



TIME OF GRACE®

Jesus #nofilter: Without Jesus, There's Only Darkness Study Notes

Summary

What did Jesus mean when he said he was the Light of the world? Pastor Mike continues this series that looks at the offensive, unfiltered, and hard teachings of Jesus. In this message, Pastor Mike unpacks what Jesus taught when he talked about light and darkness and what that means for us.

John 8:12 — 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.”

- L_____
- I_____
- G_____
- H_____
- **John 3:19-20** — This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but people 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 their deeds will be exposed.
- _____T_____

- **John 8:13, 30** — “No one has ever gone into heaven except the one who came from heaven—the Son of Man....He must become greater; I must become less.”

Points to Ponder

1. Jesus once said to his disciples, “You are the light of the world.” What did he mean by that? How does this apply to your group of Christian friends?
2. It takes the average reader two hours to read the entire Gospel of John. Could you read it before this series concludes? (Next level challenge—Read the entire thing in one day to grasp the big picture of Jesus’ teaching.)
3. Do you find the Bible’s teaching on generosity enlightening, harsh, or both? Explain your answer. (If you don’t know this teaching, ask a long-time Christian that you know.)

Homework for Next Week

Read John 10:11-18

Time of Grace Ministry
Jesus #nofilter: Without Jesus, There's Only Darkness
John 8:12, John 3:19-20, John 8:13,30
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In some of the biggest moral and cultural debates of our generation, it's really, really rare to find someone who says that they disagree with Jesus, that they hate the teaching of Jesus, that they believe that they know better than Jesus. Instead, what so often happens is people are on side A and side B. Both claim that they're representing Jesus.

You know, for example, if you asked someone, "Why go to church? Why be part of an organized religion instead of having some personal relationship with God?" A simple answer for many church people would be, "Jesus. Jesus attended the synagogue. He was part of organized religion. He appointed apostles and structured their first century churches. He always wanted us to be part. Jesus himself organized his religion therefore, you should be part of an organized religion."

But other people would say, "Wasn't Jesus the hugest critic of organized religion? Didn't he fight most not with unbelieving people but those who lead the church? Weren't his fiercest enemies the Pharisees and the Sadducees and their hypocrisy and greed?"

Or I think of something like a traditional family and sexual and gender values. If you ask someone why they hold to maybe the same beliefs that their grandparents did instead of what's very common in our culture, they might respond, "Jesus. Jesus was the one who defined marriage as a man and a woman. He was the one in Matthew 19 and Matthew 5 who quoted back to the early days of Genesis to talk about these traditional values. I'm sorry if you don't like it but this is what Jesus taught. I'm not changing my beliefs because Jesus doesn't change."

But then other people would say, "But didn't Jesus almost always take the side of those around the margins, those who were judged by religious leaders? Isn't it true that he did reach out to tax collectors, and prostitutes, and lepers, and people who didn't have their place in the organized church, and he love them, and sided with them?" If you ask some people, "You know, why on social media are you speaking about other people's lifestyles? Why are you critical and judgmental?" They would say, "Well, because of Jesus. If they stand up for what's true, you have to stand up for justice. People can't just claim to follow God and do whatever they want. He doesn't change. That's why I'm doing this."

And others would say, "Well, wait, isn't Jesus the one who said, 'Do not judge, period, love one another, period,' God is love and the world will know that you're following

God by the way that you love one another?" You see what I'm saying? No one says I'm anti-Jesus. Almost everyone on this side and the other side says that Jesus is on my side.

It's kind of confusing, isn't it? If you care about Jesus like I do, if you want to follow him faithfully like I do, if you want to be true to him, in fact worship him like I do, how do you know what the real Jesus is like? Well, there's a simple answer to that question. You have to throw yourself into the unfiltered Jesus.

Alright, the truth is you can make any claim and believe anything if you just pick and choose a word, a sentence, a paragraph. The thing that's actually a lot of work for you and me is to dig into this Jesus enough that we understand what he said in the context of why he said it, what came before it, what comes after it, what did Matthew say, and then Mark, and then Luke, and then John. We have to get huge chunks of Jesus so he can interpret himself instead of people like me or people like you imposing an interpretation that we prefer.

And that's why I'm glad you're here today. That's why I'm happy you're watching online. Because in this sermon series we're trying to get back to the unfiltered Jesus by turning to the gospel of John. Let me read to you an epic verse from John 8:12. "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 said he is the light, the L-I-G-H-T. If you're watching at home make sure you grab a piece of paper and write this down, but I'm going to admit up front before you take notes, this isn't -- it's not my best acronym. There's going to be one time or maybe two times where you put the pen down and you're like, "Come on." If there is an award for the best acronym of the year, the Acronemes or something, I probably wouldn't have to prepare a speech. I wouldn't be winning any awards.

So, I get it. But here's my goal that when you get in a car after church or when this program is done that you could turn to a person next to you and ask them, "What's the L-I-G-H-T?" And even if I have to stretch a little bit, I'm hoping that you remember these five things about Jesus, and what he meant when he claims to be the light of the world.

Alright, grab a pen. Let's jump in and write the first one down. The "L" in L-I-G-H-T stands for "Life." Light both in the Bible and nature is connected to life. If you're in the light, you have life. If you're in the darkness, that's connected to death. If you remember your fifth-grade science class and photosynthesis that should make sense, right? How many of you have plants in your home? Just curious. Hands nice and high. How many of you store those plants in the darkest room of your house? You kill all the plants, sir, yes. Well, you're going to learn a lot today, because the way that plants work through photosynthesis is that life happens. They grow, they survive by receiving the sunlight.

Now, Jesus is saying the same thing spiritually. And he's actually saying something very big. Did you notice his words? He didn't just say, "I'm light," but "I am the light,"

the definitive. Not just light of my family, or light of my community, or light of my ethnicity. "I am the light of the world." It's a huge controversial, pretty exclusive claim. Jesus says, "If you want to have life with God, if you want to have eternal life in heaven, there's only one way to get it, and it's through me." If you think just trying your best to be a decent person gives you a life with God, no. If you think, like many people, that just believing in something or having faith in some higher power will give you life with God, he said, "Nope, nope, nope." Well, just be religious and devout whatever your religion is. Unfiltered Jesus says, "Nope. No, I'm not one path up the mountain to the light of heaven. I am the light of the whole world. Whoever follows me," he says, "Will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life."

Some people think that Jesus was accepting of everyone's beliefs and this passage is proof that he was not. He made huge claims, but he was the only way to the father because he is the light of the world. But before you get offended by Jesus and walk away, notice what he said, "I am the light of the world and whoever follows me will have the light of life." I love that phrase, "Whoever." Did you know that most world religions that billions of people follow today would not be able to say that? Most religions say, "Whoever is fairly good will have the light of life. Whoever is shown noticeable improvement from their past will have the light of life. Whoever keeps these ten commandments, or these five pillars, or these eight principles, whoever has fixed their karma." The world religions say, "You better be doing good and you better be doing a lot of it. You better avoid the bad or else all of you are in trouble."

But Jesus does not say that. He's the only religious founder who says, "Whoever." "You got some stuff in your past, okay. Whoever follows me will have the light of life." You got a rap sheet? Does the local judge or cop know your name? Have you been through a divorce? Is there addiction in your past? Are you struggling with some moral issues, some sin that you keep going back to that maybe you went back to just in the last week?

Well, thank God, Jesus does not say, "Whoever is good, or whoever is better, or whoever has grown in the last year." He just says, and I quote, "Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life." Yes, Jesus is exclusive, but he is also amazing. He is offering you, despite your past, despite your present struggles, he's offering you free of charge, no strings attached, the light of his love which leads you into life with God. You could run from him but he's offering you, despite all of your flaws, light and life. So, that's the "L."

Now, grab your pen for number two because the L-I-G-H-T, the "I" stands for "I see." Alright, this is a little bit of a stretch, right? "Yeah, that's unimpressive. Don't you have time to work on this, Pastor?" I was going to put illumination but that felt like a big word. But this is really a simple concept, right? If the lights are on, I see. If it's really dark, I don't. If the lights are off, I feel doubt, I have to guess, I'm unsure. But if the lights are on, it's actually pretty simple. How many people right now in this church service are sitting in the front row? Yep, that was easy because of light. If we killed all the lights and you ask me how many people are sitting in the fourth row, I'd have to guess.

By saying that he is the light, Jesus is saying that there are some really big questions everyone's asking about life, and you don't have to guess; because of his light, you see. If you don't have Jesus though, your kind of in the dark, it's easier to be deceived, and the best you can do is guess.

You ever notice how we think a lot of things that aren't always true? Jesus says, "I'm the light of the world," because he means he wants you to see what's true. There are some really smart people in our world who have fancy degrees and titles but if they don't know Jesus, they don't see the simple answers to life's biggest questions. It feels very scientific and philosophical to say, "Well, where did we come from as human beings?" I know. "In the beginning God created." He knit up together in our mother's wombs. We are not accidents of evolution. We are intentionally created by a loving father, much like a mother and father. The overflow of their love leads to a child. The overflow of God's love led to you. You're not an accident without purpose. You're part of the family of humans that God made.

"Oh, but what happens after death? That great mystery no one knows." I know. I know a guy who died and then he came back to tell us about it. He said that whoever believes in him will live even though they die. Our back pain and our anxiety, our relational struggles, death and mourning is over. We immediately go to paradise to see the face of God. I know. "Well, how do you get right with God? How do you know you're on the good side of the divine?" Well, what Jesus told me is actually very simple. Whoever believes in him will not perish but have eternal life. "Well, what's the purpose of life? What does God want me to do? It's such a mystery." No, it's not.

God doesn't care if you work here or there. He just cares that you love people wherever you are. So, stay here. Sell your house. Apply for this job. Apply for that one. God doesn't care. He just cares that you love him and love people wherever you are. These things that keep us up at night, that philosophers debate. Jesus says, "If you follow me, you will never walk in darkness, you will see the truth of life, death, your past, your present and your future." What a beautiful confident thing not to stumble around and shuffle in the dark but to know who you are, to know where you're going, to not fear life or death because God's word is a lamp for our feet and a light for our path.

So, we covered the "L" and the "I," let's jump to the "G." "G" stands for growth. Probably know that if you've ever had a plant before. It's actually true of our mental state too, right? It can be tough to get out of bed, but there's something about lights that help us to grow. It grows our joy and our peace. I forgot this about photosynthesis, but I believe light is soaked into a plant cell, it grows to the point where it divides which stretches out the stem and the leaves and produces fruits. And so, when Jesus is saying here, "I'm the light," he's saying that if you want to grow spiritually, if you want more love in your life or peace with God, or patience when things are just not going according to your plan, well, the simple answer is, the light of Jesus. That's why we're so infatuated here at our church with the Bible. I love seeing your faces here in church every Sunday because even though it doesn't glow,

there's light and growth in His Word. And every time you go home and start your day or end your day or interrupt your day, you know, a bunch of you, your phone does glow if you have a Bible app. Here's how spiritual growth happens. Right?

So, if you're just praying, "God, give me peace. Give me patience." These are great prayers. His answer is going to be to grow you through the photosynthesis of the soul that comes from this book. And so, I'm not trying to beat you over the head with the Bible but I'm going to keep beating this message, "The Bible, the Bible. The Bible." You're not going to grow 50 feet in a day like an oak tree, it's going to be bit by bit. But exposure to the light of his word is going to grow you to be more and more like Jesus.

It makes me think of this young man who had just started coming to our church. I was really excited to sit down and chat with him for the very first time because I quickly found out from his family that they simply could not understand how his life had changed for Jesus. I remember talking to his sister. I was standing right there just last Sunday, and she just shook her head with joy and said, "I cannot believe this is my brother. His beliefs changed. His behavior changed. He's a totally different human being."

And so, I sat down with him and he's telling me about all these changes and all these changes he wants to make for God. And I was curious, so I asked him the question, "Do you read the Bible at all?" And you want to guess what he said? "Yup." He had just gotten into this habit which he called his "holy hour." So, every morning he'll get up, he'll grab his Bible, maybe he turned on a sermon on YouTube. He gets out his notebook. "You'll learn better if you take notes," he said to me, "Yup." And he told me that for 60 minutes every day he just soaks in the light of God's truth. And I'm listening to this guy like, "Dang, I should do that." You know, who would have thought explosive growth is connected to a really faithful, really solid habit of God's word.

So, let that be an encouragement from Jesus today. If you just want more spiritual fruits, if you're struggling with joy or peace in the midst of all these uncertain things in your life, what if instead of sitting, waiting, worrying, you spent the first 60 minutes or 30 minutes, or 15 minutes, or five minutes, letting the light of this truth grow your hearts and grow your faith?

L-I-G, that brings us to the "H." The "H" is the hard part because the "H" in this acronym stands for "Harsh." You notice about light, if you've been in the darkness for a while, light is harsh. When I was in middle school, I'm not sure if this is true for you, I could sleep past lunch. Anyone else have that spiritual gift? So eventually my mom would be like, "Lunch is getting cold." You have to bust open the door and whip open the curtains and if you've been in the dark, light -- despite all of its warmth and beauty, is painful. You know, you want to hide from it.

If you've been camping with friends around a fire in a really dark night and someone turns on their headlamp and looks at you. Actually, in the gospel of John 3, look at

what it says. John adds, "This is the verdict. Light has come into the world, but people loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil. Everyone who does evil hates the light and will not come into the light for fear that their deeds will be exposed."

You know, if you're a dad who acts very religious and brings the kids to church, but the kids see behind the scenes that you are very unlike our Heavenly Father, that you threaten, and you control, and you use anger, and you're verbally abusive, Jesus, he hates that. The greatest misuse of God's name is not someone dropping Jesus' name like a swear word, it's someone who claims to follow Jesus but behind the scenes they're nothing like Jesus.

If you think that we're going to accept your lifestyle because it's natural for you, it's just in your heart, and you didn't choose it, but what? If you're a sinner, why would we trust your heart? Why wouldn't I follow mine? There's not perfection within us, we're a fallen human race. We can't trust our instinct. "I feel it, therefore, it's good." That is such unbiblical logic and the light of Jesus' teaching, it will shine brightly on you. It will call you to repent, change, suffer whatever you have to, to faithfully follow the teachings of Jesus.

If you think that just because you're religious and go to church, you can be a jerk to other people. You know, you can jump online and post whatever you want because you're right. And the Bible says you can know every last scripture in the whole book, but if you don't have love, it's nothing to God, it's unimpressive to him. He doesn't just care about Bible jeopardy. He cares about people who behave like Jesus, right? And so, there will be times when you absolutely, will be judged by Jesus. And 99% of the time the way that you will be judged is through Jesus' faithful people.

Foolish people who love darkness and hate the light run from Jesus' people who are holding an open book that beams light. And I'll put it out there, will you run from it because it's painful? Eventually, my experience is that your eyes adjust, you come to trust God and even if it's hard you enjoy the warmth, and the light, and the growth, and the ability to see. But some people don't ever get that far, they run from it because they think God's job is just to say yes to everything they want. That's not true. That's not true. There's one Lord. It's not the person you saw when you were brushing your teeth today. It's Jesus. He's right, sometimes we are wrong. He's the light and sometimes the light is bright.

But I hope you don't leave Jesus, because there's one last thing he wants to offer you. The "T" in L-I-G-H-T stands for "Safety." I know. Alright, I know. You can roll your eyes. But that's true, isn't it? The dark is really dangerous. When the lights are on, there's much greater safety. Just imagine for a second if we killed all the lights in this space and you had to leave. You'd stub your toe, you'd run into someone, I would fall off the edge of the stage. But if the lights are on it's actually very safe. You see where you're going. You know where the danger is. And that's what Jesus was saying to you that if you follow him, "I'm the light of the world, whoever follows me will never walk in darkness."

In fact, it's pretty cool. In the original Greek language that the New Testament is recorded in, it's probably a touch better translation to say this. That Jesus said, "Whoever follows me will never ever, ever, ever, walk in darkness." It's an emphatic grammatical term. Jesus is saying, "Categorically, if you have me, if I am your light, you will never ever, ever be in danger of the darkness of hell." You'll never ever have to wonder if God's going to accept you or condemn you on the last day. You'll never ever, ever have to feel like you're alone because God will be with you and you'll never ever, ever have to think that you're unloved because you're not. You'll never ever, ever have to question your place in God's family. You'll never ever, ever have to wonder if you have God's ear or his heart. If Jesus is your light, he saves you from all of that danger.

When we say that Jesus saves, it's our way of saying that Jesus keeps you safe. You are never in the danger of missing God in life, in death, or in the life to come. He's offering you all of that absolutely for free, because he says, "Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness but have the light." In the context John 8 says, "The Pharisees challenged him, but many believed in him." Once again, the unfiltered Jesus didn't take everyone's side. He spoke the truth. Some ran from it. A few followed it.

So, how about you? I will not promise you that Christianity will be the easiest path or Jesus will be the easiest God to follow but I can promise you this, if you do, by the grace of God, you will have light, and growth, and safety for ever and ever. Let's pray.

Jesus, I pray today for all of us here to have the eyes to see you. There are billions of people who say they worship you and they're even more billions who don't. This is how it's always been. So, we pray, Jesus, that you would open the eyes of our heart to believe that you're good and that you're worthy, that you're deserving. That however difficult it is, however narrow the road, however heavy the cross that we have to carry as we deny ourselves, that it's so worth it. If you're a God who gives light, and love, and eternal life in the presence of the father it must be worth it.

So, God, I pray for everyone here today including myself who is tempted by the here and the now, the short-term pleasure that unbiblical lifestyles can offer. God, it is easier to live for ourselves, to follow our hearts and our truth. But if we follow your truth, your heart, it leads to something infinitely greater. So, give us faith to see it, give us hearts to believe it, and we pray all these things in the mighty name of Jesus. And all God's people say, Amen.