVE BAST

Well, and here is another wonderful verse from John's pen. It happens to come from I John Chapter 1, but he says: ^{5b}God is light, and in Him there is no darkness at all. ⁶If we claim to have fellowship with God while we walk in darkness, we lie; ⁷but if we walk in the light, as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another and the blood of Jesus cleanses us from all sin. So, here is a wonderful promise: if we will embrace Jesus Christ, the light of the world, He will cleanse us from sin, and He will help us – maybe not all at once...

DAVID DEN HAAN

Yes, it is a process.

DAVE BAST

Yes, He will let the light shine into the dark corners of our life and bring purifying grace and power and mercy.

DAVID DEN HAAN

Yes, and ultimately, right, He saves us from death; you know, the darkness of death that looms large over every human being. I can think of so many conversations I have had with people at our church about loved ones who have passed away; and the question always gets asked: Did this person believe? Was he or she a believer? And the person that is remembering this loved one will be able to say, "Yes," and that makes so much difference.

DAVE BAST

Oh, sure; yes. I have had that same experience many times as a pastor. If there is some kind of expression or confession, it is so encouraging to people because I think deep down all of us know that there is really no life outside of Him. "I am the light of the world," He says; "whoever follows Me will have the light of life," and that is the ultimate deliverance.

DAVID DEN HAAN

And that is the promise we have for us who remember and think about our loved ones who have passed away – that is what we get to look forward to as well – this resurrection life that Jesus offers to us. He is the firstborn from the dead, right? He is the one who brings us that light, too.

DAVE BAST

Well, I want to explore a little bit more, though, this idea of following Him; and whoever follows Me – in a sense, that is really an invitation. Just a few months ago I was attending a lecture by a very noteworthy New Testament scholar, and he pointed out that in John this happens over and over and over, where Jesus makes a statement, but He puts it in the singular when it could just as well have been plural. “Everybody who follows Me will have the light of life,” but He does not say that; He says, “Whoever,” meaning, you individually; and according to this scholar, John did that very intentionally – or Jesus, in saying it, did it very intentionally, because what He was really doing is asking people to consider: Are you following Me; you, not the crowd, but you individually?

DAVID DEN HAAN

“Who do *you* say that I am, and will you come and follow Me?” That is exactly right.

DAVE BAST

Right; and that is a challenge, too, as well as a promise. So, let’s look at that and tease that out next.
Segment 3

DAVE BAST

Welcome to Groundwork; I am Dave Bast.

DAVID DEN HAAN

And I am David Den Haan, and we were just talking about this “I am” statement that Jesus offers to us in John Chapter 8: I am the light of the world.

DAVE BAST

And the promise that He adds, which is, in effect, also a kind of demand: A call for each of us to decide, will we follow Him? Whoever follows Me will not walk in darkness – will be delivered from darkness of every kind: confusion, sin, death, ultimately – and will have the light of life.

DAVID DEN HAAN

You know, a great image comes to my mind on that score, thinking about are we following Jesus, who is the light of the world? I think about some amaryllis bulbs that I’ve got in my family room. They are parked right next to a window, where they get a lot of sun; and I have to spin them a little bit every day because they always lean in towards the window after a full day of sunlight; so then, after that day, if they lean too far, they are going to fall right over. So I have to spin these plants because they are so photo-sensitive.

DAVE BAST

Yes; that is a great word. They are hungry for light, aren’t they?

DAVID DEN HAAN

They sure are.

DAVE BAST

And they will look for it – they will lean into it. I remember years ago with my wife, we were driving across Kansas in mid-summer and there were these huge fields, acres and acres, full of sunflowers, and every single one of those big, yellow heads was pointing toward the sun wherever it was at that time of day. What a wonderful image that is for us. Are we drawn to the light who is Jesus Christ?

DAVID DEN HAAN

You know, there is a picture that I have, too, from scripture, where Mary and Martha – these two friends of Jesus’ who live just outside of Jerusalem – they are meeting with Jesus... Actually, Jesus is in their home, and one of them gets busy, you know, with all kinds of stuff: Putting the coffee on, setting out the dinner

place settings; doing all the work, but the sister, Mary, is at Jesus' feet. She is really kind of worshipping Him, listening to Him, taking Him in, drinking in His words; she is photosensitive, wouldn't you say?

DAVE BAST

Yes; but, let's try to be honest here. We touched earlier on the fact that there is also kind of a side of us, or a part of us, that leans toward the darkness; and I think if we are honest, we all acknowledge that, no matter how... I mean, some Christians don't. They claim to be without sin.

I will never forget an encounter I had with an old friend who had a spiritual experience, and I am sure it was great, and he made that actual claim to me. I have not sinned in I don't know long...

DAVID DEN HAAN

Oh, my!

DAVE BAST

Yes; I felt like stomping on his foot and seeing how he reacted...

DAVID DEN HAAN

I think about the masks that we sometimes put on when we come to church on Sunday. You know, we want everybody to think that we are just doing fine. We are mature. We don't really need anybody else.

DAVE BAST

And also the masks that we put on as pastors; because we come to church on Sunday and we stand up in front and everybody looks and says: Ooh, you know, the pastor; but we are the same.

DAVID DEN HAAN

We are the same; and what is interesting about that is when my congregation sees me fail in some way or flub something up in a worship service, all of a sudden there is a new connection between me and the folks that I am leading in worship. It is like they have said to themselves: Huh, I guess he is human after all. He is as broken as I am. I kind of want to spend more time with whatever he is spending some time on.

DAVE BAST

So, let's talk about this in the time that we have left. How do you do it? If we... I John 1:5 and 6 again; I quoted them earlier: If we claim to have fellowship with Him while we walk in darkness, we are lying; but if we walk in the light as He is in the light, then we not only have fellowship with Him but with each other and we are cleansed. How do you overcome the darkness – the dark things – the things you try to hide – how do you turn to the light every day, or in a practical way? What is your advice as a pastor?

DAVID DEN HAAN

You know, one of the things that I think about at our church, and I think could be true of any church is just the issue of transparency. Are there people in your life, in your congregation, with whom you are completely honest; and who, in turn, are honest with you? We put those masks on so easily, and they come off with so much difficulty. If you are having a conversation about some element of scripture or a passage or a text, the temptation is always going to be: Yes, I have this covered, you know? I don't really need any guidance, direction, or advice from you; and let me offer to you my advice instead. We just pretend so very well. Transparency is key, and it is so hard to do.

DAVE BAST

Well, you know, have you ever been walking in the woods or maybe even just in a garden and you turn over a stone or a log or something and you see all those things that kind of scurry away? I don't think that is any substitute for letting light into your life – letting others see; and it is hard to do and it is something that has to be done carefully; I mean, you really have to find a trusted friend – sure, you begin with prayer, and you begin by being honest before God, and you begin by turning again every day to the Lord Jesus and confessing your sin; all that is to turn to the light, and in the scriptures every day you read it. That is just

basic.

DAVID DEN HAAN

Well, I think about the conversations I have had in my small group that I am a part of, and they tend to stall out from time to time, and they do not seem to get back on track until somebody is honest and says: You know what? I wrestle with this. This is where I failed this past week. Or I really messed this up. And all of a sudden, the rest of us – you can almost see it on our faces – we take stock of ourselves and we have permission now to be honest, with ourselves and with everybody else in the room, and that is where real growth seems to take place. I know the conversation suddenly comes to life.

DAVE BAST

Sure it does, because in one way or another, and probably we do not like this, or do not like to hear it, but you have to put flesh and blood on it; and so, you have to find not only confessing to Christ, not only confessing to God, but the New Testament says clearly we have to confess to one another; and so you have to find that trusted friend or that pastor or that spiritual director or whoever.

DAVID DEN HAAN

I think we are moving kind of toward accountability...

DAVE BAST

There, that is it.

DAVID DEN HAAN

You know, where we say to each other: I cannot do this alone; I need you to help me, so ask me the hard questions again and again and again: How are you doing with this? How are you doing with this sin? How are you doing with your reading of scripture? How are you in prayer? What is God saying to you? Those are key.

DAVE BAST

And honesty – I would add that to the accountability. I think of another incident from John's Gospel, from Chapter 5, where Jesus comes across this lame person lying by the pool and He says: Do you want to be healed? The first question; but that is a profound question: Do we want to be delivered? Do we want to be cleansed? Do we really want the light to shine through and through? Well, if the answer is yes then there is a way to do that: Follow Him.

Well, thanks for joining our Groundwork conversation; and don't forget, it is listeners like you asking questions and participating that keep our topics relevant to your life. Tell us what you think about what you are hearing and suggest topics or passages you would like to hear us deal with on future Groundwork programs. Visit us at groundworkonline.com and join the conversation.

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Printed on June 25, 2026