

As you may have noticed over the last year, there was a point in time when I did not preach with glasses, and then there was this shift where now I do preach with glasses. My family noticed a number of years ago that my eyes were not working as well as I wanted to believe they were. So we'd watch that movie, and I couldn't read the text on the screens. I'm like, "What does that say?" Or we'd be driving down the road, and I'd see that sign on the side of the road, whatever it might be, and I could always count on Tiff or one of my kids to say, like, "Dad, you need glasses." Well, I know. Everything in me knew that they were right. But I have this weird stubbornness about me, and I had prided myself on holding off Father Time for as long as humanly possible.

I guess you could say that my strategy was just to not admit that there was a problem, and then magically there wouldn't be a problem. It's like if I never asked my optometrist if I needed glasses, at least I could go along and say that an optometrist has never told me I need glasses. And I wouldn't be lying. But somewhere along the way, humility did get the best of me, and I scheduled my appointment, and the next thing I know, boom, I have glasses.

Problem solved, right? Well, no, not at all. Because I found out that I had this astigmatism, and once I got my glasses, I was actually a little freaked out by all the things that I could suddenly see. My brain was having a hard time processing the level of detail that I could now see in the world. It was really uncomfortable. So much so that I went back to my optometrist and said, "If it looks like this, I will not wear these glasses at all." So she graciously agreed to soften my prescription to a point that I could tolerate, and here I am today.

Now, why do I share this story with you? I share it because sometimes we don't know what we don't know, and sometimes we don't see what we don't see. I didn't recognize how impaired my vision was until I saw the difference. Now I preach, and I can see your faces, which is pretty cool.

For a very long time, I had lived under the delusion that my vision was still pretty good. That maybe I could use glasses, but I didn't really need glasses. There was something in me that was deeply and, to some degree, inexplicably, resistant to the notion that I needed help. My head knows how silly that sounds, but there's some ego in there that almost believed I could somehow will myself to better vision, that I could somehow fix this on my own. Maybe you can relate to that level of delusion in your life.

I want you to remember this conversation and set it aside, set it on the shelf for just a little bit.

We are now in week 15 of a 44-week series in the Gospel of John that we are calling I Am. This is the one-third mark, and we are now in John 8. Last week Kevin taught about Jesus addressing the religious leaders and the woman caught in adultery, where Jesus bent down and began to write in the sand. It came with a bit of a caveat: that likely there is a disclaimer somewhere in your Bible that reads something like:

The earliest manuscripts and many other ancient witnesses do not have John 7:53 through 8:11. A few manuscripts include these verses, wholly or in part, in a number of other places in the Gospels.

In other words, it was a text that we have reasonable confidence that it belongs in the Bible, in the Gospels, but where it belongs is up for some debate. The reason that matters to us is that you may remember we spoke at length about a festival named Sukkot, or more commonly known as the Festival of Tabernacles. In that message, we spoke about a ceremonial aspect of the festival that involved the priests, who would go down from the temple to the Gihon Spring, near the Pool of Siloam, outside of the temple, and there they would gather all this water in pitchers and would bring them back up the hill where the water would be poured out at the altar.

It was in the midst of this ceremony, which is known as water libations, that Jesus addressed the crowds. He began to say, "Let anyone who is thirsty come to me and drink. That whoever believes in me, as Scripture has said, rivers of living water will flow from within them." And so that was the context. There was all this water being poured out at the temple.

All of that is worth reminding you of because by the time we get to John 8:12, the text simply begins: "*When Jesus spoke again to the people...*" In other words, we are still very much in the midst of that water libations scene in the Festival of Tabernacles that we were in two weeks ago in John 7. Jesus is not done addressing the crowds. Same scene, same moment.

What's interesting is that water is not the only element of this ceremony during the Festival of Tabernacles. This may surprise you, but people somehow seem to like to party, and they did. This was a huge party. In fact, we have ancient rabbinic texts from Mishnah Sukkah, from at least as early as the second century, that go into detail about what this festival looked like. So

each night, as part of the water libations, the priests and Levites would make their way down into the women's courtyard at the temple. There were a series of columns or pillars, and at the top of each of these columns were golden candelabras. Each candelabra consisted of four golden basins at the top.

During this ceremony, there would be four ladders going up to each of those golden basins. At just the right time, they would send four children who were training for the priesthood up these tall ladders with pitchers of oil in their hands, and they would pour it into the basins. Then the children would take the worn trousers and the belts from the priests and tear the fabric into strips. They would place them in the basins to use as wicks, and light the candelabras. The text says that the light from the candelabra was so bright that there was not a courtyard in Jerusalem that was not illuminated by the light of the place of the drawing of the water.

With Jerusalem and the temple all lit up, the pious and the men of action would dance before the people who attended the celebration with flaming torches that they would juggle in their hands, and they would say before them passages of song and praises to God. The Levites would play on lyres, harps, cymbals, trumpets, and countless other musical instruments.

This was a time to celebrate and to be glad. They took this time so seriously that they said that anyone who was holding themselves back and not rejoicing in this way, they were deserving of retribution, which means that shy guys like me better dig deep and show up ready to party. This was intended to be a good time.

So I want you to imagine that scene. I want you to imagine that moment as Jesus begins to speak. *"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'" (John 8:12).* This is one of those rare occasions where we could preach an entire sermon on a single verse alone. We won't, but we could. I do think it is worth the extra moment to pause and unpack just a little bit more about what Jesus is saying and to whom he is saying it to, because this is not Jesus simply referring to himself as light to counter the metaphorical darkness. There is that, but there's more to it than that.

As I said a bit ago, the other name for the Festival of Tabernacles is Sukkot, which is the Hebrew word for a tent or a hut or a tabernacle, and we see that word first show up in the Book of Genesis when Jacob builds a Sukkot in the wilderness for his livestock.

More prominently and more relevant to today's message is how and where it shows up in the story of Exodus. You may remember that Exodus begins with God's chosen people having been enslaved in Egypt. They've been there for 400 years, and they're crying out to God. One day, God appears to a man named Moses from within this burning bush, and he calls himself I Am. He sent Moses to Pharaoh, the king of Egypt, to free and release God's

people from their slavery. As Pharaoh refuses, God introduces plague after plague onto Egypt until Pharaoh has no choice but to relent.

When he finally does, Moses has all of the people grab their things. They grab their bread, which is important, and even the silver and gold from the Egyptians, which was given to them as they were leaving. He takes 600,000 men, plus the women and children, and they head off on a journey out of slavery.

This is probably several million people that are following behind Moses at this point. But it's where they journey to that I want you to see. Exodus 12:37 says, *"The Israelites journeyed from Rameses to Succoth. There were about six hundred thousand men on foot, besides women and children."* In other words, this is where they camped in their huts, in their tabernacles, in their tents, in the desert. It was where they were when Pharaoh changed his mind and decided that he was going to go after them. He did not want to let them go. Then they left Succoth. I want you to pay careful attention to what the Bible says next.

By day the Lord went ahead of them in a pillar of cloud to guide them on their way and by night in a pillar of fire to give them light, so that they could travel by day or night. Neither the pillar of cloud by day nor the pillar of fire by night left its place in front of the people. Exodus 13:21-22

Did you catch that? As they traveled from Succoth, God, the creator of all that is, the author of life itself, came down and began to lead them through the darkness, and he did it by a pillar of fire to give them light. That is how he brought them out of slavery and into a promised land.

So when they celebrate the festival of Succoth, and they climb the ladders up the pillars, and light the wicks, they give light to all of God's people in celebration. Do you think that's merely a coincidence? When Jesus addresses the crowd and says, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life," do you think those words are merely a coincidence? Jesus knows exactly what he's doing. He knows exactly what he's saying and who he's saying it to.

His statement begins with two key words: *ego eimi*. I am. Well, it seems that nobody around is quite sure what to make of Jesus' words. There were several different subgroups that were in the crowd, but the Pharisees, some of the religious elite, the ones who knew the law, who knew the Torah perhaps better than anybody else, speak up first. *"The Pharisees challenged him, 'Here you are, appearing as your own witness; your testimony is not valid'" (John 8:13).*

I'm glad that this text fell to me, because the last message I gave back in July was from John 5. In that text was this legal showdown between Jesus and the Jewish leaders and experts of the law, who were mad that Jesus would dare to heal on the

Sabbath. So they began to accuse him and depose him of what they perceived as a crime. If you want to dig more into that story, that message is on our website. But among the many things that Jesus says as a defense about why he would call God his Father, he says:

"If I testify about myself, my testimony is not true. There is another who testifies in my favor, and I know that his testimony about me is true" (John 5:31-32). The gist of what Jesus is saying is that he knows the law, and he knows what it says. He knows that Deuteronomy 19:15 says that one witness is not enough to convict anyone accused of any crime or offense they may have committed. A matter must be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses. So in John 5, Jesus points to two witnesses who have testified that he is who he says he is. The first he mentions is John the Baptist. The second is God the Father. He says, "Both of them told you who I was. Both of them told you I was coming."

So here we are in John 8, and essentially the same group of people are taking issue with Jesus' claims about himself. They're throwing his words back at him. They're saying, "Hey, here you are appearing as your own witness. Your testimony is not valid. You know this, Jesus. You said this once before." But this time Jesus' response to them is nuanced. There's some subtlety between what he said before and what he's going to say this time.

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. You judge by human standards; I pass judgment on no one. But if I do judge, my decisions are true, because I am not alone. I stand with the Father, who sent me. In your own Law it is written that the testimony of two witnesses is true. I am one who testifies for myself; my other witness is the Father, who sent me." John 8:14-18

Unlike the John 5 instance, where Jesus was claiming that God was his Father and therefore making himself equal to God. In the John 8 instance, Jesus is espousing more of an intimate unity with the Father. How many of you remember Venn diagrams in school? Those two overlapping circles. In John 5, in Venn diagram terms, Jesus is depicting something of two circles with minimal overlap. But John 8 is almost complete and total overlap. There is something that's different about their relationship.

I don't want to stretch that metaphor too far, or it begins to break down, but the unity of the Father and Son is front and center here in Jesus' words. And now he's beginning to demonstrate that there's something different about his nature that very much does enable him to testify about himself. You will see that Jesus is plenty explicit enough.

There's something different about his relationship with the Father than anybody else can see or claim because part of what

these Pharisees are contending with and part of what Jesus is referring to is a side conversation that they were having about him back in John 7. People were starting to mutter. They were starting to whisper. They were starting to have side conversations in the corners that this Jesus character couldn't possibly be the Messiah because the Messiah had to come from Bethlehem according to the prophets; they could not come from Galilee, and this man appears to be from Galilee.

So Jesus' words here in 8:14 have a bit of a double meaning. Jesus says his testimony is valid because he knows where he comes from and he knows where he is going, but they don't. They think he's referring to Galilee. But what Jesus is referring to isn't even of this world. So he says in verse 15, "You judge by human standards."

What the text literally says in the Greek is, "You judge according to the flesh." And part of what he is saying does mean something like human standards, but the more interesting inference here is that Jesus is saying, "You look at my flesh and think you know where I come from, but you have no idea."

I love how D.A. Carson speaks about this moment. He says, "They see His flesh as it were, but they never contemplate the possibility that He could be the Word made flesh," which is a reference to John 1. So Jesus says, "I don't judge anybody that way." He says, "If I judge, it's not superficial; it's not by the flesh; it's true judgment. Because it's not me alone looking at your flesh. I am standing with the Father and what we are looking at is much deeper." Just to reinforce what he's saying, Jesus utters two important words in verse 18, "*Ego Ami*," which means I Am. He says, "I am one who testifies for myself. My other witness is the Father who sent me."

They still don't get it. They don't know what they don't know. They don't see what they don't see. Verse 19: "*Then they asked him, 'Where is your father?'" (v. 19a).* In other words, you say we don't know where you come from. You say you came from your Father. You say your Father sent you. Then where is this father that you're talking so much about? But Jesus' response is some of the most damning words of all. He says,

"You do not know me or my Father," Jesus replied. 'If you knew me, you would know my Father also'" (v. 19b). So Jesus is talking to the Pharisees. These are the experts in the law. These are the people who have devoted their entire lives to obedience, devoted their entire lives to memorizing the Torah, to doing all the right things at all the right times. If anybody should know the Father, in theory, it would be them. But this perfectly illustrates the difference between information and knowledge.

Let me illustrate what I mean. If I wanted to be weird, and if I wanted to be quite creepy, and set my mind on learning as much about you as I possibly could, with the internet and all that is out there publicly, I could find a lot of information about you. I could

find out where you live, where you work, where you were born, who your family is, and how much you paid for your house, and on and on it goes. There is a ton of information out there that is publicly available about every one of us.

But that's all it is. It is information about people. I could learn all of it without ever actually meeting you, without ever actually knowing you, because knowing someone is different than consuming information about them. Knowing someone carries with it various intangibles. It's knowing what they like and dislike. It's knowing their fears. It's knowing their moods. It's knowing their triggers. Knowing someone is an intimate understanding of who they are at their core and what makes them tick.

The Pharisees had gathered information their entire lives about God, without ever actually knowing him. And that means that when his Son shows up on his behalf, the person of Jesus does not move them. His voice is one they do not recognize. He is foreign to them.

Years ago, when I was doing family ministry, we did a fun little activity one Wednesday night. All of the kids that were there—these elementary-age kids, preschoolers—and we put them in blindfolds in the middle of this grassy knoll. We had all of the parents encircle them. When I said, “Go,” Every single parent began to shout for their kids. So you can picture the scene. There are dozens and dozens of parents all hollering for their kids at the same time, and all these blindfolded kids are trying to figure out where to go. You would think it was chaos, but it wasn't. Every single one of those kids could immediately pick out their parent's voice in the crowd and make a beeline to them with laser-like precision. They walked straight to them. Why? Because they knew their voice.

Well, Jesus' words are damning. “You don't know me or my Father.” Here's where the rubber meets the road for many of us, and this is myself included, which what I spent a lot of my week praying about. It is entirely possible to come to church week in and week out for years and not know God. It is entirely possible to know all of the stories in the Bible and have Scripture memorized and not know God. It is entirely possible to sing the songs, and raise our hands, and say amen at all of the right times, and not know God. It is entirely possible to be in a community group or at a table, or some other gathering and not know God.

If I am not careful, my heart can experience much of the same drift that Jesus saw in the Pharisees. I can read the Bible and analyze it. I can teach the Bible, and some of you in this room might even like how I do it, but that doesn't necessarily mean that I am living the Bible. It doesn't mean that I'm internalizing that God is king, that Jesus is king of my life, and I am not. It does not mean that I am seeking his wisdom and counsel in prayer. It doesn't mean that I'm aware of his goodness, grace, and mercy in my life each and every day. It does not mean that I'm living

open-handed and being generous with what he gives me. It does not mean that I am the same person at home that I am here at the building, and it does not mean that I am dying to self and letting him live through me.

In short, just like the Pharisees, I can be religious without ever being in relationship with God. And that's a problem for me, just as it was for them. Maybe there's a tinge of that reality there for you, too.

He spoke these words while teaching in the temple courts near the place where the offerings were put. Yet no one seized him, because his hour had not yet come. Once more Jesus said to them, “I am going away, and you will look for me, and you will die in your sin. Where I go, you cannot come.” This made the Jews ask, “Will he kill himself? Is that why he says, ‘Where I go, you cannot come’?” 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 he, you will indeed die in your sins.”

“Who are you?” they asked. “Just what I have been telling you from the beginning,” Jesus replied. “I have much to say in judgment of you. But he who sent me is trustworthy, 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 he 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.” Even as he spoke, many believed in him. John 8:20-30

Six times in today's passage, Jesus utters the words, “*Ego eimi*.” Every single one of those is impactful. Every single one of those is intentional. Every single one of them says something powerful about who Jesus is. But two of them are exceptional. The first four all have predicates, where Jesus uses the phrase *ego eimi* as a means of describing something about himself. He says, “I am the light of the world,” verse 12. “I am one who testifies for myself,” verse 18. “I am from above. I am not of this world,” both in verse 23. But something so powerful and so important begins to shift toward the end, because we start to get what scholars call absolute uses of that phrase.

The first comes in verse 24, “I told you that you would die in your sins; if you do not believe that I am he, you will indeed die in your sins.” What the text says quite literally here in the Greek is, “If you do not believe that I am, you will die in your sins.” The second comes in verse 28. “So Jesus said, “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 but speak just what the Father has taught me." This more literally translates, "When you lift up the Son of Man, then you will know that I Am."

Here's why these two statements matter, why they're so important. Number one, there's no more plausible deniability regarding Jesus making some very big exclusive claims about himself. There's no predicate here. Jesus is saying the exact same thing to them that God said to Moses from the burning bush back in Exodus.

Moses said to God, "Suppose I go to the Israelites and say to them, 'The God of your fathers has sent me to you,' and they ask me, 'What is his name?' Then what shall I tell them?" God said to Moses, "I am who I am. This is what you are to say to the Israelites: 'I am has sent me to you.'" Exodus 3:13-14

In other words, he's not a God who was. He's not a God who will be. He is a God who is. "I Am." He simply is. And now Jesus is saying the same thing about himself. I want you to just sit with that for a moment, because, as Kevin mentioned a couple of weeks ago from C.S. Lewis, Jesus is either Lord, liar, or lunatic. There is no such thing as claiming that Jesus is only a good man. There is no such thing as claiming that Jesus is simply a good teacher. He either is who he says he is or he's not. And what Jesus just said to them was, "I Am," full stop, twice.

Now here's the second part of why this is so significant. Jesus is telling them that if they do not believe that he is the I Am, they will die in their sins. And he hyperlinks to an obscure story from Numbers that Kevin touched on a few weeks ago. In Numbers 21, there is this strange little narrative where people were beginning to grumble and complain and rebel against God while they're out there camping in the desert, out in the wilderness.

In the midst of their grumbling, many in the camp started getting bitten by venomous snakes. And we're told that many of the people in the camp started to die from all of these snake bites. As Moses began to pray, and as he began to seek the Lord's counsel, God said something unexpected to him.

The Lord said to Moses, "Make a snake and put it up on a pole; anyone who is bitten can look at it and live." So Moses made a bronze snake and put it up on a pole. Then when anyone was bitten by a snake and looked at the bronze snake, they lived. Numbers 21:8-9

Now, I'll be the first to admit that this is a strange scene. And if that was the end of the story, then it would indeed stay a strange scene. But it wasn't just some random narrative about snakes; it was a foreshadowing, which wouldn't become obvious and fulfilled until these words that Jesus is speaking right now came true thousands of years later.

"When you have lifted up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am." Even though they don't fully know what is yet to

come, Jesus does. Jesus knows that in the very near future, they will drive nails through his hands into a crossbeam, and they will hang him on a pole. They will hang him on a cross, so that all who look to him and all who believe in him would not perish. They will not die, but they will have everlasting life. Jesus looks at the Pharisees, and tells them that they will die in their sins, but as verse 30 shows, they don't have to. Verse 30 says, *"Even as he spoke, many believed in him."*

So church, let me try to break this all down a little more simply. A bronze snake on a pole wasn't the only foreshadowing that was happening here. The entire story of the Exodus is a foreshadowing about an entire community of God's people who are hopelessly enslaved, who cry out to God, who are given a deliverer, who begin a journey to an ultimate destination, who, as they leave Egypt, are already free but not yet arrived, who are led by God every step of the way, who mess up repeatedly along the way, but who get there safely if they remain faithful.

Does that sound familiar at all to you? Because if not, it should. Because here is our story as the church. We are a community of people who are hopelessly enslaved to sin, who cry out to God in our pain, who are given a deliverer in Jesus, who begin a journey to an ultimate destination in heaven, who are already free where we sit, but not yet arrived where we're going, who are led by the Holy Spirit, who mess up repeatedly along the way, and who will get there safely if we remain faithful.

Church, knowing a lot about God doesn't get us to that destination any more than it got the Israelites to the Promised Land. Every single day they had to wake up and make a decision to believe. They had to make a decision to trust God that day. They had to make a decision to follow God that day. And they believed enough to follow him through the waters of the Red Sea. They believed enough to follow him in the desert for 40 years on foot. They believed enough to gather daily bread. They believed enough to follow him into battles that they would not have otherwise won, and they believed enough to repent when they messed up.

Every step of the way, God was merciful and faithful, and if any of those things weren't true, they never would have gotten there. Well, the same is true for the Pharisees that night at the temple. The same was true for the crowds, and the same is true for all of us. But just like those crowds that night, some will believe and many will not.

This text is linked to that John 5 text that I preached some weeks back. In that sermon, we said that believing is seeing, that sometimes the only way that we will ever see is to first believe. I recognize that feels counterintuitive to us, but it's true across all walks of life. I get in the car, and I put the seatbelt on because I believe that seatbelt will protect me before I ever test it and see for myself. I believe the ball will go up and come back down, or I wouldn't have thrown it up there in the first place. I believe the

surgery will help me because the doctor tells me it will, before I ever see the results. The Israelites believed that they would see a land flowing with milk and honey before they ever saw it for themselves.

Believing is seeing, but more than that, what Jesus says about himself in John 8 adds a crucial wrinkle. Believing is seeing. Seeing is living. Jesus says, "There is no living until you see me in the flesh, until you see me on that pole and you believe that I am who I am." At the beginning of today's message, I told you about how stubborn I was about needing glasses. I told you I didn't want to believe that there was a problem, and I told you I hoped I could ignore it and it would go away. But somewhere along the way, God humbled me enough to go deal with the problem, to go deal with the reality that I was ignoring, that I was not seeing correctly. I didn't believe that until I put on glasses and saw things as they actually were for the first time in many years. Believing is seeing, and seeing is living.

Church, our sin works exactly the same way. Like the Israelites, we are hopelessly enslaved to sin. Hopelessly. And many of us can't even see that. We don't see the alcoholism. We don't see the workaholicism. We may not see the porn addiction. We don't see the gluttony or the laziness. We don't see our selfishness. We don't see any of it until the damage is done, until it's too late.

Jesus says if it gets to be too late, then we will die in that sin. But we don't have to, because Jesus offers us the same invitation that he offered the crowds that night: that when you have lifted up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am. Jesus isn't just talking about when he gets lifted onto the cross. He's also talking about whether we exalt him as Lord and King of our lives, which means that we aren't Lord and King of our lives.

So like me, you may be deeply resistant to the notion that something is wrong. You may be deeply resistant to the notion that you need help. Don't be the person who deludes yourself into thinking that maybe you could use Jesus, but you don't really need Jesus. Sometimes we don't know what we don't know, and we don't see what we don't see.

I want to invite you to see differently. I want to invite you to know Jesus. I want to invite you to see him on the cross, dying for your sins and for mine. I want to invite you to believe in him and live. Believing is seeing, and seeing is living.

This manuscript represents the bulk of what was preached at CPC. For further detail, please refer to the audio recording of this sermon.

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