

You Are The Lights of the World

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[0 : 01] Let's turn again to the chapter we read in Matthew's Gospel, chapter 5. Matthew chapter 5, verse 14.

And that very simple and yet amazing statement that Jesus makes to his followers, You are the light of the world. Now, the Bible shows us that the world is not becoming a better place.

Yes, the day we live in, it's becoming better in many different ways with regard to our comforts, with regard to the conditions that we live in.

For instance, particularly younger people who might not remember, if you want to remember the kind of conditions and the kind of comfort and the circumstances that maybe your great-grandparents lived in, go over to the black house in Arnall, and you will see just how far we've come in a pretty short time.

And so we have to be thankful for the tremendous comforts and conditions and where we're at in this particular period of our history.

[1 : 27] But having said that, what I mean is that the Bible shows us that because of sin, there is a growing corruption in this world.

This world is rotting and decaying. In the same way as within ourselves, the very fact that we are and that we have life means that eventually we will, well, if we're spared to old age, we will get old and things will begin to fail and eventually we will die.

All will die. There is an element of decay in everything. We don't like to think about it, but death reminds us of that decay.

And that has come in in the garden. That is the legacy of sin. God said the wages of sin is death. And that death has affected everything. It affects a natural creation and it affects society, that there is a moral and spiritual bankruptcy.

There is a rotting and decay. Just the very world itself, everything is going to give out. Everything is going to come, as it were, to an end.

[2 : 44] But Jesus says we have to live out our life in this world. And the Christian has an obligation to live out his life, not just selfishly to and for himself, but in a particular way.

They have to live to the Lord. And the Lord tells us here that there is a two-fold aspect to our life. We have to live as salt and we have to live as light. The salt, as we know, is a preservative.

And the salt gives flavors. That is not what we are looking at this morning. And there is no doubt whatever that the following of Christian ways and Christian principles does bring a preservation to society.

It does bring with it so much that it is good. And it's as the Christian lives out displaying the salt and the light of life that they affect society for good.

So people might say, well, how are we to live that way? Well, Jesus, remember, has just given us what we call the Beatitudes. And it's as the believer lives in this way, that their impact upon society will be like salt and it will be like light.

[3 : 59] Those who mourn, those who are pure in heart, those who are meek, those who hunger and thirst after righteousness, those who are merciful, those who are peacemakers.

Remember, this is how we are to live. Jesus isn't just talking about something that was true of a certain group of people at one stage in life.

He's saying, this is how my people are to be. They are to be merciful people. They are to be peacemakers. These are the kind of people my people are.

And it's as we interact with other people, impacting society in this way, that God's people act as salt and they act as light.

So we find Jesus making this amazing statement where he says, you are the light of the world. That's quite an amazing statement when you think it came from the one who said, I am the light of the world.

[5 : 02] Now we can well understand Jesus making that statement and saying, Jesus saying, I am the light of the world. And we would all say, yes, absolutely. But it's amazing when he then turns it to us and he says, you are, that's what he says, you are the light of the world.

And so we've got to take that on board because we live in an age, as we said, where we have so many, many blessings.

There's so many advances in technology and science and medicine. And it has made the world in many ways an amazing place to live in. And it's made the world very small where we're able to interact and share with people all over the world, just like that.

It's quite an amazing world. And we've got to thank God for these things. And we see all the different medicines and the different, just medical science is making great advances.

It's just people's understanding of life, of the cosmos, of understanding of the natural world. All these things is developing and growing all the time. However, as we said at the very beginning, there is still darkness, moral darkness, spiritual darkness.

[6 : 17] And as you look around, even in our own society, we cannot but look around and say, well, there is a darkness. When you look at the violence that is within our land, that's darkness.

That comes because of moral darkness. So many people live as prisoners in their own homes. People are scared. We're very fortunate where we live.

But there are many people in Great Britain today who are scared to go out. There are many elderly who are confined to their own homes, not because they're incapacitated, but because they're scared.

It shouldn't be. But it's there because of this moral darkness that is enveloping the nation. There's violence. There is corruption. There is breakup. And all these things come because of this moral darkness.

And we live at an age where there's incredible pressure. Whether we are living, and I think everybody will recognize that, that by and large we are in a secular society.

[7 : 23] A society that pays very little attention to God. And it's a society that has put intolerable demands and pressures on us.

A secular society is a hard taskmaster. And you look around, just look into history and see that secular societies have been hard taskmasters.

And there's so much pressure. So much, so much, often with people, despair. There's so much hopelessness in Britain today.

People are void of hope. And sometimes you say to yourself, well, how is that? Well, you go back to Eden. And it's all there. You know, that's why the Bible is so important, it's so relevant.

Because people say, how come, how come things are breaking up? It's because of sin. You go back to Eden, and it's a picture of breakup.

[8 : 24] Everything broke up. Adam and Eve's relationship with God broke up. Their own relationship with one another broke up. Their relationship with the environment, it broke up.

Everything was breaking up. It's a sad story of breakup. And that's what sin does. And unless God will intervene, then that darkness, that breakup, and the fallout from the breakup, which is darkness, will envelop more and more.

And that's why God has sent His Son, who is the light of the world, into this world. To bring light. To bring hope. To bring meaning. To bring a purpose to all these things.

So the Lord, who says, I am the light of the world, says to us, you are the light of the world. Now there's probably many of us in here, we would say, there was a day when we were not the light of the world.

In fact, even today, if you're a believer, you may feel when you say, well, if I'm the light of the world, I'm a very poor light. And I'm sure a lot of us feel like that. And we say, well, the flicker, or the flame, or the light, that comes, must be a very, very weak light.

[9 : 45] But what we've got to remember, it's not our own light. It is the light of Christ, that is within His people. It's not, we are not displaying ourselves. We are not displaying our own efforts, our own good works, our own righteousness.

We have none. But you know, it's the more that we live to Christ, and for Christ, and in Christ, the more that that light will shine. And people will see it. People will see the impact.

But there was a day when it wasn't like that. We preferred darkness to light. Jesus said that in the Bible. He said, men love darkness rather than light.

Why? Because their deeds were evil. You see, that's one of the things that the light does. Light reveals darkness. Light shows up the darkness.

Light shows up what is dark, what is wrong. You go into a room, that's pitch dark, and you might be in a room, that's a total and absolute mess.

[10 : 48] Suppose you went into a room, that had been trashed, but it's completely dark, and then you get a torch, and you put it on, you go, oh, my word, what a mess in here.

How did you discover that mess? It was the light. It was the light that revealed it. And that is why a lot of people don't want the light. They don't want the impact of Christianity.

They don't want this into their lives, because it makes them feel uncomfortable. It's challenging. It's a rebuke to their life. And they say, no, I would rather just leave me alone.

So that is why people will often choose darkness rather than light, because the moment that light begins to come in and expose the darkness, dispose, expose what is within their own heart, straight away they're challenged, straight away they're having to face up, they realize, I am accountable before a living God.

But this is what happened. The light came, the light, God's light, began to shine into our heart, and we began to see our sin. And that caused us to cry out to the Lord for forgiveness.

[11 : 59] That's what God does. And you know, he comes in mercy into our heart, shining his light, the light, his own light in, and showing us what we are. And you know, when he does that, it's a humbling, crippling discovery.

That you're not what you thought you were. That your own goodness kind of evaporates. Your own righteousness, it just goes.

If you were like me, there was a day when I trusted in my own righteousness. And somehow I thought, even although I knew the gospel inside out, even although if somebody had come to me and say, what must I do to be saved?

I could have said to them, believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved. And I knew that that was a way of salvation. I knew I needed a savior, and yet somehow I clung to my own righteousness.

And I thought, at the end of the day, that'll do me. It's extraordinary. But that's what we're like. Then the Lord shines in and says, no, it won't do.

[13 : 07] And it's one of the most awful discoveries to realize just how deceived you were. And that your own righteousness is going to condemn you. There's nothing of worth or value in it.

But you know what the light does? The light shows it. The light beams on up to the one who can. And we see what God has done. We see God's provision. God has sent his son, Jesus, into the world.

And that's what the light does. It shines upon Jesus. And we see him as the savior. He's the light of the world. He's the one for me. Sometimes the Lord does that very slowly in people's lives.

Sometimes he does it very quickly in people's lives. Or at least their discovery of it. That's how it may appear to themselves. But that's what happens. And so the passion that the Lord is shining the light on into their heart, like as John Newton said, I once was blind, but now I see.

And it's a great thing when we're able to see, when we're able to understand. And so the Lord is saying to his people, you are the light.

[14 : 21] You are the lights in this world. And you know, the removal of each light from our communities, from our towns, from our islands, and from our land is a huge loss.

It's something we always ought to take to heart. In fact, it shows that things are in a bad way if the righteous have been taken away and people don't take note of it.

That's one of the, in one of the prophecies, it talks about that that the righteous are perishing and no one takes it to heart. Every time a light is taken out of this world, this world is a little poorer.

Because there was one who was interacting, one who was praying, one who was interceding. interceding. We have no idea the prayers that have gone up from the hearts, from the lives of those often who are bedridden, often who are housebound.

They're praying for their whole street. They're praying for their family. They're praying for the church. They're praying for the community. Little do we realize the impact that these people have. [15:36] and when they're gone, we feel it. We feel it. It's a wonderful thing to have a light in any house. And it's always a solemn thing when the light goes.

May we pray that many, many more lights will come on and shine within our own town here. So we have to ask the question, I suppose in that sense we've been answering it as we go along.

Why does the Lord make his people the light of this world? Well, he's doing so in order to display, we would say, his own wonderful work and grace.

Because you see, the world cannot help but take note of changed lives. There are some people, and we have to acknowledge that their life before they're converted is a very upright and a very decent life.

and in fact, when they're converted, there is a very little difference outwardly between what they were and what they've become. But there are also many others and there is a radical change within their lives.

[16:50] Angry people and there's a calmness. People who are wild and there's now a control. and you take note of it. It makes a, it impacts the community.

People talk about it. Some people might talk by way of derision, but deep down, it's not derision.

They might outwardly, they might make fun of it to others, but deep down, it's made them think.

And you see, all these things are displaying, it's a challenge to people. It hits people's conscience. I saw a poster somewhere that said, conscience is a pest.

And you know, there's a lot of truth in that. That's how a lot of people think. Conscience is a pest.

God has put a conscience within us. And it's that which gnaws away.

It's an awful thing when a conscience becomes dead. A deadened conscience. Thank the Lord if your conscience is still troubled and you have a sensitive conscience. But you know, there are many people and in the quiet, in their own quiet, and maybe in the middle of the night, they'll awaken and they'll think about God through the challenge that another life has been, where they've seen the change take place.

[18:07] But as we said earlier, that is one of the reasons why many of the world hate the Christian. Because there are a rebuke to them, there are a reminder to them that there is a God.

But we said also that light doesn't just reveal darkness, light also dispels darkness. And that's how the believer's life should be.

It should be one that is dispelling the darkness. The Christian's presence ought to have a lightning impact wherever they are.

It ought to bring light. But we've always got to be careful. You know, I often think that what the Christian is is more powerful than what they say.

And if our lips say more than our life, then people won't listen. People won't listen. People will say, ah, well, it's all very well. He says this and he says that. That's not the kind of person they really are themselves.

[19:10] So we have to be very careful. It goes back to the Beatitudes. It goes back to this. How am I living? It's all very well to preach peace and yet be somebody who's divisive and causing trouble and somebody who is angry and hurting.

The world will say, Christian? Don't think so. They may say it, not living it. So you see the huge challenge. But the more that we live, live displaying Christ as we said earlier, not displaying ourselves.

but Christ, being lost in him, living for him. And that is what brings light. That's what brings the impact.

And again, the Christian is somebody whose life brings hope to others. Let's not lose sight of that. You might be sitting in here today, I don't know.

You might be in here today and you're not a believer, but you want to be. And there's a hope in your heart. And do you know what that hope is based on? Yes, it's on God's word. But it's based on the fact that you see other people here who are exactly the same as yourself and their life has been changed.

[20:27] And that is holding out hope for you. I know a woman, not in this island, and her husband was a really wild character.

And later in life he was converted. And the Sunday he went forward at the particular communion, because of the crowds here, we don't do that, but in many of the mainland congregations, the table is set at the front and then during the singing the people rise up and come down to the table. And as her husband got up and walked down to the table, she wasn't a Christian herself, his getting up at that particular moment and walking down created such an impression of hope in her heart. She said, well, if the Lord could do it for him, he can do it for me. And that was the beginning of her seeking the Lord.

And she came, she's a lovely Christian woman, but it was the impact of that changed life and the hope that that changed life held out to her.

[21 : 39] See, there's the light, that's the light of the world. That's exactly what Jesus is saying. You are the light of the world. So we must never lose sight of these things.

But you know, side by side with that, the Christian is also a rebuke. Because the Christian's life showing that change, it's sending out this challenge and this realization.

One day, one day, I'm going to have to face up. I'm going to have to go before the judge of all things. Well, we must seek to live for Christ.

And we must seek to live for Christ where we are. You know, sometimes we say, I wish I was somewhere else. Wish the Lord had put me somewhere else.

I think at different times in our life we say that about lots of different things. Wish I was in a different job. Wish I was in a different home. Some people may even today be saying, I wish I was in a different family.

[22 : 49] It's not a very nice thing to say, but sometimes people say that. I wish I lived in a different community. I wish I lived, wish I didn't live in this island.

Wish I wasn't in this church. I wish I wasn't in, you know, there's loads of different things. The Lord has put you in a particular place, in all the different areas of life.

The Lord's in control of everything. He's sovereign over everything. And we often try to change it and say, well, I want it some other way. The Lord says, no, this is where I put you just now. You get on with it.

Legion, remember when Jesus healed the Legion. Legion said, Lord, I want to go with you. I don't want to live in that community anymore. I'm done with it. I want to be with you. Jesus said, sorry, I want you to go back.

Back home. Back to the community. Back into your own home. Because you're now a light. light. And I want you to live like a light in the community.

[23 : 51] And that's what he did. He went around everywhere telling people about Jesus. And that's how the Lord wants us to be. To live for him where we are.

May we seek then every day for the grace to shine for him that he will shine through us. And the way that he will shine through, the closer we live with him the more time we spend with him.

You remember Moses when he came down from the mountain? He had spent all that time with the Lord, just himself and the Lord. Remember when he came down, the people couldn't look at him. He didn't realize this. It tells us this. Moses didn't realize his face shone. It was shining so bright with the reflected glory of God.

light. Because he had spent so much time in his company, in his presence. But Moses didn't know it. That was real light.

[24 : 53] And Jesus says to us, you are the light of the world. Let's pray. Oh Lord, our God, we pray that by grace we will become more and more a shining light for thyself in this world.

And we pray that we might be gentle and that we might be loving, that we might be peaceful, that we might be full of joy, that we might be full of faith.

We pray, oh Lord, that we will indeed display Jesus Christ in our life. Lord, help us as we go through and forgive us the times that we don't.

Forgive us, Lord, our inconsistencies. Forgive us our failures. Forgive us, Lord, when we speak in a wrong way, when we hurt people, when we're careless with our words, when we're careless with our actions.

Have mercy upon us, Lord, and do us good. Guide us as we go along and take away our sin. In Jesus' name we ask it. Amen.