

Scripture: John 8:12-20

Sermon: Live as Children of Light / translated by Melody Ouk

1. The true meaning of “I am the light of the world”

There are seven first-person declarations of Jesus that appear only in the Gospel of John. Simply put, there are seven types of self-revelation in which Jesus revealed himself using the words, “I am”: “I am the bread of life.” “I am the gate for the sheep.” “I am the good shepherd.” “I am the resurrection and the life.” “I am the way, the truth, and the life.” “I am the true vine.” These are all first-person self-revelation statements that Jesus made while revealing himself. The unique grammar that appears in Greek and Latin, which I have mentioned many times during my sermons, is used in self-revelation. Greek and Latin do not necessarily use personal pronouns to indicate the subject. This is because the suffix after the verb provides information about who the subject of the verb is. Since the subject can be indicated by the verb alone, the subject is omitted. However, personal pronouns are used when emphasizing the subject performing the action. The verb equivalent to the English “to be” verb is ‘eimi’ in Greek. Even if you just write Eimi, it means ‘I am ~’, but Jesus insisted on using the personal pronoun Ego, which means ‘I’, by saying “Ego eimi”. So the reason the personal pronoun ego was used in the phrase “I am the light of the world” is to emphasize “I”. It conveys the nuance of “I am the light of the world, not anyone else. I am the light of the world.” What is the hidden meaning of these words? It implies that there are others who act as if they are the light, not me. It could be that there is a hidden intention to draw a contrast, saying, “They are not the light, I am the light of the world.” Assuming that there is a similar light, Jesus says, “I am the light of the world.” I will explain similar lights later.

Another hidden meaning of the statement, “ἐγὼ εἰμι τὸ φῶς τοῦ κόσμου· (ego eimi to pos tou kosmou) I am the light of the world,” must be found in the Old Testament. In order to understand the salvation that Jesus speaks of, we must understand the salvation that the Old Testament speaks of. This is because Jesus did not speak of a new salvation by skipping the Old Testament. The seven self-revelations of Jesus in the Gospel of John are all based on the Old Testament. The statement, “I am the light of the world,” is based on Isaiah 42:1-6. Isaiah 42 explains God’s will to call Israel as His servant and the light of the nations. “I, the Lord, have called you in righteousness; I will take hold of your hand. I will keep you and will make you to be a covenant for the people and a light for the Gentiles (v. 6).” This verse explains why God called the Israelites and made a covenant with them. He wanted them to be a light for the Gentiles. It means that they should take on the mission of light that illuminates the dark world. This verse is connected to the Sinai covenant. The verse in Exodus 19:5-6, which expresses the Sinai covenant, is one of the most important verses in the Old Testament. “The whole earth is mine. Therefore, you will be my chosen people, your kingdom of priests who serve me, and you will be a holy nation.” However, the Israelites abandoned this mission. When the mediator failed, the way for the Gentiles to approach God was completely blocked. Jesus came to this earth to fulfill the mission that Israel failed to fulfill, and so he proclaimed, “I am that light.”

2. Fake Eternal Life

The mission of light is to drive out darkness. The world is in darkness. As I said last week, we live in a world divided into light and darkness. The Gospel of John calls living a life following the light of true life in a dark world “eternal life.” The Gospel of John says that Jesus is the only one who gives eternal life. “that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life” (John 3:16). Eternal life is a life that is connected to God through entering a fellowship with Him. However, people of the world in darkness do not seek eternal life in Jesus but in other things. Because they are not connected to God, they seek things that can give them eternal life. I think

you could call them “counterfeit eternal life” or “fake eternal life.” They are things that run in darkness on the inside but seem to give life on the outside. What are some examples of counterfeit eternal life that people of the world pursue? In their 20s, passionate love and physical love are counterfeit eternal life. In their 30s, having a high salary and a job that is socially admired are counterfeit eternal life. In their 40s and 50s, wanting to experience eternal life through their children’s success or the size and neighborhood their house is located in are counterfeit eternal life. After their 60s, a stable retirement plan and good health are counterfeit eternal life. These things are counterfeits of eternal life. Koreans love counterfeit goods so much that they often see merchants hanging signs saying, “This is not made in China” in tourist destinations in Europe. Jesus is speaking to the Pharisees and scribes who are pursuing such counterfeit eternal life. “That is not the eternal life of the kingdom of God. You are counterfeit. True eternal life can only be obtained through me.”

Why are the Pharisees and the scribes the ones who seek counterfeit eternal life? They are the ones who are desperate to obtain eternal life. Who are the Pharisees? They are the ones who tried to strictly follow not only the rules in the five books of Moses but also their own rules and regulations. They thought that the reason the Messiah did not come was because the Israelites were not holy. So they thought that the Messiah would come when they thoroughly maintained holiness and satisfied God. Jesus said to the Pharisees and the scribes who so thoroughly kept God’s laws, “You are counterfeit.” He said, “You are blind and are misleading the blind.” Jesus said that they were blind people in the darkness. The Pharisees and the scribes were darkness disguised as light.

3. The Spectrum of Darkness

The scripture is connected to the story of the woman caught in adultery. The people who brought the woman to Jesus and questioned her were the Pharisees and the teachers of the law. In verse 12, Jesus spoke to them again, which must mean that he was speaking to the Pharisees and the teachers of the law. The Pharisees cannot understand Jesus’ words. Why is that? Because they think they are the light. True eternal life and true light cannot be accepted by those who pursue a similar eternal life and think that it is everything. Light is effective for those who admit that they belong to darkness. The words that Jesus is the light of life resonate so well with people like the tax collector, the prostitute, and the woman caught in adultery. This is because they feel deep in their bones that they are in darkness. However, the Pharisees are not like that. In their eyes, they are the true light, and Jesus is a counterfeit. To them, Jesus is nothing more than a counterfeit Messiah who is delusional and only says strange things.

There is something we can realize by contrasting the adulteress and the Pharisees in the scripture. Just as there is a spectrum in light, there is also a spectrum in darkness. Sinners such as tax collectors and prostitutes are the most miserable people in deep darkness. These people are aware that they are in darkness, so they have an incredible desire for light. That is why when Jesus says, “I am the light of the world,” they absorb His words like a sponge. However, people who are in the border of darkness, like the Pharisees, are people in deceptive darkness disguised as light. They think they are in the light, but in reality, they are in darkness. People who are in deceptive darkness judge and condemn those who are in darkness. Deceptive darkness is the religion represented by the Pharisees and the scribes. The characteristic of this religion is that it creates a religious hierarchy and thrives by preying on those who are morally inferior to them. The Pharisees believed that they were the light, so the woman was darkness. Because they were the light, they dragged the woman to Jesus. The woman deserves to be treated that way because she is darkness, and they think it is okay to treat them unfairly because they are light. This characteristic is not only evident in the Pharisees of Jesus’ time, but

also in modern Christian churches. People who do not go to church, Buddhists, and Muslims are all considered darkness. Like the Pharisees, they easily judge those who create various rules and keep them as light and those who do not keep them as darkness. We are holy because we do not drink or smoke. We are in the light because we keep the Sabbath. I pay tithes and make various offerings, so I am in the light, and I can judge those who do not do so. The words, "Let him who is without sin among you throw the first stone at her" are words that tell us all to realize that we are in darkness. Moral superiority is the biggest characteristic of darkness disguised as light. Their religion places great importance on food laws such as what to eat and what not to eat, Sabbath laws such as whether to keep the Sabbath or not, and qualifications such as whether or not to be circumcised and whether or not to be baptized. And everyone who doesn't fit that criteria is condemned to the dark.

4. Life Following the Light

Let's talk about the real light, not the darkness that deceives the light or the counterfeit eternal life. In the scripture, Jesus says, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life." Who is saying that someone can enter the light? "Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life." It's very simple. It means that if you follow the light, you will walk in the light. In this sentence, the verb "follow" is used in the imperfect tense. In other words, it is progressive. It is not the past tense of "I once followed Jesus." nor the future tense of "I will follow Jesus someday." It is following Jesus continuously now and every day. The moment you stop following the light, you will be captured by darkness. One of the things that Korean Christianity has been teaching incorrectly is that if you just believe in Jesus, you will go to heaven. It is not wrong, but it is insufficient. Because we have emphasized the act of believing too much, we have missed the following Jesus that Jesus emphasized so much. Faith is just the key to connecting with God. If our life has a new relationship with God through faith, then following Jesus is absolutely necessary after faith. Rather, Jesus seems to place more emphasis on following. When he called his disciples, he never once said, "Believe in me." He said, "Follow me." So the disciples left their nets and followed the Lord. "Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me (Matthew 16:24)." A life that follows the light is not a dot, but a line. It is not a one-time thing, but a continuation of life that must continue without end.

5. The specific meaning of a life following the light

What is a life following the light? I think we can say three things about the hidden meaning of the statement that those who follow Jesus will not walk in darkness but will receive the light of life.

The first is a change in personality. It means that we begin to live a life that resembles the character of Christ. Ephesians 5 compares the conduct of light and the conduct of darkness. "For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light (for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness, righteousness and truth)." Jesus' character, represented by goodness, righteousness and truth, is said to be the fruit of light. A life that follows the light is a life that bears fruit in the character of Christ. True Christians cannot help but be attractive. This is because those who follow Christ are full of love, know how to control themselves, and know how to deny themselves. They do not boast, like the Pharisees, that they are morally superior to others. The compassionate, inclusive, and welcoming character of Jesus is revealed in the fruit of his life.

The second meaning of living a life following the light is that you will join a community of light. Ephesians 5:7 says, "Therefore do not be partners with them." It is a word telling us to stay

away from idolaters who are in the midst of fornication, impurity, and greed that create darkness. Joining a group that pursues righteousness, goodness, and truth is a shortcut to obtaining the light of life. When you join a healthy community, your life becomes transparent, so you are less likely to participate in the works of darkness. Join a group of light. Then it will be easier to follow the light.

The third meaning of life following the light is to participate in a missionary life that exposes and drives out the darkness and sin of this world. Mission is a life of sending. We are missionary beings sent into the world. The reason and purpose for which we enter the circle of light is directly connected to this third meaning. We have been given the mission to drive out the darkness of the world through the circle of light. A missionary life is not only a life that exposes darkness with light, but also a life that shows the model of light that this is a righteous, good, and true life. The church, as a community of light, must show in advance that this is the life of heaven as a model of light. When the church fails to do this, the path for the people of the world to find the true light is blocked.

6. A life that makes our neighbors shine

The Pharisees could not live a life following the light because they tried to be the light to shine themselves. In contrast, Jesus is light and shines through his efforts to make others shine and make their lives bloom. The Pharisees tried to be light and shine by using those who were morally inferior to them, but that is the principle of darkness. Darkness has the characteristic of using the darkness of others to stand out. We must recognize that living as a child of light is a life that makes others shine. That is a missionary life. Many people live without knowing how beautiful and precious their lives are. I think that living as a child of light is a life that makes those who meet me shine because of the light within me. Since I am light, those who meet me naturally shine. When I approach them with care and the fruit of light, the fruit of love appears in the other person. I had a thought on my birthday last week, that if I treated everyone like a person celebrating their birthday, the world would become a brighter and more beautiful place. When it's someone's birthday, we treat them specially. When a restaurant is told it's someone's birthday, they give them a free dessert. I believe that if we treat the people we meet as if it is their birthday, their lives will shine. I think that day the adultress met Jesus was her like birthday because it was the day she was born again. Jesus treated her like she was born again, so she was truly born again. I pray in the name of the Lord that we all realize this principle and live beautiful lives, loving and cherishing each other as children of light.