Hi,

Today’s updates:

* This Sunday in my 11am class we will be continuing the series, *Living Hope*, for I know we could all use some more hope in these very difficult times. I hope you will join us [on my Facebook page for ministry](https://www.facebook.com/Scott-Engle-St-Andrew-UMC-110365790736617/?modal=admin_todo_tour).
* The links to my on-line classes, the video recordings of the classes, the class audio podcasts, and the archive of these daily emails can all be found at [www.scottengle.org](http://scottengle.org/scotts-weekly-classes/). All the postings are up-to-date.

Yes, Jesus is the light of the world and we to reflect that light in every corner of our own lives.

***Deuteronomy 16:13-15 (NRSV)***

**You shall keep the festival of booths for seven days, when you have gathered in the produce from your threshing floor and your wine press. Rejoice during your festival, you and your sons and your daughters, your male and female slaves, as well as the Levites, the strangers, the orphans, and the widows resident in your towns. Seven days you shall keep the festival to the Lord your God at the place that the Lord will choose; for the Lord your God will bless you in all your produce and in all your undertakings, and you shall surely celebrate.**

***John 8:12-20 (NRSV)***

**Again Jesus spoke to them, saying, “I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life.” Then the Pharisees said to him, “You are testifying on your own behalf; your testimony is not valid.” Jesus answered, “Even if I testify on my own behalf, my testimony is valid because I know where I have come from and where I am going, but you do not know where I come from or where I am going. You judge by human standards; I judge no one. Yet even if I do judge, my judgment is valid; for it is not I alone who judge, but I and the Father who sent me. In your law it is written that the testimony of two witnesses is valid. I testify on my own behalf, and the Father who sent me testifies on my behalf.” Then they said to him, “Where is your Father?” Jesus answered, “You know neither me nor my Father. If you knew me, you would know my Father also.” He spoke these words while he was teaching in the treasury of the temple, but no one arrested him, because his hour had not yet come.**

The festival of Booths (aka Tabernacles; see Leviticus 23:39-43) was a joyous time in ancient Jerusalem. It was part of the Exodus story that the Jews lived out each year in their festivals. Passover festival in the spring was a party to celebrate God’s rescue of their enslaved forebears. Booths, an agricultural harvest festival in the fall, was a celebration of God’s care of those former slaves in the Sinai wilderness. Families were to live in temporary shelters (hence, “booths”) during the seven-day festival, so that they would never forget God’s graciousness in the wilderness.

The ancient Jews used light to express the joy of the great festival of Booths. They lit four giant golden lamps in the temple courtyards that were so bright, it was said they lit up the entire city. But that wasn’t all. The evening Booths celebrations also creatively incorporated the use of light . . . lots of light.

Why so much light? Because the festival was all about God and God’s saving grace, and God is the light that overcomes the darkness. “It is you who lights up my lamp; the Lord, my God, lights up my darkness” (Ps. 18:28); “The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear” (Ps. 27:1). God’s Law is the light: “Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path” (Ps. 119:105). Even God’s servant is the light: “I am the Lord, I have called you in righteousness and I have taken you by the hand and kept you; I have given you as a covenant to the people, a light to the nations” (Isaiah 42:6).

*The Light of the World*

Beginning in John 7, we find Jesus in Jerusalem for the fall festival of Booths. As a Law-keeping Jew, Jesus would have come to the temple at least three times a year, for each of the three major festivals. This year’s trip to Booths would be more memorable than most. What we find is a man in an ever-growing confrontation with his opponents. Jesus teaches with authority and the crowds wonder where he could have acquired such learning (7:14-24). Whispers and rumors begin to fly around the city; the people begin to wonder why Jesus hasn’t been arrested, given what he has said and done. They ask, “Can it be that the authorities really know this is Messiah?” (7:26). In response, the temple priests and Pharisees send out officers to arrest Jesus during the festival, though they are unable to do so.

The confrontation continues to grow. The crowds are divided about Jesus, as are even the priests and Pharisees. When Jesus comes upon a crowd beginning to stone a woman for adultery, he confronts them, suggesting that whoever is without sin throw the first stone . . . and the crowd slinks away, one by one.

Then, with the seemingly innocent statement, “I am the light of the world,” Jesus rocks the crowds again. Just as Jesus claimed to the true “bread of life,” the nourishment needed for eternal life, Jesus now takes upon himself the fulfillment of what the light represents. The Law is the light . . . now, Jesus is the Law. Isaiah’s servant of God is the light . . . now, Jesus is that servant. God is the light that banishes the darkness . . . now, Jesus is the incarnation of God.

Anyone with ears to hear would understand the weight of Jesus’ words. Indeed, those who would charge him with blasphemy would be right in doing so, unless Jesus is the One whom he is claiming to be.

*Who says?*

The Pharisees understand Jesus’ claim and demand to know why they should believe him. Jesus says this about himself, but where is the second witness wisely demanded by the Law of Moses?

Jesus’ first response seems almost non-responsive. He need not produce a witness because he knows from whence he has come (8:14-15). That alone makes his testimony valid. Of course, such an answer wouldn’t satisfy the Pharisees. Why should they believe the implied claim he came from above, any more than the claim that he is the light? Then, Jesus tells them he does have another witness who can testify to the truth of Jesus’ claims.

The witness is his Father! And, he tells them, because the Pharisees don’t know Jesus’ Father, they don’t know Jesus, nor the truth he brings them. “If you knew me, you would know my Father also” (8:19). No wonder these leaders of Israel tried to arrest him and would one day succeed.

*A journey to the truth and to a cross*

Jesus knows that he could hardly be clearer in making plain his identity with the Father, and, hence, with God. It is not surprising then that Jesus follows up his claim to be the Light by foreseeing his own death. He knows full well where this is headed – unless he backs off and turns away from the vocation given him by God.

Jesus begins by making plain what he only implied earlier, he is “from above,” while his accusers and the crowds are “from below.” They are “of this world.” Jesus is not. Further, he says, “I told you that you would die in your sins, for you will die in your sins unless you believe I am he” (v. 24). English translations obscure Jesus’ intent here by translating *egō eimi* (Greek for “I am”),as “I am he.”It would be better translated as “ . . . unless you believe I AM.” It is a clear and unyielding statement of Jesus’ identity with God. And the cross upon which he will be lifted will be his exaltation and the definitive revelation, for again in v. 28, Jesus repeats the “I AM.”

From bread to light to, tomorrow, a gate for the sheep, we are coming to understand that Jesus is the Great I AM, and to embrace the life-changing ramifications of this astounding claim.

‘til tomorrow, grace and peace,

Scott