

# Exalting Jesus Christ

## "The Light of the World"

### INTRODUCTION:

- I. I want to begin the lesson this morning by asking you a very personal question.
  - A. How confident are you that when you die you will spend an eternity with Jesus Christ in heaven?
    1. I'm not asking if you *hope* or *wish* or *pray* that heaven will your home.
    2. I'm asking if you know beyond any doubt whatsoever that if you were to die today, heaven will be your home forever.
    3. If you've ever wrestled with uncertainty about God's love, or His grace and mercy toward you, then perhaps this study will help.
  - B. This morning, as we continue our studies through John in our series "Exalting Jesus Christ" we're going to be allowed the opportunity to listen in on a debate about the person of Jesus Christ.
    1. What we will find in the verses we'll be examining in just a moment are some of the most remarkable claims Jesus ever made about Himself.

- a. And these claims should forever erase any doubts you may have about the hope and assurance of your salvation through Jesus Christ.
2. This entire debate between Jesus and His adversaries will begin with His bold and courageous claim of being "The Light of the World."
3. This isn't the only time Jesus will make this bold claim. In fact, there are three times in the gospel of John when Jesus claimed to be the Light of the World:
  - a. **John 8:12** – *Then Jesus spoke to them again, saying, "I am the light of the world. He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness, but have the light of life."*
  - b. **John 9:5** – *"As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world."*
  - c. **John 12:46** – *"I have come as a light into the world, that whoever believes in Me should not abide in darkness."*
4. And these three instances of Jesus claiming to be "*The Light of the World*" don't even compare to the numerous times in which John called Jesus "*the Light*," or in which Jesus Himself claimed to be "*Light*."

- II. However, before we begin looking at this claim and the ones that follow, we need to understand something about the setting in which this particular claim was made.
  - A. According to the gospel of John, Jesus had come to Jerusalem for the Feast of Tabernacles.
    - 1. It was at the close of this great Feast that a most dramatic ceremony took place within the Temple courts.
    - 2. As the evening sun was setting, thousands of devout worshippers gathered in the area of the Temple known as the Court of the Women until it was finally filled to capacity.
    - 3. Within this court there were four great candelabras, each with four large, magnificent golden bowls filled with fresh oil.
    - 4. When darkness finally came over the ancient city, a signal was given to light the great candelabras.
    - 5. Suddenly the darkness of the night was pierced with a light that was said to illuminate every street and courtyard in the city of Jerusalem.
    - 6. As the worshippers gazed at the dazzling lights, their hearts were filled with great joy over the significance of this wonderful moment.

- B. The Feast of Tabernacles called to memory several important events in Israel's history, including the days when the children of Israel were guided through the wilderness by a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night (Exodus 13:21).
1. The blazing light from the Temple's candelabras brought to the memory of these worshippers the light which guided their ancestors through those years in the wilderness.
- C. But there was another great significance to this dramatic ceremony.
1. On the day when the Tabernacle was dedicated (Numbers 9:15-22), the glory of Jehovah came to rest on that tent-like structure in the form of a brilliant, radiant cloud.
  2. Later, when the great Temple of Solomon was dedicated (1 Kings 8:10-11; 2 Chronicles 5:13-14), the same radiant cloud rested on the Temple.
  3. The light which blazed from the Temple courts on the Feast of Tabernacles reminded the people of the glory of God which dwelled among them.
- D. Finally, the blazing light brought to memory the saying of Isaiah.
1. **Isaiah 9:2** – *"The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who dwelt in the land of the shadow of death, upon them a light has shined."*

2. Jehovah had been Israel's salvation and their only source of light during moments of their greatest darkness.
  3. This too was on the minds of the thousands of worshippers whose hearts were filled with great joy upon seeing the brilliant light dispel the darkness of night.
- E. Some scholars suggest that at the very moment those four great candelabras' were lit in the Temple courtyard, Jesus made His bold claim: **John 8:12** – *"I am the light of the world. He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness, but have the light of life."*
1. Regardless of when Jesus made this statement, there was no way to mistake the significance of His claim of being *"The Light of the World."*
    - a. Jesus was claiming to be the Light which guides men through the wilderness of this world, and which brings them to the ultimate land of promised rest.
    - b. He was claiming to be the radiant glory of Jehovah, or as the Hebrew writer records, *"the brightness of his glory"* (**Hebrews 1:3**), and therefore the very presence of Jehovah among his people.

- c. And finally, Jesus was claiming to be the light of Jehovah's salvation, shining forth to those who are walking in the darkness of sins.
- d. It was an unmistakable and undeniable claim to deity.

**BODY:**

- I. As we turn to the eighth chapter of John once again, we find Jesus in the middle of another great controversy over His bold and courageous claim to deity.
  - A. The Pharisees, those arrogant, self-righteous religious leaders who prided themselves in being the great defenders of the Law of God, were quick to respond.
    - 1. As we will see in the verses that follow, the attitude of these men progressively escalates from contradiction, to insinuation, to denial, to insult, to sarcasm, and finally to violence.
    - 2. Woven into the fabric of these verses are five reasons why the Pharisees rejected the Savior and His words – and we'll look at each of these in greater detail. But they are:
      - a. A lack of knowledge.
      - b. A lack of perception.
      - c. A lack of faith.

- d. A lack of desire.
  - e. And finally, a lack of humility.
  - 3. When Jesus makes His final claim, these outraged, hate-filled religious leaders will become convinced in their own twisted minds that Jesus has once again blatantly committed blasphemy – and for that He must die.
- B. So let's step into this scene and listen intently to the debate between Jesus and His adversaries.
- 1. And as we do, let's let the claims of Jesus give us hope and reassurance that He is, indeed, our Savior.
- II. To the crowds gathered in the Temple on this particular evening, Jesus said, *"I am the light of the world. He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness, but have the light of life."*
- A. The response of the Pharisees was immediate – but it was a response that showed their lack of knowledge; their spiritual ignorance.
- 1. **John 8:13** – *The Pharisees therefore said to Him, "You bear witness of Yourself; Your witness is not true."*
  - 2. Therefore, Jesus responded:

- a. **John 8:14** – *"Even if I bear witness of Myself, My witness is true, for I know where I came from and where I am going; but you do not know where I come from and where I am going."*
  - b. **John 8:19** – *"You know neither Me nor My Father. If you had known Me, you would have known My Father also."*
3. This rejection of Jesus and His words was for the same reason their ancestors had rejected God and His words hundreds of years earlier in the days of Hosea the prophet.
- a. **Hosea 4:1-3, 6** – *Hear the word of the Lord, you children of Israel, for the Lord brings a charge against the inhabitants of the land: "There is no truth or mercy or knowledge of God in the land. 2 By swearing and lying, killing and stealing and committing adultery, they break all restraint, with bloodshed upon bloodshed. 3 Therefore the land will mourn; and everyone who dwells there will waste away with the beasts of the field and the birds of the air; even the fish of the sea will be taken away. . . 6 My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge. Because you have rejected knowledge, I also will reject you from being priest for Me; because you have forgotten the law of your God, I also will forget your children."*



4. Sadly, in the days of Hosea, this lack of knowledge was a result of deliberately rejecting the words of God's prophets – in the same way as these religious leaders were deliberately rejecting the testimony of Jesus Christ, and all the evidence that proved He was truly the Son of God.
- B. But there was another reason why the Pharisees rejected Jesus – a lack of perception.
1. This lack of perception is brought into focus in verses 15 and 23. Verse 15 highlights their problem, while verse 23 explains why they have it.
    - a. Jesus said: **John 8:15** – *"You judge according to the flesh; I judge no one."*
    - b. Then He added: **John 8:23** – *"You are from beneath; I am from above. You are of this world; I am not of this world."*
  2. The problem with these Pharisees is that they were judging Jesus *"according to the flesh"* – all they could see (or all they wanted to see) was simply the externals.
    - a. Jesus was only the son of Joseph – He was only the carpenter's son. Not the Messiah! Not the Son of God!

- b. They lacked the ability to see beyond their own prejudices and see all the evidence that proved beyond doubt the deity of Jesus Christ.
  - 3. And the reason is explained in verse 23 – they were *"of this world."*
    - a. They had become so wrapped up in the things of this world – in going through all the motions of appearing to be religious, but with no true spiritual service.
    - b. They had lost spiritual intimacy with God and had become spiritually short-sighted – all they could see was the man Jesus.
  - 4. Sadly, the inevitable result of their spiritual nearsightedness is found in the next verse
    - a. **John 8:24** – *"Therefore I said to you that you will die in your sins; for if you do not believe that I am He, you will die in your sins."*
- C. But there was another reason why these Pharisees so blatantly rejected Jesus – a lack of faith.
  - 1. The apostle Paul tells us there is only way faith comes:
    - a. **Romans 10:17** – *So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.*

- b. The seed of God's word produces faith only when it is planted in the hearts of those who hear it.
  - (1). There can be no spiritual fruit in our lives unless there is spiritual growth.
  - (2). But there can be no spiritual growth without spiritual life.
  - (3). However, there can be no spiritual life without the seed of God's word planted in our hearts.
- 2. This was the problem with the heart of these Pharisees.
  - a. Jesus said: **John 8:37** – *"I know that you are Abraham's descendants, but you seek to kill Me, because My word has no place in you."*
  - b. Then He added: **John 8:43** – *"Why do you not understand My speech? Because you are not able to listen to My word."*
- 3. Despite the fact that the Pharisees were recognized as the religious leaders of their day, and despite the fact that they claimed to be experts in the Law, their understanding and their knowledge of the Law of God was selective.
  - a. They saw only what they wanted to see.
  - b. They tried to force the word of God to conform to their theology, rather than allow their theology to be shaped and formed by the word of God.

4. Therefore, it's no wonder that they rejected Jesus – the truth of God's word, and the truth of God's word spoken by Jesus, had no place in their hearts.
  - a. They had in essence closed their ears to the hearing of the word, and therefore had made themselves incapable of having faith in Jesus.
- D. But this was no accident. They stopped their ears from hearing the faith-producing words of Jesus because of a lack of desire.
  1. They no longer had any desire to do the will of God. Instead, their desire was to serve another.
    - a. Jesus said: **John 8:44-45** – *"You are of your father the devil, and the desires of your father you want to do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own resources, for he is a liar and the father of it. 45 But because I tell the truth, you do not believe Me."*
  2. Although these proud Pharisees could trace their physical lineage back to Abraham, their spiritual lineage goes all the way back to the devil himself.
    - a. It was the devil whom they served. The serpent had seduced them with the forbidden fruit of arrogant religious pride.

- b. They prided themselves by showing all their religiosity externally: **Matthew 23:5-7** – *"But all their works they do to be seen by men. They make their phylacteries broad and enlarge the borders of their garments. 6 They love the best places at feasts, the best seats in the synagogues, 7 greetings in the marketplaces, and to be called by men, 'Rabbi, Rabbi.'"*
- 3. It should come as no surprise that these proud, self-righteous Pharisees would plot to kill Jesus, they were of their father the devil and want to do the desires of their father.
  - a. Or, as the old saying goes, "Like father, like son."
- E. Well, as we've been saying all along, the real underlying reason for the Pharisee's rejection of Jesus was their lack of humility.
  - 1. Their pride actually caused these Pharisees to go so far as to deny Jesus was even a Jew:
    - a. **John 8:48** – *Then the Jews answered and said to Him, "Do we not say rightly that You are a Samaritan and have a demon?"*
      - (1). This is just another way of saying, "You're a demon-possessed Samaritan!"

- b. But Jesus responded: **John 8:49-51** – *"I do not have a demon; but I honor My Father, and you dishonor Me. 50 And I do not seek My own glory; there is One who seeks and judges. 51 Most assuredly, I say to you, if anyone keeps My word he shall never see death."*
- 2. Unfortunately, when one becomes filled with arrogant pride they often resort to verbal attacks – to insults.
  - a. **John 8:52-53** – *Then the Jews said to Him, "Now we know that You have a demon! Abraham is dead, and the prophets; and You say, 'If anyone keeps My word he shall never taste death.' 53 Are You greater than our father Abraham, who is dead? And the prophets are dead. Who do You make Yourself out to be?"*
- 3. The insult is couched in the words, *"Who do You make Yourself out to be?"*
  - a. They knew Jesus was claiming to be the Son of God – *"The Light of the World."*
  - b. But to them, Jesus was only Joseph's son – the carpenter's son.
  - c. And yet, maybe not even the carpenter's son. After all, Mary claimed to have conceived Jesus while she was still a virgin.

4. When Jesus claimed that *"the Father"* bore witness of Him, the Pharisees challenged Jesus by saying: **John 8:19** – *"Where is Your Father?"*
  - a. In other words, "Where is this one You claim is Your father? Do You even know who Your father is?"
  - b. The innuendo is found in **John 8:41** – *Then they said to Him, "We were not born of fornication. . ."*
  - c. They had heard the rumors that Jesus was the offspring of an illicit relationship between Mary and some unnamed man.
  - d. The implication was Jesus was born of *"fornication."*

III. If all the previous claims of Jesus hadn't been enough to raise the anger of these Pharisees to fever pitch, the last claim Jesus made sent them over the top.

- A. Jesus claimed to have the same eternal nature and Godhood as the *"I AM"* who spoke to Moses in the burning bush.
  1. Although these proud Pharisees claimed to be descendants of Abraham, Jesus claimed to have existed long before Abraham was born.
    - a. Jesus said: **John 8:56-58** – *"Your father Abraham rejoiced to see My day, and he saw it and was glad." 57 Then the Jews*

*said to Him, "You are not yet fifty years old, and have You seen Abraham?" 58 Jesus said to them, "Most assuredly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I AM."*

2. Earlier in the gospel of John, Jesus claimed, *"I am the bread of life" (John 6:48)*, and *"I am the Light of the world" (John 8:12)*.
  - a. But now Jesus claimed *"before Abraham was, I AM."*
  - b. He did not say, "before Abraham was, I was." He said, *"before Abraham was, I AM"* – which is a claim to His eternal nature as God the Son.
  - c. This was a term which every Jew understood was used by God to describe Himself and His eternal nature.
3. When God spoke to Moses in the burning bush and commanded Him to go back to Egypt and tell the people of Israel God had sent him as their deliverer, he wanted to know how he would answer their questions if they should ask who had sent him on this mission of deliverance.
4. **Exodus 3:14** – *And God said to Moses, "I AM WHO I AM." And He said, "Thus you shall say to the children of Israel, 'I AM has sent me to you.'"*



5. When Jesus told these Pharisees, *"before Abraham was, I AM,"* He was claiming absolute, unequivocal equality with Jehovah God the Father.
  - a. Jesus claimed He was just as eternal and divine as the *"I AM"* who spoke to Moses in the burning bush.
6. **John 8:59** – *Then they took up stones to throw at Him; but Jesus hid Himself and went out of the temple, going through the midst of them, and so passed by.*

## **CONCLUSION:**

- I. So why should this story give you assurance and confidence when it comes to your salvation?
  - A. It should give you hope and assurance because the One who made all these wonderful claims was Jesus.
    1. Jesus was not just some man who lived two-thousand years ago and went around doing good and teaching people. He was, and is, God the Son.
      - a. He is just as much entitled to be called God, as God the Father.
      - b. He was with God the Father in the beginning.

- c. And His claim, "*before Abraham was, I AM,*" is a claim of His Own eternal nature – Jesus Christ has always been, and always will be.
2. This is the One of Whom the apostle Paul wrote:
  - a. **Philippians 2:3-13** – *Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. 4 Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others. 5 Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, 6 who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, 7 but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. 8 And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross. 9 Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name, 10 that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, 11 and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.*

*12 Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; 13 for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure.*

3. Jesus is God the Son, who left heaven and took upon Himself the form of a man so that He could suffer and die on a cross, and be resurrected from the dead, so that you could be free from all your sins.
  - a. He never once did anything out of selfish ambition or conceit.
  - b. In fact, He considered your interests greater than His own.
4. All He asks in return is for you to bow your knee to Him – by humbling yourself and submitting to His will – and confess that He is the Son of God, to the glory of the Father in heaven.
  - a. In other words, all Jesus asks in return for giving you His life is for you to give Him your unquestioned obedience.
  - b. All He asks is that you "*work out your own salvation with fear and trembling*" knowing that God is doing His part to work in you to do His will.

5. Jesus put it this way:
  - a. **John 8:31-32** – *"If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed. 32 And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free."*
  - b. Then He added: **John 8:36** – *"Therefore if the Son makes you free, you shall be free indeed."*
- B. If you want to be free from your sins – free indeed:
  1. Then come to Jesus Christ in faith and obedience, being baptized into Him for the remission of your sins.
  2. Or, come back to Him, repenting of your sins, confessing them to God, and be made free once again – free indeed.
  3. The Christ who died for you is ready to welcome you with open arms – the choice is yours.