

Lesson Three: The Light of the World

Main idea: Jesus is the light that shows us the way out of our dark sin.

Teacher preparation:

- Read Scripture references, Exodus 13:17-22, John 7-9, Revelation 21:23-25, Leviticus 23
- Gather: Bible, dry erase markers or chart paper and markers, clear contact paper, colored tissue paper (lots of blue and green, and a few pieces of other colors), black permanent markers, scissors
- Take time to meditate on this week's Scripture and think about your own life. In what ways are you still choosing to walk in spiritual darkness? Are there any "secret sins" you are keeping hidden in the dark? Take time to evaluate your own life and pray that God would shine his light on any darkness you may still be dwelling in.

Scripture references:

- John 1:1-5
- John 8:12
- 1 John 1:5-7
- Psalm 119:105
- John 9:1-7, 25

Game: Red Light, Green Light.

The person who is "it" is the stoplight, and the goal for the other children is to be the first to reach the stoplight without being called out. Play begins with the stoplight on one end of the room, and all the other players lined up shoulder to shoulder at the other side of the room, about 15 feet away. The stoplight stands with his back to the others and says "green light." The other players are now allowed to move toward the stoplight. At any point in play, the stoplight may shout "red light." The other players must immediately stop. Any player caught moving after the stoplight says "red light," is out. The stoplight then turns around again and says "green light." Players may move toward the stoplight again. Play continues like this until all players are out (meaning the stoplight wins,) or until a player reaches and touches the stoplight while "green light" is in play. (This means that player wins and becomes the new stoplight.)

Message:

Open in prayer, then say, for the past two weeks, we have been learning about who Jesus says he is. The most important part of Jesus' character is that he is God, the perfect, loving creator of the universe. Every time we hear Jesus say, "I am," we are reminded that he is God. Last week we learned that Jesus is the bread of life that fills up our physical and our spiritual needs. Today we are going to look at the second I AM statement of Jesus, which he makes twice. He says it first in chapter eight of John and then again in chapter nine. Before I tell you what this I AM statement is, let's see if you can figure it out with a little clue. I am going to read you the very first few sentences from the gospel of John. See if you can figure out from what I read what Jesus' second I AM statement is. The answer is near the very end of what I will read, so listen closely! (Read John 1:1-5.) "In the beginning the Word already existed. The Word was with God, and the Word was God. He existed in the beginning with God. God created everything through him, and nothing was created except through him. The Word gave life to everything that was created, and his life brought light to everyone. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness can never extinguish it." Who can guess what the second I AM statement of Jesus is? (Allow a few responses.) When John sat down to write the life story of Jesus that we now call the gospel of John, he felt it was important to say that Jesus – who is referred to as the Word here – existed since the very beginning of time and created everything with God the father. John went on to explain that the life of Jesus was like a light to a dark world, and that the darkness can never put that light out. What wonderful news! Jesus is that light. He is the light of the world. Let's read where Jesus himself makes this I AM statement. Let's have a sword drill to find it. Take any ribbons, bookmarks and fingers out of your Bible and hold it above your head. When I say go, find John 8:12. Go! (Read, or have a student read John 8:12.) "Jesus spoke to the people once more and said, 'I am the light of the world. If you follow me, you won't have to walk in darkness, because you will have the light that leads to life.'"

To really understand what Jesus is saying here, it helps to look at his words in the big picture of what was going on around him right then. As we all know, Jesus was a Jew. The Jewish people did things a certain way and celebrated certain holidays, just like people of every culture do today. One of the holidays the Jewish people celebrated, and still celebrate today, is called the Feast of Booths. Sometimes you may hear it called the Feast of Tabernacles or Sukkot. Let's not let all the confusing names throw us off. A booth, or tabernacle is simply a tent. The Feast of Booths reminded the people of

Jesus' time, as well as people today, of how God had lead his people out of Egypt and through the wilderness. As they traveled through the day, God guided them with a pillar of cloud. At night he provided them with light with a pillar of fire. As they travelled, they had to move the Tabernacle, which was basically a giant, magnificent tent where that acted sort of like a travelling church. It was where the priests could meet with God. So the Feast of Booths remembers how God travelled with and guided his people on their 40 year trip to the promised land.

The Feast of Booths was an eight day party celebrated in the city of Jerusalem. Jewish people would travel miles and miles just to be in Jerusalem for this celebration. The Feast of Booths happens in fall, around the time all the crops are being brought in from the fields. It was a time of great feasting, and there were many, many different things they did (and do) to celebrate. Today, we are just going to focus on one little part of the festivities. Well, I say little, but what I really mean is big. Really big. 75 feet tall, in fact! To remind them of the pillar of fire that God used to light their nights as they wandered through the desert, the priest in Jesus' time would light four huge candelabras. These candelabras were like giant lamps with a place for four lights. These 75 foot tall candelabras were outside the temple, and strong young men would climb up to the four bowls at the top of each one and pour ten gallons of oil into the bowls, then the oil would be lit, and the whole of Jerusalem was lit up by their bright light.

Can you imagine how cool that must have looked? And it gets even better. Jerusalem is built on a hill, with the Temple at the highest part of the hill. So the light from these giant candelabras could be seen for miles around. And remember how I said people would travel from very far away to come to Jerusalem and be a part of the celebrations for the Feast of Booths? Well many, many of those people would have to camp outside of the city walls, in their own tents. So they would have little lamps in their tents to light up the night too. Just picture standing in the Temple, with these bright burning lights high above you, and all around you, around the whole city, little lights burn like stars in the tents of the people. It would be like the best Fourth of July fireworks you've ever seen, only better, because these lights remind you of God's loving guidance. Everybody would be cheering and celebrating when the candelabras were lit. There would be music and everyone would be filled with joy.

This is the celebration that was going on when Jesus made his second I AM statement. We don't know exactly where Jesus was standing when he said "I am the light of the world. If you follow me, you won't have to walk in darkness, because you will have the light that leads to life." But I imagine him standing right in the center of the party, in the Temple, near the lit candelabras.

So what did Jesus mean when he said he is the light of the world? Well, when we look at everything that was going on around him, it is easy to see that he was saying that he is God. Jesus is saying that he is the light that led the people with Moses through the desert and away from Pharaoh. He is saying he is the only one that can light up our lives, and lead us out of darkness. Can anyone tell me what darkness we face? (Let the children answer.) The darkness we face is not the darkness that comes when the sun goes down. The darkness that Jesus lights up and leads us out of is our own sin. This is the most important thing to know in all our lives: Jesus Christ is the light that leads us out of the darkness of our sin. The Bible tells us more about this in 1 John 1:5-7. "This is the message we heard from Jesus and now declare to you: God is light, and there is no darkness in him at all. So we are lying if we say we have fellowship with God but go on living in spiritual darkness; we are not practicing the truth. But if we are living in the light, as God is in the light, then we have fellowship with each other, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, cleanses us from all sin."

Have you ever been in a very, very dark room? I mean, so dark, you can't even see your hand in front of your face? You have to be very careful if you try to move around, because you might run into something. It is almost impossible to tell where you are going. That is what it is like when we are living in spiritual darkness and choosing to sin instead of following Jesus. We can't see anything clearly and we can't do anything well. What happens when someone turns on the light? Suddenly, you can see everything! That's the message we get from these verses, and from Jesus. There is absolutely no darkness, no sin in God. If we choose to be in the dark, in sin, we cannot be walking in God, in the light, doing right things. When we choose to be in the light, Jesus cleanses us from all of that darkness and sin. He did this by dying on the cross for us. All we have to do is choose to follow Jesus in the light by doing right things.

How do we find out what the right things to do are? Let's find out with a sword drill. Take all bookmarks out of your Bibles and hold them closed above your head. When I say go, look up Psalm 119:105. Go! (Read or have a student

read this verse.) “Your word is a lamp to guide my feet and a light for my path.” This verse says that the word of God, the Bible, is what guides us and helps us to know right from wrong. We follow Jesus in the light when we do what the Bible says. That is why it is so important to read your Bible, and go to church where you can learn more about what the Bible says.

Now we are almost done. Remember at the beginning of the lesson today I said that Jesus makes this I AM statement twice? First he said “I am the light of the world” during the Feast of Booths, surrounded by blazing lights. The second time may not seem as spectacular, but it is quite miraculous. Listen as I read to you the story, found in John 9:1-7.

As Jesus was walking along, he saw a man who had been blind from birth. “Rabbi,” his disciples asked him, “why was this man born blind? Was it because of his own sins or his parents’ sins?”

“It was not because of his sins or his parents’ sins,” Jesus answered. “This happened so the power of God could be seen in him. We must quickly carry out the tasks assigned us by the one who sent us. The night is coming, and then no one can work. But while I am here in the world, I am the light of the world.”

Then he spit on the ground, made mud with the saliva, and spread the mud over the blind man’s eyes. He told him, “Go wash yourself in the pool of Siloam” (Siloam means “sent”). So the man went and washed and came back seeing!

Jesus made a blind man see! This made the Pharisees, the religious leaders of the time, very angry. They did not care that a man who was blind and unable to do much for himself was able to see for the first time in his whole life. They were mad at Jesus because they thought Jesus was trying to take power away from them. Jesus was not concerned with having power, he was only concerned about making sick people better. The Pharisees were not physically blind, but they were spiritually blind. They had the savior of the world, God, standing right in front of them, but they refused to believe Jesus is who he says he is. They argued with everyone, including the blind man, about who Jesus must be. They thought Jesus must be a sinner. Of course he isn’t. They were just choosing to stay in darkness instead of walking in the light of Jesus. The man who was once blind responded well to the Pharisees in verse

25 of chapter 9. He said, "I don't know whether he is a sinner," the man replied. "But I know this: I was blind, and now I can see!"

As followers of Jesus Christ, we can all say the same thing. Once, we were living in our own sins. We stumbled around in darkness. But now we can see clearly, because Jesus, the light of the world, has lead us out of the darkness of our sins and into the light of his life.

End in prayer.

Craft: Light of the World Stained Glass

Students will use clear contact paper and cut up tissue paper to make a stained glass hanging depicting a globe superimposed with a large cross. Pass out squares of clear contact to each student, with the backing still on it. (6" X 6" squares at the smallest. A square foot per child would be good.) Instruct the children to draw a large circle that takes up their whole paper using a black permanent marker. Remind them to be careful not to get marker on their clothes. Assist younger students as necessary. Encourage them to make the outline of the circle nice and thick, about the width of their finger. (Or two.) Imagine this as the metal frame seen in real stained glass. The thick black lines help the colors look even brighter. In the center of the circle, draw the outline of a large cross. Make sure this outline is thickly colored too. Next, allow the kids to cut or tear the tissue paper into small squares. (This may be done before class by you to save time, if desired.) Once all the paper is in little pieces, help the kids peel the backing off of their contact paper and lay it on the table in front of them, sticky side up. They then will take the pieces of tissue paper and lay it on the contact paper, with the edges of the tissues paper bits overlapping slightly, leaving no blank spots. The students will use blue and green in the circle to make the world, and any other colors available for the cross (bright colors such as reds, oranges and purples would work best.) Once the design is filled in with tissue paper, help the students to cover the design in another piece of clear contact paper, so the tissue paper is sandwiched between the sticky sides of two pieces of clear contact paper. Help the students with this, as once the sticky sides of the contact paper meet, they will be very difficult to pull apart and could ruin the art. Once both pieces of contact paper are secured and smoothed out, have the kids trim away the extra paper from around the circle.

