

“Being the Light of the World” Matthew 5:14-16

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Intro

Let's open our Bibles to Matthew chapter 5. I'm going to focus on v. 14-16, on Jesus' teaching that we are the light of the world. But I'm going to start in v. 1 to give us the context. Read Matthew 5:1-16

The world is becoming an increasingly dark place, if you haven't noticed. The pace and scale they're self destructing is actually kind of impressive. Many of us are bewildered and wondering what to do about it and how to live as a Christian during this time. The intention today, God willing, is that this passage would help us get our bearings, help us understand from a Biblical perspective what is happening around us, help us understand our part in this, and mobilize us into the right kind of action.

The solution to our civilization's moral implosion is the teaching that Jesus gave us right in this passage. We need to realize that Jesus' teaching is sufficient for the people of God in every age. He called us the light of the world. What does it mean to be the light of the world?

This is what a pastor on the Oprah Winfrey Network said about being the light of the world - “My light, my gifts, my calling, your gift, your significant joy that you bring to the earth, the unique individual that is you, this thumbprint that has never been seen before and will never be seen again. You have a light, something in your spirit, given by God that the world needs to see. Let that light shine. Don't hide your gift, don't hide your talent, don't hide your calling, but emerge, arise, and become everything you were created to be.”

If being the light of the world means to release our personal greatness or unleash our human potential, we are in even bigger trouble than we thought. To understand what Jesus really meant, we need to take a step back and look at the big picture.

What is going on out there? What is the world? The world is a dark place. The human heart is hostile to God -

Romans 8:7-8 NASB95 - 7 because the mind set on the flesh is hostile toward God; for it does not subject itself to the law of God, for it is not even able to do so, 8 and those who are in the flesh cannot please God.

Ephesians 2:1-3 NASB95 - 1 And you were dead in your trespasses and sins, 2 in which you formerly walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience. 3 Among them we too all formerly lived in the lusts of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest.

The world is not neutral, where people could take or leave God. It's a dark place where the human heart is depraved by default. “There's a lot of good in the world.” There is a lot of good and the goodness and beauty of God is evident in the world. I'm talking about the sinfulness of the human heart. Isaiah 6 - The response of humanity to the holiness of God was bare naked terror. Even those who seem righteous, when you turn over the rock there is abject unholiness.

When did this start? The fall - Cain, Noah's day; Why did this happen? Depravity; Tower of Babel, Sodom, Israel; That's what we're seeing in the world. It's the same principle at work as Noah's day, Sodom - "you're judging us?" The sinfulness of man is native to the world and it gets worse and goes on full display when society's reject the light of God's revelation. That's what's going on right now. What we're seeing right now is normal.

The Bible explains and makes sense of what we're seeing around us. The depravity we're seeing around us, the thorough rejection of God's standards in every area of our society, is well explained and well documented in Scripture. That's part of the miracle of inspiration. That's a piece of support for the idea that the Bible is the Word of God.

Jesus knows the human heart. The context of Matthew 5 assumes the world is a dark place. That is the context in which Jesus calls us the light of the world.

I. Our God-Given Role

In contrast, God is light. 1 John 1:5 NASB95 - 5 This is the message we have heard from Him and announce to you, that God is Light, and in Him there is no darkness at all. Truth, righteousness, holiness, love, faithfulness, justice, and so on. Jesus called himself the light of the world.

- John 8:12 NASB95 - 12 Then Jesus again spoke to them, saying, "I am the Light of the world; he who follows Me will not walk in the darkness, but will have the Light of life.";
- The incarnation: John 1:4, 5, 14, 18; 4 In Him was life, and the life was the Light of men. 5 The Light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it. ... 14 And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we saw His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth. ... 18 No one has seen God at any time; the only begotten God who is in the bosom of the Father, He has explained Him.
- Hebrews 1:1-3 NASB95 - 1 God, after He spoke long ago to the fathers in the prophets in many portions and in many ways, 2 in these last days has spoken to us in His Son, whom He appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the world. 3 And He is the radiance of His glory and the exact representation of His nature, and upholds all things by the word of His power.

Jesus, as God in the flesh, reveals who God is to humanity. He came into this dark world and brought God's truth and righteousness. God has revealed himself to mankind in many ways. God has a plan to redeem the world from darkness. Part of the plan is to redeem a people for himself out of the darkness to glorify himself.

God redeemed Israel - [Deu 4:5-8 NASB95] 5 "See, I have taught you statutes and judgments just as the LORD my God commanded me, that you should do thus in the land where you are entering to possess it. 6 "So keep and do [them,] for that is your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the peoples who will hear all these statutes and say, 'Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people.' 7 "For what great nation is there that has a god so near to it as is the LORD our God whenever we call on Him? 8 "Or what great nation is

there that has statutes and judgments as righteous as this whole law which I am setting before you today?

God redeems us: [1Pe 2:9 NASB95] 9 But you are A CHOSEN RACE, A royal PRIESTHOOD, A HOLY NATION, A PEOPLE FOR [God's] OWN POSSESSION, so that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; [Eph 5:8 NASB95] 8 for you were formerly darkness, but now you are Light in the Lord; walk as children of Light [Act 26:17-18 NASB95] 17 rescuing you from the [Jewish] people and from the Gentiles, to whom I am sending you, 18 to open their eyes so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the dominion of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who have been sanctified by faith in Me.'

This is part of God's plan to glorify himself in the world. To bring his light into the darkness. This is what it means to be the light of the world - not releasing our inner greatness, there's no emerging going on here, but to be God's people in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom we shine as lights.

This identity is based on objective reality. We aren't the light of the world because we do light-of-the-world things. Disciples hadn't done anything when Jesus said this. We are the light of the world by virtue of the objective reality that God has saved us and made us his people. He has given us his word and his Spirit.

Let that sink in: We represent God, the Creator of the universe, to the world that doesn't know God. And we are the only ones who have this role in the world. It's us. This does not lead us to be self-righteous: We used to be part of the darkness.

If you don't know him today, the door is open to come out of the darkness and into his light. Just turn from your own ways and come back to God, it's that simple. God made a way for you to be reconciled to God through Jesus' death and resurrection, so you don't have to stay far from God, you don't have to stay in your sins. Jesus can make you free and make you a child of God. We have to own this identity. This is the basis from which we should interact with and relate to the world.

Politics: Many of you relate to the increasing wickedness around us in terms of a political identity. You look to Jordan Peterson and Ben Shapiro for solutions and wisdom when it comes to the problems we are facing in society. They don't have a basis from which to solve our problems. It's about as good as atheism. Their worldview is basically secular humanism, and there is no foundation for concepts like justice, truth, and morals.

We can: Vote for people who are a close match to our values. Work with those who share some values. Join the fight for our civilization. But we are not part of their tribe. We may end up participating in, getting involved in, responding to things in a way we shouldn't. We should think of ourselves like the angel who came to Joshua. And when Joshua asked the angel which side

he was on, the angel said, neither. We're on God's side. We hold the left and the right to the standards of God's Word.

A secular conservatism is just as bad as a secular liberalism. We see history bare that out. To the increasing darkness we're facing, conservatism is not the answer, the word of God is the answer, and we're the only ones who have it. We are the children of God and anything else we are must be slave to that master identity. We are the light of the world. We are the children of God in a world that rejects and hates God. Remember that God has intentions for us as lights in this world.

II. Our Mandated Responsibility

In V. 14 there are two straightforward metaphors: Cities are large and hard to hide (unless you're David Copperfield). Put it in a prominent place it will be impossible to hide. A light is meant to be shown, not put under a basket - for God's glory, part of God's plan.

God warns us against hiding it. Why does he bring this up? He knows our tendencies. There are common reasons for wanting to hide our light - fear of man, desire to fit in, avoiding rejection, want that promotion. Don't hide it, show it.

What if we hide it? Luke 8:15-18 NASB95 - 15 "But the seed in the good soil, these are the ones who have heard the word in an honest and good heart, and hold it fast, and bear fruit with perseverance. 16 "Now no one after lighting a lamp covers it over with a container, or puts it under a bed; but he puts it on a lampstand, so that those who come in may see the light. 17 "For nothing is hidden that will not become evident, nor anything secret that will not be known and come to light. 18 "So take care how you listen; for whoever has, to him more shall be given; and whoever does not have, even what he thinks he has shall be taken away from him."

In the Parable of talents, the man who hides his talent is thrown into outer darkness where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth. It's meant to be shown.

How should we let it show? Live out our identity with our actions and words; this is both active/intentional and done in everyday life. "See your good works" not just about works. Jesus knows there will be a life change upon salvation. The intention is for them to connect your Christianity with your life. If we never say anything, they won't be able to do that.

Jesus is our example of what light does.

Light illuminates: He taught people, corrected misconceptions, brought clarity. And he did it exactly in the areas where they needed it at the time. In the Sermon on the Mount, for example, he straightened out areas where the Law of God was being twisted to sinful ends. We should do the same.

With our lives we can show them God's design for marriage and for raising our kids. We can show them what it looks like to make things right when we mess up. We can communicate godly masculinity and femininity to the world. We can show them what beauty is by the art we create.

With our words we should tell people that God doesn't accept and affirm whatever lifestyle they choose. He loves us too much for that. He isn't there to help you reach your full potential. We're here to worship him. There are people in our culture who don't know God at all. Illuminate and show people who God is.

Light guides: Jesus guided people to God - "I am the way. No one comes to the Father but through me." Likewise we guide people to Christ through the Gospel. We should be active in evangelism.

Light awakens: Jesus awakened sinners by his interactions with them. The woman at the well in John 4 is a great example. He wafted the scent of righteousness before people's noses so they would be stirred out of their indifference toward God.

We can wear our Christianity on our sleeve. You all have relatives who spout forth their opinions about everything, so why not be very open about your Christian opinions? Insert those casually into conversation.

Light exposes. Jesus exposed people's sins, especially the ones who thought they were righteous. His confrontations with the religious leaders are good examples. Likewise, it's ok for us to make clear to people that what they're doing is wrong before God. Some people are hesitant to do this. The reason given is "why should we hold non Christians to Christian standards?" I just want to remind you that they are being judged by that standard. The least we could do is tell them they're in danger of God's wrath for these things. Again, this is something that Jesus, the prophets, the apostles all did. [John the Baptist] We are in that role. They have to know who this holy God is that they've offended so they can know that they should quit their own ways and come back to God.

This is especially necessary in the areas of our society that are committing horrendous acts of rebellion against God. Injustice in government, teaching children perverse things in school, drag queen story hour, we have a responsibility to speak the truth in these situations. We know this kind of thing brings God's judgment. They are in big trouble with God and we don't want them to perish.

Love solves the problem of how to engage in these conversations tactfully and with grace. 1 Corinthians 13:4-6 NASB95 - 4 Love is patient, love is kind ... love does not brag and is not arrogant, 5 does not act unbecomingly [obnoxiously, rudely]; it does not seek its own, ... 6 does not rejoice in unrighteousness, but rejoices with the truth;

A hymn we sing in our house includes this second verse. Commander of the morning come command our hearts we pray, renew our minds and in your power we'll live for you today. While godless men fulfill their own desires with darkened minds, we sons of light and sons of day must work while there is time.

There's work to do here. We need to own our identity as the light of the world and openly show the truth and righteousness of God in every way we know how. They need it out there.

III. Our Guaranteed Results

V. 16 This is not a "might" or "maybe" - the English translation is a little misleading. The grammar here is telling us that the intended result or the purpose of letting our light shine is glorifying God. "that they would see your good works."

There are two types of results that glorify God. Misconception: If Christians had been doing it right, we would have won the world.

When others respond with hostility they often make accusations, mock us, flaunt their sin, try to silence us, or force us to participate. Why do they do this? Because they're convicted of their sins. Just like in the story of Cain and Abel.

John 3:19-20 NASB95 - 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. 20 "For everyone who does evil hates the Light, and does not come to the Light for fear that his deeds will be exposed.

They will glorify God by this hostility - 1 Peter 2:12 NASB95 - 12 Keep your behavior excellent among the Gentiles, so that in the thing in which they slander you as evildoers, they may because of your good deeds, as they observe them, glorify God in the day of visitation.

They may also glorify God by their repentance. Be patient, we don't know what God will do with people. Don't write people off. Don't write our society off.

What's going to happen? We can't predict what God will do with his light. We could see revival; we could fall completely in judgment. It's up to God. We should dump the light for all we're worth and let it do its work one way or another.

Final Answer

We are the light of the world. God has redeemed us from the darkness and given us himself in Christ. We are the only ones in the world who have God. We must live out this identity openly and boldly.

We have work to do. Let's not lose heart.