

Notes for the Ones Called–Out to Meet

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The Light of the World

by Dan Trygg

“Others were saying, ‘This is the Christ.’ Still others were saying, ‘Surely the Christ is not going to come from Galilee, is He?’ ⁴² Has not the Scripture said that the Christ comes from the offspring of David, and from Bethlehem, the village where David was?’ ⁴³ So there arose a division in the multitude because of Him. ⁴⁴ And some of them wanted to seize Him, but no one laid hands on Him. ⁴⁵ The officers therefore came to the chief priests and Pharisees, and they said to them, ‘Why did you not bring Him?’ ⁴⁶ The officers answered, ‘Never did a man speak the way this man speaks.’ ⁴⁷ The Pharisees therefore answered them, ‘You have not also been led astray, have you?’ ⁴⁸ No one of the rulers or Pharisees has believed in Him, has he? ⁴⁹ But this multitude which does not know the Law is accursed. ⁵⁰ Nicodemus said to them (he who came to Him before, being one of them), ⁵¹ ‘Our Law does not judge a man, unless it first hears from him and knows what he is doing, does it?’ ⁵² They answered and said to him, ‘You are not also from Galilee, are you? Search, and see that no prophet arises out of Galilee.’” John 7:41-52

“Again therefore Jesus spoke to them, saying, ‘I am the light of the world; he who follows Me shall not walk in the darkness, but shall have the light of life.’” John 8:12

It was the Feast of Tabernacles (Sukkōt), a time to remember the wilderness wandering. Every Jewish family would build a shelter made out of sticks and leaves to commemorate their 40 year journey through the desert. They would sleep in this shelter for the eight days of the feast. They also commemorated God’s provision of water in the wilderness. Each day a priest would go down to the pool of Siloam and fill a golden pitcher with water from the pool of Siloam, and bring it up triumphal procession through the city streets to the temple. He would march around the altar once, and then pour it out as an offering to God. On the last day of the feast, he marched around the altar seven times, symbolizing the entry of Israel into the land of promise, where there was an abundance of streams and rivers. **It was at *this* moment, when this rite had been observed, that Jesus stepped forth and proclaimed, “If anyone is thirsty, let him come to Me and drink, and out of his belly will flow rivers of living water”, ...**a reference, John says, of the Spirit (7:37-39).

This was a very **bold proclamation**, and people understood the significance of His declaration. Note the amount of turmoil and discussion generated by this action in the chapter. Some thought He was the Prophet, the one Moses had prophesied about (Deut. 18:15). Some thought He was the Christ (King of the Jews – Lk. 23:2). Others disputed this, saying that the Christ would not come from Galilee, but from Bethlehem. Some intended to seize Him, but when it came down to it, they couldn’t bring themselves to do it. “Never has anyone spoken in this way,” the temple guards declared. At this, the Pharisees reproached them, saying, “No one of the rulers or Pharisees has believed in Him. But this multitude which does not know the Law is accursed.” They were proud, arrogant and despised the people they were supposed to be caring for. Nicodemus, who *was* a Pharisee and a ruler (and who had come to talk with Jesus before – 3:1), tried to be a voice of reason, but they rejected and mocked him. “You aren’t also from Galilee are you? **Search and see that no prophet arises from Galilee.**” There was a prejudice against Galilean Jews at play here.

Galilee had somewhat of a checkered past to these religious purists. It *still* colored their perception. Galilee had been part of the northern kingdom of Israel that had split off from following the house of David (932 B.C.). Galilee was an area that included regions of Zebulun and Naphtali, to the west of the Sea of Galilee. That region had fallen to Assyria (721 BC), and had been populated by a mixture of peoples. It became a land of gloom and spiritual darkness. After the exile to Babylon, when Jews came back to the land, they never displaced the gentiles in Galilee, as they did in the area of Judea. **So, Galilean Jews were looked down on by Judean Jews**, as being somewhat sullied by living in proximity to their gentile neighbors. Even their speech was affected by the ethnic mixture of the populace in their region, and was quite noticeable to Judean Jews (Matt. 26:72). **Certainly, the mockery of the Pharisees toward Nicodemus was a reflection of their attitude of superiority over Galilean Jews.** If they had followed *their own counsel* to Nicodemus, however, they might have been surprised to find that there is indeed a very strong prophetic passage that refers to Galilee. **If they would have searched, they would have seen that there are six references to Galilee in their OT Scriptures, and one of them does refer to a future time.**

In Isaiah 9:1-7, the prophet says that God would *take away the gloom* from this region, and, in fact, “*make it glorious*, by the way of the sea, ...Galilee of the gentiles. **The people who walk in darkness will see a great light. Those who live in a dark land, the light will shine on them...**” “...You will increase their gladness. **They will be glad in Your presence as with the gladness of harvest, as men rejoice when they divide the spoil...**” The region of Zebulun and Naphtali includes precisely the region from Nazareth, northward and eastward down the Sea of

Galilee, the area of Jesus' Galilean ministry. The "way of the sea" is the name for the highway that traverses the westward side of the Sea of Galilee. **What other phenomenon had increased their gladness than the healing ministry of Jesus in that very area?** Crowds of people were flocking to hear Him and be healed of their diseases. Certainly, those who were healed experienced joy that could only be comparable to the joy of those at harvest, or those dividing spoil. **But the Pharisees and rulers of the Jews were not interested in honestly searching the Scriptures to see what God had said.** They *assumed* that they already knew enough, and were unwilling to search any further.

At this feast, the Jews also remembered how God led them by a pillar of cloud by day, and a pillar of fire by night. Whenever the pillar of fire at night, or the pillar of cloud by day, lifted up, the Israelites packed up and followed it until it again came to a standstill, and they would set up camp again (Ex. 13:21,22; 40:36-38). They did this for the entire 40 years they were in the wilderness. **According to the Mishnah, this experience was commemorated by four gigantic candelabra** (75 feet tall), each with four bowls holding ten gallons of oil each. Worn priestly garments were used for the wicks of these lamps. These were erected in the court of the women. At the end of each day, at a special "Illumination ceremony", these were set ablaze filling the entire temple area with light. Remember, these were the days before electric lights. There was *nothing* like this in everyday life! This was something to behold! The size of these flames and the brightness of these lamps were incomparable and awesome! These 16 torches could be seen for miles away, and **they reminded the people of the glory of the Lord, which had lit the way for the people of Israel in the wilderness.**

Part of the difficulty many of us have in understanding this passage is that the entire section from 7:53=8:11 is not part of the original gospel of John. It does not appear in some of the oldest manuscripts, and it is a "floating passage" in that it appears in different places. When you remove that from the context here, then it is much easier to see how chapters 7 and 8 are one context.

The treasury was located in the court of the women, and John tells us that Jesus spoke out from there (v. 20). So **Jesus was standing right there**, where these huge lamps were being lit, and the crowds nearby, **when He declared to these leaders**, who had been debating His identity, **"I am the Light of the world, he who follows Me shall not walk in the darkness, but shall have the light of life"**.

The context of this says everything! You can't miss what Jesus was claiming here. **Jesus is clearly putting Himself in the place of God!** This even *magnified* when you realize that He is the same guy who cried out *that very same morning*, at the water ceremony, "If anyone is thirsty, let him come to *Me* and drink, and out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water."

The Pharisees quickly come back, throwing Jesus' words from a previous encounter (5:31) back in His face, **"You are bearing witness of Yourself; Your witness is not true."**

Jesus deftly responds that **the truth of His testimony concerning Himself is reliable because He knows where He came from and where He is going, but they do not.** They are judging according to external appearances. The Lord said, "I am not judging anyone. But even if I did, my judgment is true; because I am not alone, but I and the One who sent Me. **I bear witness of Myself, and My Father bears witness of Me.**"

When **they asked Him, "Where is Your Father?"** Jesus said, "You don't know Me, nor My Father; **if you had recognized Me, you would have recognized My Father also.**"

This little section ends with "...and no one seized Him, because His hour had not yet come." This is John's way of preparing us for what will eventually happen. His hour *will* come.

What a powerful, multi-faceted incident!

Jesus, the "great light" of Galilee had come to Jerusalem to proclaim that He is really the light of the entire world! For those who choose to follow Him, He will lead them like the pillar of fire, and they will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life. **Just as there is no life without water, so there is no life without light. Jesus is both. He is the Source of Living Water and He is the Light that brings Life.**

We see also, once again, the closed mindedness of those who think they know who Jesus is, but will not take the time to find out all the facts. They are just going on partial information, and making decisions based on only a surface skimming of the information available to them. As a result, **they are blind to the truth that is staring them in the face, simply because they have stopped looking.**

Furthermore, **this is a powerful call to discipleship!** It is the one *following Him* who will not walk in the darkness, but will have the light of life. **It is not just about "acknowledging who Jesus is". It requires movement. Dependence. Obedience.** It really comes back to Jesus' *modus operandi* from 5:19. Jesus *did* what He *saw* the Father doing. That sounds very much like the pillar of fire. If the Light of the world leads us somewhere, like the pillar of fire, then we must be willing to pick up and follow Him *wherever* and *however* He leads, and *stay there* as long as He indicates. **If we choose to follow, we will avoid being lost in the darkness, and we will have life's Light.**