*VBC*

*Pastor John Johnson*

*John 7:37-8:12*

*June 29-30, 2013*

**“The Feast We May Be Missing**”

This week, I met with a surgeon to discuss my pancreatic condition

-we’re still in a sort of wait and see mode—to see if this mass will necessitate surgery—or if it will just go away

-but if surgery is required—I have learned some important things about timing—

1. don’t have surgery in July—there is a higher rate of complications in July than any other month

(It’s also when graduating medical students begin working as residents)

1. don’t be admitted July 4th—people admitted to the hospital on an emergency basis on public holidays are 48% more likely to be dead one week later
2. finally—make sure they operate early—problems related to anesthesia and other things can increase 4—fold between morning and late afternoon—people get tired

TIMING MATTERS—as we saw in 7:2ff—it mattered when Jesus would go to Jerusalem

-He tended to go when there was a festival—for He would use these events to interject Himself into the story (think Passover)

-and in this—*reveal something of Himself—that changes lives*

*-as is the case here—*it was the Feast of Tabernacles

-something akin to our Thanksgiving

-for it came at the end of the agricultural year—the final harvest was just gathered—so it was festive

-and Jesus rarely missed a party

*-as Willimon puts it—“He was never a priest bathed in incense up at the temple; He was a wandering rabbi who did some of his best teaching amid the festivity of a meal”[[1]](#endnote-1)*

-He loved to mix it up, always on the move, eating and drinking with questionable types

*-showing up at a wedding with twelve unattached men*

-but this was more than a celebration of something in the immediate

-it was a time to reflect, remember, look further back—back to God’s provision in the wilderness

-a time when Israel was a pilgrim people, living a transient life, living in temporary shelters in the desert

-relying on the daily manna from the sky

-the water that would miraculously flow from a rock

-and guidance that was provided by the pillar of fire

-so those coming to the feast left their comfortable settings and set up temporary shelters, booths

-to remember their need for God

1. remember how He provided the bread—and Jesus stood up and declared—I am the Bread of Life—eat My flesh
2. remember how He supplied water—and Jesus stood up and announced—I am this Living Water—come and drink—7:37

-and people shook their heads and said—“*who is this homeless man—unemployed, unmarried, and uneducated?”*

-and when the day drew to a close and light gave way to darkness

-and giant lampstands were lit—that illumined the whole courtyard

-a ritual in this Feast intended to remind worshippers of the pillar of fire in the wilderness that gave Israel direction

-that led them through uncertainty and chaos and discomfort—where things were formless and void—things dark

-that sometimes stopped people—and people learned to wait on God until they realized He was waiting on them

-that sometimes called for people to pick up and go—leaving the securities and comforts—traveling in the night when all we can hang on to is presence

-revealing this—that God does whatever He pleases—sets the terms of the journey—giving only enough light for the next step—Psalm 119:105

-but ultimately is leading to a destination—a land of promise

-in this moment—because the time was right

-Jesus “again” interjected Himself into the ceremonial ritual and spoke—*read 8:12*

-there was no mistaking—given the timing and place and language—that Jesus was associating the Feast with Himself

-the Pillar of fire, the Shekinah cloud was Him, is Him

*-a light whose movement can also appear to be random—arbitrary, mysterious*

-when Jesus said—I am THE Light—He made this claim—His light preempts all other claims to light

-He is the fundamental source that permits no rival

-when He announced He IS the light—it was a statement that carries the reality of now—*not was—not will be*

*-while I am in the world, I am the light of the world—9:5*

-but what does this mean for us?

1. *His light enables us to avoid the perils and snares of the darkness*

-just like the Pillar of Fire—His light will keep us from walking in dark places

-in the dark, man gropes around with uncertainty

-he stumbles in the shadows—but light dispels, eliminates the confusion, the uncertainty—for darkness is not dark to God

-apart from His light, we revert to what comes naturally—to gravitate to the dark, walk in the image of the powers of evil[[2]](#endnote-2)

-light reorients—reveals the right direction—enables us to see the right way forward

-see when it is time to stop—time to begin—time to turn—time to pull back

1. *His light enables us to flourish in this world*

-for this is what light does—it ultimately gives life

-illustration—my one tomato plant

-light possesses a power essential to true life—leads to a certain thriving, blooming

-this is why light and life are put together

-whereas darkness leads to lifelessness and death—light leads to the thriving of being

1. but like bread—that is of no consequence unless you eat it
2. and water—that cannot quench our thirst unless we drink it
3. so the light is of little significance unless you do something

-which Jesus makes clear—FOLLOW ME

-but this may be language we have used so often it has lost its meaning

1. To follow implies we must be willing to stay behind and not ahead
2. To follow means to get close—

-respond to His unpredictable movements—for Jesus is on the road—on mission—always on the move

-this is why the structure—(pres ptc)

-if you are going to be with Jesus—get moving!

-take back the world that belongs to Me!

-advance the kingdom!

-don’t be impeded by too much baggage

-in your going, make disciples—Matthew 28

-and don’t limit yourself to Jerusalem or Judea—Acts 1:8

*-Jesus comes where we are—but rarely leaves us where we were*

Point—to follow implies decisive and intimate discipleship

-following so close you don’t need to ask Him what is His will

-so close He transforms our minds and wills and desires

-so close to Him that we readily discern the difference between light and darkness

-so close we take on this life and reflect it

-so close that *we too become the* light of the world—something Jesus intends His light to do—Matthew 5:14-16

-“You are the light of the world—let it shine before others”

APPLICATION

-and this is why this text matters in these days—

-for there is a growing darkness in our culture, a darkness threatening life

-it seems like we can’t see the moral lines anymore

-but there is a deeper darkness—and it has to do with us

-we are assuming the problem is with the darkness—and it is not—as John Stott so powerfully put it—

*“’The world is going down the drain’ we say with a shrug. But whose fault is it? Who is to blame? Let me put it this way. If the house is dark when nightfall comes, there is no sense in blaming the house, for that is what happens when the sun goes down. The question to ask is, ‘Where is the light?’*

-what needs to happen? The text makes it clear—

-we have to do two things if there is a hope for tomorrow—

1. *We need to seriously assess our willingness to follow Jesus*

-not of the neutral, conditional, superficial, casual variety—like the crowds who followed Jesus until He made demands

-*to follow is to lose our lives*

-“If any man would come after me, let him deny himself and take up His cross and *follow Me”*—Mark 8:34

-for only then will we take on the characteristics of light

-but there is something more—

1. *We need to be equipped to expose the darkness*

-this is what light is supposed to do

-“Walk as children of light…and do not participate in the works of darkness—but instead expose them”—Ephesians 5:8ff

-for if we don’t clarify and expose and bring life—things will get progressively darker—*and this is what is happening!*

-let me suggest four critical areas—

1. *Light on the IDENTITY OF MAN*

-this is so important—for what we believe humans to be shapes our views about everything else

-without clarity—without demonstrating that man is made in the image of God—lots of things get skewed

-if man is merely an accident of nature—than life has no meaning, let alone, purpose

-and man is merely matter—than life is treated with disrespect—both in the womb and outside the womb

-if man is his own god—anything goes

1. *Light on the ROLE OF GOVERNMENT*

-without clarity—without speaking up—the role of the State steps outside of its boundaries

-it’s the nature of government to overreach because this is what man does

-there is a need for light that reminds government that it derives its authority from God and is subject to God—Romans 13

-that its purpose is to help create the space and conditions for individuals and families to live out their freedom and their responsibilities

-that its responsibility is to recognize certain realities—like when life begins and how marriage is defined

-these are defined by God—not determined or defined by government

-light reveals that government’s role is not to play God—for when it does—it ends up being the devil

1. *Light on the NATURE OF RELATIONSHIPS*

-without clarity—people begin to assume a hook-up culture, no fault divorce, and cohabitation are okay—even healthy

-more than 65% of marriages today are preceded by cohabitation

-and there are a lot of reasons—the sexual revolution, individualism, secularization, divorce rates

*-some have bought into the lie that cohabitation is a harmless “test drive”—that is testing out marital compatibility*

-but here’s what the light exposes—

-cohabitation increases—not decreases—the risk of divorce

-cohabitation changes people—less commitment, more confusion, serial relationships

-and most of all—it hurts kids—who grow up in a less secure environment

1. *Light on the SERIOUSNESS OF DEBT AND DEFICITS*

-without clarity—some will see this as merely a matter of economics—when it really is a moral issue

-for we are living at the expense of future generations—we are violating our relationship with our kids

-it is a living for today—a practical atheism—as if the future does not matter

Jesus was making more than a claim—He was giving His followers a mandate

*-Christians will have to think hard — and fast — about these issues and our proper response*

-we will have to start thinking—have things to say that are worth saying

-reading Douthat (Bad Religion); Hunter (To Change the World; Platt (Follow Jesus)

-have the courage to walk straight in to the darkness, clothed in light, and shatter false assumptions—confront lies

-and above all—we will have to live Christ—treating others with humility and patience and thoughtful consideration

-if we don’t speak into these—shed light—counter the darkness—who will?

-where does it start?

-right here—right now—coming to God and asking—what would You have me do?

1. Why Jesus, , chap 4 [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. Understanding Spiritual Warfare, 98 [↑](#endnote-ref-2)