

Let Your Light Shine

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[0 : 00] For a little time, let's turn to Matthew chapter 5, verses 14 to 16. Matthew 5 at verse 14, You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden.

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. 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.

Well, this great chapter, as well as the following chapters, of course, are known as the Sermon on the Mount. And the Sermon on the Mount in these chapters in Matthew is much about, pretty much all of it is about what it's like to be disciples of Christ.

What disciples should be like, what disciples should do, what discipleship is about, what is required of us as disciples.

What is the character of disciples of Christ? And it includes what we are to be internally as well as externally.

[1 : 15] It includes what a disciple is in terms of what we are in our hearts. And it includes what we are as disciples outwardly as we live our lives publicly and before other people.

It includes what we are to be in private. It includes what we are to be in public as well. All of that is packed into these great chapters of the Sermon on the Mount.

And we're just picking out this particular feature in verses 14 to 16 as a description of disciples and what disciples are about. And it begins with a definition of what we are, what disciples of Jesus are. Not just what they are like, but what in fact they are, are in terms of describing them as light. You are the light of the world. It doesn't say you will become light.

You will become the lights of the world. You are the light of the world. It's a definition of what we are. And it's so important at all times, not just at the beginning of a new year, that as Christians that we realize what in fact we are.

[2 : 27] We begin with what we are before we move on to what we do and what we are required to do by God. Because unless we understand increasingly what we are, what God has made us, we're not going to be in such a strong position to then move on to what God requires of us, what we are to do.

It's as we are what God has made us that we are required to do the things that God requires that we do for Him. So what we are, first of all, is defined.

But then there's a description of what we are required to do. And that's in the verses there, 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.

You are the light of the world. You are light. Before you look at it being the light of the world, you have to just stop and say you are light.

God's people are light. They weren't always light. There's that famous chapter in Ephesians or passage in Ephesians that we often quote and hear quoted where it says in Ephesians chapter 5, For at one time, verse 8, You were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord.

[3 : 54] Walk as the children of light. Before it says walk as the children of light, it says you are light in the Lord. Before it says you are light in the Lord, it says you were darkness.

We don't want to dwell on the darkness that we were. But it's important to realize that what God does by His grace, by His saving grace, by working savingly in the lives of individual people, is that not only are they delivered out of the darkness in which we are by nature, but we are actually made into the opposite of that darkness.

You were once light. It doesn't say you were once darkness. It doesn't say you were once in the darkness. It doesn't just say you were once surrounded by darkness.

It says you were darkness. Darkness is what we are as fallen individuals, as fallen human beings, as sinful human beings.

Darkness is our natural condition as sinners. Darkness is what we are as we are born into this world. Darkness is what we are without Christ.

[5 : 04] Darkness is what we are, but for grace. You were darkness. But, you see, that's what He's moving on from.

He doesn't want us to dwell on what we were so that we actually focus more on that than what God has made us. You were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord.

God has not just delivered us from darkness, from the realm of darkness, as it's put elsewhere. It's also that He's made us light. You are now light in the Lord.

He's turned you into the opposite of what you were. And that's one of the great things that characterizes Christians, characterizes Christians and the disciples of Christ, that they are the opposite of what they began as, that God's grace has changed them, and it's so important in this year ahead that we keep sight of that and that we put this before people as well that we witness to, that they are required as we are required, not just to have a kind of patch-up job of their lives, that they are required to do more than they can create themselves in order to have acceptance with God and be what the Bible describes as a Christian, a living person.

We are required to be born again. We are required to be turned into the opposite of what we begin with, to be light, whereas once we were darkness.

[6 : 35] But it's saying, not only that, you are the light of the world. Not only has God made His people into light, the opposite of what they were, but He's turned them into the kind of light that shines out into the darkness.

He's turned them into light with the purpose of shining into the world and upon the world. You are the light of the world.

And of course that implies that, as often is the case in the Bible, that darkness is something that has a moral feature to it.

It's not just natural darkness that you find in creation. The Bible speaks about darkness as something moral, something spiritual. And of course light is the same as the opposite of that.

And that moral darkness that the world is naturally in, that the world is still in, that the world itself, to use the way the Bible speaks of, the world, not just the physical creation, but that moral world, that spiritual world, that world of human beings.

[7 : 44] That's the setting in that moral darkness that is ours by nature, that is characteristic of the world and will always be characteristic of the world until God changes it.

That's the setting for the light. God hasn't made His people light so that they can actually, as this passage itself puts it, so that they can actually put some sort of covering on it and just keep it to themselves.

The very fact that you are the light of the world and that that implies moral darkness in the world shows that that's the situation in which the light has to shine and let its properties flood out.

Light really is only meaningful in the context of darkness. darkness. Why do people have such things as lights? Why, it says, they're very obviously the same.

Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a basket but on a stand and it gives light to all in the house. Why is there such a thing as light?

[8 : 58] Well, it's so that it will dispel the darkness, so that it will shine into the darkness and show up things that otherwise would not be seen because of the darkness.

And that too is something that follows into what we are to be as Christians. So let's remember at the beginning of this year that God has made his people lights and that he has made them together collectively and indeed individually that they are the light of the world.

He's talking here to the disciples and he's talking to the disciples collectively. So you can take from that that this really is addressing God's people together as they form his people in the world.

You, plural, are the light of the world. You have been placed by God as that great light that shines in the context of this moral darkness of this world.

That's what you are. That's what God has made you. And the purpose of it is that you shine for him. So let's begin this year on that note of what God's people are.

[10 : 14] And let's ourselves seek to know that we are light in the Lord. You can only be light as you are in the Lord. As you have the Lord as your own Savior.

As you are rooted and grounded in him with your life. And by faith live by trusting in him. That doesn't make any of us perfect. That doesn't mean that that's perfect from one day to the next or from one hour to the next.

But it does mean that that's where God's people, that's where the disciples of Christ have their life anchored and rooted in Christ himself. And where you are rooted in Christ and based upon Christ, then you are light.

You cannot be in the Lord and not be light. even though it's at times possible to be light and yet not let our light shine to the extent that we should.

So make sure that you are in Christ. Don't assume that you're in Christ. Look at yourself in the light of scripture. And seek further understanding of what it is to be in Christ.

[11 : 20] And what the privileges are of being in Christ. And especially the privilege of being the light of the world, of being a light to those who are still in darkness.

God cannot give us a greater privilege than that, than to be his lights and to be the light that this world so desperately needs. It's the first thing then, what God's people are, a definition of what his disciples are.

Secondly, he gives us a description of what his disciples, of what God's people are required to do. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden, nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket but on a stand.

Now I begin there with two illustrations of what we are to do, although they also form part of the description of what we are as lights or as the light of the world. The description being the city that's set on a hill and also the lamp that's lit in order to give light to all who are in the house.

These two descriptions are themselves really very much about being visible and being useful. The visibility of light is one of its obvious features.

[12 : 40] You cannot miss light when it's on but you miss it when it's not on. And when you put light somewhere that's dark, its property there actually brings a dispelling of the darkness.

The darkness is pushed back. You can see what you could not see before. And what it's saying here is that a city set on a hill cannot be hidden.

It's obvious. It's visible. I think maybe we could take it that it includes a city at night because it's to do with light in these verses from 14 right through to 16.

It's talking about light. So it would be logical to think of this city set on a hill which cannot be hidden, which is visible as a city at night.

When you get a city set on a hill, even in the daylight, it's obvious that there is a city there, that there's actually a township there, that there are people living there. You can see the houses, they're all prominent on the hillside.

[13 : 41] But when it's dark and when these houses are lit and when there are lights in these houses, then it's even more obvious that that city is not hid. It's obvious, it's visible. And in the darkness, it's visible because of the light.

And it's saying to us, as Christians, not only has God made us lights, but in making us lights, he's made us visible to the world. He's made us visible in the darkness.

And he's made us visible to those who are still in the darkness and are still darkness. darkness. And of course, the usefulness of it is described there in terms of the lamp.

Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket but on a stand, and it gives light to all who are in the house. What is more useful than light? You can't think of many things more useful than light. When you light a lamp, and of course this is going back to times when lamps were the kind of thing that you had with fuel of some kind and oil usually of some kind and it's wick and you had to keep it trimmed and you had to keep it topped up with the oil if you wanted the light to go on shining.

[14 : 54] And that's something that in our own generations past people were well aware of in our own communities as well. Well that's the kind of thing that's mentioned there. Nor do people light a lamp.

When you light a lamp, you have a purpose specific purpose in doing that. And the specific purpose is that it will give light to all who are in the house.

That it will dispel the darkness. Now he's coming from these two illustrations, he's now coming to the application of that. In the same manner also or likewise, in the same way, let your light shine before others.

In other words what he's saying is take these two illustrations with you. Take the way that you see light whether it's a city at night set on a hill or somebody lighting a lamp with the purpose of giving light to all who are in that house.

Take that with you and apply it to your lives as believers, as disciples of Christ. And these properties in the illustration follow into what you are to be and what you are to do as God's people. [16:02] let your light so shine before people, before men, before others. Remember that the setting as we saw is darkness.

The setting is the darkness, the moral darkness of this world. The moral darkness of sinfulness, of opposition to God, of hatred of God, of alternatives to God, of false religions, of no religion at all, of atheism, of secularism, of all the things that you find in the world that are different to and contrast with what it is to be in Christ.

You are set on a hill, you are the light of the world, so let your light shine before others. In other words, he's not just content to say, you are light.

He's now coming to our responsibility. God has made us light. God has made us people with the opposite as we saw of what they were. But you see, he now puts the onus onto us.

He now puts the responsibility onto us to let our light shine out. In other words, the way that we live our lives is how that light that God has made us or created in us is to shine out into the world and show its properties.

[17:29] we are responsible for that. We are given the responsibility to let our light shine out. Let your light shine before others.

light. And as with the lamp in the house, so it is with us as Christians as well. It gives light to all who are in the house.

And it's our responsibility and it's our privilege as God's people to let this light, this light of God's truth, this light of salvation, this light of being a Christian, to let it shine forth and seek to come to invade every single area of society.

There are so many parts of our country that lie in moral darkness. When you take a trip where you don't have to go very far, but especially you can see from the air, if you're traveling from here to Glasgow or Edinburgh or whatever, and you actually look down if it's a flight during the darkness, you can see the great swathes of countryside that are just simply dark as you look down upon them on a clear night, and then you come to pick out roads that are highlighted because there are lights marking that road, and then you come to the townships and in the cities themselves, these great conurbations of light, and you can see the contrast, but you can see the large areas that don't have the light that other areas have, and that's how it is morally and spiritually as well, because there are areas of, not just talking about geography just now, like areas of the country, but there are areas of people's lives and of what happens in society, there are areas whether you think of people's lives religiously, whether you think of the teaching of our children in schools, whether you think of education, whether you think of medical matters where things like medical ethics need to be upheld by

Christians, so much darkness still exists in all of these areas of society, and we need to let the light shine, and that's why we pray for those who are Christian teachers, and those who are Christian doctors, and those who are Christian surgeons, those who are Christians in the police, and those who are Christians in all other areas of society as well, not that we don't pray for others, but we pray for them because they are lights, and because they are required to let their light shine in places where the darkness makes it very difficult to do so.

[20:07] And that's what we are required to be and to do as Christians as well. Wherever God has set us, there's going to be darkness confronting us and around us somewhere or other.

Let your light shine like the lamp that may give light to all in the house. Let this be a year when we think of all those parts of our society and the lives of our people where darkness still holds sway.

Where the things of darkness are what people live by and people swear by. People want to retain for themselves so that the light of Christian truth will actually invade these areas of society.

In other words, that's why it's really saying here in the same way, let your light shine before others. It doesn't define any particular set of people. It's just simply before others, before people, before whoever it is you live amongst.

Let your light shine. Now there are things that are necessary for that to take place. I don't know how it happens nowadays that lighthouses are kept in order, but certainly in the old days when you had lighthouse keepers and when you had them responsible for maintaining the light in the lighthouse,

think of how absolutely crucial it is for the light in a lighthouse to keep shining and to keep shining most clearly.

[21 : 40] And these lighthouse keepers had responsibility to make sure that the lamps were trimmed when they were those sort of lamps, but also to keep the lenses clean, to keep it free of the salt that accumulated through the salt spray and so on that would so easily cover the glass the lenses, especially the glass around the lenses and the lenses themselves.

And when you think of how vital it is that all of these things will be kept in order so that the ships that ply around the coast would be kept free from danger and from disaster on the rocks.

Well it's the same morally and it's the same spiritually. You and I have to keep the lenses of our lives clean. We have to keep cleaning them on a daily basis.

The holier the life is, the brighter the light shines. The holier a person you and I will be, the more you will contrast with that darkness and therefore the more your light will shine in the darkness. darkness, the more it will be obvious and the more it will be useful and serve its purpose. So you have to keep the lens clean. In other words, you have to deal and I have to deal in a regular way with sin, with my own sin.

[23 : 11] With the sin that is still such a part of my life. You have to kill that sin. You have to maintain the lens of your life clean by dealing with sin. Otherwise it will accumulate and very often as it accumulates so more and more the light is prevented from shining forth.

And there's nothing worse than somebody who claims to be a Christian and is not really all that different to the world and lifestyle. That person is not letting their light shine. They're not keeping the lens clean.

They're not maintaining the lamp in its condition. Not only do you have to maintain the lens in its cleanliness but think back to the lamp when it needed fuel, when it needed oil.

You have to keep filling it with oil. You have to keep filling it with good quality oil for the light to be at its best. And that's what we do in the gospel. That's what we have a Bible for.

That's why God has given us prayer. That's why God has given us meetings to come together. Not just to pray but to worship Him and to learn of His truth. That's why He's given us time to study on our own, to pray on our own, to be as Jesus says in these chapters people who enter into our closets and close the door behind us and then pray and follow His example in prayer.

[24 : 37] What's that all about? It's about putting fresh oil into your lamp, into your life. It's about taking on again more of that fuel by which your light will shine.

So you keep the lens clean and you keep topping up your fuel. You keep the supply in good order. And as this year unfolds, let it be for me, let it be for you a year when we remember those two issues and take them with us and maintain our lives in such a condition by God's grace as will indeed allow the light to shine forth.

let your light shine out before men. But how are we to let that light shine? What especially is there in the passage that that tells us how that light is to be seen by others?

Well it's particularly in the passage an emphasis on good works. It's interesting isn't it that it says let your light shine so that they may see your good works.

It's really equating the shining light with the good works. In other words people see the light of a Christian life not just by a mere confession but by doing things practically that show that you are Christ's disciple.

[26 : 04] That you are following his example. That you are in every sense practically involved as a Christian in the things that need your light and in the things that God has given you as opportunities to be practically for him involved in the world that he has set you in.

This practical Christianity is such an important aspect of it. Of course you can have such things as decorative lights but actually light in itself is rather a plain thing isn't it?

Of course it draws your attention to it if there is something wrong with it especially. But normally you just get on with it and unless it's got such a shade or some kind of glass around it that really shows up a brilliant pattern or something like that.

But light in itself is really plain. If you think of a bulb just hanging from a ceiling without any fancy stuff around just a plain bulb itself. Well it's very plain. But just look at how useful and how practical it is.

It doesn't really draw attention to itself. But it does its work. It shines out in the darkness. And God hasn't made us lights so that we would just be nicely decorated and draw attention to ourselves.

[27 : 41] God has made us light so that people will see our good works. That people will actually know that we are Christians from the work that we do in serving others.

In serving God by serving others. In being practically involved in our society, in our neighborhoods, wherever else it is. That's how in the early days of course as you see the church and the book of Acts develop and grow.

In the earliest days of the church and the book of Acts one of the remarkable things is how practically involved the disciples and God's people people then were in the lives of one another and also of others around them.

They brought all things and deposited them together that they possessed and out of that distribution was made. Then you go through the book of Acts and you come to chapter 6 and you come to the setting up of the diaconate or deacons as we now call them.

Why was that necessary? Well because there was such a burden placed upon the apostles to deal with people who were poor and people who needed practically to be given attention that they just couldn't cope with all of that and they were being taken away from their main work of prayer and preaching the word.

[29 : 03] And so it is in our society today as well. Of course there are so many more agencies than was the case in the time of the apostles or even many years since the apostles.

And there are many agencies that help people with their poverty and with care and we're thankful for that and it's part of God's goodness that he has provided such care and such agencies for us.

But you know there ought to be no agency ahead of God's people, ahead of God's church for actually showing practical concern and compassion and help to other people.

Let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works and glorify your Father who is in heaven. We're not there to be just decorative features as God's people, as God's disciples.

We're there to be useful. We're not there just to close the door and just live a private life in a kind of monastic sense.

[30 : 15] We're there to live as light set in the context of this moral darkness around us and you let your life shine by your good works and by those good works.

So your light comes to be noticed and comes to be influential and comes to be effective in the darkness that's around you.

Let your light shine. Let your light shine. Let your light shine before other people so that they may see your good works. But that's not quite finished with that.

And may glorify your Father who is in heaven. We said that light in itself, white light, ordinary light is a very plain thing you might say.

And here as well we're told that the great purpose of our lives is to bring glory to God. The aim, the ambition, the purpose of light is to be useful.

[31 : 23] But in terms of the light that we are as Christians, as believers, as disciples, again it's not to draw attention to ourselves, not to give praise to ourselves. It's not to bring commendation to ourselves that we are to shine as lights in the world, that we are to let our good works be seen and experienced by those that we live amongst.

But it's so that they may glorify, give glory to your Father who is in heaven. Our light as it shines is to be useful to people, to bring benefit to people, to help people, to distribute to people.

But it's especially to let them see God, to throw light upon Him if you like, to bring Him into the spotlight.

And to show up His features as our Father in heaven. So that people will come and glorify Him. And praise Him. And give Him honour.

And come and serve Him also. But remember also that as lights in the world, that chapter in Ephesians that we quoted from earlier, gives us another important feature of what it is to shine as lights in the world.

[32 : 53] It's not simply to shine in such a way that by our practical good deeds we are useful, we help people, we are all of that. And therefore glorify our Father who is in heaven.

That we actually light up the way to eternal life. That we show people what it is to believe and what it is to have our trust in God. There's another side to it too.

You shine in the darkness so that you show up the sinfulness of that darkness. The ungodliness of that darkness. That's an important feature of being lights in the world.

Just listen to the way Paul put it to the Ephesians in chapter 5. Let no one deceive you with empty words. For because of these things the wrath of God comes on the sons of disobedience.

He's been talking about their sexual immorality, the covetousness, the idolatry of those who are pagans around these Christians. Therefore he says, do not become partners with them.

[33 : 56] For at one time you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as the children of light. For the fruit of light is found in all that is good and right and true.

And try to discern what is pleasing to the Lord, what the will of the Lord is. Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them.

For it is shameful even to speak of the things that they do in secret. But when anything is exposed by the light, it becomes visible.

You are there to make sinfulness visible. God has placed you in the world as opposite to what you wear yourselves and opposite to what that world is in its moral darkness.

Not just to be an alternative to it. Not just to show something entirely different to it. But to show it up. And by holiness of life and by living as consistent Christians.

[35 : 06] So that we be the conscience of the world, if you like. That's really what it means, surely, when it talks there in Ephesians about exposing these works of darkness. Bringing conviction to people that sin is real and offensive to God and needs to be repented of.

And people therefore come to forgiveness and to salvation and to acceptance and to real joy and things of lasting substance. Let your light shine before others.

So that they may see your good works. And give glory to your Father who is in heaven. May the Lord bless these thoughts on his word.

Let's pray now. Almighty God, we thank you for the grace and the power that transforms us from darkness into light.

That delivers us from the power of darkness and brings us into the kingdom of your dear Son. We thank you today at the beginning of this year that you have reminded us of the importance of shining for you.

[36 : 20] Of being lights in the world and letting our light shine. Forgive us, Lord, for the opportunities that you bring our way that in the past year we have failed to let our light shine.

We pray that as this year unfolds, that we may constantly be watchful for further opportunities to let our light shine. O Lord, forbid that we should ever be ashamed of what we are, of what we have and of what we have to do.

Enable us in dependence on your strength and on your grace. To let our light shine so that people may see our good works. And may bring you praise and glory as our Father in heaven.

Hear us now and accept us for Jesus' sake. Amen. Amen. Amen.