

The Light of the World

Matthew 5:14

In John 8:12 John records Jesus' teaching that He is the light of the world. Jesus said, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life." These words of Jesus came the day following the spectacular nighttime ceremony known as the Illumination of the Temple. This celebration took place in the temple before four massive golden candelabra that were topped with huge torches. It is said that the candelabra were as tall as the highest walls of the temple and that topping the candelabra was a bowl that held 65 liters of oil. When the sun set on the night of the ceremony, young priests would carry oil up to the great bowls and light their protruding wicks. As the flames leapt from the torches, not only was the temple illuminated, but all of Jerusalem sat in the glow of the light. As the torches roared, the people would dance and sing in the temple courts as they remembered the great pillar of fire (the glorious cloud of God's presence) that led the people of Israel during their sojourn in the wilderness. It was in the temple the following morning, with charred torches still in place that Jesus said, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life."

Jesus was in effect saying, "The pillar of fire that came between you and the Egyptians, the cloud that guided you by day and illumined the night, the glorious cloud that filled Solomon's temple – that was me! Jesus is the light of the world. The fact that Jesus is the great light of the world is foundational to our understanding and must control our thinking as we look at Matthew 5:14-16, where Jesus applies the metaphor to us!

THE REALITY OF SPIRITUAL DARKNESS

Who is the "you" in Jesus' statement, "You are the Light of the World?" Was this just a pronouncement made to the disciples or those in Jesus' immediate hearing? Is it only for a select group of spiritual elites? Jesus' words in Matthew 5:14 are true for every believer. Every person who has been born again is to be a light in this dark world.

Several things are implied by Jesus' teaching, "You are the light of the world."

1. The world is in a state of utter darkness.

The world seems bent on talking about its enlightenment.

The Renaissance of the 15th and 16th centuries stoked a new interest in knowledge.

The Enlightenment of the 18th century was, in many ways, the beginning of the modern attack on the authority of the Scripture. Philosophy and human reason was elevated to the place of preeminent authority above divine revelation. The prevailing thought was that knowledge brings light. Martyn Lloyd Jones says:

Knowledge, they say, is that which brings light, and, of course, in so many respects it does. It would be foolish to dispute that. The increase in knowledge about the processes of nature and about physical illnesses and disease and many other subjects have been truly phenomenal. New knowledge has also thrown greater light upon the working of the whole cosmos, and has given greater understanding with regard to many different aspects of life. That is why people commonly talk about being enlightened as the result of knowledge and of culture. Scripture still proclaims that the world as such is in a state of gross darkness. The tragedy of our century has been that we have concentrated solely upon one aspect of knowledge. Our knowledge has been of things, mechanical things, scientific things, a knowledge of life in a more or less purely biological or mechanical sense. But our knowledge of the real factors that make life life, have not increased at all.

Failed personal lives, relationships, behavior, and conduct are all examples that knowledge isn't the answer.

2. Only a Christian can give fruitful instruction with regard to the fundamental problems of the world.
3. A Christian knows and understands more about life than any expert who doesn't know Christ.

For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, it pleased God through the folly of what we preach to save those who believe. 1 Corinthians 1:21

HOW ARE WE THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD

Jesus who said, "You are the light of the world," also said, "I am the light of the world." We cannot separate these two statements. In other words, we are only the light of the world because of our relationship with Jesus, who is Himself the light of the world. In Ephesians 5:8-9 Paul said, "For at one time you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light (for the fruit of light is found in all that is good and right and true). Not only have we received light, but we ourselves have been made light through our union with Christ.

In 2 Corinthians 4:6 Paul says, "In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. For what we proclaim is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, with ourselves as your

servants for Jesus' sake. For God, who said, 'Let light shine out of darkness,' has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ."

It is that light which has been shown on us that we are to reflect to the dark world we live in. Paul says, "And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit" 2 Corinthians 3:18.

We should take note of the progression of Jesus' teaching. We are the salt of the earth first, and then we are the light of the world. What is the significance of this? The emphasis we see in the Sermon on the Mount is first what the Christian *is* and then what he is to *do*. Salt of the earth is the general effect of the Christian on his world – in his home, grocery store, office, sports field, etc. Jesus moves from who the Christian is as salt to what he is to do, or his particular function, as light. Salt causes others to notice a difference in your life – the way you act and the way you speak. It causes them to ask questions like where does your joy come from or how do you seem to have such purpose in your life? It is at that point that we are able to speak the light of gospel truth. Martyn Lloyd Jones says:

Far too often we Christians tend to reverse the order. We have spoken in a very enlightened manner, but we have not always lived as the salt of the earth. Whether we like it or not, our lives should be the first thing to speak; and if our lips speak more than our lives it will avail very little. So often the tragedy has been that people proclaim the gospel in words, but their whole life and demeanor has been a denial of it. The world doesn't pay much attention to them. Let us never forget this order deliberately chosen by our Lord; the salt of the earth before the light of the world. We are something before we begin to act as something.

WHAT IS THE EFFECT OF THE LIGHT

1. Light exposes the darkness.

Think about trying to fumble around in a dark room. In my house it is treacherous to walk across the living room floor in the early hours of the morning to tuck a little one back in bed. In the dark it's impossible to see the mile long line of matchbox cars backed up on the "loop around the coffee table". One misstep will have you hopping across the floor. But as soon as the light is turned on it reveals what is there. There is a real sense in which people are not truly aware of the darkness until light appears. Speaking about the beginning of Jesus' teaching ministry Matthew said, "The people dwelling in darkness have seen a great light, and for those dwelling in the region and shadow of death, on them a light has dawned" Matthew 4:16. One of the best ways of revealing something is to provide a contrast. Every Christian who walks with the light of the world reflects the light of the world in such a way as to expose the darkness. Martyn Lloyd Jones says:

Just by being [a] Christian he shows a different type of life, and that immediately reveals the true character and nature of the other way of living. In the word, he is like a light being [which has been turned on], and immediately people begin to think, and wonder, and feel ashamed. He need not say a word; just by being what he is he makes people feel ashamed of what they are doing, and in that way he is functioning as light. He is providing a standard...[which] brings out the error and failure of man's way of thinking and living. The influence the Christian has as light in the world is to show [what] belongs to darkness. [Those in darkness] thrive in darkness, and somehow or other they cannot stand the light.

This is exactly what John says in John 3:19-20, "And this is the judgment: the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil. For everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his works should be exposed."

2. Light explains the cause of darkness.

The greatest thinkers according to the world's standards can offer little more than an analysis of the world's problems. They can identify the fruit, but they are in darkness as to the sole cause of the troubles of the world. Christians know and understand that the real problem with the world isn't a lack of knowledge, but rather an estrangement from God. Man has been made such that he cannot truly live unless he lives in relationship to God. He was made by God and for God. Paul reminds us of that in Colossians 1:16, "For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him." Every difficulty in the world today can be traced back to sin – specifically the sin of selfishness and self-seeking. All the quarrels, disputes, misunderstandings, jealousy, envy, and malice all come back to man's feverish love and of self.

The problem is not a lack of knowledge. Neither is it at the end of the day a lack of light. The problem isn't that men haven't seen the light, it's that he hates the light and loves the darkness instead. The problem with man is not in his intellect, it's in his nature.

3. Light provides the only way out of the darkness.

This is where every Christian should be jumping to the task! The problem with man is his fallen, polluted, sinful nature. We have tried knowledge, education, political enactments – all to no avail. Is there hope? Absolutely – there is abundant and everlasting hope! What man needs is not more light, but rather a new nature that will love the light and hate the darkness. The lost need the light of Christ to lead them to the light of the World. Jesus came to seek and save the lost! Jesus doesn't merely come to give us new teaching or a better understanding of the problem. Jesus makes men

new – new desires, new life, and new love for the light. Let me close with a plea from Martyn Lloyd Jones:

Christian people, you and I are living in the midst of men and women who are in a state of gross darkness. They will never have any light anywhere in this world except from you and from me and the gospel we believe and teach. They are watching us. Do they see something different about us? Are our lives a silent rebuke to them? Do we live as to lead them to come and ask us, "Why do you always look so peaceful? How is it you are so balanced? How can you stand up to things as you do? Why is it that you are not dependent on artificial aids and pleasures as we are? What is this thing you have got?" If they do we can then tell them that wondrous, amazing, but tragically neglected news, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners. Christian people alone are the light of the world today. Let us live and function as children of the light.