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I Am Who the Light of the World

John 9

When God appeared to Moses on Mt. Sinai, he told him his name: Yahweh... "I Am." For generations, Jews considered it blasphemous to utter that holy name. Then along comes Jesus who not only speaks the Name of God, he claims it for himself. He seems to be saying, "When you look at me, listen to me, spend time with me, you are looking, listening and hanging out with the holy, eternal God of Israel."

For Lent, we are looking at six of the "I Am" statements in John. Last week was "I am the Bread of Life." This morning... "I Am the Light of the World!" He says it in John chapter 8 for the first time, and then in 9 heals a blind man to miraculously illustrate his point. [Read John 9: 1-12]

As Jesus walks along he spots a beggar who has been blind all his life. It was believed that if you suffered a disability, it was a sign of God's disfavor. If you were a leper, or lame or blind, it must be because someone had done something to tick God off. So the disciples ask Jesus, "Who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" "Neither," Jesus says. "But this will be an opportunity for God's power to be displayed." Then he declares, "I am the light of the world"... and illustrates it by delivering this man from a lifetime of darkness. And he does it in a gross way. [Demonstrate with mud and spittle.]

He spits on the ground and makes mud. Then he covers the man's eyes with mud and tells him, "Go wash in the pool of Siloam." Why didn't Jesus just heal him right there? Why make this poor blind man, who now looks weird with mudpacks on his eyes, grope his way through the streets of Jerusalem to wash in a particular pool? We don't know. Maybe it was a test of the man's faith. But it reminds us that Jesus can heal anyone anyway he wants to!

The man did what he was told. Can you imagine fumbling your way to the Pool of Siloam, leaning down, splashing water on the crusty mud that some guy stuck there, and, for the first time watching streaks of light break through? And light turning to color... and colors turning to images. And then, as you stare into the water for the first time in your life you see what you look like! Wow!

Notice he came back... maybe to say "Thank you." When he arrived, his neighbors could not believe their eyes. He sure looked like the blind beggar they had always

known. Some said, "Yep, this is the guy." Others said, "No, it only looks like him. This couldn't possibly be the same man."

I heard this week of a man who gave his life to Christ and had been baptized. I've known him for years. He is a complete jerk. My first response when I heard it was, to my shame, "This can't possibly be the same man!" But that's what Jesus does!

Everyone is so confused; they take the man to the religious leaders. [Read 13-23]

Notice: When did Jesus heal the blind man? On the Sabbath! Just like the man at the Pool of Bethesda. You know how the Pharisees hated it when Jesus healed on the Sabbath, and you know how Jesus did it on purpose to make the point that he had the authority to do so... and that their stupid traditions had derailed God's intent for Sabbath which was rest and restoration. What could be more restorative than being healed?

Anyhow, Jesus stirred things up with the religious leaders... again. But they were divided. Some wondered how anyone could do such a thing unless he was a prophet. Then they thought, maybe this guy wasn't really blind after all. Maybe it's a scam. And if it is a scam then Jesus didn't really heal on the Sabbath, and they still get to make the rules and excommunicate anyone who doesn't obey them. So they send for the blind man's parents who are so afraid of these religious bullies that they throw their own kid under the bus. Yes, they say, he was blind from birth, but as for how he got healed... "He is of age; ask him."

So they call the ex-blind guy back for a second interview. Listen to the smack talk. [Read 24-34]

Don't you love how snippy the guy is? Here's my favorite line: "I have already told you and you did not listen. Why do you want to hear it again? Do you want to become his disciples, too?" But his most famous line comes in verse 24: "Whether [this man] is a sinner or not, I don't know. One thing I do know. I was blind but now I see." Remember a hymn that includes that line? Amazing Grace. "I once was lost but now am found. Was blind but now I see!"

In the end, the Pharisees are furious, but they can't refute the evidence. So, they fume and rant and throw him out. But Jesus is not quite done with him. [Read 35-38]

Isn't it precious how Jesus goes looking for the guy after he gets booted out of church? And in the conclusion to this story, we see one of the central themes of John's gospel repeated again: belief in Jesus. "Do you believe in the Son of Man?" (Jesus asks?) "Who is he, sir? Tell me so that I may believe in him." (Notice Jesus' ironic response) "You have now seen him...." [He couldn't have seen him before he

was healed.] And the man's wonderful reply, "Lord, I believe," and he worshiped him."

This is one of my favorite John stories. I love this guy's courage, and I love watching as his faith in Jesus just keeps growing. Look at the progression. He goes from declaring that "the man named Jesus" (11) healed him to calling him a "prophet" (17), to pronouncing him "the man come from God" (33), and finally confessing, "Lord I believe" and worshipping him! (38) I wonder if John doesn't love the story, too. John is the only one who tells it, and he locates it smack dab in the middle of his gospel as if to anchor the whole thing. And it reintroduces John's favorite metaphor for Jesus: Light!

John uses the "light" image 16 times in his gospel... more than all the other gospels combined. In fact, if you'll recall, John starts his gospel with this image when he describes Jesus as the Word made flesh:

^{1:4} In him was life and that life was the LIGHT of men. The LIGHT shines in the darkness and the darkness has not extinguished it... ⁹ The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world.

Remember, the very first words in John's gospel take us back to the very first words of the Bible in Genesis 1: the story of creation. "In the beginning was the Word..." John says. "In the beginning God created..." Genesis says. And do you recall the very first words we hear from God in Genesis? "And God said, "Let there be light! ...and God saw that the light was good!"

When John points to Jesus as the Light of the World, he is pushing us back to the earliest moments of revelation. And this metaphor of light as God's good replays itself again and again. David declares in Psalm 27, "The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear?" And do these words from the prophet Isaiah sound familiar? "The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness, on them has light shined." (Is 9:2) Ever heard them? Every Christmas Eve as we are reminded that the arrival of Jesus—the Light of the World—was foretold hundreds of years before that night in Bethlehem!

For John, darkness stands for evil. Darkness represents the alignment of spiritual forces against God's purpose for His world. The battle between light and darkness is the battle between God's forces of good and Satan's forces of evil. For instance, when Judas leaves the Last Supper to betray Jesus, this is how John puts it. "As soon as Judas had taken the bread, he went out. And it was night."

That little phrase "and it was night" is John's way of calling to our attention that Judas was conspiring with the forces of evil to snuff out the Light of the World.

So what does light do? Why is light such a perfect image for Jesus? Well, it does at least two things. First, it reveals. It reveals the way we should go. It reveals the perils that lie in our path. In our camp in Mexico, we all walk around at night with these goofy looking headlamps, because there is no electricity. When we walk to our tents, when we walk to the outhouses we need light to find our way. Jesus says, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life." When we follow Jesus—when we really walk in his light, not just play at being a Christian—He reveals the way that we should go.

The revealing power of light can be brutal, can't it? A brightly lit mirror in the morning is a harsh way to start the day. The revealing light of Christ also tells us the harsh truth about our life. Even though it can be shameful and painful, when the light of Christ shines on the sin and brokenness in our lives, that is the first step towards forgiveness and healing. It is why LifeGroups are essential—not just nice or worthwhile—but essential. It is why one of the earliest steps in CR is a fearless inventory of one's life and why people don't do that alone but in community. It is through the community of other believers that Christ's light reveals what needs to be confessed and forgiven.

In fact, John touched on this in one of the letters he wrote: ⁶If we claim to have fellowship [with God] yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live by the truth. ⁷But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin." Do you have anyone that shines the light of Christ upon your life? If you don't, you are living dangerously.

Light reveals; it also heals. When we packed up our tents in Mexico, they were still wet. And after a few days in a dark bag inside a dark Penske truck, when we opened our tent to dry it out, it smelled like a dead fish. It needed the purifying, healing power of light! And no one knows the curative power of light better than Northwesterners! My doctor makes me take Vitamin D, because I don't get enough of the light I need. Some of you even have SAD, right? Seasonal Affective Disorder. If you don't get enough light, it depresses you! Light purifies; it heals.

When Jesus declares, "I Am the Light of the World" he is saying, "I Am the one who reveals truth to you. I will show you the truth about God and about yourself. I will show you life as it should be lived. I will show you the truth about sin and if you will let me, I will shine my healing light on what is sick and putrid and purify it and make it right." The real presence of Christ in our lives—and again, I'm not talking about that little, nibbly, one hour Nod to God on Sunday mornings, no, but the person who really opens her life to Jesus—discovers the power that comes from walking in His light.

There are few Chapel Hill ministries that are more enlightening, more revealing, more healing in the life of young people, than our mission to Mexico. For the kid

who takes our prosperity for granted, for the kid who thinks only of himself, for the kid who thinks that our American way is the only way... nothing shines the light of God's truth like crossing that border, experiencing real poverty and offering their lives in sacrificial service to those who have so little and whom God loves so much.

I am excited to have you hear how the Light of the World shined on some of our young lives two weeks ago. [Students share]

CONCLUSION

Every year, Chapel Hill rallies our young missionaries to Mexico and to other parts of the world, because we believe that Jesus is the Light of the whole world and that only by walking in His light can anyone have real life. Thank you for your support!

But there is a verse troubles. ⁵ "While I am in the world, I am the light of the world." Well, Christ is no longer in the world. He is back in heaven with his Father, so, what does that mean for this epic battle with darkness? If Jesus, the Light of the World, is no longer here, shining what will hold the darkness at bay? Jesus said, "I am the Light of the World." But he said something else to his disciples in Matthew 5:14: "You are the light of the world." Christ, the Light of the World, is no longer walking around in a body. Now, the Spirit of Jesus lives inside each of our bodies. We are the reflection of Christ in this world; Jesus continues to shine through us.

So as we close this morning, I would simply ask this: How much darkness is being banished by the light of Christ that shines through you? Does the light of Christ in you reveal truth and guide people into life? Does the light of Christ in you bring healing and hope and restoration? If you were the only Jesus person in a place of darkness—and that is true for many of you—how far back is the darkness forced to retreat from you? Are you the light in your world... in your school, your home, your workplace, your neighborhood? When you walk into a place, do people who may not even know Jesus recognize that something life-giving has just come on the scene?

You are the light of the world, beloved! Are you? May your light so shine before man that they will see your good works and give glory to your father who is in heaven.

Sermon Questions

- **REFLECT & APPLY TOGETHER:** Share your thoughts. Don't teach! Listen and reflect on God's word together; grapple with what God is calling us to do and be through this passage.
- **PRAY TOGETHER:** Tell the Lord one thing you are thankful for, and lay one concern before the Lord.
- **DIG DEEPER**
 1. Read our text. There are four different responses to Jesus in this story. Can you identify them? Which one most closely describes your own response to Christ right now?
 2. Jesus said, "I Am the Light of the World." What does light do?
 3. Jesus also said, "You are the light of the world?" How is that so? What are the implications of that for the way we live?