

NT LESSON #15

“I AM THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD”

(John 7,8)

BY Ted L. Gibbons

INTRODUCTION: My mother was mostly blind during the final years of her life. A passionate reader, a woman who loved to sew and mend and cook and clean, her infirmity made the favored activities of her life nearly impossible. She did learn to crochet by touch, and made over one hundred Afghans for her grand- and great-grandchildren in those final years, but they were years lived in temporal darkness. But through it all she glowed! There was a source of light in her, a shining certainty, that enabled her to see more clearly than any of those whose love and compassion brought them to her side to read to her and to visit with her and to reminisce with her. The real light of the world, rather than being dimmed by her handicap, increased its brightness and radiance as the weeks and months passed by, until it seemed there was no darkness in her at all. More than any person I have ever known, she knew what Jesus meant when he said, “I am the light of the world.”

I. JESUS ATTENDS THE FEAST OF THE TABERNACLES AND TEACHES IN THE TEMPLE

1 AFTER these things Jesus walked in Galilee: for he would not walk in Jewry, because the Jews sought to kill him.

2 Now the Jews' feast of tabernacles was at hand.

3 His brethren therefore said unto him, Depart hence, and go into Judea, that thy disciples also may see the works that thou doest.

4 For there is no man that doeth any thing in secret, and he himself seeketh to be known openly. If thou do these things, shew thyself to the world.

5 For neither did his brethren believe in him.

6 Then Jesus said unto them, My time is not yet come: but your time is always ready.

7 The world cannot hate you; but me it hateth, because I testify of it, that the works thereof are evil.

8 Go ye up unto this feast: I go not up yet unto this feast; for my time is not yet full come.

9 When he had said these words unto them, he abode still in Galilee.

10 But when his brethren were gone up, then went he also up unto the feast, not openly, but as it were in secret. (John 7:1-10)

In October of the 33rd year of the Savior's life, the Feast of the Tabernacles convened in Jerusalem. But Jesus was not in Jerusalem and did not seem anxious to go there. What circumstances might have kept him in Galilee? (See John 7:1,25,30) The pain of his rejection in Jerusalem by Jewish leaders must have been amplified by the disbelief of his own kinsmen (see John 7: chapter heading and John 7:5). He sent his brethren to Jerusalem without him, in spite of his own Old Testament command:

Three times in a year shall all thy males appear before the LORD thy God in the place which he shall choose; in the feast of unleavened bread, and in the feast of weeks, and in the feast of tabernacles . . . (Deuteronomy 16:16)

The chosen place was, of course, the temple in Jerusalem. But Jesus sent his brothers on without him, even though they tried to convince him to come:

His brethren therefore said unto him, Depart hence, and go into Judea, that thy disciples also may see the works that thou doest. For there is no man that doeth any thing in secret, and he himself seeketh to be known openly. If thou do these things, shew thyself to the world. (John 7:3,4)

If you really are the Son of God, show it to the world. And what better place exists to do so than the Feast of Tabernacles? Jews from all over the known world will be there.

The Feast of Tabernacles was one of the great Jewish feasts of the year. In fact, it was reckoned by the Jews to be "the greatest and most joyful of all . . ." (See Bible Dictionary, "Feasts," p. 673) It was a eight-day feast, including two Sabbath days. As a faithful Jew, Jesus would have been expected to attend. Failure to do so would have indicated a loss of faith and face. But the animosity of his enemies and his kinsmen probably caused him to delay his departure to the place where his death would take place in just six months.

But he went, "when his brethren were gone up . . . not openly, but as it were in secret." (John 7:10)

In Isaiah 50, the prophet speaks of the Atonement in the first person (“Messianically”). The words seem to describe the innermost feelings of the Redeemer about the forthcoming atonement. “I was not rebellious, neither turned away back . . . I have set my face like a flint . . .” (Isaiah 50:5,7) That phrase, for me at least, has always described the sentiment that sent Christ on to Jerusalem and into the stronghold of his mortal enemies: “I have set my face like a flint . . .” ‘I mean to go where I am supposed to go and I mean to do what I am supposed to do.’

And so he went to his final Feast of Tabernacles, where even his apparent absence had caused a controversy:

Then the Jews sought him at the feast, and said, Where is he? And there was much murmuring among the people concerning him: for some said, He is a good man: others said, Nay; but he deceiveth the people. Howbeit no man spake openly of him for fear of the Jews. (John 7:11-13)

But the Savior, intent on the completion of his mission, was not satisfied with being at the feast. He went to teach:

14 Now about the midst of the feast Jesus went up into the temple, and taught.

15 And the Jews marvelled, saying, How knoweth this man letters, having never learned?

16 Jesus answered them, and said, My doctrine is not mine, but his that sent me.

17 If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself.

18 He that speaketh of himself seeketh his own glory: but he that seeketh his glory that sent him, the same is true, and no unrighteousness is in him.

19 Did not Moses give you the law, and yet none of you keepeth the law? Why go ye about to kill me?

20 The people answered and said, Thou hast a devil: who goeth about to kill thee?

21 Jesus answered and said unto them, I have done one work, and ye all marvel.

22 Moses therefore gave unto you circumcision; (not because it is of Moses, but of the fathers;) and ye on the sabbath day circumcise a man.

23 If a man on the sabbath day receive circumcision, that the law of Moses should not be broken; are ye angry at me, because I have made a man every whit whole on the sabbath day?

24 Judge not according to the appearance, but judge righteous judgment. (John 7:14-24)

His message is clear. "I am the Messiah. I was sent by God and I am the Son of God." This is a message that the Savior repeats more than 120 times between John 3 and John 17. In this chapter alone it is stated in verses 16, 18, 28, 29, and 33.

Again, as he had so often done, he showed his disciples and his critics the way to know the truth:

If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself. (John 7:17)

The people of Jerusalem seemed astonished by the inactivity of the leaders of the Jews. "Is not this he, whom they seek to kill? But, lo, he speaketh boldly, and they say nothing unto him. Do the rulers know indeed that this is the very Christ?" (John 7:25, 26)

II. JESUS DECLARES HIMSELF THE LIVING WATER

Impressive ceremonies had been added to the Feast of the Tabernacles in the years following its first celebration. One of those was "the drawing of water from the pool of Siloam and its libation on the altar (of this it was said that he who has not seen the joy of the drawing of the water at the Feast of Tabernacles does not know what joy is) . . ." (Bible Dictionary, p. 673) This drawing and pouring of the water from a golden pitcher took place each morning of the feast. It was probably to this ceremony that the Lord referred in John 7:37: "In the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried, saying, If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink." It must have been a superb teaching moment, one that brings to mind a rather extended quotation from *The Silver Chair* by C.S. Lewis. This story, from Book IV of the *Chronicles of Narnia*, tells of a young lady nearly perishing from thirst, but frightened by a Great Lion, who in these books, is a symbol for Christ.

Jill got up and looked round her very carefully. There was no sign of the Lion; but there were so many trees about that it might easily be quite close without her seeing it. For all she knew there might be several lions. But her thirst was very bad now, and she plucked up her courage to go and look for that running water. She went on tip-toes, stealing cautiously from

tree to tree, and stopping to peer round her at every step.

The wood was so still that it was not difficult to decide where the sound was coming from. It grew clearer every moment and, sooner than she expected, she came to an open glade and saw the stream, bright as glass, running across the turf a stone's throw away from her. But although the sight of the water made her feel ten times thirstier than before, she didn't rush forward and drink. She stood as still as if she had been turned into a stone, with her mouth wide open. And she had a very good reason: just on this side of the stream lay the Lion.

It lay with its head raised and its two fore-paws out in front of it like the lions in Trafalgar Square. She knew at once that it had seen her, for its eyes looked straight into hers for a moment and then turned away—as if it knew her quite well and didn't think much of her.

"If I run away, it'll be after me in a moment," thought Jill. "And if I go on, I shall run straight into its mouth." Anyway, she couldn't have moved if she had tried, and she couldn't take eyes off it. How long this lasted she could not be sure; it seemed like hours. And the thirst became so bad that she almost felt she would not mind being eaten by the Lion if only she could be sure of getting a mouthful of water first.

"If you're thirsty, you may drink."

They were the first words she had heard since Scrubb had spoken to her on the edge of the cliff. For a second she stared here and there, wondering who had spoken. Then the voice said again, "If you are thirsty, come and drink," and of course she remembered what Scrubb had said about animals talking in that other world, and realised that it was the Lion speaking. Anyway, she had seen its lips move this time, and the voice was not like a man's. It was deeper, wilder, and stronger; a sort of heavy, golden voice. It did not make her feel any less frightened than she had been before, but it made her frightened in rather a different way.

"Are you going to drink?" said the Lion.

"I'm dying of thirst," said Jill.

"Then drink," said the Lion.

"May I—could I—would you mind going away while I do?" said Jill.

The Lion answered this only by a look and a very low growl. And as Jill gazed at its motionless hulk, she realised that she might as well have asked the whole mountain to move aside for her convenience.

The delicious rippling noise of the stream was driving her nearly frantic.

"Will you promise not to---do anything to me, if I do come?" said Jill.

"I make no promise," said the Lion.

Jill was so thirsty now that, without noticing it, she had come a step nearer.

"Do you eat girls?" she said.

"I have swallowed up girls and boys, women and men, kings and emperors, cities and realms," said the Lion. It didn't say this as if it were boasting, nor as if it were sorry, nor as if it were angry. It just said it.

"I daren't come and drink," said Jill.

"Then you will die of thirst," said the Lion.

"Oh dear!" said Jill, coming another step nearer. I supposed I must go and look for some other stream then."

"There is no other stream," said the Lion. (pp. 15-17)

Christ is the living water. He is the source of "rivers of living water" —enough water for every living creature. It was this water that he offered to the skeptics and enemies and disciples of Jerusalem, many of whom, though very thirsty, "daren't come and drink." "If any man thirst, let him come unto me and drink." (John 7:37) Ponder this invitation for a moment. What, in the gospel sense, is 'thirst'? For what things do people thirst in the spirit? What are the desperate longings of the heart and soul that, unfulfilled, bring misery and despair as guests in their wake? It was certainly this unwillingness to come to Christ and drink that caused Jeremiah to write

For my people have committed two evils; they have forsaken me the fountain of living waters, [and] hewed them out cisterns, broken cisterns, that can hold no water.(Jeremiah 2L13)

III. JESUS DECLARES, "I AM THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD."

At one point during the Feast, the temple courts were illuminated by the lighting of four golden candelabra. It may have been at the moment of this spectacular event that the Savior spoke these words: "I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life." (John 8:12)

Christ spoke nearly these same words in the midst of the three days of impenetrable darkness preceding his visit to the American continent in 34 AD. "I am the light and the life of the world." (3 Nephi 9:18) What a gift it would be if we could understand those words as they were understood by the survivors of the American destruction that accompanied His crucifixion. Surrounded by death and darkness and destruction, they heard the voice of the perfected Son of God: "I am the light and the life of the world." This is more than rhetoric. It is reality in its deepest sense. D&C 88:6-11 teaches us the truth about the light of Christ.

He that ascended up on high, as also he descended below all things, in that he comprehended all things, that he might be in all and through all things, the light of truth; Which truth shineth. This is the light of Christ. As also he is in the sun, and the light of the sun, and the power thereof by which it was made. As also he is in the moon, and is the light of the moon, and the power thereof by which it was made; As also the light of the stars, and the power thereof by which they were made; And the earth also, and the power thereof, even the earth upon which you stand. And the light which shineth, which giveth you light, is through him who enlighteneth your eyes, which is the same light that quickeneth your understandings; Which light proceedeth forth from the presence of God to fill the immensity of space—

IV. JESUS GIVES "WATER" AND "LIGHT" TO MEN SENT TO ARREST HIM

There was a skepticism among the unbelievers, among those people who believed that Christ was too much a man to be the Messiah. "Howbeit we know this man whence he is: but when Christ cometh, no man knoweth whence he is." (John 7:27)

This question of his origins is a pertinent one. Some utterly rejected him on this basis alone:

Others said, This is the Christ. But some said, Shall Christ come out of Galilee? Hath not the scripture said, That Christ cometh of the seed of David, and out of the town of Bethlehem, where David was? So there was a division among the people because of him. (John 7:41-43)

The Jewish leaders tried to use this "evidence" against him. To those who thought he might be the Messiah, they said, "Art thou also of Galilee? Search, and look: for out of Galilee ariseth no prophet." (John 7:52)

The common understanding was that Jesus was from Galilee. The people knew he had grown up in Nazareth. But these people believed the scriptures, and therefore expected him to be from Bethlehem (John 7:42; Matthew 2:4-6)

How many of those who criticize the Church and its leaders in our own day have turned away from the truth because of false information received from those who claimed to know, but did not know, the truth about us. And the solution to the problem of those who did not understand was (and is) so simple: just ask—"Master, the scriptures say that the Messiah is to come from Bethlehem, but we understand that you are from Galilee. Can you explain this apparent contradiction?" And of course he could, in one sentence. "I was born in Bethlehem, but my family home was in Nazareth. I grew up there."

There is some evidence that the LDS Church is finally achieving some respect and recognition among the more conventional Christian religions. Some people are finally ready to allow us to speak for ourselves. For example, consider the following

IVY LEAGUE SCHOOL HOME TO MORMON DOCTRINE CONFERENCE

As The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints nears the 12 million member mark, along with more than 110 Mormon temples dotting the earth, the church is coming of age in speaking out on its beliefs and practices.

One such discovery session will take place next week at Yale University's Divinity School during a three-day Mormon studies conference beginning Thursday with the theme "God, Humanity and Revelation: Perspectives from Mormon Philosophy and History."

"It's the first conference of its kind," says Kenneth West, conference organizer and a student at the Ivy League university in New Haven, Conn.

"We want to expose the Yale community to Mormon ideas," said West, who is LDS. "No major divinity school or seminary has held a conference of this magnitude."

More than 150 people have registered at www.yale.edu/mormon_conference.

Scholars from all over the nation and the United Kingdom are congregating at Yale; 11 presenters are LDS, and seven of those are from Brigham Young University. Ten other Mormons sit on panels. Columbia, Vanderbilt, University of Richmond and Hanover College claim other LDS scholars.

Non-LDS panelists include an Episcopal priest, an Anglican priest and Evangelical, Methodist and Presbyterian ministers who will respond to the LDS papers; the 31 presenters hail from Wellesley, Humboldt, Yale, Atlanta's George Institute of Technology and elsewhere. (Karen Hoag *The Daily Herald*, Saturday, March 22, 2003)

It would be a wonderful thing if we were finally permitted in all things to speak for ourselves about what we believe. This conference at Yale may be a part of the appearance of such opportunities.

In New Testament times, the message and the miracles of the Savior reached many hearts: "And many of the people believed on him, and said, When Christ cometh, will he do more miracles than these which this man hath done?" (John 7:31)

Thus the Pharisees were forced to take action in spite of popular opinion. "The Pharisees heard that the people murmured such things concerning him; and the Pharisees and the chief priests sent officers to take him. " (John 7:32) These officers found him and they listened to him and they returned without him. The Pharisees were livid!

Then came the officers to the chief priests and Pharisees; and they said unto them, Why have ye not brought him? The officers answered, Never man spake like this man. Then answered them the Pharisees, Are ye also deceived? (John 7: 45-47)

This event is remarkably like the experience of Wilford Woodruff at Benbow Farm in England, where Wilford baptized 600 persons.

When I arose to speak at Brother Benbow's house, a man entered the door and informed me that he was a constable, and had been sent by the rector of the parish with a warrant to arrest me. I asked him, 'For what crime?' He said, 'For preaching to the people.' I told him that I, as well as the rector, had a license for preaching the gospel to the people, and that if he would take a chair I would wait upon him after meeting. He took my chair and sat beside me. For an hour and a quarter I preached the first principles of the everlasting gospel. The power of God rested upon me, the spirit filled the house, and the people were convinced. At the close of the meeting I opened the door for baptism, and seven offered themselves. Among the number were four preachers and the constable. The latter arose and said, 'Mr. Woodruff, I would like to be baptized.' I told him I would like to baptize him. I went down into the pool and baptized the seven. We then came together. I confirmed thirteen, administered the Sacrament, and we

all rejoiced together.

The constable went to the rector and told him that if he wanted Mr. Woodruff taken for preaching the gospel, he must go himself and serve the writ; for he had heard him preach the only true gospel sermon he had ever listened to in his life [‘never man spake like this man’]. The rector did not know what to make of it, so he sent two clerks of the Church of England as spies, to attend our meeting, and find out what we did preach. They both were pricked in their hearts, received the word of the Lord gladly, and were baptized and confirmed members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. The rector became alarmed, and did not venture to send anybody else. (Matthias F. Cowley, *Wilford Woodruff—His Life and Labors*, p.118)

V. CHRIST OFFERS “LIGHT” AND “WATER” TO THE WOMAN TAKEN IN ADULTERY

1 JESUS went unto the mount of Olives.

2 And early in the morning he came again into the temple, and all the people came unto him; and he sat down, and taught them.

3 And the scribes and Pharisees brought unto him a woman taken in adultery; and when they had set her in the midst,

4 They say unto him, Master, this woman was taken in adultery, in the very act.

5 Now Moses in the law commanded us, that such should be stoned: but what sayest thou?

6 This they said, tempting him, that they might have to accuse him. But Jesus stooped down, and with his finger wrote on the ground, as though he heard them not.

7 So when they continued asking him, he lifted up himself, and said unto them, He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her.

8 And again he stooped down, and wrote on the ground.

9 And they which heard it, being convicted by their own conscience, went out one by one, beginning at the eldest, even unto the last: and Jesus was left alone, and the woman standing in the midst.

Note the circumstances and think about what is really going on here. Jesus, still apparently during the Feast of the Tabernacles, has come into the temple “early in the morning” (John 8:2), “and all the people came unto him . . .” The Pharisees, have tried unsuccessfully to take him and who have plotted his death, now find him in the holiest spot of all Judea, and “all the people” have come to hear him.

In what seems to have been a desperate effort to undermine his influence, they brought an adulterous woman to him. How did they catch her “in the very act”? They have not brought the other party in this transgression: no man was there to share the accusation. But if she was taken in the very act, he must have been there as well. This seems very much like a set up. Realize that this unthinkable breach of Christian kindness is conducted by the religious leaders of the covenant people. Observe that there is no hint of service or sorrow in their attitude toward this unfortunate woman. Is it any wonder that “Jesus stooped down, and with his finger wrote on the ground, as though he heard them not.” (John 8:6)

If in your own ward or branch the ecclesiastical leader called someone out of the audience to the stand and said of her what these men said to Christ of that woman, what would you do? Could you watch the leader or the sinner unmoved while the leader made public accusation against her, explaining her transgressions in detail to everyone there assembled? I think in such a situation, heads would bow on every neck in the congregation, as people wrote on their programs and waited for the shame to end.

This is not about the woman, or her infraction of the Law of Moses. The woman, to the Pharisees, is a pawn in a game with much higher stakes. This is about the Savior, and whether or not he will support the Law of Moses. If he does not, certainly many of the people can be turned against him. They brought her to “tempt . . . him, that they might have to accuse him.” (John 8:6)

I have imagined this scene many times, always with pain. How could men, even these men, treat a child of God in such a way. It pleases me that the Savior makes every effort to ignore them and spare her further embarrassment. But they would not let it go. “So when they continued asking him, he lifted up himself, and said unto them, He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her.” (John 8:7) This may be as rich a glimpse into the soul of the Savior as we see anywhere in the Gospels. They know he knows their thoughts. He has read their hearts again and again during his ministry. “Would you like me to announce your sins—your very acts—to those here assembled and listening? Would you like to be treated as you have treated this woman? “And again he stooped down, and wrote on the ground” giving them an opportunity to do what they gave her no opportunity to do: to escape the scrutiny of their peers for their sinful deeds. Note that they were “convicted by their own conscience, and went out one by one . . .”

But the woman stayed. I think she, in that moment, had her first drink of "living water." She had seen the "light." She stayed. He finally arose and spoke to her.

Woman, where are those thine accusers? hath no man condemned thee?
She said, No man, Lord. And Jesus said unto her, Neither do I condemn thee: go, and sin no more. (John 8:10,11)

Does not this love, this compassion, this kindness cause you to love the Savior more? Jesus protected this sinner and offered her his light and his water---a way to peace. She must have learned in that moment what Jill learned from the lion near the river. *There is no other water.*

Did the Lord forgive the woman? There seems to be no evidence of forgiveness. His command to her was, "Go and sin no more." He was directing the sinful woman to go her way, abandon her evil life, commit no more sin, transform her life. He was saying, "Go, woman, and start your repentance"; and he was indicating to her the beginning step--to abandon her transgressions. (Spencer W. Kimball, *The Miracle of Forgiveness*, p. 165)

CONCLUSION: You can see if you are blind. You can drink the living water in the driest desert. Jesus is the true light. "He is the light and the life of the world; yea, a light that is endless, that can never be darkened.." (Mosiah 16:9) He is the living water. "He that believeth on me, as the scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water." (John 7:38) Jesus has said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me." (John 14:6) Let us see the light and drink the water, and follow him to the Father.

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