

Season 10: John 6-12

Episode 6: Jesus the Promised Light (John 8:12-59): A Conversation with Courtney Doctor

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Felicity: We're very thankful for crossway sponsorship of this season have been very much enjoying getting into some of their resources. Courtney doctor and Joanna Kimball have written behold and believe, a Bible study resource, on the I am statements in John. It's designed to go along with the Gospel coalition's women's conference, but it is a stellar study that will no doubt be of use in many different contexts. I love the way in which they take us through the context and get us into the text detail and then really help us dwell on heart level application of these rich verses. Guaranteed to be helpful. Grab a copy wherever you get your welcome to two sisters and a cup of tea my name's Felicity. I'm here with my sister Sarah. We're going to be jumping back into John's gospel. We're in chapter eight and this week we're so delighted to have Courtney doctor with us. Welcome, Courtney.

Courtney: Thanks for having me. This is fun.

Felicity: Courtney currently serves as the director of women's initiatives at the Gospel Coalition in America. She teaches the Bible, she's written some excellent Bible study resources and in the midst of it all, she's a mum and she's a really fun grandma. If you ever encounter her on social media, you'll know she's doing fun stuff with her grandkids. Courtney, we're just glad to have you with us.

Courtney: Thanks for having me.

Sarah: Courtney, how do you feel about tea and biscuits and embracing the english kind of tradition of meeting over tea and biscuits?

Courtney: Well, I always have a cup of tea every day. I am a coffee drinker in the morning, but then every afternoon I have a cup of tea. I love it. I'm having a few cups of tea these days because I've had this residual cough that just won't go away and there's nothing like tea for just soothing your throat. So I'll be drinking this tea as we this is a roybas tea that sometimes I turn into a late and other times I drink just as is. But it's delightful. And then english biscuits. So I have some questions about that because I've had shortbread cookies, I've had biscotti and I've had those lovely scones that you put lovely things on and I don't know which one. And I'm yes to all of them. So yes, I am team english biscuit, no matter what they are. But what do you consider to be english biscuits?

Sarah: Okay. The scone is definitely not a biscuit. It's definitely as far from a biscuit as you can. But I think in the US. The scone is more like a biscuit. Right.

Felicity: It's still good. I mean, an english scone is go with tea, but it's just not got a snap.

Sarah: And you would never put jam and cream on an actual biscuit.

Courtney: Okay. So is a biscuit more like the shortbread cookie?

Felicity: That's probably the closest, although they're kind of soft. Are they shortbread? It's more like. Yeah, but the biscotti snap along with the shortbread cookie.

Courtney: Yeah. You know what? In June when we're together, I'm going to need it. I need clarity on this because I know I'm going to like it, but I'm counting.

Sarah: Very good.

Felicity: What I love as well is that you called your Roy boss suddenly. It became a late. When you added milk. I've just never heard of. I'm going to just call myself a late drinker just because I add milk.

Courtney: What do you call it?

Felicity: Because just tea.

Courtney: Okay. We were in Kenya. We were in Kenya and they asked me every morning if I wanted mixed tea. And I mean, it just got to where I was. Yes. Like, yes, the mixed tea, because it had the milk in it, but it was so good anyway.

Felicity: Well, so let me just introduce a little bit of what you've been doing. So we really appreciate your Bible studies. You've particularly written a couple that we have appreciated

in relation to your TGC kind of role. So there was one with James Steadfast a couple of years ago, and now you've written with Joanna Kimbrel, published by Crossway. You've written one in John's gospel. Behold and believe. It kind of digs into the I am statements, just like, how have you enjoyed writing? Have you been shaped by it? How's it gone? Studying and writing in John's gospel?

Courtney: Like, oh, it was such a privilege. It was a privilege to write with Joanna. We had a ton of fun doing it. But the subject matter. So it's not just all of John's gospel. It focuses on the seven I am statements found in John's gospel. And nobody can spend time looking at that. These words, these things, these claims that Jesus made about himself. So these are, to look at the I am statements means that you're looking at Jesus' own words about himself. So who he's claiming to be. And you can't do that without either one of two reactions, right? You walk away, which is what we see in the scriptures, some people doing, or you believe, and you love him more. So it was such a privilege to spend that time reflecting on these almost audacious claims that he makes about himself. That to spend time really thinking about it. Because a lot of people who think, well, Jesus was a good man. Or, Jesus was a good teacher. When you look at these seven claims, these seven statements, you realize that's impossible. They are completely audacious unless they're true. And so to sit and soak in the reality. Of what each of those really means about him. And then the implications and ramifications for our life. Was a huge privilege. It's just lifted my eyes to see him in new ways.

Sarah: And it was so wonderful. Well, we're getting stuck into chapter eight today. Where we're encountering another of his I am statements. I am the light of the world. I'm going to read our passage for us. So we're going from chapter eight, verse twelve, to 59. You'll notice that in your Bible. There's probably an editor's note on the start of the chapter eight. And we're running with the editor's suggestion. And we're jumping in at chapter eight, verse twelve. So let me read for us. When Jesus spoke again to the people, he said, I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life. The Pharisees challenged him. Here you are appearing as your own witness. Your testimony is not valid. Jesus answered, even if I testify on my own behalf, my testimony is valid. For I know where I came from, and I know where I'm going. But you have no idea where I come from or where I am going. You judge by human standards. I pass judgment on no one. But if I do judge, my decisions are true. Because I'm not alone. I stand with the father who sent me. In your own law, it is written that the testimony of two witnesses is true. I am one who testifies for myself. My other witness is the father who sent me. Then they asked him, where is your father? You do not know me or my father. Jesus replied, if you knew me, you would know my father also. He spoke these words while teaching in the temple courts. Near the place where the offerings were put. Yet no one seized him because his hour had not yet come. Once more Jesus said to them, I'm going away, and you will look for me, and you will die in your sin. Where I go, you cannot come. This made the Jews ask, will he kill himself? Is that why he says, where I go, you cannot come? But he continued, you are from below. I am from above. You are of this world. I am not of this world. I told you that you would die in your sins. If you do not believe that I am he, you will indeed die in your sins. Who are you? They asked. Just what I've been telling you from the beginning. Jesus replied, I have much to say in judgment of you. But he who sent me is trustworthy. And what I have heard from him, I tell the world. They did not understand that he was telling them about his father. So Jesus said, when you've lifted up the son of man. Then you will know that I am he. And that I do nothing on my own but speak just what the father has taught me. The one who sent me is with me. He has not left me alone, for I always do what pleases him. Even as he spoke, many believed in him. To the Jews who had believed him, Jesus said, if you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free. They answered him, we are Abraham's descendants and have never been slaves of anyone. How can you say that we shall be set free? Jesus replied, very truly, I tell you, everyone who sins is a slave to Sin. Now, a slave has no permanent place in the family. But a son belongs to it forever. So if the son sets you free, you will be free indeed. I know you are Abraham's descendants. Yet you are looking for a way to kill me because you have no room for my word. I am telling you what I have seen in the father's presence. And you are doing what you have heard from your father. Abraham is

our father, they answered. If you were Abraham's children, said Jesus. Then you would do what Abraham did. As it is, you're looking for a way to kill me. A man who has told you the truth that I heard from God. Abraham did not do such things. You are doing the works of your own father. We are not illegitimate children, they protested. The only father we have is God himself. Jesus said to them, if God were your father, you would love me, for I have come here from God. I have not come on my own. God sent me. Why is my language not clear to you? Because you are unable to hear what I say. You belong to your father, the devil. And you want to carry out your father's desires. He was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth. For there is no truth in him when he lies. He speaks his native language. For he is a liar and the father of lies. Yet because I tell the truth, you do not believe me. Can any of you prove me guilty of sin? If I'm telling the truth? Why don't you believe me? Whoever belongs to God hears what God says. The reason you do not hear is that you do not belong to God. The Jews answered him. Aren't we right in saying that you are samaritan and demon possessed? I'm not possessed by a demon, said Jesus, but I honor my father and you dishonor me. I am not seeking glory for myself, but there is one who seeks it, and he is the judge. Very truly, I tell you, whoever obeys my word will never see death. At this they exclaimed, now we know that you're a demon possessed. Abraham died, and so did the prophets. Yet you say that whoever obeys your word will never taste death. Are you greater than our father Abraham? He died and so did the prophets. Who do you think you are? Jesus replied, if I glorify myself, my glory means nothing. My father, whom you claim as your God, is the one who glorifies me. Though you do not know him. I know him. If I said I did not, I would be a liar like you. But I do know him and obey his word. Your father Abraham rejoiced at the thought of seeing my day. He saw it and was glad. You are not yet 50 years old, they said to him. And you have seen Abraham. Very truly, I tell you, Jesus answered before Abraham was born. I am at this. They picked up stones to stone him, but Jesus hid himself, slipping away from the temple grounds.

Felicity: Thank you, Sarah. A long passage, but so full of this increasing kind of intensity of what's going on. But it's all kicked off at the start with this framing. I am the light of the world. Jesus's statement at the start there, and that's something that is something that easily rolls off our tongues, is a familiar phrase about Jesus. But Courtney, I wonder, can you help us see afresh some of the weight and the significance of those words?

Courtney: Hmm. Well, I would love to try. I think that when we come across that statement, you're right, it can just roll off of our tongues. But we have to remember that when we read any book of the Bible, that we read it as a whole unit. And John has already said some things about the light, right. It's actually how he opened his gospel. So you know that the theme of light is going to be important in John's gospel. So he started his gospel. Within the beginning was the word, and the word was with God, and the word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him, all things were made. Without him, nothing was made that has been made. Verse four in him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it. There was a man sent from God whose name was John. So this is a different John. This is John the Baptist, not John the apostle. The one writing he came, John the Baptist came as a witness to testify concerning that light. So that's why John the Baptist came, to testify about the light, so that through him, all might believe. Verse nine, the true light that gives light to everyone, was coming into the world. He was in the world and through the world. And though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him. He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him yet. To all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, so those who believed in the light, that he was the light of the world, he gave the right to become children of God. And so when we get to John eight and Jesus says that I am the light of the world, what he's saying is, I'm the light that John was talking about in John one. And when he says, whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life. So we tie those two things together, and we realize what he's saying is whoever believes in him and follows him has eternal life, has salvation. So salvation is wrapped up in this idea of Jesus being the light. But as good Bible readers, right, we don't just read it in the context of that individual book. We read it in the context of the whole Bible. And darkness and light are a theme that run from the very first pages of scripture till the very last pages of scripture. And so the very first recorded words of God in

all of scripture, the very first thing that he says is, what? Let there be light. That is the very first thing that on all the pages of scripture that God says. And on the last pages of scripture, what we see in revelation 21 is that the city does not need the sun or the moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and the lamb is its lamp. So who is the lamb? The lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world? It's Jesus, right? And so we see that from the beginning, let there be light. All things were created through Christ, right? So the light of the world, the first thing he does is separate. He creates light, dispels the darkness, separates the light from the darkness. And then at the end of the story, the darkness is again dispelled, but forever and ever and ever, because Jesus himself is the light. And so in John also wrote the three epistles, 1st, second, and third John. And in one John one, he says, this is the message we have heard from him and declare to you that God is light. And in him there is no darkness at all. And so when we look at all of this, holding it together, and we look at John eight, where he says, I am the light of the world, and we see that he's been the light of the world from eternity past, and he will be the light of the world for eternity future. And that that light dispels darkness, then I think what we have to sit back and realize is the darkness of sin will be dispelled, the darkness of shame and of sadness and of confusion and chaos, which is what we see in Genesis one. And that the light of the world came into the world, was sent into the world by the father, came into the world for us, for you and for me, because Jesus didn't need the light, right? He is the light, but the light was sent for us. And he is able, he was sent in order to dispel the darkness in your life and in my life. And to me, that is just tremendous truth to cling to and hope to rest in. Yes. That's just amazing.

Felicity: I love that. I love that. That is so helpful. And to see that whole bigger context. And even just in our last conversation, we're really homing on the festival of Tabernacles, which is the kind of immediate context here, and God's presence being such a big part of that. And then if we put Jesus saying, I am the light of the world, and all that, you've just helpfully unpacked for us that God with his people, Jesus with his people, dispelling the darkness very relationally, very personally for us. And it's just, wow. Really heartening, encouraging all of that.

Sarah: It's brilliant, isn't it? And it is very relational here, isn't it? We are in the thick of a really big conversation going on between Jesus and the Jews and religious leaders. There is a really stark contrast, isn't there, between those who walk in the light, or who he describes as those who could walk in the light here and those who walk in darkness. I wonder, Courtney, what most struck you as you studied these different paths and particularly just kind of drawing out some of the contrast that we see in this particular passage?

Courtney: Yeah, they're polar opposites, aren't they? And they are just what we just looked at throughout the entirety of scripture. They're polar opposites. But I was thinking about that this morning. And when is the last time that either of you kind of stumbled around in the dark? I did it last night because I've had this cough. I've been sleeping in the guest room so that I don't keep my husband up. I'm just not as familiar with that room as I am with my own. And so last night, I got up, and I was trying to find the light switch. And in the process, I knocked over my water bottle, I stepped on my phone, and I stubbed my toe. And then I found the light switch. And once the light was on, I navigated that room without any problem, even though it's not familiar to me. To me. I was just thinking about that this morning, how walking in darkness is really the polar opposite of walking in the light. Walking in darkness is scary, and it's confusing, and it can be dangerous. But walking in the light, the light provides these things. It provides clarity, and it provides confidence, even. It provides safety. That is not a hard leap to make as an analogy of our lives, that to walk in the darkness. Sometimes, if it's all we know before we know the light, before we've experienced the light, we don't know that it's different. We don't know how we know it's a little confusing and maybe even a little scary, but we don't know that we don't have to live like that. Once you've experienced the light, why would we ever go back and walk in darkness? And scripture basically asks us that question multiple times over and over, but the light really is life and provision and protection.

Sarah: Well, I just think it's really interesting here that the people who are questioning Jesus on and on, they just kind of dig themselves deeper and deeper, don't they, into the

darkness. Like, they really don't want to see what's in front of them. With Jesus, the phrase, where does he say in verse 37, you have no room for my word? I think that's really striking kind of portrayal of living in the darkness, actually, that there's no softening there. There's no room for his word to take root, is there? And just how striking that is for then their kind of hostility growing and not being able to accept him.

Felicity: Yeah, and it does seem to grow. You kind of almost get the layer upon layer of what it is to be in the darkness. This idea of being stuck in your sin, you will die in your sin. There's no escape. And they're still there saying, well, I don't know why I should listen to you. That every word they say sort of confirms the consequences of what is happening. I thought in the previous chapter we had this kind of opposition that was really evident. And as we've got into this chapter, it seems that the consequences of being opposed to the light of the world are even more clear. Like, these guys are really in trouble by being in the dark. But in contrast, then, you have such a beautiful picture of what it is to be in the light as you were helping us see there. Courtney, I love this idea of just being free, the freedom that comes in verse 31. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free. And freedom then also meaning sonship and being a child of God, not being slaves. Really profound.

Courtney: Yeah, but it's not always easy, is it, to step into the light? Think about when the light is turned on in a dark room and you blink and you kind of takes you a minute to adjust. And there are certainly animals in creation that shy away from the light. They prefer the darkness and all of those things, right? Declare the glory of God because that's us. That is us. Without the light of the world illuminating our hearts and our minds, I think we shy away from the light. It can be painful, right, to step into the light, but there is freedom. I love that, that you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free, and that is light. That is freedom.

Felicity: And I think then this, seeing Jesus all the more clearly in this way, I think, as you were saying when you're talking about writing your study, that when you encounter Jesus in this way, then your heart is kind of won over more and more to this, but you've kind of begun to touch on there. The challenge of this as well as the comfort of. So where does it hit? We are always seeking to not just understand it, but to drive it to the heart. So how do these words. How does this passage both challenge and comfort us on a heart level as we're in it?

Courtney: Yeah. I think when Jesus says, I am the light of the world, whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life. He's offering an invitation, but he's also kind of throwing the gauntlet down. Right. He's drawing that line in the sand. So the challenge is, am I willing to follow? Will I follow? Right. That was basically what he was putting before the religious leaders of the day, whoever, even you guys, right? Whoever follows me, you will not walk in darkness. Why? Because you're walking with the light himself. So the challenge is, am I willing to follow, and are you willing to follow whoever's listening. But the great comfort in it is the same thing. Because if I am, what does he say? I will never walk in darkness because the light of life will be mine. It will be with me. He will be with me. And I think what we need to realize when he says, you will never walk in darkness, right? That's the comfort. That's the hope. You will never walk in darkness. It does not mean that there will not be hard seasons. Sometimes it feels like the darkness is pressing in, right. Sometimes it feels like the darkness is going to be the thing that wins. But Jesus, who is, who was and who is and will forever be the light of the world, the light that is so bright that there is no need of sun or moon in the new heavens and the new earth, that's how bright his light is. So Jesus, who is the light of the world, what did he tell us in John one? The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it. And so when the darkness presses in, I think we do need, the challenge is to believe. And the comfort is that he says that we will never walk in darkness, meaning the light of the world wins every single time. And that is a tremendous comfort to my soul.

Sarah: Yeah, it's really helpful just to dwell on that, isn't it? And I think kind of pushing that a bit further, just kind of when I'm tempted to sin, to really be reminding myself of what I'm choosing to go against as I'm in that temptation or as I'm in that kind of trajectory, it's really clearly put here, isn't it? Kind of Satan and Jesus. And actually, as we start to dwell and meditate on the truth that Jesus says and on his character and who he is and how powerful that light is, actually, that does turn my heart away from sin and inclines my heart to Jesus

all the more, doesn't it? And that's what I need. I don't need a guilt trip or I don't need, like, a wrap on the hand. I need Jesus and I need his light to kind of dispel the temptation to sin and darkness and however attractive that might look or whatever it is. Yeah, that's just really helpful, Courtney, just really seeing Jesus front and center there and what it is for our hearts to be inclined towards him in that.

Felicity: I wonder, Courtney, would you pray for our hearts in that, that we would be inclined towards Jesus?

Courtney: I would love to. Father, thank you. That you are the God of light, and in you is no darkness at all. Thank you that you sent your son the light of the world. Thank you that he has shown in the darkness and the darkness will not overcome us. But, Lord, we are able by your spirit, because of your son, to walk in the light. And so, Father, I pray for any brother or sister who is not walking in the light who does not know the light. Lord, I pray that you would illumina their hearts and minds to believe Jesus. To believe in him and to believe him, and in doing so, to have life. Lord, I pray for all my brothers and sisters listening who do know Jesus and who feel like the darkness is winning. I pray that you will encourage their hearts and souls and that you will shine brightly, Father, in their hearts and minds, illuminating and helping them remember the truth of your word. Father, be with us all by your spirit, because of your son. You have said that people who walk in darkness have seen a great light. And so, Lord, let us behold him, let us believe him, and let us have life. In his name. It is. In his mighty name we pray. Amen.

Felicity: Amen. Thank you so much to Mullon. And that's kind of only skirting the surface of this passage, isn't it? I feel like I'm in it. The more I just behold Jesus. I think that's it, isn't it? The more I'm in it, the more I encounter Jesus. So that is us. We are very grateful for you coming on board, Courtney. A great conversation. Do get a hold of a copy of behold and believe. It's published by crossway. It's really worth digging into and a really good one to do with a friend. I think it's one that benefits from great conversation together. So grab a copy wherever you get your books, and we will see you next time.

Courtney: Thanks for having me.

Sarah: Bye bye.

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