

The Light Of The World

Sermon on the Mount, Vol. 11

HBC 9/20/20

Matthew 5:14-16

This whole sermon is Jesus' elaboration on the theme "*Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand*" (4:17). Those who repent are the ones touched by God who respond with the characteristics He described as "blessed." His final **blessing** was for those who endure persecution and false accusation for living that way.

The conclusion to this picture of life in the spiritual kingdom of heaven is two metaphors Jesus used to describe the way He intends for His people to influence others. Both metaphors connote the concept of **influence**, but each one describes a different **kind** of influence. The first metaphor, which we studied last week, is **salt**.

Matthew 5:13: *You are the salt of the earth; but if the salt has become tasteless, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled under foot by men.*

Today we explore the second of the two metaphors for influence. Jesus says **you are the light of the world**.

I. **You are light; you cannot hide**

Matthew 5:14: *You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden;*

The presupposition of both of these metaphors is that **the world is in the grips of corruption and darkness**. The world is **corrupted and decaying**; it is **dark and darkening**. The world has no goodness to build upon. It is comprised of several billion totally depraved inhabitants who make it a worse and worse place simply by living according to their nature. With only temporary aberrations to the contrary, the world cannot do anything but get worse and worse. In an exhortation to continued godly living and proclaiming God's truth, Paul warned Timothy:

2 Timothy 3:13: *But evil men and impostors will proceed from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived.*

Salvation is nothing less than **deliverance from darkness to light**.

Colossians 1:13: *For He rescued us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son, . . .*

The **darkness** is comprised of **dullness, depravity and despair**. The **light** is true knowledge of God, goodness, righteousness, joy, love, laughter, and hope. In God's marvelous plan, He has chosen that we be the vehicles of all those things in the midst of the world which lies in darkness. What Jesus is talking about is nothing less than the amazing reality that **we are actually representatives of Him in the world**.

John 1:9: *There was the true **light** which, coming into the world, **enlightens** every man.*

John 3:19: *This is the judgment, that the **light** has come into the world, and men loved the darkness rather than the **light**; for their deeds were evil.*

John 8:12: *Then Jesus again 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 12:46: *I have come as **light** into the world, so that everyone who believes in Me will not remain in darkness.*

Ephesians 5:8: . . . *for you were formerly darkness, but now you are **Light** in the Lord; walk as children of **light***

1 John 1:6: *If we say that we have fellowship with Him and yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth;*

One Bible commentator cleverly says *He is the "light lighting," and we are the "light lighted."* **Collectively**, believers are the light. **Individually**, we are lights, or luminaries:

Philippians 2:14-15: *Do all things without grumbling or disputing; so that you will prove yourselves to be blameless and innocent, children of God above reproach in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, **among whom you appear as lights** in the world,*

A city set on a hill cannot be hidden because it is visible at all times. By day its skyline is obvious. By night its lights can be seen for miles. Like a city on a hill, a **Christian is meant to be seen**. Everyone you contact has a chance to see what you're made of.

Matthew 5:15: . . . *nor does anyone light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house.*

Lamp is an ideal illustration of what a Christian is meant to be. A **lamp** doesn't produce light by itself, but it is a **vessel** for light. Jesus is the Light, and we are the individual lamps in which His light shines.

Basket is a basket or bowl with a capacity of about two gallons, or almost exactly a peck, hence the archaic translation **peck-measure**. What Jesus is saying is that no one would light a lamp designed to illuminate its surroundings, and then place it under a basket. The logical thing to do is to put the lamp where it will most effectively spread its light.

Lampstand was any of several things. It could be a shelf extending from a center pillar of a room large enough to need a long cross-beam. Sometimes it was a single stone projecting from the wall, or a piece of metal placed in the wall for the same purpose.

The point is that a **lamp** was lit for the purpose of **giving as much light as possible** to as many people as possible in as large an area as possible. The houses Jesus

was talking about were typically only one room, so one lamp could give light **to all who are in the house**.

What a lamp is to a house, a follower of Christ should be to the world. A lighted lamp dispels darkness. A Christian is meant to dispel darkness of sin and bring the light of truth. A secret Christian is as incongruous as a hidden light.

God wants you to be both **indirect** and **direct** in your **influence**. As salt acts invisibly to preserve, Christians indirectly influence society for the better. As light acts visibly and overtly to reveal things and dispel darkness, Christians must proclaim the light of God's truth.

II. Your Mission: Shine for the glory of God

Matthew 5:16: *Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven.*

Let your light shine is a command in Greek. The form of the command expresses **urgency and immediacy**. There is never a time when light is not helpful. **Before men** indicates the **target** of light. Men and women are born in darkness and trapped there until liberated by the light. Notice an important concept here, by looking at a subtle contrast with something Jesus says a little later:

Matthew 6:1: *Beware of practicing your righteousness before men to be noticed by them; otherwise you have no reward with your Father who is in heaven.*

Do you see the comparison? The **good works** of 5:16 are done **out of gratitude** for salvation, which is obtained by grace through faith. Those works are pleasing to God. They can be done only by those who walk in His grace—those who are poor in spirit, etc. The abominable hypocrisy Jesus condemns in 6:1 is practicing acts of righteousness **in order to be seen by men**.

We are commanded to be doing things out of love and gratitude to God, in obedience to his word—**and we are to do them openly before people who live in darkness**. But our **motivation** is to glorify God. If the motivation is to impress people with our righteousness, the only reward available to us is if someone notices and pats us on the back. As Jesus says, **Truly I say to you, they have their reward in full**.

The important difference is the difference between seeking to **gain honor for yourself** and seeking to **bring glory to God**.

Matthew 5:16: *Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your **good works**, and glorify your Father who is in heaven.*

The word **good** (works) here is a word that implies **attractiveness**. The way we live and the way we speak should be such that it attracts people to the source of the goodness—God Himself, who is the ultimate light and the source of the light that shines in our lives. God has designed for us to be the kind of people who live such that people are

attracted to Jesus Christ. **Glorify your Father who is in heaven** is the result when someone embraces Jesus Christ as a result of the influence you have.

Consider how to put this passage into practice in your life. It needs to be done with a sense of **purpose** and a sense of **urgency**, because nothing in the world around us is liable to draw out spontaneously from us the source of the light. Remember, there are two sides to the influence you have:

You are salt, so it's necessary for you to **be in contact** with the world that needs your influence. Don't be preoccupied with finding ways to withdraw from the world, or it will never benefit from the preservative influence you bring. And don't let the purity of your life be compromised by sin, or your influence will be nullified.

You are light, so you need to be **visible**, and you need to point people to truth. So what is the method you use to bring people to Christ? What is your strategy? What is the target group of people you believe God wants you to influence?

Who do you think of among your everyday friends and acquaintances who needs Christ? Are you praying for that person's salvation?

How do you plan to get closer to people who need Christ? Have you been thinking and praying about how to use things you have in common?

When do you think you will get to the point of talking to that person about Jesus and telling him or her how important Jesus Christ is to you and asking for the privilege of presenting the gospel?

What might you be able to do or to arrange that will cause the subject to come up? Invite to a Bible Study or church service? Plan an event to spend time together? A phone call? A visit?

Seasoned evangelist Leighton Ford wrote this¹:

Before we criticize what the other man is doing, we ought to remember [D. L.] Moody's classic reply to a critic who disapproved of his methods. "I don't like them too much, myself" he admitted—"what method do you use?" When the critic said that he had used none, Moody tartly replied, "Well, I think I like the way I do it better than the way you don't."

¹Quoted in *Lifestyle Evangelism*, p. 73.