

## Live as Lights

Matthew 5:14-16

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<sup>14</sup> “*You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden.* <sup>15</sup> *Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house.* <sup>16</sup> *In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.*”

Imagine living in darkness for a moment. Imagine waking up at sun rise time tomorrow and there is no morning. It is still dark. The sun did not come up. There are no lights to turn on because the electricity is out. Imagine living in darkness for the next few days. I am sure you will say “where’s the light?”. We need light. We are meant for light. But you cannot create light. We are dependent on the sun to give us light, warmth and everything else needed for us to live.

It is said that babies in the womb open their eyes around twenty-seven weeks into pregnancy. And that is when they begin to process light.

In Genesis 1:2, we see that in the beginning was void and darkness. And God said “*let there be light*”. God is the source of light. This light is not just physical light but more. God’s light is Truth. And, in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus teaches his disciples that “*you are the light of the world*”. You are the light of the world? How? What Jesus mean?

Before we get into the specifics of this passage, let me summarize what we have been seeing so far. In the Beatitudes, our Lord Jesus Christ taught what a disciple is *not* what a disciple ought to do. What is disciple of Jesus characterized by? A disciple of Jesus is characterized by a poverty in spirit, by a contrite heart, by having a meek attitude, by having a desire for righteousness, by being merciful, by purity. The disciple is a peacemaker and rejoices even when persecuted. And what follows after, in verses thirteen through sixteen, our Lord transitions to *implications* from *instructions*. Jesus tells his disciples what they are to *do* in light of who they *are*. Be salt. Just like salt, be that peculiar preserving ingredient in this world. Just as salt prevents rotteness, be a force in this world to curb and contain the depravity that we see all around. Being salt can be as simple as speaking the truth in love to someone.

Now, in verses *fourteen* through *sixteen*, Jesus teaches by using another metaphor. Light.

I have divided this small passage into *three* parts.  
 The first part is Jesus's *expectation* of his disciples.  
 The second part is Jesus' *illustration* of how to be light.  
 The third part is Jesus' *intention* why you are to be light.  
 And I hope to expound each part by asking three questions.  
 Here is the first question.

*Is Jesus Christ your source of light or truth?*

When Jesus uses the word "light", he means Gospel truth but not limited to truth only. Jesus means your conduct, your behavior, your witness, your generosity and much more. Light means the life of Jesus manifested in you and through you.

The first thing we ought to see is that God is the source of light. Hear what the apostle John says about God.

*"God is light, and in him is no darkness at all."* 1 John 1:5.

Jesus himself said - *"I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life"* John 8:12

And when Jesus says "you are the light of the world", he means you are merely a reflection of the light of Christ.

Let me give an illustration. John the Baptist was a forerunner for Jesus.

*"He (John the Baptist) was not the light, but came to bear witness about the light."* John 1:8

And Jesus commends John the Baptist for being a bright light but *not* the source of light.

*"You sent to John, and he has borne witness to the truth. <sup>34</sup> Not that the testimony that I receive is from man, but I say these things so that you may be saved. <sup>35</sup> He was a burning and shining lamp, and you were willing to rejoice for a while in his light. <sup>36</sup> But the testimony that I have is greater than that of John."* John 5:33-36

Jesus did not need John the Baptist to witness about him. John the Baptist himself said that after me comes someone whose shoelace I am not worthy to untie. This was a privilege for John the Baptist. In the same way, you have the privilege too. Jesus expects all his disciples to be lights in this world. Not just bishops. Not just pastors. Not just evangelists. Not just theologians but all his disciples are the light of the world.

And this light or truth did not or does not originate with you and I.

Matter of fact, we were darkness, we lived in spiritual darkness, and we were doing dark deeds. But when the light of Christ shone on you, you were transformed.

Paul writes this way in Ephesians chapter five:

*“for at one time you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light”*

Ephesians 5:8

*“Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them.”* Ephesians 5:11

*“For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness,..”* Ephesians 6:12

So, to others who don't know Christ, you are light. What a great privilege to be messengers of light in the Lord.

Now, there are people who have taken this one sentence in verse fourteen and have been inspired to the extent that they embraced the moral of it but rejected Christ altogether. They have made it just a moral statement. Be the good in the world. No need for God or Jesus Christ. Just do good. I saw on someone's desk these words written on a picture frame “Do good all the time whenever and where ever”.

How do you define good? Some people say, “if that is good to you, that is your good”.

I remember a man once said to me that he has a habit of lying. And that he how it gets by in life. So, lying is good to him?

Listen to Isaiah 5:20 *“Woe to those who call evil good and good evil, who put darkness for light and light for darkness, who put bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter!”*. It is not going work well for those redefine evil for good.

There is only one foundation for the disciple of Jesus Christ. And that foundation *must* be Jesus Christ.

*“For no one can lay a foundation other than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ.”* 1 Corinthians 3:5,11

So, Jesus says, “you are the light of the world”. But *how* are you to be light of the world?

Jesus illustrates for us. Let's look at the *second* part of the passage.

*“A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. <sup>15</sup> Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. <sup>16</sup> In the same way, let your light shine before others.”*

It is said ancient towns were built on hills or on the slopes of mountains. And the material used was limestone. And you could not miss these towns because they were built on an elevation and they reflected light because of the color of the walls.

When you drive on Oregon highways, it's hard not to miss Mount Hood.

The second illustration that our Lord uses is a candle or a lamp. They would usually use oil lamps back in the day. And that would be enough to light the whole house. Jesus's illustration is very easy to understand. If you say you are a disciple, that quality of a disciple is distinctive like a city on a hill or a lamp in a house. It must be visible.

Using these illustrations, Jesus gives the imperative in verse 16. See that phrase, "*in the same way*" meaning just as you would not miss a city on a hill or a lamp that is lit, let your light *shine*.

Now, Jesus does not mean promote yourself or market yourself for self-glory. Jesus warned his disciples "*Beware of practicing your righteousness before other people in order to be seen by them*". "*when you give to the needy, sound no trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may be praised by others*" Matthew 6:1,2

Jesus means live in such a way that your life as Jesus's disciple is evident, plain and clear to others.

Consider these *three* areas in being a light to others.

Conduct, witness and service.

First consideration: Your conduct.

*Is your conduct backed by conviction?*

*"Do all things without grumbling or disputing, that you may be blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world, holding fast to the word of life"* Philippians 2:14-16

*"Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable.."* 1 Peter 2:12

*"we aim at what is honorable not only in the Lord's sight but also in the sight of man"* 2 Corinthians 8:21

Second consideration: Your witness.

*"I pray that the sharing of your faith may become effective for the full knowledge of every good thing that is in us for the sake of Christ"* Philemon 6:1

Third consideration: Your service or generosity.

*"They will glorify God because of your submission that comes from your confession of the gospel of Christ, and the generosity of your contribution for them and for all others"* 2 Corinthians 9:13

Finally, *why* does Jesus call you to be a light to others?

Jesus reveals his *intention* for his disciples. Look at the last part of verse 16.

*“..so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.*

*Is God’s glory your goal?*

There is something others can detect very quickly if one is being narcissistic and self-centered.

When you live for the glory of God, others can see and give glory to God too.

Here is a simple test. Is the applause, the affirmation of others, the approval of others your primary driving force? That man or woman will be very popular.

Jesus was popular too because of his compassion for others. But Jesus says something that shocked his audience in his day.

*“Now great crowds accompanied him, and he turned and said to them, <sup>26</sup> “If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple. <sup>27</sup> Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after me cannot be my disciple.” Luke 14:25*

My prayer is that you see Jesus’ *expectation* of you, Jesus’ *illustration*, and Jesus’ *intention* for you. And that you give him glory.

Discipleship begins with self-denial, with poverty of spirit. And that is when you begin to become a light to others. Being light to others is being broken-hearted for your sin. Being humble. Seeking righteousness. Pursuing purity of heart. Being merciful. Being peacemakers. Not minding suffering for Christ. Those who have these qualities. These are lights of this world.

There have been exceptional Christian men and women who have made a mark in whole societies. One such woman is Amy Carmichael. She left her native Ireland and went to India to serve the downcast and untouchables of the land. And she ran an orphanage. She became a mother to many orphan girls. Amy’s convictions were completely Biblical. She was salt and light!

May your light shine in Christ!

----- Discipleship Questions-----

MESSAGE SUMMARY: **Live as Lights**. Matthew 5:14-16

HEAD: These questions help you examine the truth of God's Word.

1. As disciples of Jesus Christ, how are we to understand the word "light" from verse 14? Matthew 4:13-16, Psalm 36:9, 43:3, 119:105, 130, John 8:12, 12:46

HEART: These questions help you wrestle with what you believe.

2. In what way are you to be light of this world?
3. What is God convicting you of and to believe in light of this message?

HANDS/HABITS: These questions help you bring the truth into your everyday life and develop behaviors that change your habits.

1. For personal reflection: Are there things in your life that obstruct the light of Christ to shine? What you watch, what you read, what you think may be some areas. Matthew 6:22-23