

“Have the Light of Life, Know the Truth, and Be Set Free!”

This Scripture reveals a specific confrontation between Jesus and religious leaders in Jerusalem, especially the Pharisees. In the midst of this debate, the gospel reveals aspects of Jesus’ self-understanding and some of the challenges raised by his opponents. He declared to them in **verse 12**, *“I am the Light of the world. Whoever follows me will have the Light of Life and will never walk in darkness.”* Those words indicate Jesus had an understanding of himself, which went well with the gospel’s prologue in **John 1:4-9**, as well as, with the other references to the *“Word”* or Jesus being the *“Light”* in **John 3:19-21**, **John 9:5**, **John 11:9-10**, and **John 12:35-36, 46**. Clearly, Jesus – *“the Light of the world”* provides those, who believe in him *“the Light of Life”*, so we will be freed from the bondage to the darkness.

Jesus’ claim provoked a rebuttal from the Pharisees. **In verse 13** they said, *“Now you are testifying on your own behalf; what you say proves nothing.”*

In **verse 14**, Jesus put forward the argument that their judgment was made in a purely human fashion and that they did not know where he came from. **In verse 14**, *“No,’ Jesus answered, ‘even though I do testify on my own behalf, what I say is true, because I know where I came from and where I am going. You do not know where I came from or where I am going.’”*

In a radical departure from the way many try to display Jesus today, he said in **verse 15**, *“You make judgments in a purely human way; I pass judgment on no one.”* He reminded them how the Jewish law indicates what two witnesses agree upon is true. **In verses 16-17** Jesus said, *“But if I were to do so, my judgment would be true, because I am not alone in this; the Father Who sent me is with me. It is written in your Law that when two witnesses agree, what they say is true.”*

In verse 18, Jesus stated, *“I testify on my own behalf, and the Father Who sent me also testifies on my behalf.”* The Pharisees revealed their failure to recognize his origins as they said in **verse 19**, *“Where is your father?”* **He told them**, *“You know neither me nor my Father. If you knew me, you would know my Father also.”*

The Gospel of John continued in **verse 20**, *“Jesus said all this as he taught in the Temple, in the room where the offering boxes were placed. And no one arrested him, because his hour had not come.”* Addressing their refusal to believe in him, Jesus said in **verse 21**, *“I will go away; you will look for me, but you will die in your sins. You cannot go where I am going.”* With those words, we get a glimpse at the humor of Jesus. It was the Pharisees, who were constantly pointing out everyone else’s sins. Referring to how the religious leaders would not be able to find him after he was resurrected from the dead, he went on to point out they would be the ones, who would die in their sins because they would continue to refuse to believe in him.

Again, they were confused by his comments and did not know what he was talking about. The Reading continues in **verse 22**, *“So the Jewish authorities said, ‘He says that we cannot go where he is going. Does this mean that he will kill himself?’”* **In verse 23**, *“Jesus answered, ‘You belong to this world here below, but I come from above. You are from this world, but I am not from this world.’”*

Jesus raised up their failure to recognize his true identity as he disclosed himself in **verse 24**, *“That is why I told you that you will die in your sins. And you will die in your sins if you do not believe that ‘I Am Who I Am’.”* That last phrase was a way of connecting himself up with the name of their God, “Yahweh,” for it was a not so much veiled reference to what God said to Moses in Exodus 3:14 in response to the question about God’s name. Jesus asserted that reference again in **verses 28** and **58**.

The Pharisees continued to not recognize the Father, Who Jesus kept saying had sent him, is God. Yet, many others heard and believed. **In verses 25-26**, the Scripture continued, *“‘Who are you?’ they asked him. Jesus answered, ‘What I have told you from the very beginning. I have much to say about you, much to condemn you for. The One Who sent me, however, is truthful, and I tell the world only what I have heard from Him.’”*

The Reading went on in **verses 27-30**, *“They did not understand that Jesus was talking to them about the Father. So he said to them, ‘When you lift up the Son of Man, you will know that ‘I Am Who I Am’; then you will know that I do nothing on my own authority, but I say only what the Father has instructed me to say. And He Who sent me is with me; He has not left me alone, because I always do what pleases Him. Many who heard Jesus say these things believed in him.”* Jesus sparked another vein of debate by saying in **verses 31-32**, *“If you obey my teaching, you are really my disciples; you will know the Truth, and the Truth will set you free.”* The Pharisees were angry that Jesus seemed to be calling them slaves. Although their nation had been conquered and was ruled by the Romans, they never thought of

themselves as being anyone's slaves. The Scripture states in **verse 33**, ***“We are the descendants of Abraham,’ they answered, ‘and we have never been anybody’s slaves. What do you mean, then, by saying, ‘You will be free’?”***

Challenging the understanding of the Pharisees in **verses 34-37**, ***“Jesus said to them, ‘I am telling you the Truth: everyone who sins is a slave of sin. A slave does not belong to a family permanently, but a son belongs there forever.’”*** ***“If the Son sets you free, then you will be really free. I know you are Abraham’s descendants. Yet you are trying to kill me, because you will not accept my teaching.”***

After Jesus explained they were slaves of sin, he said in **verse 38**, ***“I talk about what my Father has shown me, but you do what your father has told you.”*** This moved the Pharisees to claim in **verse 39a**, ***“Our father is Abraham.”*** Jesus argued their father was not Abraham but the adversary of God, Satan, because they did not do what Abraham did. **Verses 39b – 41a** report, ***“If you really were Abraham’s children,’ Jesus replied, ‘you would do the same things that he did. All I have ever done is to tell you the Truth I heard from God, yet you are trying to kill me. Abraham did nothing like this! You are doing what your father did.’”***

The Pharisees responded in **verse 41b**, ***“God Himself is the only Father we have and we are His true children.”*** Jesus challenged their belief and said in **verses 42-47**, ***“If God really were your Father, you would love me, because I came from God and now I am here. I did not come on my own authority, but He sent me. Why do you not understand what I say? It is because you cannot bear to listen to my message. You are the children of your father, the Devil, and you want to follow your father’s desires. From the very beginning he was a murderer and has never been on the side of Truth, because there is no Truth in him. When he tells a lie, he is only doing what is natural to him, because he is a liar and the father of all lies. But I tell the Truth, and that is why you do not believe me. Which one of you can prove that I am guilty of sin? If I tell the Truth, then why do you not believe me? He who comes from God listens to God’s words. You, however, are not from God, and that is why you will not listen.”***

The Pharisees, evidently realized they were losing the debate, so they went on the demonizing offensive and asked in **verse 48**, ***“Were we not right in saying that you are a Samaritan and have a demon in you?”*** Not only did Jesus deny their charge but he went on to contrast himself with them in **verses 49-51**, ***“I have no demon. I honor my Father, but you dishonor me. I am not seeking honor for myself. But there is One Who is seeking it and Who judges in my favor. I am telling you the Truth: whoever obeys my teaching will never die.”***

I suspect they were realizing their defeat in the argument with Jesus, so they took a great leap of accusation and responded to Jesus in **verses 52-53**, ***“Now we know for sure that you have a demon! Abraham died, and the prophets died, yet you say that whoever obeys your teaching will never die. Our father Abraham died; you do not claim to be greater than Abraham, do you? And the prophets also died. Who do you think you are?”*** Jesus brought the argument to a close and disclosed his enemies among the Pharisees and Religious Authorities were living in the darkness by saying in **verses 54-56**, ***“If I were to honor myself, that honor would be worth nothing. The One Who honors me is my Father — the very One you say is your God. You have never known Him, but I know Him. If I were to say that I do not know Him, I would be a liar like you. But I do know Him, and I obey His word. Your father Abraham rejoiced that he was to see the time of my coming; he saw it and was glad.”***

I suppose they did not know how to respond, so they revealed their lack of understanding and spewed their last taunt in **verse 57**, ***“You are not even fifty years old — and you have seen Abraham?”*** The conclusion of the Reading and of this debate came as Jesus declared in **verse 58**, ***“I am telling you the Truth, before Abraham was born, ‘I Am’.”*** Yes, Jesus closed the argument by revealing again his close connection with the God Who spoke to Moses from the burning bush and Who called him to deliver the Children of Israel out of their bondage in Egypt, for when Moses asked God’s Name the answer was the same, ***“I Am”***. Jesus asserted his pre-existence, which, along with his being the ***“Light of the world,”*** was included in the prologue to the Gospel of John. The Gospel of John reported the response of the Pharisees in **verse 59**, ***“Then they picked up stones to throw at him, but Jesus hid himself and left the Temple.”***

Assuming we do not become like the Pharisees, how do we respond to the one sent by God? How do we respond to Jesus the Christ, the Son of God? **Let us have the “Light of Life”, “know the Truth”, and be set “Free”!** Amen.