

A photograph of a forest path. Sunlight filters through the trees, creating a dappled light effect on the ground. The path is made of dirt and gravel, and the trees are tall and thin, with some evergreens in the foreground.

Who is Jesus?

Salvation and Judgment
by the Son of God

John 8:12-30

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Introduction

Who are you? Who are you, really? What is your true identity? These are important questions, and I think they impact how we live our lives. In my life, I've often tried to define myself by what I do. By my accomplishments, my achievements, my accolades. I'm a musician. I'm an artist. I'm an athlete. I'm an influencer. I'm a student. The problem is that these are all situational, these are all circumstances that can change. And an even bigger problem is that I might fail in my endeavors. My dreams might never be realized. This leads to a lack of stability in my life, and a loss of my sense of purpose in this world. Instead of defining my identity by what I do, there is a better way. There is a better way to discover who I really am. If you'll hear me today, it begins by looking at Jesus. And he will show us who we really, truly are.

Context

Our passage today is John 8:12-30. We find ourselves again at The Feast of Tabernacles. This was a festival to remember God's faithfulness during Israel's wilderness wanderings. Jesus is speaking with the Jews, and he's revealing his identity. He's doing it in a very specific way, making it clear for those who have ears to hear – meaning, those who want to really see him for who he is. This is the question that is driving our entire passage today: Who is Jesus? Who is he really? What is his true identity?

Clues

There are so many references to the Old Testament in our passage. These are Old Testament references that the Jews know and understand. Jesus is almost toying with the Jews at this point. He's dangling so many clues in front of them, yet they refuse to put them together. And the point is that they can't. They are unable to do it. They don't want to do it, and they don't want to believe it. They are blinded by their unbelief. My goal today is to help you clearly see three big clues – three references that reveal Jesus' true identity, and lead you to worship him.



1. Jesus is the Light of the World

Again Jesus spoke to them, saying, **“I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.”** (John 8:12)

The first clue to Jesus’ true identity is that he is the light of the world. We think of light in broad terms such as goodness, life, or hope. But it would have meant something very specific to the Jews that Jesus was speaking to.

*“I am the LORD; I have called you in righteousness; I will take you by the hand and keep you; I will give you as a covenant for the people, **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. (Isaiah 42:6)*

*he says: “It is too light a thing that you should be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob and to bring back the preserved of Israel; I will make you as **a light for the nations**, that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth.” (Isa. 49:6)*

These passages from Isaiah would have come into the minds of the Pharisees, especially during the Feast of Tabernacles. In these two passages, it’s clear that light refers to bringing the knowledge of God to the world – to the nations. It’s a light that liberates from spiritual darkness. It’s a light that opens blind eyes, to see salvation reach to the ends of the earth. Jesus said that there is no other light that can do this. He is the only, exclusive, saving light.

Application

Do you see Jesus as your Savior? Or do you look at the things of this world to save you? Do you think money will make you happy? Do you think fame and popularity will bring you peace? Will the American dream give you freedom? Do you seek approval from certain people? Do you want to be noticed or recognized by a special someone? Do you place your hope in technology, government, or social justice? Only Jesus will save and satisfy your soul. He calls you now to turn to him and his truth, to open your eyes, to see, and to be free.

Our first clue to who Jesus is is that he is the light of the world, bringing the truth and knowledge of God to the nations. This angered the self-righteous Pharisees. They try to discredit Jesus. Let’s see what happens next.



2. Jesus is sent from God, his Father

The second clue to Jesus' true identity is that he is sent from God, his Father. The Pharisees say that Jesus has no proof for such an outrageous claim. You can't just say these things about yourself. Someone must testify to it, be a witness to it, verify it.

*So the Pharisees said to him, "You are bearing witness about yourself; your testimony is not true." Jesus answered, "Even if I do bear witness about myself, **my testimony is true**, for I know where I came from and where I am going, but you do not know where I come from or where I am going. You judge according to the flesh; I judge no one. Yet even if I do judge, **my judgment is true**, for it is not I alone who judge, but I and **the Father who sent me**. In your Law it is written that the testimony of two people is true. I am the one who bears witness about myself, and **the Father who sent me** bears witness about me." They said to him therefore, "Where is **your Father**?" Jesus answered, "You know neither me nor **my Father**. If you knew me, you would know **my Father** also." (John 8:13-19)*

The second clue to Jesus' true identity is that he is sent from God, his Father. Jesus is referencing how in the Old Testament, God is referred to as the Father of Israel.

***You are our Father**, though Abraham does not know us and Israel does not acknowledge us; **you, O Lord, are our Father**, our Redeemer from old is your name (Isa. 63:16-17).*

*O Lord, **you are our Father**; we are the clay and you are our potter; we are all the work of your hand. Be not so terribly angry, O Lord, and remember not iniquity forever (Isa. 64:8-9).*

Jesus says that if the Pharisees really knew who he was, then they would see for themselves that he is speaking the truth. If they are really going to need another witness, then Jesus' Father bears witness about him. But since the Pharisees don't know Jesus, and they don't know who his Father is, then they will never be able to see him for who he is as the light of the world.

Excursus: Truth, Time, and the Treasury

It is interesting that Jesus talks about having true testimony and true judgment. He says that the Pharisees judge according to the flesh. They judge according to superficial standards. They know nothing about Jesus and the heavenly realm. Case in point: They can't see on a spiritual level that Jesus is talking about God being his father. Jesus doesn't judge with superficial standards. Jesus sees the spiritual sphere – something that the Jews are unable to do because of their unbelief. Jesus is saying: "I am the light of the world. You do not follow me. You walk in darkness. You do not have the light of life." And see what the text says next:

*These words he spoke in the **treasury**, as he taught in the temple; but no one arrested him, because **his hour** had not yet come. (John 8:20)*

This verse about the treasury seems like a random insertion, but it really serves to push up the point of Jesus being the light of the world. In this specific area of the treasury, there were massive candelabras, raised up on pillars. Fire and smoke were meant to portray the pillar of fire and the lighted cloud that led Israel during their wilderness wanderings. And Jesus is saying that he is the light. He is salvation. Not just for Israel, but for the world. For the nations.

To focus on the fact that Jesus is sent from the Father, we see that no one arrested him. When we talk about "his hour," we're not talking about chronological time, but appointed time. The Father said, "Not yet. Now is not the time." The Father was looking out for his son. He was taking care of him. He was organizing and orchestrating everything for the right moment. Jesus trusted his Father with his life and he did not live in fear. He was free to do what his Father wanted. He lived his life with spiritual understanding and sensitivity. He lived on a spiritual level.

Application

Are you able to discern things on this deeper, spiritual level? Can you see the world through spiritual eyes? Those who merely see the world with their flesh are unable to see where God the Father fits in. They are unable to see his sovereign hand behind our situations and circumstances. For example, God has given you a specific family and specific friends for a specific reason. Will you reach out to them? Where you apply to college and where you are accepted are all ordained by God. Will you trust him no matter the outcome? Your family, your friends, your future – all sovereignly ordained by God. In times of peace and in times of war, God the Father governs it all. Look for the Lord in your life. Prayerfully consider how he is in control and acknowledge his presence. Trust the Father with your life and do not live in fear. You will be free to do what God wants.

The second clue to Jesus' true identity is that he is sent from God, his Father, bearing true testimony and true judgment from above. Things are starting to get serious now. Jesus starts being forceful with the Pharisees. He doubles down on his claims. He draws dividing lines. He says: "Because you don't know me or my Father, this is going to be detrimental for you. It's going to mean death."



3. Jesus is the Lifted Up Son of Man

The third clue to Jesus' true identity is that he is the lifted up Son of Man. He lays it out in this way:

*So he said to them again, “**I am** going away, and you will seek me, and **you will die in your sin**. Where **I am** going, you cannot come.” So the Jews said, “Will he kill himself, since he says, ‘Where I am going, you cannot come?’” He said to them, “You are from below; **I am** from above. You are of this world; **I am** not of this world. I told you that **you would die in your sins**, for unless you believe that I am he **you will die in your sins**.” (John 8:21-24)*

Jesus speaks about sin and death, and he brings them back to thinking about judgment and his claim about being the light of the world, not walking in darkness but having the light of life. Look at how many times he says “I am,” aligning himself with God being The Great I AM. He’s starting to get explicit, his clues get more clear, but the Pharisees remain blind in their unbelief.

*So they said to him, “Who are you?” Jesus said to them, “Just what I have been telling you from the beginning. I have much to say about you and much to judge, but he who sent me is true, and I declare to the world what I have heard from him.” They did not understand that he had been speaking to them about the Father. So Jesus said to them, “When you **have lifted up the Son of Man**, then you will know that I am he, and that I do nothing on my own authority, but speak just as the Father taught me. And he who sent me is with me. He has not left me alone, for I always do the things that are pleasing to him.” (John 8:25-29)*

Here we see the Pharisees being as direct as possible. They ask him: Who are you? And Jesus says he’s been telling them the truth from the beginning, but they still don’t understand that when Jesus talks about his Father, he means God. So Jesus makes a third and final Old Testament reference, giving them a third and final clue, using the language of lifting up the Son of Man. This is a callback to John 3:14, which is itself a reference to Numbers 21:9.

And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, (John 3:14)

So Moses made a bronze serpent and set it on a pole. And if a serpent bit anyone, he would look at the bronze serpent and live. (Numbers 21:9)

The Pharisees know this reference. Jesus compares himself to the bronze serpent made by Moses in the Old Testament. Again, when the Israelites were wandering in the wilderness, God sent snakes to punish them for their grumbling. But God also provided a way of escape. Moses made a bronze serpent and set it on a pole. If bit, the people simply had to look at the bronze serpent, and they would live. This is a picture of the cross and the promise of salvation.

Application

Are you dying in your sins? Sin is a poison. All of us have been bit by the snake of sin, yet some of us refuse to look to the bronze serpent and live. Repentance begins by turning away from our sin and looking to Jesus. Even the “small sins” like selfishness, pride, jealousy, anger, and lust. While not sinful actions, they are still sinful attitudes. You might think they are harmless – little pricks on your skin, just small snake bites. But the poisonous venom will permeate your veins. Satan means to murder you. There is a way of escape. But you must want it. You must want to live. True Christians will turn away from all of their sins and look to Christ to save them.

This is our third and final clue to Jesus’ true identity: Jesus is the lifted up Son of Man, bringing salvation to those who want to look and live.



Big Idea

What do we do with these three clues? What do we see? What do they show us? Our first clue to Jesus' true identity is that he is the light of the world, bringing the truth and knowledge of God to the nations. The second clue to Jesus' true identity is that he is sent from God, his Father, bearing true testimony and true judgment from above. And the third clue to Jesus' true identity is that he is the lifted up Son of Man, bringing salvation to those who want to look and live.

The True and Better Israel

While talking to the Jews, Jesus related his clues to the nation of Israel. Israel was supposed to bring the truth and knowledge of God to the nations. They were supposed to bear true testimony and true judgment to the world from Father. They were supposed to make a way for salvation. Instead, Israel was disobedient, grumbled in the wilderness, corrupted the temple system, produced Pharisees, and rejected their Messiah. Jesus is the true and better Israel, fulfilling where they failed, obedient until his death, and then becoming the firstborn from the dead.

The Son of God

So who is Jesus? Who is he really? What is his true identity? This is our answer, revealed to us in Scripture, our main truth, and our big idea for today: Jesus is the Son of God, bringing salvation to those who believe and judgment to those who reject him.

Applications

There are several points of application. The first you can see clearly in the text. Jesus is the light of the world, and he says to follow him. You must follow Jesus. Whoever follows him will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life. Following Jesus means letting him lead. It means forsaking the world. It means taking up your cross. It means trusting him wherever he will take you. And it means loving him with all of your heart, soul, mind, and strength.

The second application is from our big idea. We saw that as the Son of God, Jesus brings salvation to those who believe. You must believe Jesus. Now when I say believe, I mean believe everything about Jesus. Believe what he says, believe what he promises. Steep yourself in Scripture, and saturate your mind with his truth. Let his words dwell in you richly and allow it to transform your heart.

The third application is also from our big idea. Since Jesus is the Son of God, he brings judgment to those who reject him. Therefore, you must embrace Jesus. This is serious. Are there areas in your life where you reject Jesus? Do you love the darkness, rather than the light? Maybe you refuse to acknowledge him in certain areas of your life. Watch where you reject him, put to death where you deny him, and accept him with open arms. And I'm using the word embrace because it also communicates that we need to love him. Do you love him?

Gospel

Our passage today ended with: *As he was saying these things, many **believed** in him. (John 8:30)* And at this point in the text, Jesus did not yet go to the cross. He did not reveal his true lifting up on the cross. And when the text says lifted up, it means both physically lifted up but it also means lifted up in glory. There is glory in the death and ultimate resurrection of Jesus. Jesus, the son of God, died for your sins. And just like how he resurrected on the third day, you will find yourself resurrected to eternal life with him in heaven. You only have to trust him. Look to the cross if you want to live! Do you believe this? God's Word promises this to you:

*For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever **believes** in him should not perish but have eternal life. (John 3:16)*

Conclusion

I've often tried to define myself by what I do. But I've been looking at this the wrong way. Instead of defining myself by what I do, it is far better to define myself by who I am. If you are believers, my brothers and sisters, hear what Jesus says about our identity:

“You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to **your Father who is in heaven.** (Matthew 5:14-16)

Just as Jesus is the light of the world, his disciples reflect and relay his light. We are the light of the world. And we still do good works — but they are not for us to celebrate our own accomplishments, achievements, and accolades. They are for others to see so that they can give glory to our Father who is in heaven... our Father who is in heaven! Just as Jesus is God's Son, we too have become God's sons and daughters. We are safe and secure on stable, solid ground. The things that we do come from who we are in Christ. While he might call and challenge us to do other things, and even if we fail, nothing can take away his claim on us.

Jesus shows us who we really, truly are. In this world there is light and darkness. There are good works and there are evil works. There is God the Father and there is Satan the Devil. If you are a Christian, if you have looked to the cross and lived, you have been adopted into God's family. Like Jesus, you too are God's true son. God is your father, Jesus is your brother. And we are the light of the world. Jesus is the Son of God, bringing salvation to those who believe and judgment to those who reject him. Have you heard? Do you see? Look to Jesus, he will show you who he is, and he will show you who you really, truly are.



All We Want and Need

Father God, you sent your son
And showed us who he is:
He is the light, and lifted up
For those you would forgive.

If we would believe that he's
The way, the truth, the life --
May we follow and embrace him,
And love him, heart and mind.

But if the world would blind us
And leave us feeling lost,
May we never look away from
Our Savior on the cross!

Holy Spirit, help us now
To feel and clearly see
That Jesus Christ, the Son of God,
Is all we want and need.

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