

Main Idea: The claims of Jesus in John’s Gospel put Him in a class all by Himself, as we’ll see once again in John 8:12-30. Two things happened in our text which make it clear that we too must deal with the claims of Jesus.

- I. Consider Jesus’ claims (12).
 - A. Here is what He said about Himself.
 1. He put Himself in an exclusive category.
 2. He said He can do what no one else can do.
 - B. Here is what He said about His followers.
 1. The person following Jesus will never walk in darkness.
 2. The person following Jesus will have the light of life.
- II. Consider the responses to Jesus’ claims (13-30).
 - A. He faced challenges to His claims (13-18).
 1. His defense rests in His own testimony.
 2. His defense rests in His Father’s testimony.
 - B. He faced questions about His Father (19-20).
 1. He refers to the Father as *the one who sent me*.
 2. He said if you know one, you know the other.
 - C. He faced questions about His predictions (21-24).
 1. He put the focus on man’s biggest problem: *dying in your sins*.
 2. He put the focus on what He was going to do about it.
 - D. He faced questions about His identity (25-29).
 1. He said they would know after they crucified Him.
 2. He said what mattered most to Him was pleasing His Father.
 - E. He faced some who believed in Him (30).

Make It Personal: How am I responding to Jesus’ claims?

1. Do I really believe what He said about us?
2. Do I really believe what He said about Himself?

Scripture Reading: Exodus 13:17-22

A few years ago a man stopped by our church and asked to see me. He told me he had something for me, a special gift. He asked me to step outside the building and pointed to an object that was sitting on the mailbox at the other end of the parking lot.

“See that rock? It’s a special rock. It came from God, and it will bless you, and I want to give it to you.”

I’ve heard a lot of stories before by people wanting money, but that was a new one. It seems to me that if you can get a blessed rock directly from God, you don’t need my help, at least, not in the form of money.

That’s quite a claim, isn’t it? A man says he has a blessed, heavenly rock. In case you’re wondering, I didn’t accept the gift. I’m just a little leery of men who make such out-of-this-world claims.

Of course, we hear claims all the time. Politicians make claims. Coaches make claims. Bosses make claims, like “Oh, your job is secure. I’ll make sure of that.” Parents make claims, “You can trust me, son. I’ll always be there for you.”

But of course, even with the best intent, the noblest of claims are just that, *claims*. What a person claims can be suspect, for a lot of reasons. He may lack the ability to fulfill what he claims, or run into something out of his control that derails the claim, or flat out be wrong about his claim, like the man with the rock from heaven.

^{**}Note: This is an unedited manuscript of a message preached at Wheelersburg Baptist Church. It is provided to prompt your continued reflection on the practical truths of the Word of God.

¹ For an earlier development of this passage, see the Gospel of John series at WBC in 2010.

So guess what we find when we open our Bibles and listen to Jesus? The truth is, Jesus made a lot of claims, and I mean *astounding* claims. It's not just what Jesus *did* that sets Him apart—He healed the sick, miraculously fed thousands, raised the dead. It's also what He *claimed*, about Himself, about His purpose for coming, about what happens when a person believes in Him, and *doesn't* believe in Him.

Friends, when you read the four gospels, and especially John's gospel, you can't escape the shocking reality that Jesus made astounding claims. We're looking at several this summer in a series called, "*Getting to Know the I AM.*"

Last time we heard Him say, "I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will never go hungry (John 6:35)." Today we turn to John 8:12-30. We're going to see two things. First, we'll see another of Jesus' claims—that's verse 12. And second, we'll see a variety of responses to His claims—that's verses 13-30.

The truth is, because of the nature of Jesus' claims, everyone responds, including us.

I. Consider Jesus' claims (12).

Look at verse 12, "When Jesus spoke again to the people, he said, 'I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.'"

Jesus actually made two claims here, and we'll explore them momentarily. But first, it will help us to consider the context.

First, notice where Jesus was when He said this. According to verse 20, this teaching session took place "in the place where the offerings were put." That's the treasury, located in the Court of Women. That was one of the busiest places in the temple complex, with a constant flow of worshippers coming and going.

There were thirteen trumpet-shaped chests there, narrow at the top and rounded at the bottom. According to William Barclay, the Jews used these trumpets to collect the people's offerings, sort of a designated giving system. Into the first two trumpets the Jews dropped half shekels which were used to pay for upkeep of the Temple. In the third and fourth trumpets the people dropped money for pigeons for offerings of purification. Into the fifth they put money to pay for the wood needed to keep the altar burning. The offerings put into the sixth paid for the incense used in the Temple services. Into the seventh went money towards the upkeep of the gold vessels. If you had any money left, you put it in the other six trumpets for an undesignated love offering.²

So that's where He made this claim. Now the question *when?* In John 7 Jesus went to Jerusalem for the Feast of Tabernacles—that's in October—where He was accused by the religious leaders of being a deceiver. The same leaders brought a woman taken in adultery to Jesus at the beginning of John 8 to trick and trap Him, but He silenced them by saying, "If any of you is without sin, let him cast the first stone."

Verse 12 begins, "When Jesus spoke again to the people." That would indicate that this teaching session took place soon after, perhaps the very day after the close of the Feast of Tabernacles. That's significant, for there were two important ceremonies that took place during the Feast of Tabernacles. One occurred each morning, the pouring out of water. The other was called the Illumination of the Temple. It took place at the beginning of the Feast, and it took place right here near the place where the offerings were put.

² William Barclay, p. 10.

Kent Hughes explains, “In the center of the treasury four great torches were set up. Some accounts say that the torches were as high as the highest walls of the temple and that at the top of these golden candelabra were great bowls holding sixty-five liters of oil. There was a ladder for each candelabrum, and in the evening young, healthy priests would carry the oil up to the top, where they would light the protruding wicks. The great flames that leapt out of these torches illumined the whole temple and much of Jerusalem. It was specular!”³

According to the Mishnah, once the torches were lit men would literally dance for joy with burning torches in their hands, singing songs and praising God, while the Levites played music on their harps, lyres, cymbals, and trumpets. They would dance until the dawn, and of course, eventually the fire and its light would burn out.

Don’t miss that. That’s what just happened. Just a few days before Jesus made the claim we’re about to consider, the people had celebrated around four huge pillars of fire, praising God for how He once led their forefathers through the wilderness with a pillar of fire.

Then Jesus made this announcement. *I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.* There are two parts to this claim.

A. Here is what He said about Himself. “I am the light of the world.” See those extinguished torches over there? It’s good that you’ve been praising God around those torches and remembering the pillar of light that He sent to guide your people so long ago. But know this. I am the light that guided your forefathers back then, and what’s more, I am the light of the whole world now.

By saying that Jesus made two things perfectly clear. First...

1. *He put Himself in an exclusive category.* “I am the light of the world.” This is an extraordinary claim, one that could not come from the lips of a mere man but only from God Himself.

As Leon Morris points out, “Light is not a natural human possession.”⁴ It’s true. Could a human being ever say, “I am light”? No. He could say, “I have a light,” or “I can show you the light,” but not, “I am light.” Yet that’s precisely what Jesus said. “I am the light of the world.”

This is clearly a claim to deity. In the Old Testament, light is associated with God. The psalmist says in Psalm 27:1, “The LORD is my light and my salvation.” Isaiah 60:19 says, “The LORD will be...your everlasting light.”

The Gospel of John is filled with references to light (21 times). John writes, “In him was life, and that life was the light of men (John 1:4).” “There came a man who was sent from God; his name was John. He came as a witness to testify concerning that light...He himself was not that light; he came only as a witness to the light. The truth light that gives light to every man was coming into the world (John 1:6-9).”

Jesus Himself said in John 3:19-21, “This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but men loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil. ²⁰ Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that his deeds will be exposed. ²¹ But whoever lives by the truth comes into the light, so that it may be seen plainly that what he has done has been done through God.”

³ Kent Hughes, p. 228.

⁴ Leon Morris, p. 438.

To the man born blind Jesus said in John 9:5, “I am the light of the world.” He says similarly in John 12:46, “I have come into the world as a light.”

So with this claim Jesus put Himself in an exclusive category. In effect...

2. *He said He can do what no one else can do.* What’s that? Just think what light does. Light shines—think of the sun. Light causes things to grow—think of photosynthesis. Light gets rid of darkness—think of what happens when you walk into a dark room and turn on the light switch. Light reveals. Light exposes. Light makes things clear.

I can do all of that, says Jesus. I am the light.

And of course, this is but one of His claims. Scan John’s gospel and you’ll hear more. I am the bread of life (6:35). I am the door of the sheep (10:7, 9), I am the good shepherd (10:11, 14), the resurrection and the life (11:25), the way, the truth, and the life (14:6), and the true vine (15:1, 5). Friends, when He made those claims Jesus made it clear that He can do what no one else can do.

But it’s not just what He said about Himself that’s shocking. Notice part two...

B. Here is what He said about His followers. “Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.”

Could you say that? Could Mohammed? Could Buddha? If you follow me, you’ll never walk in darkness again but will have the light of life??? Let’s ponder this carefully. Jesus says two things will happen to the person who follows Him.

1. *The person following Jesus will never walk in darkness.* It makes sense. Since Jesus is light, it naturally follows that those who claim to know Him would be characterized by light, not by darkness. To walk in the light is to walk in the path illuminated by the light of God’s Word. To walk in darkness is to walk outside that path. Darkness represents life away from God who is light, and walking in darkness means living a life away from God, which means living in ways that displease God. And that’s something the person following Jesus *won’t* do. He will never walk in darkness. If he is in darkness, it indicates he’s stopped following Jesus.

We learn something else from Jesus.

2. *The person following Jesus will have the light of life.* There are many things that Jesus gives the person who comes to Him—peace, joy, forgiveness, etc—but notice this benefit. He will have *the light of life*.

What’s mean? What does it mean to have “the light of life”?

Not long ago I was at Scioto Hills Camp for the men’s retreat. When I left the ARC after the Friday evening chapel, it was late, and so as I headed through the woods, I was walking in the dark. You’ve been there. If you’re going to stop walking in darkness, you need light, right?

What does a person need that’s been walking in the darkness of sin? If he’s going to come out of the dark, he needs light, and that’s what Jesus gives. *The light of life*. The “light of life” can mean the light that comes from life, or the light that gives life, or probably it means both.⁵

The psalmist talked about this in Psalm 36:9, “For with you is the fountain of life; in your light we see light.” And in Psalm 56:13, “For you have delivered me from death and my feet from stumbling, that I may walk before God in the light of life.”

⁵ Barclay, p. 11.

The light of life is the kind of life God always intended for you, my friend. It's why He created you. It's why He sent His Son into the world, for John 1:4 says, "In him was life, and that life was the light of men." Ultimately, it's why His Son went to the cross.⁶ To sinners who are born in darkness—and that's every one of us—this is an incredible guarantee. *Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.*

But don't miss this. Who receives this benefit? Everybody? No. It's the person who *follows Jesus*.

What's that mean? The verb "to follow" (Greek *akolouthein*) has five different, closely related meanings, as Barclay helpfully explains. One, it's often used of a soldier following his captain on a long march or into a battle. Two, it's used of a slave accompanying his master, staying close behind and ready to do whatever asked. Three, it's used of accepting a wise counselor's advice, of *following* his suggested course of action. Four, it's used of giving obedience to the laws of a city or state. We too talk about following or keeping the laws of our country. And five, the word refers to following a teacher's line of argument. Even now, I could ask you, "Are you following me?" That is, are you following what I am saying, understanding it, and thus ready to implement it?

Put that together and you begin to understand what's involved in *following Jesus*. He is the captain and we are to follow Him into battle. He is the Master and we are to follow Him and do His bidding. He is the Counselor and we are to follow His counsel without question. He is the Law-Giver and we are to devote ourselves to His commands which are not burdensome. And He is the Teacher and we are to follow and apply His teaching to our lives.

It's for that person, and that person alone, for whom Jesus' claim is true. The person who *follows Me*, says Jesus, will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life.

Let's be honest. There are many people today who call themselves Christian who do not follow Jesus. They do not follow Him to His Word for they seldom open the Book, let alone seek to live by it. They do not follow Him to His church which is His Body. They do not follow Him into the fulfillment of the mission He has given us, to make Him known to the nations. They do not follow Him in the way they spend their time and money, for He used every possession and moment of time for the will of His Father and He calls us to do the same.

This is a serious problem. What are we to think of those who identify themselves as Christ-followers (that's what "Christian" means) but do not truly follow Christ? Friends, the person who comes to Jesus must come on His terms, or he doesn't truly come at all. To say, "Well, I received Jesus as my Savior and I know I'm going to heaven, but I am not following Him with my life," is a great contradiction. Jesus calls us to *follow Him*, and it's to the person who indeed follows Him that this claim applies, *he will have the light of life*.

So there's Jesus' claim, about Himself, about those who follow Him. How should we respond to it? To help us, in the next scene John shows us how others responded.

II. Consider the responses to Jesus' claims (13-30).

⁶ We see this in Isaiah 53:11, "After the suffering of his soul, he will see **the light of life** and be satisfied; by his knowledge my righteous servant will justify many, and he will bear their iniquities."

To be honest, the flow of the following passage is difficult to follow. The main structure is fairly clear—it’s a dialogue between Jesus and the Pharisees. But the themes discussed are intricate and interwoven and actually quite complicated. To sum it up, Jesus faced five responses to His claims that day, and they’re the same kind of responses He’s receiving today.

A. He faced challenges to His claims (13-18). Notice verse 13, “The Pharisees challenged him, ‘Here you are, appearing as your own witness; your testimony is not valid.’”

That’s interesting. The Pharisees don’t even respond to Jesus’ claim. Instead, they try to turn the focus to a legal technicality. They don’t even comment on what He said. They just say He had no right to say it for it doesn’t fit their standard. They say His witness isn’t “true.” They’re not talking so much about whether what He said is true or false, but whether valid or invalid. They see no reason to accept what Jesus just claimed because they consider His claim totally invalid.

So the Pharisees don’t buy His claim. He says He is the light of the world and the claim is so outlandish to them that they begin to argue a technicality.

How do you prove such a claim? How do you prove something is light? By arguments? By citing case laws of previous sightings of light? If I said right now, “There is light in this room,” how would I prove that? Leon Morris says it well, “Light establishes its claim. It does so, not by arguments, but by shining. Light must always be accepted for itself, and that notwithstanding the objections of the blind.”⁷

It wouldn’t matter right now if fifty blind people said, “I don’t believe there is light shining in this room.” They could demand evidence, but no evidence would convince them, nor will the reality that they are not convinced change the fact that the light indeed is shining.

Let me take this a step further by reading something from commentator C. J. Wright, “How can light convince us that it *is* light except by what it does for us? We do not demonstrate that light is light by treatises, or by analyses of its constituent rays. It is only *light* to us when it illumines and quickens us...Anyone can, *to his own satisfaction*, confute the claim which Beauty makes, by saying, I do not see it; or the claim inherent in Goodness, by saying, I do not hear it; or the self-evidencing nature of Truth, by saying, I do not know it. But man does not *create* Goodness, or Truth, or Beauty; and to say that he cannot *see* them is to condemn himself, not them.”⁸

So it is with Light.

How do you help a person who says, “I don’t believe it. Jesus said He’s the light of the world, but I haven’t seen a thing.”? And particularly, how do you help the person won’t even consider the claim but wants to argue a technicality?

Let’s listen to Jesus’ response in verses 14-18, “Jesus answered, ‘Even if I testify on my own behalf, my testimony is valid, for I know where I came from and where I am going. But you have no idea where I come from or where I am going.’¹⁵ You judge by human standards; I pass judgment on no one.¹⁶ But if I do judge, my decisions are right, because I am not alone. I stand with the Father, who sent me.¹⁷ In your own Law it is written that the testimony of two men is valid.¹⁸ I am one who testifies for myself; my other witness is the Father, who sent me.’”

⁷ Leon Morris, p. 439.

⁸ C. J. Wright, quote taken from Leon Morris, p. 439.

We could take Jesus' response here and do a whole message on it, but I want us to see big picture. To those who said His claim was invalid He gave a twofold defense.

1. *His defense rests in His own testimony.* If you're in a courtroom, you know the judge wants to hear more than one witness before reaching a verdict, for he knows that human witness can be wrong. So it takes the testimony of two or three human beings to substantiate the truth.

But Jesus isn't a mere human being. He is the God-man, and so He alone can say, "Even if I testify on my own behalf, my testimony is valid."

And what makes His self-testimony valid? He says, "For I know where I came from and where I am going." Friends, if you know those two things, then you can give self-testimony, for only God can say them, since only God has complete knowledge of the past and the future.

2. *His defense rests in His Father's testimony.* "My decisions are right," says Jesus, "because I am not alone. I stand with the Father, who sent me."

Jesus talks a lot about His Father in John's gospel, and especially here in John 8.⁹ I stand with the Father. He sent me. He is my witness. He tells me what to say (26, 28). So you want two witnesses? Okay, I am one witness, and my Father is the second.¹⁰

Not surprisingly, Jesus' response produced the following reaction.

B. He faced questions about His Father (19-20). Then they asked him, 'Where is your father?' 'You do not know me or my Father,' Jesus replied. 'If you knew me, you would know my Father also.' He spoke these words while teaching in the temple area near the place where the offerings were put. Yet no one seized him, because his time had not yet come."

How did Jesus respond to the question concerning His Father? In reality, He didn't. He just told them, "You don't know Him, nor do you know Me."

Jesus knows these Pharisees aren't honest seekers, but self-righteous, religion-trusting blind men. They don't really want more truth, for they've refused to accept the truth they're already received.

You see, this isn't the first time Jesus told them about His Father. Throughout John's gospel...

1. *He refers to the Father as the one who sent me.* You'll find the word "sent" 55 times in John's account, and most of those times it's Jesus referring to His Father as "the one who sent me" (1:33; 4:34; 5:24, 30, 36, 37, 38, etc). Those references in chapter five are key, for there Jesus is talking to these same religious leaders. So He's already told them plenty about His Father, and they don't get it because they don't want to get it. They've got a religious system to protect, and Jesus doesn't fit in it.

But Jesus does underscore one important truth here about His Father.

2. *He said if you know one, you know the other.* "If you did know me, you would know My Father." That's because, as Jesus will later say plainly, they are one (John 10:30).

Then came more questions...

C. He faced questions about His predictions (21-24). Jesus actually initiated these questions by making another set of claims in verse 21, "Once more Jesus said to them, 'I

⁹ The word "father" appears 21 times in this chapter.

¹⁰ Earlier in John 5:31-47 Jesus gave several other witnesses, such as His miracles, John the Baptist, and the Scriptures.

am going away, and you will look for me, and you will die in your sin. Where I go, you cannot come.’”

So Jesus makes four predictions, four claims if you will. He says four things are going to happen. One, I am going away. Two, you will look for me. Three, you will die in your sin. And four, you cannot come where I am going (which, by the way, is the same prediction He made a few days before in 7:34).

Not surprisingly, those bold predictions produced more questions, for verse 22 says, “This made the Jews ask, ‘Will he kill himself? Is that why he says, ‘Where I go, you cannot come’?’”

Again, they don’t get it. They think He’s talking suicide. And as before, Jesus again doesn’t answer their question so much as point out why they don’t get it.

Notice the contrast He makes in verses 23-24, “But he continued, ‘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; if you do not believe that I am the one I claim to be, you will indeed die in your sins.’”

Jesus put the focus in two places. First...

1. *He put the focus on man’s biggest problem: dying in your sins.* In fact, He says it three times. Verse 21, you will die in your sin. Verse 24, you will die in your sins. Verse 24 again, you will indeed die in your sins. Here’s man’s biggest problem. It’s not just sin. It’s dying in your sin. If you think living with sin and its consequences is bad, and it is, this is far worse, *dying in your sins*. If you die in your sins, you will remain in your sins and be cut off from God Almighty forever.

This is man’s biggest problem, my friend. It’s why educated, upstanding men can listen to the Son of God Himself, and not understand what He’s saying. Sin blinds the sinner. Sin turns the sinner against His Maker, to his own destruction.

Is there hope for the sinner? Thankfully, there is, and we see it right here. It’s not what the sinner can do for himself. It’s what Jesus came to do for the sinner.

2. *He put the focus on what He was going to do about it.* I have come to take care of your sin problem, says Jesus. That’s why I am going where you cannot go, to the cross, to the grave, to the other side of the grave, and back to heaven. And unless you believe I am the One I claim to be, you will indeed die in your sins.

My friend, there remains no other option. Either you will die in your sins or you will put your trust in the One who said He came to die for them.

Not surprisingly, this produced more questions...

D. He faced questions about His identity (25-29). “‘Who are you?’ they asked. ‘Just what I have been claiming all along,’ Jesus replied. ‘I have much to say in judgment of you. But he who sent me is reliable, and what I have heard from him I tell the world.’ They did not understand that he was telling them about his Father. So Jesus said, ‘When you have lifted up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am the one I claim to be and that I do nothing on my own but speak just what the Father has taught me. The one who sent me is with me; he has not left me alone, for I always do what pleases him.’”

They still don’t get it, do they? They can’t figure out who He is. But they will. When?

1. *He said they would know after they crucified Him.* That’s verse 28, “When you have lifted up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am the one I claim to be.”

Once they crucified Him, then it became clear. They thought He was a fraud that needed to die. But when He died, then they realized that's what He planned to do all along. And why would He do that? He tells them why...

2. *He said what mattered most to Him was pleasing His Father.* "I always do what pleases Him." That again is why we need Him, for this is what we fail to do. We do *not* always do what pleases the Father. To the contrary, we have displeased Him time and time again, indeed every time we have done things our way instead of His. That unkind word to our spouse, that lustful thought, that white lie, that failure to thank Him for His good gifts.

Which of us could ever say, "I always do what pleases Him"? I can't.

If you have displeased the Father, your only hope for being reconciled to Him is by putting your trust in the One who did please Him.

As happened here.

E. He faced some who believed in Him (30). "Even as he spoke, many put their faith in him." What does that mean? It means they heard His claims and said, "Yes, I believe it. I believe *You*. I believe You are the one that the Father sent to do for us what we are powerless to do for ourselves."

Many did that. Many put their faith in Him and began following the One who said, "I am the Light of the world."

My friend, it's so easy to make claims. Like the man who claimed to offer me a blessing rock from heaven.

It's quite another thing to make claims and back them up with action. And that's what Jesus did. He did what He claimed He was going to do. He went to the cross, died in the place of sinners, left that tomb, and then returned to His Father in heaven.

You don't need to take heed to a man who offers a blessing rock from heaven, for it's a bogus claim. But you and I must take to heart the claim of the One who did what He said He was going to do.

Make It Personal: How am I responding to Jesus' claims?

Ask yourself two questions.

1. *Do I really believe what He said about us?* He said we are sinners. He said that unless we believe in Him we will die in our sins. He said that if we really believe in Him, we will follow Him and stop walking in darkness. Do I believe that? Do you?

2. *Do I really believe what He said about Himself?* He said He is the light of the world, and that whoever follows Him will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life. That's His claim. Do I believe Him?