

## I AM the Light of the World

2/7 I AM Series

John 8:12

02 28 2010 Sam Jones Memorial UMC

### Introduction

On December 21, 1968, **Apollo 8** lifted off from Cape Canaveral and became the first manned spaceflight to circumnavigate the moon. On Christmas Eve, the crew sent a live TV broadcast from lunar orbit. They concluded the transmission with the astronauts taking turns reading from the book of Genesis.

William Anders: "For all the people on Earth the crew of Apollo 8 has a message we would like to send you". *"In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth. And the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters. **And God said, Let there be light: and there was light.** And God saw the light, that it was good: and God divided the light from the darkness."*

Jim Lovell: *"And God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And the evening and the morning were the first day. And God said, Let there be a firmament in the midst of the waters, and let it divide the waters from the waters. And God made the firmament, and divided the waters which were under the firmament from the waters which were above the firmament: and it was so. And God called the firmament Heaven. And the evening and the morning were the second day."*

Frank Borman: *"And God said, Let the waters under the heavens be gathered together unto one place, and let the dry land appear: and it was so. And God called the dry land Earth; and the gathering together of the waters called he Seas: and God saw that it was good."*

Borman concluded, "And from the crew of Apollo 8, we close with good night, good luck, a Merry Christmas, and God bless all of you—all of you on the good Earth."

### I. The Light of the World

Jesus said, ***"I AM the light of the world."***

According to the opening chapter of Genesis, God's first act of creation was speaking **light** into being. I find it intriguing that the Lord did not create the sun, moon, and stars until the FOURTH day of creation. We cannot imagine light without a source. However, God created light as a separate substance and shaped it like a potter working with clay.

Millennia later when **John** wrote the prologue of his Gospel, he recalled the opening words of Genesis. He described Jesus Christ as *"the Word of God."*

*"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. In him was life, and that life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not understood it." (John 1:1-5)*

Then in John 1:4, John wrote about God's Word: "*In his was life, and that life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not understood it.*"

God sent his Son into the world to reveal his grace and love. When Philip asked Jesus, "*Show us the father,*" Jesus responded, "*Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father.*" (John 14:8-9) Our Maker offers to his people the three-fold gift of life.

- ❖ Life: Creation      Physical/biological life
- ❖ Life: Eternal      Salvation and an everlasting relationship with God
- ❖ Life: Abundant      Abundant, fulfilled, and meaningful life in this world

This life is "*the light of men.*" In a fallen world of darkness, sin, and death, Jesus shines brightly as God's invitation to light, forgiveness, and life. Later in his public ministry, Jesus said: "*I am the light of the world.*" (John 8:12).

The darkness cannot understand the Light and will never overcome it. In physical science terms, darkness is simply the absence of light. Whenever God's light shines in our lives, then darkness is banished.

## II. Never Walk in Darkness

Jesus said, "*I AM the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness . . .*" When we accept Christ as our Savior and Lord, we walk out of darkness and into God's glorious light.

A chapter later in John's Gospel Jesus acted out these words when he encountered a **man blind** from birth. Jesus spit on the ground and made some mud. Then he placed the mud on the man's eyes and told him to go wash at the Pool of Siloam. After the blind man washed the mud from his eyes, he could see!

All of his neighbors were astonished at the miracle. When they asked him how his eyes were opened, he responded, "*The man they call Jesus.*" They brought the man to the Jewish leaders called the Pharisees. Rather than rejoicing in the man's healing, they became angry because Jesus had performed work on the Sabbath by making mud.

They brought the man who had been blind before them for a second time and said, "*Give glory to God. We know this man called Jesus is a sinner because he broke the Sabbath law!*"

The man replied, "*Whether he is a sinner or not, I do not know. One thing I do know: I was blind but now I see!*" (John 9:1-34) Centuries later in 1779, John Newton recalled the blind man's words when he wrote:

*"Amazing grace! How sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me!  
I once was lost, but now am found; was blind but now I see."*

According to physicists, the visible light detectable by the human eye is only a small part of the **electromagnetic spectrum**. The entire continuum includes radio, microwave, infrared, visible, ultraviolet, x-rays, gamma rays, and high energy gamma rays. We only see a very small portion of the spectrum.

And we don't always "see" all that that we can see! People practice **selective vision**—seeing only what they look for OR seeing only what they want to see.

This is one reason that many people run from God—they don't want to see what God's light reveals. In [John 3:19-20](#), Jesus said: *"This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but men loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil. Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that his deeds will be exposed."*

The light of the world grants us the gift of **vision**—the ability to see ourselves and our world clearly. When we come into God's light, we may not like what we see. Like a dingy restaurant, dim light can cover a multitude of sin. However, the Spirit enables us to see our every fault, flaw, shortcoming, and sin. But sinfulness is more than the sum total of our individual wrongs—it is the recognition that there is something terribly broken within us that we cannot fix on our own.

When Jesus began his public ministry, he summarized the gospel with the proclamation: *"The time has come and the kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe in the gospel!"* Note that repentance is the first step towards belief—a recognition of our sinfulness and the inability to save ourselves. THEN we are enabled to see ourselves as God sees us—dear children who are incredibly valuable to our heavenly Father. Our Creator, Redeemer, and Sustainer loves each of us with a love that is beyond all measure of height and width and depth.

God accepts us "as is" but loves us too much to let us remain that way. Divine love is a **stern love** that calls us onward and upward. Wise parents know this is true raising children.

An ad for the new TV series *"Parenthood"* says: "Parenthood means knowing when you hear your child scream "I hate you" that you're doing something right!" A parent's job is NOT to make their children happy or to be their buddy—a parent's job is to shape children for adulthood.

God loves us too much to leave us alone. The Spirit convicts us of our sin and calls us onward towards perfection. The Holy Spirit nags, badgers, harasses, and hassles us. Divine love is an all-consuming affair that will not accept anything less than our absolute best.

"The light of the world" also guides and **illuminates our way**. [Psalm 27](#) declares, *"The Lord is my light and salvation."* [Psalm 119](#) says, *"Your word is a lamp unto my feet and a light to my path."* In [Ephesians 5:8](#), Paul writes: *"For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light!"*

<p>God's Spirit and Word teach us how to live as children of the light and then light our way. <a href="#">Virginia Law</a> told of her experience as a missionary in the Congo. She said that at their mission station, there were men who served as night sentries. They carried oil lanterns. One night, one of them brought her a message. She noticed his lantern and said, "That lamp doesn't give much light does it?" He replied, "No. It doesn't. But, it shines as far as I can step."</p>
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I've thought of those words occasionally while driving at night. Car **headlights** on "high beam" illuminate the road up to 150 yards (450 feet) or one and one-half football fields. "Low beams" illuminate about half that distance—75 yards or 225 feet. This sounds like a long distance. However, if a motorist is traveling at 60 miles per hour then s/he is traveling 88 feet PER SECOND. Including reaction time at this speed, it takes an average driver about 100 yards to brake to a complete stop.

When stopping distance is greater than the effective illumination of the headlights, experts call this "*overdriving your headlights*." It is something we are guilty of doing not only on the road but also in our Christian walk.

I believe in planning and preparation. On a trip, I carefully plan the route. If I'm going somewhere I've never been before, I will "Google" the directions and print a map with turn-by-turn directions. For Christmas, I received a "Tom-Tom" GPS which grants satellite information to my travels.

Oftentimes we come to God praying for guidance; and at least in my case, I expect a fully prepared trip map from AAA, complete with exact directions, waypoints, and arrival time. In my experience, however, this is not how the Holy Spirit typically operates.

Last week we began our Lenten journey together by recalling Jesus' words, "*If anyone would follow me, he must deny himself, take up his cross, and follow in my footsteps*." There is no indication given about where the pilgrimage may lead. Our job is to follow our Master.

Sometimes we may be granted a view of the distance. More often, however, the light shines as far as we can step. And that's enough.

### **III. The Light of Life**

Jesus said, "*I AM the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life*." What an incredible promise—to know that Jesus not only promises light, not only brings light, not only is present in light, but Jesus IS the light—and the light of life can shine within each of us.

In this passage, Jesus said, "*I am the light of the world*." In another setting, however, Jesus said to his followers, "*You are the light of the world!*" God's light shines in our lives. Such light is not meant to be hidden but displayed for all to see—and then be enabled to see!

The divine light shines in our lives like the brilliance of the sun reflected by the **moon**. The moon has no internal illumination. Instead, it reflects the light of the sun. On a "full moon," we see the entire face of the moon's nearside totally lit.

I grew up as a child hearing about the "**dark side of the moon**." Due to the moon's rotation and orbit, only one hemisphere of the moon faces the earth. The other side is always hidden from us. I'm a bit embarrassed to say that it wasn't until fairly recently that I realized the "dark side of the moon" isn't always dark! In fact, it gets illuminated as much as the near side! When we see a "new moon" in the sky with no reflected light, the backside is totally illuminated—we just cannot see it. Textbooks and scientists now talk about the "far side" and the "nearside" of the moon instead.

The astronomic lesson reminds us that God’s light can wax and wane in our lives like the monthly phases of the moon. There are moments in our lives when we shine brightly with divine light and love. And there are other times when our witness is dark and dim.

Last Sunday night the PUMP group of sixth graders experienced a “**Trust Walk**” as part of their lesson. During the first part of the exercise, half the group was blindfolded while the other half served as guides. Then each pair swapped roles. Later we blindfolded the entire group except for one leader. It was the leader’s job to lead everyone else around the room filled with obstacles. Afterwards, we talked about how it felt to be both a follower and a leader.

There were some interesting responses. Although many of them felt very uncomfortable when they were blindfolded, they also worried when they were the guides. One student said, “I kept worrying that I might lead them the wrong way.”

I’m too much of a preacher to ignore an opening like that. I responded by saying, “Whether you realize it or not, someone is always watching your example and following your lead.” And at least for a moment, I think some of them “got” it.

We are the light of the world; and for some people, our lives might be the only gospel they hear proclaimed. We are called to shine with the light of God’s reflected love so that others can also find the way.

### **Conclusion**

Jesus said, *“I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life.”* This “I AM” statement by Jesus leaves us with two choices: to walk in the darkness or to walk in the light. When we follow Jesus, we are given the light of life. His Word illuminates our way—granting us light to take the next step and the next and the next.

We are also given both the privilege and responsibility of sharing God’s light with others. Such light is not meant to be hidden but to be a beacon for all to see. Our children sing the song: *“This little light of mine, I’m gonna let it shine. Let it shine, let it shine, let it shine.”*

The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness will never, ever comprehend it or overcome it. It was there in the beginning and continues to shine both now and forevermore. God’s light brings illumination, guidance, faith, hope, joy and love to our fallen world and darkened lives.

Jesus said: *“I AM the light of the world.”* Jesus said, *“You are the light of the world.”* Shine on.