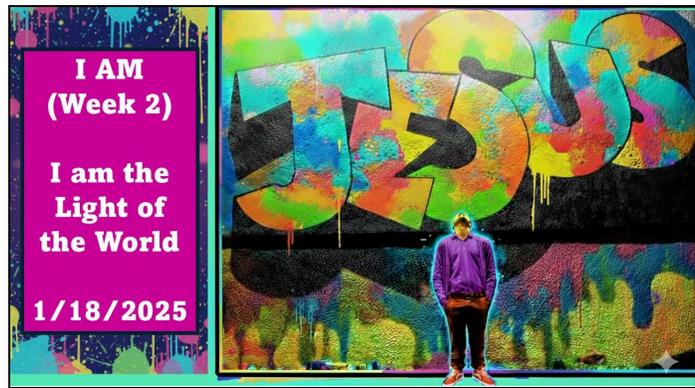


I AM (Week 2) - I Am the Light of the World Yesterday's Sermon Summary

1. So what's this series about? There are three similar texts in all three of the "Synoptic Gospels" (Matthew, Mark, and Luke) - in it Jesus asks His disciples, "Who do people say that I am?," and then Peter personally, "Who do you say that I am?" In a sense, Jesus answers those questions for Himself in the gospel of John through the "I am" statements.



2. Up this week is John 8.12, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows Me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life" (this is repeated in Jn. 9.5). This "I am" statement is appropriate for the setting. We know from details before and after this verse that this occurs during The Feast of Tabernacles or Booths, and in the courts of the Jerusalem Temple. And as it happens, four giant lampstands were lit at all times in the Temple courts during the feast. So Jesus could literally point to them and say, "Yeah, that's what I'm like."

3. The theme of "light" recurs throughout John's gospel and in order to understand what Jesus is saying here, we need to take into account some other verses across the gospel. First up, the first five verses of the book, in which you'll read, "What has come into being in Him (Jesus/the Word) was life, and that life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness and the darkness did not overtake it" (1.4-5; see too [Jn. 1.9](#)).

4. So initially John's gospel points us backward to the First or Old Testament to understand light. The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia describes the meaning of light in the O.T. as follows: it is often closely tied to holiness, moral excellence, pure motives, and benevolent intent, and is often associated with God's own character. (The New Testament picks up on this in verses like [James 1.17](#) and [1st Timothy 6.16](#)).

5. But more specifically John 1.4-5 points us back to creation. The very words of God in Genesis 1 are "Let there be light," which refers not to sunlight which comes on day 4 but to the distinction of light and goodness from darkness and disorder. So, in other words, John's gospel is saying that the whole story and arc of the Bible is about light, and Jesus fits right into that.

6. Ok, let's pause so that we can consider the profound depth of what John's gospel is saying when it declares that Jesus is "light." First, it means that what we see in Christ is both what is in every human heart and what every human being seeks (look again at [Jn. 1.4](#) and [1.9](#)). This is why a theologian like John Knox, key figure in the birth of Presbyterianism in Scotland in the 1500s, would conclude, "No one else holds or has held the place in the heart of the world which Jesus holds. Christ is the clue to all that is."

7. Moreover, the light of Christ is connected to "life" (again, see [1.4](#)). We know from our study of the first "I am" (which is "I am the bread of life") that "life" in John means the best or highest form of life, human life as God intended it to be, what's called in scripture "eternal life." So in order to find and remain in this kind of life you have to find, connect to, and live the light of Christ. Without light there is no best possible version of life.

8. Near the beginning of Holy Week in John's gospel Jesus says, "I have come as light into the world, so that everyone who believes in me should not remain in the darkness." This tells us the purpose of Christ's light in our lives - it is to show us the way out of darkness. Robert Fuquay, a United Methodist pastor, writes about this as follows: "We often experience God's light in Christ like a flashlight. It is not meant to show you the far destination as much as the next steps to take. This can be frustrating, especially because we want to know where our steps will take us. But we also need to admit that it's easier for us to stop worrying about where we'll end up and instead focus only on the next thing God wants us to do."

9. In summary, when Jesus declares "I am the light of the world," He means in John's gospel that a) He is caught up in and is central to the story of the world from its inception, b) what we see and hear in Him is what every human anywhere and at any point in time has both sought and known in his or her heart, c) this light is only path by which we can live the best version of life, etc.

9. Emily Heath, a United Church of Christ pastor in New Hampshire, writing about this theme in John puts it all together well: "Have you ever been lost in the dark? If so, how did you find your way? My guess is that you looked for the light, and you followed it back to the path. Are you feeling lost now? It's not too late. Look for the light of Christ. Follow it back to the path you want to take. But don't stop there. Let the flame reignite you, lift it up, and now that you are found once more, decide that you will shine again."

Stay in the Light this Week

Want to read about light in John's gospel? Here are the pertinent passages, you can scatter them throughout your personal devotional time throughout the week (we've also included two entries from 1st John, which is closely tied to John's gospel):

- [John 1.1-9 NRSVUE](#)
- [John 3.16-21 NRSVUE](#)
- [John 8.12-20 NRSVUE](#)
- [John 12.27-36 NRSVUE](#)
- [John 12.44-50 NRSVUE](#)
- [1 John 1.5-7 NRSVUE](#)
- [1 John 2.7-11 NRSVUE](#)

A prayer for the week (we used this at the end of the sermon...

Adapted from St. Gregory of Naziansus (300s CE):

Lord God, Jesus Christ is the light of the world. Therefore, let me not be ashamed so that I will approach Him over and over to be filled with His light. Let me not remain what I am but instead become what I know will remain. In this life Your light shines and cannot stop shining, and no darkness can overcome it, though darkness fights ferociously against it. Let me live in that hope and confidence, I ask. O Splendor of the eternal light and Sun of justice, may I be a child of Your perfect light, amen.

A few short devotionals about "light" to sprinkle throughout your week:

- [Light, I Am - United Church of Christ Light](#)
- [Children of Light - United Church of Christ](#)
- [Following the Light - United Church of Christ](#)
- [Created to Be Light - United Church of Christ](#)
- [Walk in the Light - United Church of Christ](#)