

Truth for Today

The Bible teaching radio programme

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The seven "I Am's" - "I am the Light of the World"

Many years ago my wife and I took the family on a visit to St. Paul's Cathedral. Two images survive the ravages of time on the memory.

In one, I can remember being on the whispering gallery, which we all found fascinating. Those of you who have been there will know that the door leaving the gallery is quite low and for adults at least there is a need to stoop to pass through it. At that time, the children were young but growing. As I passed through the door, stooping as I did so, I looked over my shoulder and warned the children to be careful not to bang their heads. Predictably, I was so anxious to warn them to take care that I banged my own head on the lintel as I was doing so. The incident has passed into the family archives, under the heading, "Don't do as I do, do as I say." How often the Bible warns us to practise what we preach, and to lead by example. It's no good warning others if we take no notice of the warning ourselves.

The other memory of the visit is standing and admiring Holman Hunt's masterpiece, "The Light of the World". It is a wonderful painting, depicting the Lord Jesus standing on the outside of a door, with a lamp in His hand. The door is overgrown with weeds and thorns. It evidently hasn't been opened for a long, long time, if ever. The moral is clear. The Lord Jesus is waiting patiently to be allowed admittance. He is anxious to bring light into that dark dwelling.

There can be no doubt that the painting is a comment on that lovely verse in Revelation 3:20. The Lord Jesus is saying to the occupant of the house "Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If any man hear My voice and open the door, I will come in to him and will sup with him and he with Me." The lesson is plain and remains as true now as when the words were first written. The Lord Jesus is knocking at the heart's door of anyone who is willing to listen to Him. He is offering Himself as one willing to come in and take control of our lives, if only we will allow Him to do so. What joy and peace He brings.

In John 8:12 the same message comes in another way. Jesus said, "I am the Light of the world: he that followeth Me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life."

Seven times over in the Gospel of John we read of Jesus saying "I am - something." Each of the sayings is special and tells us something important about the Lord Jesus. In each case, the saying begins with emphasis - "I am". He is the Mighty God, the Creator and Sustainer of the universe. The Gospel of John begins by telling us that He is the Word, the One Who is in Himself the very expression of God because He is God. By Him all things were made and without Him was not anything made that was made. He is the beginning of everything that has had a beginning. To Him belongs unoriginated existence and all originated existence owes its existence to Him.

The Bible asserts all this and more when it speaks of Him as the "I am."

It is in that context that we read in John 1:4, "In Him was life; and the life was the light of men". Again, in verse 9, "He was that True light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world."

What does all this mean? First of all, "God is light." (1 John 1:5). It is an inherent quality of God that He is light. All light emanates from Him. But not only does He give light and provide light. He is light and the source of light.

Then, as to life, the Lord Jesus has life in Himself, inherently, because He is God, in person. Having life in Himself and being God, He has the power to communicate life to others. We have life because it has been communicated to us. God has given it to us.

But, of all animate creation, man is a race apart. The life God has given the race of man is different in kind to the life God has given to any other of His creatures on earth. Only man (i.e. the first man Adam) received life by the direct breathing of God, always a mark of a life that is very special. We read in Genesis 2:7 that "the LORD God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul." Receiving life in this special way, man as a race has a special relationship with God and a special responsibility to God. This comes out in these verses I have referred to in John 1.

Thinking in general terms, light has a source. Secondly, there is an object on which the light falls. The verses we have thought about run in parallel with that. God is light, the true source of all light and truth. He is the True God. He has made Himself known in the Lord Jesus Christ, Who came into the world to make a full and final revelation of God. And it is the race of man in particular to whom the full revelation of God is directed. Think again of the words quoted. "The life was the light of men." "The True Light ... lighteth every man that cometh into the world." In other words, the revelation of God in Christ is available particularly for the enlightenment of every member of the human race born into the world. Mankind as a race is a particular target upon which the light of God falls. Only mankind has been given the capacity to know God. A great privilege indeed. However, every privilege brings with it a commensurate responsibility. Here, we perhaps move on to a third consideration. We have thought, first of all, that light has a source - secondly, that light falls upon an object to which it is directed. Now, thirdly, having done so, an effect is produced. Under the scrutiny of light, things are seen as they really are. Light not only discloses what is good. It also exposes what is bad. So, the revelation of God, in Christ, the True Light, the Light of the world, reveals or discloses the heart of God, full of love for men. It also exposes the heart of man. The prophet Jeremiah tells us in Jeremiah 17:9, "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it." Because of this, as Jesus said, "This is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. For every one that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reproved. But he that doeth truth cometh to the light, that his deeds may be made manifest, that they are wrought in God." (John 3:19-21).

It is against the background of this teaching that we get in John 8:12 the statement of the Lord Jesus, "I am the Light of the world: he that followeth Me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life."

I feel I should now refer to three illustrations of this truth found in the Bible. Incidentally, it is worth remembering that the best illustrations of Bible truth are found in the Bible itself.

Firstly, then, we read in 2 Corinthians 4:6-7, "God, Who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us." Putting it simply, there has been a shining in so that there might be a shining out. God has shined into our hearts. The light of that shining has so affected us that there is a shining out. We are glad to tell anyone who is prepared to listen to us that we are followers of the Lord Jesus who loved us and gave Himself for us. The shining out of our witness to others is itself a witness that God has shined into our hearts. What has that shining brought to us? The knowledge of God in the person of HIS beloved Son, Jesus Christ, the Light of the world.

Let us now turn to John 9. In studying and understanding the Bible, context is very important. That is, every detail has to be related, first of all, to its own immediate context, and then against the background and context of scripture as a whole. That is the undoubted meaning of that statement in 2 Peter 1:20, "No prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation." We ignore context at our peril. What, then, is the context of the Lord's statement, "I am the Light of the world"?

First of all, just before that, we have the record of the light of God exposing the sinful hearts of those who set themselves up in judgment against an adulterous woman. She was a sinner alright; make no mistake about that, but so were they. As we used to say in the days of open coal fires and cooking ranges, "It's no good the kettle calling the frying pan black." In those days, both the kettle and the frying pan had a very liberal coating of extremely black soot, unless they were cleaned meticulously every day. One was every bit as black as the other. Likewise, the scribes and Pharisees were in no position to condemn the adulterous woman. Their sins were different to hers, but every bit as bad. Under the sharp scrutiny of the Light of the world, they were exposed for what they were, sinners like everybody else.

Then, after the Lord's discourse arising from His statement, "I am the Light of the world," there is the record of the giving of sight to the man who had been born blind. It is a delightful, true story, told in lovely detail in John 9. Let us trace it through the chapter.

In verse 5, before the Lord Jesus performed the miracle, He said to His disciples, "As long as I am in the world, I am the Light of the world." After giving the blind man his sight, the Lord Jesus drew him on step by step, and he made rapid progress in his knowledge and estimation of the Lord. In verse 11, he speaks of the Lord as "a man that is called Jesus." In verse 17, he has learned enough about Him to call Him a "prophet." Then in verse 33 he appreciates that Jesus is "a man of God." Then, a true climax, in verse 36 he called Him: "Lord." Finally, in verse 38, we read, "He worshipped Him." Good, steady, consistent progress. We do well to follow the pattern.

By the way, if the passage referred to in 2 Corinthians 4 is a picture of the effect manward of the Light of God shining in Jesus, John 9 is a wonderful illustration of the response Godward in worship made possible because Jesus came into the world as the Light of the world. The man certainly had natural sight given to him. As he said, "One thing I know, that whereas I was blind, now I see" (John 9:25). But, while it was true that he was given natural sight, it was

also true that he received spiritual sight. The One Who is the Light of the world brought spiritual sight into his dark soul and the progress he made in the knowledge of God through Christ led him to worship. Good spiritual progress indeed.

How apt, how telling, are the words of Philip Bliss in his lovely hymn:

*The whole world was lost in the darkness of sin,
The Light of the world is Jesus;
Like sunshine at noonday His glory shone in,
The Light of the world is Jesus.
No darkness have we who in Jesus abide,
The Light of the world is Jesus,
We walk in the light when we follow our Guide,
The Light of the world is Jesus.
Come to the Light, 'tis shining for thee,
Sweetly the Light has dawned upon me,
Once I was blind, but now I can see;
The Light of the world is Jesus.*

So we see that knowing the Lord Jesus as the Light of the world makes a tremendous difference in the spiritual appreciation of a Christian. Surely it must be so.

Think of Mary Magdalene, our third illustration. She had been brought to know the Lord Jesus and was totally, absolutely devoted to Him. As we read in Luke 7 and 8, she loved Jesus very much because she had been forgiven much. He was everything to her, out of whom He had cast seven devils. The Light of the word had become the Light of her life. Tragically, for her, the rulers of the nation, and indeed, the known world, had taken Him away from her. They had abused Him, tortured Him, crucified Him, murdered Him. Without Him, such a world was to her a very dark place indeed.

We are not surprised, then, to read in John 20:1, that Mary Magdalene came early, "when it was yet dark, unto the sepulchre," where the body of Jesus had been laid. The very atmospheric conditions were a picture of what the world around was to her without Christ, her beloved Lord. What was she to do? She mourned. She wept. She saw the figure of a man. In her intense grief she did not recognise that it was Jesus. Thinking Him to be the gardener, she said, "Tell me where thou hast laid Him, and I will take Him away." Then she heard Him address her by name. "Mary." (John 20:15-16). That was it. Just one word. Her name. As we read in John 10:3-4, "He calleth His own sheep by name ... they follow Him: for they know His voice." She responded immediately, "Rabboni, Master." He then gave to her a great commission. She was to go to the other disciples and tell them the wonderful news. He was alive from among the dead. He was shortly to ascend to heaven. Because of His death and resurrection those who believed on Him were able to know God in a far more intimate way than had ever been possible before. And Mary, the converted sinner, who loved Jesus so much because of all He had done for her, was to be the bearer of this wonderful message.

We must now return to our basic verse. Jesus said, "I am the Light of the world: he that followeth Me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life."

To whom does this promise apply? Fundamentally, it is available to true disciples of Jesus, those who are prepared to accept His teaching, apply it to their lives, and follow Him in everything they do. Of course, no one can do that unless they are His, unless they belong to Him, unless they are committed to Him, and acknowledge Him as their Lord. In turn, only those who know Him as Saviour can truly call Him Lord. We must first come to Him and confess our sinfulness and unworthiness. We must believe the simple Christian gospel "that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day, according to the scriptures" (1 Corinthians 15:3-4). Then, and only then, can we in reality be His disciples in the proper sense of the term. Then, and only then, can we really know the joy and the blessing of this wonderful promise: "I am the Light of the world: he that followeth Me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life."

Let us pray.

Lord Jesus, we thank Thee for the examples of those who came to know Thee as the One Who came into the world to be the Light of the world. We thank Thee for the difference it made in their lives. We thank Thee for the spiritual progress they were enabled to make. Help us to follow their example by following Thee. Amen.

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