

Lighting Up the New Year

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[0 : 00] And we can read again at verse 14, Matthew chapter 5 and 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, as you well know, this is part of a passage from 5, chapter 5 to 7, of the Gospel of Matthew that's usually known as the Sermon on the Mount.

And it's important for us to note that the Sermon on the Mount in its entirety, as Matthew presents it to us, was actually spoken to Jesus to his disciples.

It's very clear at the beginning of chapter 5, when the crowds had gathered round as they followed him from these places that are mentioned at the end of chapter 4. Seeing the crowds, Jesus went up on the mountain, And then when he was sat down, his disciples came to him, and he opened his mouth and taught them, saying.

And then from then on, right through to the end of chapter 7, you have teaching addressed specifically to Christ's disciples. And within that passage 5 to 7, we have what's known as the Beatitudes, in verses 2 to 11 of this chapter.

[1 : 41] So that you have that small unit in itself, contained within the wider unit of the Sermon on the Mount. But it's all to do with teaching for the disciples, and indeed here in the Beatitudes, and also through to the verses we're looking at this evening, 14 to 16, not just is he teaching disciples, but he's teaching about what discipleship is about.

What is a disciple? What are disciples? What's the life of a disciple like? And when you take account of all of that, we see that as you read verses chapters 5 to 7, when you finish it and you put it down, you then immediately are aware of the fact that it is just impossible for us to match or to actually have the kind of lifestyle perfectly that is described there in these passages.

And that, of course, is the way that God, throughout the Scripture, as well as in this passage, the way that God actually brings us into consideration of our own defect and our own weakness and our own inability so that it drives us to the grace of God, to the enabling grace of God, so that we draw our strength to live as disciples from Him.

But here in these verses, we find part of this description and using the illustration of light as it's used in verses 13 to...

Verse 13, they're using the illustration of being the salt of the earth. So we're just confining it to the way here he mentions that you, again addressing the disciples, as we said, you are the light of the world.

[3 : 33] A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. Now in all of this, we have to remember that because Jesus is addressing His disciples, what He's really setting out in these chapters is what you can call, or what people, some commentators commonly call, often call, the counterculture that Christianity is to the culture of the world.

This is really Jesus setting before the disciples, you are yourselves part of this counterculture. You are yourselves the culture that seeks in presenting the truth to the world to actually overturn that culture of worldliness that opposes the gospel.

So that all the way through the Sermon on the Mount, you have, as you find in this illustration, you have a very obvious contrast between what disciples are and what disciples are to be doing, and the surrounding environment of unbelief, of worldliness, of opposition to the gospel, everything that characterizes that culture around them that they seek to actually infiltrate or influence with the culture of the gospel and of God's salvation.

And that's why you find it's so important to note the contrast. They're very obvious contrasts. They're total contrasts in many respects, as it is here between light and darkness. So, first of all, we can see that here we have a description of what God's people are. What God's people are.

[5 : 18] And then secondly, more fully, we'll look at what God's people are required to do in their service for Him. What God's people, firstly, what they are.

You are the light of the world. Now, they weren't always like that. You weren't always a disciple of Christ. I wasn't always a disciple of Christ.

We were not always disciples following the Lord and having our will bent to His will and to the Scriptures. Ephesians describes perfectly what we were.

In Ephesians chapter 5 and verse 8, Paul is reminding these Ephesians that are now part of the church of God there in Ephesus, you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord.

You notice what he's saying. He's not saying, you were once in darkness. You were once surrounded by darkness. You were darkness, is what he's saying. But now in the Lord, you are light.

[6 : 20] In other words, the Lord has turned them. The grace of God hasn't just simply taken them out of darkness, out of an environment of darkness that surrounded them. What it's done is make them into the opposite of what they themselves were.

That's the beauty of God's grace. That's the power of God's grace. That's essentially what is meant by being born again. You come to be turned by God's grace and by God's power into something entirely the opposite of what you were.

You were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. And elsewhere, Jesus counsels us against our tendency, perhaps, to think far better of ourselves than we ought to.

And in fact, you can see in chapter 6 and at verse 22 there, where he says that we cannot serve two masters and so on and we are to lay up for ourselves treasure in heaven.

The eye, he says, of the body, of the lamp is the body. The eye is the lamp of the body. So if your eye is healthy, your whole body will be full of light.

[7 : 34] Now that's on a natural basis, first of all. If your eye is healthy, then the light that gets through your eye will be beneficial to you. And then he says, but if your eye is bad, your whole body will be full of darkness.

In other words, you cannot see if you're blind, if your eye is badly diseased or whatever. But then he spiritualizes that and he actually turns it into a spiritual and moral point.

If then the light in you is darkness, how great is the darkness? Remember, there were people listening here to Jesus. He wasn't just, he was addressing the disciples, but there were many other people.

The crowds that were listening in. And this is what he is saying to them. Some of you, he is saying, might think that you are light inside your hearts. That you actually are light in yourselves.

And you may be thinking that this indeed is what you are in reality. But he says, take care because it's possible that what you think is light is actually darkness.

[8 : 37] And if the light that is in you is darkness, how great is that darkness? How do you know whether you are light or darkness in your heart? Well, there are different ways of answering the question, of course.

And you go back to the Beatitudes, difficult as they are to follow. But in principle, you can say that that's really the essence of what a Christian outlook and a Christian practice is about.

People who have as their priority the kingdom of heaven, the comfort of themselves and other people and meekness and qualities like that that they're striving to reach in their lives even if they know they're not perfect in these respects.

But now he says, in the Lord, you are light. You are the light of the world. And when he puts it like that, it implies, of course, as he then goes on to say, a city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden.

And it seems that we should understand that he's still talking about darkness, but here's, in the darkness of night, here's a city that's set up on a hill and in the darkness of night you can't miss it because it's lit.

[9 : 49] Its lights actually show that there's life there, that there's people there, that there's a population there and that it shows up in the darkness. The city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden.

You can't persuade somebody, there's nobody living there in that city that's set on a hill when it's full of light. People will say, of course there's people there, I can see the lights, I can see the lights in their homes.

It's a sign of life. And he says, you are the light of the world, a city set on a hill which cannot be hidden. And of course, that implies and really sets before us the context, the framework in which, the setting, if you like, in which discipleship is set.

A discipleship is set in the moral and spiritual darkness of the world. As disciples of Jesus, as this year unfolds, it's so important for us to remember this is in fact the setting in which our discipleship is set.

This is the setting in which we have to show our discipleship, in which we have to be the light of the world because we are surrounded by darkness. And that doesn't just mean people who have fallen on hard times.

[11:10] It doesn't matter what kind of sophisticated life a person has, how highly educated a person may be, what achievements in life they may have reached, what strata in social society they may have actually attained to, what profession they may have in the world.

Without Jesus they are darkness. And if they're opposed to the gospel, however well thought of they may be by fellow human beings, God still says, you are darkness.

darkness. And that's the setting for us in this new year. As a congregation of people who worship the Lord regularly, who know the gospel, who want to live out the gospel, who want to be known as a gospel congregation, this is the setting in which God has placed us because this town like every other town as well as parts of our countryside and all of our countryside indeed to an extent.

But our society is marked, the whole of that society of people that we belong to apart from those who are in fact gospel people and God's people and worshipping people, it's darkness.

Secularism is darkness. Atheism is darkness. Other religions are darkness. Idolatry is darkness. Immorality is darkness.

[12:46] That's the darkness in which we're set. And we're set in it so as to give out our light, the light of our discipleship, the light of Christ, the light of the salvation that God has brought into our very beings.

You are light. You are a city set on a hill. And in fact, that's really, in a sense, the only meaningful way in which you can understand light. You go back to the beginning of the Bible, the description of the creation.

We've looked at it fairly recently in prayer meetings. And you remember how the Bible begins. In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth, and the earth was without form and void and darkness was upon the face of the deep.

And the Spirit of God moved on the face of the waters. And then it says, And God said, Let there be light. Why did he create the light?

What is the purpose of the light? The purpose of the light in its very creation by God was to dissipate the darkness, was to scatter the darkness, was to turn the darkness away so that the conditions became the opposite of what darkness is.

[14:11] And spiritually, that's exactly the same in principle as it was in the creation at the beginning. God said in regard, it's amazing, isn't it, a verse that comes to mind is that great verse in 2 Corinthians.

I'm sure we've mentioned it before, but because it's directly related to what we're saying in 2 Corinthians chapter 4 where Paul is speaking there about Jesus and the life that is in him where he says that, 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.

That's a really stupendous text because it's going back to Genesis at the creation of light by God.

It's saying there was nothing but darkness till God said Let there be light.

And it's saying here we are as human beings and we were darkness and in our darkness God said Let there be light there. He doesn't say Let light He has shone into our hearts.

That's not what it is. If you notice carefully what he's saying is that God has shone in our hearts. He's created a light right in the darkness that we were.

[15:44] And as soon as God has created that light that life in us turning us from our deadness into life from our darkness into light well that light just explodes outwards and it affects every part of your person your thoughts your words your understanding your conclusions your outlook your behavior is now characterized by light.

light and Jesus is saying this is the purpose of the light to scatter the darkness and it's something that goes on shining as God has given it this quality and this purpose so there's the first thing what God's people are you are light you are a city set on a hill you are the light of the world my friends where is the world going to find direction where is the world in 2017 going to find proper direction to their lives to their thinking because they don't read their Bibles very few read the Bible they don't come to church they don't get instruction in the truth where are they going to see the truth where are they going to find light where are they going to find something opposite to the darkness that marks themselves and their ways they have to find it in us

God has given us the light with this purpose that it shines outward you see it saying there somebody who lights a candle or a lamp they don't put it under a basket but on a stand and it gives light to all that are in the house and Jesus is really saying you are the light of the world you are a city set on a hill Christ has not given you the light so they can then bury it with something and hide it and put it somewhere for safe keeping where only you can see it no the property of light is to shine and the property of light and shining the purpose of it is to scatter darkness let your light so shine before others that's what God's people are they are light with that purpose of shining in the darkness of showing up the darkness of the darkness of dispelling the darkness and of replacing it with light the light of truth of righteousness of salvation and then what

God's people are required to do well we've mentioned the illustrations here the city set on a hill the lamp that's set on a lampstand these are very obvious illustrations for us but the application of it is really what's important in the same way he's making the connection between these things naturally speaking and what we are as disciples to be spiritually in the same way in a spiritual sense let your light shine before others and that's important before others is to be a public life a life that's seen a life that's taken note of a life that shows itself in a public way a discipleship that lives outwardly in the context of the darkness let your light shine before men before others in the presence of others so that in their experience they will actually know that there's a light shining there that there's something there that challenges them something there different to what they are in themselves something there makes them ask questions something that touches their conscience something that says to them are you yet light in the

Lord all of that is included in the challenge that Jesus is setting before us and in order to let the light shine of course in a normal sense think of a lighthouse for example or some important light light that marks a place where there may be danger it's important that the lenses are kept clean and in order to let our light shine we need to maintain a holy life the holier your life is the brighter your life your light will shine that doesn't mean the holier your life is the less you will draw opposition to yourself very often it's the opposite but our responsibility and our privilege in being disciples of Jesus Christ is not to actually think first and foremost of what the reaction of people is going to be what the opposition might be like but rather to be committed to live that holy life that the lens of our lifestyle is kept clean so that the light of Jesus shines through it and that by that people will see not that we ourselves are good people but that

[21 : 26] Christ is a great saviour that God is a great God and in order to keep the lens of our life clean we're just using language that hopefully might help the young folks that language that they can associate as Jesus is doing here with ordinary things lamps and keeping the lamps clean so the light shines out effectively there are two things in the light of your life that we need to maintain if that light is going to shine as it should first of all we have to deal with sin not a pleasant subject not a pleasant exercise but absolutely vital nonetheless unless unless you deal with sin as you know of sin in your life if disciples don't actually come and confess their sins and seek God's cleansing power and God's furtherance of them in fighting with sin and in putting sin to death and killing sin the lens of your life is going to begin to cloud up if you're traveling on the roads recently of course you'll have known that there was a lot of salt on the road necessarily when it was more frosty than it is the last few days and if you travel a long distance such as down the

A9 for example as we did recently then you soon become very aware of the fact that your lights on your car actually get so covered with that muck of the road that you need to clean them otherwise the light does not come through effectively and eventually it will become pretty obscured altogether and so it is with our life as well sin has to be dealt with sin has to be killed self has to be put to death there's no alternative that's why Jesus defines elsewhere those who come after him as his disciples if anyone will be my disciple what's the first thing he says let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me when you find Jesus carrying his cross or if you saw somebody else in those times

carrying the cross on their shoulder towards a place of crucifixion you knew very well what that indicated you didn't have to look at that person and ask where is he going to happen to him you knew that that person was going to die the cross was an instrument of death and when Jesus uses that as an illustration of what it means to follow him it's a very difficult challenging description but that's Christ's description and these are Christ's terms if anyone will be my disciple let him take up his cross let him deny himself let him put self on the cross and put it to death and I don't need to tell you all of your disciples of Jesus tonight that one of the most difficult things and it will remain one of the most difficult things to the day of your death is to put self to death to mortify the deeds of the body as Paul puts it elsewhere it's so difficult that you can only do it as Paul says in Romans by the spirit of God if you by the spirit put to death the deeds of the body then you shall live and of course he doesn't just mean deeds of the body in the sense that only in the physical sense of sin should we be engaged against sin what he means is the sin that is within us that's in our hearts that's in our souls that expresses itself so much through our bodies if we put it to death we shall live and the more you put it to death the holier a person you will be and the holier a person you will be the more your light will shine why do we go to church why do we read the bible why do we come committed as we are to come to midweek meetings to receive teaching to have fellowship there with other

Christians to hear people praying it's all about this isn't it it's all about applying yourselves to holiness applying yourselves to being Christ disciples applying yourselves so as to keep the lens of our lives clean I have to ask myself tonight are you a preacher of the gospel and is the lens of your own life becoming clouded or dirty are you cleaning it each day are you actually making sure that you go to the Lord and you say Lord create in me today a clean heart maintain my cleanliness help me to pursue further in my life of holiness help me to fight the temptations that say you don't need to be that holy or that committed you only have to read the Sermon on the Mount as we said already to realize the standard that Jesus requires and of course we have to say that when we fall short of it and when we know we're not what we should be it's not so that we will despair and then give up and say well the life of a disciple is impossible

I can't meet that standard of course you can't neither can I but you go to God and you confess your shortcoming and you plead for his forgiveness and for his renewal and for his guidance and you'll find that God is true to his word and he will not give up on you and he'll continue to sanctify your life as you bring it to him as well as killing sin the second thing to keep the lens of your life clean is that you feed it on the best oil these are the days of course in Jesus when oil fed the lamps and the better quality oil the brighter the lamp would be feed your soul on the best possible oil in other words come often to the word of God read the Bible consistently for yourself doesn't have to be great chunks of it it's far better actually to do smaller portions regularly than a huge chunk every couple of weeks but don't leave gaps do it daily come to

[28 : 10] God's word and feed your soul upon it keep coming and encourage others to come to hear the gospel preached because the Bible makes it clear that that's God's primary means by which our souls are fed faith comes by hearing the word of God and we have to give ourselves I as a preacher have to give myself to it as well it's more difficult to listen to yourself but you have to listen to other people and you have to do something which feeds your own soul as well as feeds those that are under your preaching hopefully by God's grace so it's feed it with the best oil don't spend your life reading rubbish magazines or rubbish books that won't feed your soul nothing along with light reading with alternative readings but they're not to be the primary foodstuff for your soul and it's the same when you come to watch television when you listen to music don't let it be the kind of music where the ideology of the world infiltrates your mind there's plenty of good music that's not necessarily specifically

Christian music there's some so-called Christian music that really isn't worth listening to feed your soul with what you know is nourishing what will make you a better holier person what will make you more like Christ always ask yourself is this that I'm listening to this that I'm watching this that I'm reading this company that I'm keeping is it going to make me more like Christ is it going to contribute to my holiness is it going to make me a brighter disciple for my light to shine and that's why in this passage he says so that they may see your good works how does our light shine out well it's very obvious from that it simply says that they may see your good works we mustn't denounce good works there's a kind of species of theology that says you're saved by good works but you and

I know very well that's not what the Bible teaches but when you say that's not what the Bible teaches it doesn't mean the Bible doesn't teach the importance of good works because our practical Christianity really is what the Lord is saying will be seen by others how do you let your light shine you let your light shine by living the lifestyle and being practically in every way you can be a useful disciple of Christ never ever come to the conclusion that you have nothing to offer the kingdom of God that you don't have any talents whatsoever that the church can use there's nobody in this building that needs to say that that should say that every single one of us has been created by God with specific qualities and gifts different to other people sometimes very different to other people every single person in this building tonight has something or other by which they have been created in which they have been created for

God to use for him the world needs light you know friends sometimes we find ourselves really saying isn't it really awful how the world is and it is isn't it that dark day that we're living in and it is but then we have to actually say to ourselves why is it so dark is it just the darkness of the world that's causing it to be so dark or is it the dimness in the life of Christ's disciples of the light that God has made them to be and that they're not necessarily looking after I'm saying that to myself at the beginning of this new year I have to say to myself first and foremost and this is what Jesus is saying to us let your light shine that they may see your good works ask yourself tonight what can

I do for Jesus what must my life be that it's not at the moment if I'm not yet a disciple in the sense of truly being committed to Jesus ask yourself well what does Jesus think of me then hasn't he created me to be a light bearer for him why am I not bearing light if I'm not saved it's not his fault and all of us who are Christians and converted and know the Lord here's the challenge for this year you know it's not just a challenge it's the biggest privilege we have to be lights for God in a dark world to live for him as bright disciples we sometimes come across lights that are very attractive lights that are actually themselves designed to be the centerpiece of what you take note of but really that's not why

[34 : 02] God has made his people the light of the world it's not to draw attention to themselves it's not so that people will say well I like the appearance of that lamp or that light you lose sight you see the more ornate the light is the more wonderfully carved it is or the more whatever it is kind of light it may be chandelier whatever what you really need to keep in mind is what's the purpose of light pure and simple it's to give light it's to scatter darkness and what he's saying here is that not only may they see your good works but they may give glory to your father who is in heaven and that's the crux of it isn't it why has he made us lights why has he turned us from darkness into light why are we a city set on a hill which cannot be hidden why is he saying let your light shine before others so that they may see your good works why do we engage in good works yes of course we get benefit from it others hopefully get benefit from it but here's the primary reason that they may glorify your father who is in heaven we have to live for him we have to glorify him the very light that we are is light that must give honor and praise to his name even if people reject that light if they say

I don't want any part of that what you and I must never be and never do is let them have that justifiable reason for rejecting Christ that says you didn't show me very much about him you didn't let your light shine and I couldn't see him the world is going to be looking for all kinds of excuses why to keep opposing the gospel why not to accept its teaching why not to become part of the church why not to follow Christ never give them this reason you didn't let your light shine and I couldn't see Jesus for this year let's try as a people individually and collectively to be that city set on a hill this town needs it to be the light of the world for

Jesus and to buy out good works let people see the light that God has made us glory and thereby to bring glory to our father who is in heaven let's pray lord our god help us we pray to fulfill the terms of our discipleship indeed the terms of our creation you have made us for yourself you have created us to bring you glory and praise and honor and your restoring of us from darkness into light as that same purpose that we had in your creation of us at the beginning that we would give glory and praise to your name that you might receive honor by us lord we ask that you would make us brighter people than we are spiritually help us to hate the darkness and help us to dispel it in the way in which we live we pray that by your grace oh lord enabling us we will through this year commit ourselves as a people to be a city set on a hill to be a people that are taken note of that we have been with Jesus that we serve you that we seek to bring you the praise and honor that you are worthy of hear us now we pray for Jesus sake amen let's conclude our worship this evening singing in psalm 48a in the sing psalms that's on page 63 i have to get it right this evening i got it wrong this

morning and i apologized to the presenters who were presenting this morning when i read version b rather than version a of another psalm i ended up having to do the presenting myself so it's psalm 48a on page 63 and we're singing verses 8 to 14 through to the end of the psalm as we have heard so have we seen god's city will endure the lord almighty evermore his city keeps keeps secured and so on through to the end of the psalm as we have heard so have we seen god's as we have so have we seen god's city will endure the lord almighty evermore his city keeps secure we contemplate your steadfast love within your hands oh god our life your name your praise extends through all the earth abroad all that you do is righteous lord and Zion's joy is great and to dust and rejoice us may your judgment celebrate oh Zion walk and count our turn you every citadel so that two children yet and more our story you may tell for God the Lord who is our God forever will abide he is our God forever more and to the end our night after the benediction

I'll go to this side door this evening now may the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ the love of God the Father and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you now and ever more Amen