

The Light of the World

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Well, after the wonderful music, it's hard to believe that we are only now coming to the highlight of our time together because a highlight is always when we open the word of God. As much as we love the music and are grateful for the singing of our choir, the highlight is always the word of God because it is there where God speaks to us directly and with authority out of his word. So we are very delighted to have you here with us today as we open the Scriptures together and return to Matthew 5 for our continued study of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount and I invite you to turn to Matthew 5 with me here this morning.

We come to a text today that brings us to such transcendent realms of truth once again. It is very important for you to understand that what we are about to embark on and what we are about to see over the next hour, is something of great and profound fundamental importance that goes to the very purpose of existence of the church, the very reason that God has his people in this world and those of us who are his people, who belong to the Lord Jesus Christ, need to understand the whole reason that God has a people that serve him in the world. You know, we say this but probably not often enough and as we gather together around God's word Sunday by Sunday, it's very important for us to realize something very fundamental, very significant, something that is defining in its force and in its truth: Christianity makes an exclusive truth claim. Jesus Christ makes an exclusive truth claim. He said, "I am the way, the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me." Scripture says that "there is salvation in no one else for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men by which we must be saved." In fact, turn to the book of Galatians 1 to see this reinforced as well. The exclusivity of the Gospel, of the true Gospel, and the fact that there is none other.

The Apostle Paul opened his letter to the Galatians warning them, chastising them as they were straying away from justification by faith, he said in verse 6, "I am amazed that you are so quickly deserting Him who called you by the grace of Christ, for a different gospel; which is really not another; only there are some who are disturbing you and want to distort the gospel of Christ. But even if we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel contrary to what we have preached to you, he is to be accursed! As we have said before, so I say again now, if any man is preaching to you a gospel contrary to what you received, he is to be accursed!" The point being is that there is only one true Gospel. It is exclusive. And only the biblical Gospel of Jesus Christ is the truth that leads to God.

Everything else is false. Everything else is a lie. Even if it is said in the name of Jesus, even if it is said in the name of the Gospel, there must be truth to it because it cannot be contradicted. The God of the Bible is the only true God, Jesus Christ is his only Son and he is the only Savior of mankind, and only by repentance and faith in Christ can you be saved from your sins. There is no other way. There are no rituals that a church can tell you to do that can save you. There is no other God. Any God that posits itself against the God of the Bible is a false God by definition and is simply a satanic misrepresentation. It's so important for you to understand that, beloved, to realize that the Bible makes an exclusive truth claim and therefore we are not pluralistic in our teaching. We say that there is one God, one Christ, one Gospel, one salvation, and everything else is false. It's so important for you to understand that. The Gospel is the only message of salvation to all men in the world.

Now, that exclusive truth claim helps us understand and gives us a context as we approach our passage here in Matthew 5, beginning in verse 13, if you will, and I'll read verses 13 through 16 in what is about to follow. Matthew 5:13-16 says, Jesus speaking to his disciples says,

13 "You are the salt of the earth; but if the salt has become tasteless, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled under foot by men. 14 You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden; 15 nor does anyone light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house. 16 Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven."

Now, as we come back to the Sermon on the Mount having been away from it for a few weeks now with the intervening of the holidays and so forth, let me just tell you by way of reminder, by way of review, perhaps especially for those of you that are visiting with us this morning. Welcome, we're so glad you're with us. Here in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus Christ is defining what true repentance looks like. He said in Matthew 4:17, if you would look over there, as kind of a summary introduction to the content of the preaching of Jesus, Matthew quotes this statement from Jesus where he said, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." We understand from Scripture that when the Bible calls men to salvation, it calls them to trust in Christ, that's true, but that trust in Christ is accompanied and joined with a repentance from sin. In order to come to Christ, you must realize that you are a sinner and repent of that sin, turn away from it and bring yourself under the Lordship of Jesus Christ who alone can save you.

So Jesus says, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand," and in the arrangement of Matthew's Gospel, he gives us this lengthy sermon from Jesus in Matthew chapters 5 through 7 that basically tells us what repentance looks like. It is an exposition. It is an explanation of the meaning of repentance. So in the verses that we've looked at already, verses 3 through 12, you get a sense of what the character is that repentance produces. You get an idea, you get an up-close look at the specifics of how repentance plays out in

the life of a disciple. And it's not there in verse 3, "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." The fact that we realize that we are spiritually bankrupt, that we have nothing good to offer to God on which he would accept us, or even worse, that he would be obligated to us. We realize that we have nothing to offer to God; that we are sinners who have rebelled against him; that his word is perfect and we are not; that his character is holy and we are not; and therefore we come to him as beggars who ask for mercy rather than as righteous people who expect and demand to enter into heaven as a result of the things that we've done or the lives that we've lived. That's fundamental. That is basic in terms of what repentance is.

Now, in keeping with the sense of exclusivity that we opened and framed this message with, I want you to understand something and remind you, those of you that have been with us, that Jesus throughout those Beatitudes, verses 3 through 10, 3 through 12 depending on how you want to define them, you'll see that he says in verse 3 for example, look at the text with me, he says, "theirs is the kingdom of heaven"; verse 4, "they shall be comforted"; verse 5, "they shall inherit the earth," and on it goes. As we've said many times, as you read through the Beatitudes, it's making an exclusive statement that says, "These people and these people alone are the ones who belong to the kingdom of heaven. No one else belongs to the kingdom of heaven except for those who are broken in spirit and mourn over their sins," and that that produces a certain kind of inner man in their lives. Sure there are a lot of people that claim to be Christians but they're not and if you would just examine their lives, or if they would examine their own heart, they would realize that they're not confessing sin, they're not broken over sin, they don't even care about it, they just blithely name the name of Jesus.

And at the end of Matthew 7, just to reinforce these things, look at Matthew 7:21, the exclusivity of this is such a needed beacon of light into the dark confusing world of spiritual teaching in which we live. We need to realize that not all paths lead to God. There is one path that leads to God and there are many that lead to hell and Jesus says in Matthew 7:21, he says, "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven will enter." The point being is that it's not simply naming the name of Jesus, it's not making simply a verbal confession apart from a heart transformation, a heart commitment to this one that you call Lord. So there is so much exclusivity that is wrapped around the true Gospel.

Now as we come to our text here today, Matthew 5:13-16, Jesus is adding to that sense of exclusivity of which he teaches and he says something about his disciples. He says something about, remember, he is flowing from these Beatitudes that he has taught, having described the character of those who were truly repentant, having described those who truly belonged to him, now he says that, "There is something unique about you. There is something exclusive about being my disciple. There is something about you that is different from everybody else in the world." And it goes to the very purpose and the reason of our existence.

He says that in verse 13, "You are the salt of the earth." Again, it's emphatic. "You are the salt of the earth. You and nobody else are the salt of the earth." Salt in the ancient

time was used to hinder physical decay in meat and Jesus says that, "You alone are the salt that hinders spiritual decay in the world." We looked at that verse last time we were in the Sermon on the Mount and so we won't spend any more time on it. He gives a metaphor to his disciples to give them a sense of their purpose, their mission, the place that they have in the world order. And for those of us that truly know Christ, without even being aware of it, without being conscious of it, without trying to, stated differently, those who have repented and are working out the characteristics of the Beatitudes, those are the people that Jesus is alluding to. Jesus says, "The people who have repented, who have the spiritual character marked by the attitudes, it's people like that that alone are the salt of the earth. Only they hinder spiritual decay. Everyone else is part of the problem. Everyone else is in the darkness of the world, is in that spiritual decay," and Jesus says, "You're the only ones that make this kind of impact."

He goes on now in verse 14 and gives another metaphor to help us understand our purpose and it helps us understand that there is an exclusivity about it. In verse 14 he says, "You are the light of the world." It's emphatic. "You yourselves, you are the ones of which I speak. I'm not speaking of others. You are the ones who are the light of the world." So Jesus gives these metaphors to help us understand, and here's where something really basic, so fundamental is at place, for us to understand the reason that we exist as the people of God. Jesus says he has raised us up, he has saved us so that we could have an impact on the world that is like salt, that hinders decay. The world would run much more quickly into darkness if it were not for the restraining presence of the church, of the people who belong to God. The holiness of God's people radiates out, you might say, and has a restraining impact on the sin of the world around us. Through the preaching of the Gospel, through the teaching of Scripture, through the quiet humble lives of people just like you, there is this effect that takes place even though we can't see it. Now, what Jesus says is he gives us, as he goes into verse 14 he gives us another metaphor by which to understand the purpose that we serve in the world. He says, look at it there in verse 14 with me, he says, "You are the light of the world." He says, "My disciples act like light in the midst of the world's spiritual darkness," and he says, "You and you alone can serve that purpose. You and you alone do serve that purpose."

So, beloved, we'll talk about, we'll unpack this a little bit more. We're just kind of giving an introductory summary of it here. Christians alone are the light of the world in a way that I'll explain. It's a secondary sense but Christians alone are the light of the world. No one else can serve this purpose. Think about it this way: you saw at the start the exclusivity of the Gospel, right? We defined that. We looked at that. And it's only the people who have been born again who have that truth and that is the only saving message that the world can hear, everything else just leads them into further darkness. So what Jesus is telling us is that by saving us, he has given us a purpose that no one else can serve. There is no government that can proclaim the message of salvation. There is no other teacher that does not believe the Bible, there is no system of religion that can do what Christians do. Only Christians can serve the purpose of actually bringing the truth to the world because everyone else is in darkness. So as Christians, speaking corporately, speaking broadly about the people of God in the world, Christians are the light of the world.

Wasn't it a Christian, think about it in your own life, think about it this way: wasn't it a Christian somewhere along the way that somehow introduced truth to you? Wasn't it a pastor or a parent or a sibling or a friend, a classmate, that for the first time started bringing truth to you and it started to open your mind and you started to understand? It wasn't a government official that did that. It wasn't a policeman who stopped you and said, "Here, let me give you the light"; he gave you a ticket maybe but not the light that could save your soul. So even in our own lives, we understand something about that, that there was something about the testimony of a Christian, the life of a Christian, that awakened us to our darkness. They had light. Many of you would have a testimony that said, "I knew a Christian and I knew he had something that I didn't have," right? You knew that. You could just tell. Well, it was because you were in darkness and they had light in using the metaphor that Jesus uses.

So unlike others in the world, unlike anything else in the world, Christians have the truth and that is a noble position to have. It is also a position of responsibility to have. It is a privilege and it is a responsibility and that's what Jesus is trying to help us understand as he teaches us here in verses 14 through 16. That exclusive position comes with great responsibility.

So here's what we're going to do here this morning as we look in the passage in more detail, we're just going to look at the role that we have and to look at the responsibility that we have. Point 1 if you're taking notes, let's talk about the role that the disciples of Christ have. The role. And here's why this metaphor of light is so important. The Bible teaches that the world is in darkness, the whole world was lost in the darkness of sin, the hymn writer said, and Scripture makes this abundantly plain. Scripture teaches that men are slaves to sin; that they are under the domination of the devil; that they are under the wrath of God; that they are dead in sin and in trespasses; and that they are without hope in the world. It is not just if you think about a metaphor as a word picture, it's not just that they are dead, they are in a casket and they have been buried and the vault has been sealed. There is no way out for someone who does not know Christ. You cannot get out of that condition on your own. And men, Jesus said they are like living corpses, they are like men who are walking dead, they reject the truth. When they hear the truth, they reject it because as Jesus said in John 3, "they love darkness more than truth." So the position of men in sin is awful. It is darkness. Jesus through his Apostle Paul says in Romans 3:12, "there is none righteous, not even one. There is none who does good."

So the Bible presents a picture of man not as someone walking around carrying a spark of divinity in his heart, not as someone who has light within him and he only needs to let that light out. That's not the picture that Scripture gives of men at all. Scripture pictures men in a dark room that has no light, that has no door, that has no windows, that has no way out. That's the picture of men in sin and that's why, beloved, that's why we treasure so much, that's why there is such great value in who Christ is and what Christ said about himself. Against a black backdrop of the deadness and darkness of the world, Jesus Christ said this in John 8:12, he said, "I am the Light of the world; he who follows Me will not walk in the darkness, but will have the Light of life." Christ comes and says, "I alone am

the Light of the world." Where men are bound in sin, Christ alone is the pure and holy one. Where men are dead to God, Christ is alive to God and, indeed, he is God himself. Where men could only try to work their way to God and fail miserably in the end and fall into perdition and destruction of an eternal nature, Christ says, "I can save you out of that. I am the Savior of the world." He is the Light that can bring people out of their darkness. He is the Light that can awaken them that they are even in darkness. He is the Light of the world. He is the only Light in the world.

That has implications. That means that when you come to saving faith in Christ, as Christ works and saves a people out of their sin and as we share in that life of his, it means that we carry, in a sense you could say we carry reflected light. It's not that you and I are primary light in the world. It's not that you and I are the light in the same way that Christ is. But Christ has saved us out of that darkness, has put light, as it were, in our heart, and as a result of that we carry a light to the world that comes from Christ. And it is in that sense that we are the light of the world. It is in that secondary sense, bearing a light that comes from the primary source who is Christ himself.

So, beloved, as Christians, as the people of God, what is the purpose of the people of God? What is the significance of the people of God? Well, we understand, first of all, that there is a great distinction between the world and the people of God. The world is in darkness and we function as light to them. The world is dead and we are alive. Christ who is bodily in heaven now lives through his people, through the indwelling Holy Spirit, and as it were, he shines through his people. He manifests light through his people, through the teaching of God's word, through the proclamation of the Gospel, even through the imperfect holiness of the lives that his people live. Beloved, the purpose of the people of God, the reason that we exist as Christians, is that we might be vessels, that we might display the truth and power of God to a world that is dead in lies and in darkness. That's why we exist. God uses his people to testify to men about his exclusive truth and he exclusively uses his people to do that.

Now, men may close their eyes by which we mean men may reject it, you might shine a flashlight at somebody but they close their eyes and put their hands over it and the light doesn't penetrate, but that's not because the light isn't shining, it's because it's a willful rejection of the truth. And that is the typical response, you might say, but do you understand that that does not diminish the reality of who we are and the purpose that we serve. The truth of the matter is that while some men may close their eyes, others will heed the witness, others will receive that light as God works in their hearts and that light will be that which points them to the secondary light of our words and our witness, the secondary light will point them to the primary source who can save their souls. So, beloved, even though we are walking about in the world, we're not of it. In fact, we have a distinct purpose. We should think about ourselves as having a distinction from the world. We've been saved out of it, for one thing. Our destiny is different from the destiny of the world. The world will plunge into hell, we will be raised up to new life in Christ and so we have a distinction in destination. And while we are here, while you and I are here in this world, there is a distinct purpose laid upon us by our Lord to do that which no one else can do. It is the reason that we exist.

And notice as Jesus speaks, look back at verse 14 with me, Matthew 5, notice that as Jesus speaks, he opens up with a declarative statement. He is speaking about a reality that exists. This is not a command in verse 14 but rather a description. This is a statement of reality from Christ and he says, "You are the light of the world." This is who you are by nature. It is who you are by definition. It is who we are because it is what Christ has saved us to be and who he makes us to be. You are the light of the world. And what Jesus does after having made that statement is he gives a couple of illustrations to help us understand what it is like and what it means.

He says there in verse 14, he says, "You are the light of the world," and as it were, he says, "let Me illustrate this for you now in terms of what that looks like." He says, "a city on a hill cannot be hidden." What he's doing is he is explaining what it is like for his people to be the light of the world and how that works. And in the ancient days, they would have understood this. Ancient towns were often built of white limestone in a way that when the sun shone on them in the day, they gleamed because the light was reflecting off of them; as the sun bounced off the white buildings, there was a display that could not be missed. At night as the residents of the city lit up their lamps, shining forth from the city, the collective glow of the lamps of the city from the countryside, you'd see that and you couldn't miss it. There was too much light. It couldn't be avoided. It was there and Jesus says, "That can't be hidden. That effect cannot be stopped." Light resonates against the darkness in a way that is visible and evident. He's not talking about ancient architecture here, he's talking about spiritual truth that helps us understand what it means to be his people and what the impact is, what the surprising impact is of belonging to Christ.

You see, beloved, when Christ saves a people and works faithfulness in their heart and when we bear witness to Christ through the teaching of his word, when you bear witness to Christ in your private testimonies, in your private evangelistic opportunities, when you just live a faithful life against the background of the unfaithful rejecting lives of the world, it stands out and you can't miss it. The contrast is too great. The difference between light and darkness is such that it cannot be hidden and what Jesus is saying is, "That's what it's like when people repent and develop the kind of character that is described in the Beatitudes, that has a display that is made to the world that cannot be avoided." That's why the world tried to silence Christians in the past and still do to this day in other areas, and try to exterminate them and kill them and imprison them in order to shut up the light, in order to stifle it, in order to stop it. Why did they do that? Because the light was obviously distinct and it was a threat to them and so they tried to snuff it out. That's why that happens. You see, by very nature, cities like that could not be hidden and what Jesus is saying is in a very profound way, he says, "By very nature, who My people are cannot be hidden."

And Jesus goes on and makes a similar point in the next verse in Matthew 5:15. Look at it with me. Again, he's giving illustrations, he's giving examples to help us to understand how we fit in the order of things. There is this world and there is this order to it, so to speak, there is darkness and sin and Satan and how do you as a Christian fit into that?

Verse 15, Jesus says, "nor does anyone light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house." What's the point of a lamp? You say, "Well, are you kidding? Is that serious? Is that actually a question to be answered?" A lamp gives light. That's its purpose. That's what it does and Jesus says, "So when you light a lamp, you wouldn't go and just put a basket over it to hide the lamp light. That would be ridiculous. The whole point of the lamp is to illuminate the room." Understand by purpose, that's what a lamp does. What Jesus is saying is that by divine purpose and divine call, the purpose of his people is to be light to the world, not to hide that; that in the midst of that darkness, we would be light.

So, beloved, stepping back now. We've said the first point here is: what is our role in the world? Our role is to be the light that he has already made us to be. And in this, my friends, in this Jesus is explaining to us why we exist, why are you here in this world as a Christian. And when you work out the implications of what this passage is saying, what Jesus is saying here, you realize that there is something really deep and profound and fundamental that shapes the whole way that you view your perspective on why you are in this world.

Listen, and there are times where I deplore the weakness of my ability to think and speak and this is one of them because what this Scripture is leading us into is so profound and deep and yet it is so simple that when I say it, at first it might sound to you like this is so simplistic and I fear that my own inability is going to hinder your ability to grasp what this means for your lives. The nice thing in my position is that I'm not alone. The Spirit of God helps us in our weakness. The Spirit of God helps you to understand, helps you to see and to apply in a way that goes beyond my meager human ability.

So let me just in a moment of unwise boldness maybe, say this: I was at a church yesterday and I looked into their bookstore. It was closed and so I just looked into it and you just try to see the titles that are on the shelves there, and it was all so completely man-centered it made me sick. "How you can be content. How you can be happy." All about how something from the Bible can make you feel better about life is basically the sense of it. And the whole tenor of that, even if there are good things in those individual titles, that's not the point, the whole tenor of the display is to say that Jesus has something for you that will make life better for you in this world. That was the whole tenor of it. There is no denying that that's what the whole point of it was. Now, I want to tell you that the reality of Christianity is completely different from that. God did not save you primarily so that you could have a good life here and now. And if that's your perspective of what Christianity is, you need to go back to the Bible and start all over. That's all wrong. That's all wrong. This isn't primarily about making you have a contented, peaceful, easy life in this world during your 70 years. God saved you so that you would belong to him; that you would be a servant of his. He saved you to be light in the dark world; that you would have a purpose that transcended your own existence. You don't exist in order to serve yourself or your own purposes, you exist, beloved, as a Christian, you exist to serve Christ. And a lot of the time in his goodness and mercy and his kindness and his overwhelming grace to us, that does give us a comfortable life but that's incidental. That's not the purpose. That's confusing something secondary and turning a

side gift into the reason that Christ exists for you and missing the whole point. Other Scriptures make this so clear. God saved you, let me say it again: God saved you so that you would belong to him and that you would be a servant of his purposes.

Other Scriptures make this so clear. Look at John 15. I want to look at about four passages to just make this clear to you. John 15 beginning in verse 16, for example. John 15:16, words from Christ which help set things straight in our minds. Jesus said, "You did not choose Me but I chose you." Wow. Alright. That changes everything right there. Jesus is speaking primarily to his disciples right there but the overflow goes to those of us 2,000 years later. Jesus says, "You did not choose Me but I chose you, and appointed you that," here's the purpose, the reason that he chose us, the reason that he makes us his people. This is a purpose clause, in the Greek, hina, this, for this reason, in order that, "you would go and bear fruit." Jesus says, "I made you my disciple, I chose you to be My disciple and I had a purpose in doing that, that you would go and bear the fruit that I have for you to bear." Not that you would live for yourself but that you would live for Christ who saved you and bear fruit on his behalf; that you would be productive in your life in your service to Christ in whatever realm he gives to you. Whether it's as a mother, whether it's as a businessman, whether it's as a missionary, whatever the case may be, the roles that we actually live out are secondary to recognizing that we are given this life and we are given salvation in order to live for the purposes of God in our lives, not to maximize every dollar or piece of happiness that we can get out of it. That's not why you exist. This is completely redefining of understanding what you do and why you're here.

Jesus says in verse 16, look at it again with me, "I chose you, and appointed you that you would go and bear fruit." And your response to that is to step back and say, "Lord, what would be the fruit that You would bring out of this meager little sapling of a tree that You've made me to be? What fruit would You have come out of my life with the abilities and the talents and the resources that You have given me? How would I use those to serve You?" And in the context of a local body like this, and what a blessing it is to be able to say this, Jesus says that part of that in verse 17, he says, "This I command you, that you love one another." And lest you think I'm skipping the verse deliberately, "go and bear fruit, and that your fruit would remain, so that whatever you ask of the Father in My name He may give to you." "God, let me be fruitful. God help me be fruitful. I ask You to help me be fruitful and to carry out the purpose of Christ for which I have been appointed." And part of that fruit in verse 17, "This I command you," Jesus said, "that you love one another." So here we are gathered together, the people of God with the purpose of God and part of that purpose is to love one another within the body. That's why, beloved, church unity, church purity is so important. That's why what you do with your faithful lives and being a part of the life of a local church is so vital, it's because this is the context in which we love one another and Jesus says that's part of the fruit that he intends us to bear for him is to love one another as part of the fruit.

Turn over to Acts 1:8, again just wanting you to see these purpose clauses and these statements of the reason that we exist. Acts 1:8, speaking to his disciples after the resurrection, Jesus said, Acts 1:8, he said, "you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea

and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth." What's the reason you exist? To be a witness to Christ; that that would be a defining central focus of the people of God that flows over into the way that it plays out in our individual lives. You exist to bear fruit for Christ. You exist to be a witness to him.

Look at Ephesians 2 and there is kind of a cumulative impact of these things, kind of, wouldn't say randomly chosen but Ephesians 2, just a collective testimony of Scripture interpreting Scripture for us. Ephesians 2:10, "we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them." God saved you, had prepared in advance a life for you to live that would be a manifestation of good works to the glory of his name. Why did he do that? So that you would walk in it. So that you would actually live out and fulfill the purposes for which God saved you.

One last one in Titus, kind of choosing verses that we've already taught on in the past. Titus 2:14 and we'll try to tie all of this up together here in just a moment. In Titus 2:14, Scripture says that Christ Jesus "gave Himself for us to redeem us from every lawless deed, and," purpose, "to purify for Himself a people for His own possession, zealous for good works."

Beloved, what I ask you to do, I ask you in love, Scripture commands you to think this way about yourself and about the purpose of your life, even if this is coming to you at the later end of life and you don't have as much time as you would like in order to live it out. Start now. Start now rather than regretting lost years. Start now and say, "Okay, what's ahead of me now?" Christian, understand that Christ saved you and placed you under new ownership; that he owns you and that he possesses you. He owns you by right of purchase. He paid a price for you with his life, with his shed blood. So when he saved you, he saved you to own you so that you would belong to him and that you would serve his purposes in life, not your own. And to the extent that there is a difference in purpose, a difference in agenda, as you grow in Christ, "I want this in life," but God directs you in a different way, day by day, moment by moment you submit to that, you conform to that. You say, "I had my desires and plans but God has worked in my life differently. I accept that. I embrace that. I love that. I will serve Him in the realm that He has given to me instead of the one that He didn't. I embrace the life that I have rather than resenting the fact that I didn't have the one that I wanted at the start," you say to yourself.

You see, beloved, go back to this idea of possession. He saved us so that we would be a people for his own possession. So you belong to him in order to serve his purposes. You are surrendered to the Lordship of Christ as a result of your salvation and that means that you need the word of God and help from other believers in God to help you to understand what in your individual life it means to live out those purposes and to be the light that he has appointed you to be. But the whole mindset, you see, Jesus is cultivating a mindset in you, a way to think about your relationship to him and to the world. And it utterly divests you of the intrinsic selfishness that we are all born into this world about and living on the "me" planet and it's all about me and what I want and that's not the case as a Christian.

You say, "I exist for Christ and I exist to fulfill His purposes. And I am apart from the world in order to be a testimony to the world and that's why I exist."

Now, so, talk about some wrong perspectives here in response to that, the perspective that God just exists in order to give you health and wealth, that God just has a wonderful purpose for your life and that's why he saved you so that it could be about you. That's appalling. That's wrong. That's not right. It's incorrect to think that way. There is another sense and you can expose true from false Christians with this little thing. Some people will claim to be Christians but they refuse to talk about their faith. They say, "It's just a private matter between me and God. I'm just going to go out in nature and I'll worship God by myself." No. No, God saved you to serve his purposes in the world. So you have that God saved you in order to have this influence in the world that is like salt, that's like light and that that's why you exist. Not so that you could have a happy sense of contentment in your own heart undisturbed by the world or people around you. That's not Christianity, that's selfishness.

Our dear brother, Martin Lloyd Jones, 1909-1981, a medical doctor and a great creature of God's word to whom I owe so very much said this and I quote, he says, "The true Christian does not even desire to hide his light. He sees how ridiculous it is to claim to be a Christian and yet deliberately try to hide the fact. A man who truly realizes what it means to be a Christian understands that God has done this in order that he may influence others. The true Christian is a man who cannot conceal it. Not only that, he does not desire to conceal it because, he says, ultimately the purpose of it all is that I might be a light to the lost." The purpose of your salvation in part is to be light to the world. That means you don't hate the non-Christians around you. It doesn't mean that you withdraw from them. It doesn't mean that we live out our Christian lives in isolation. It means that we live in fidelity to Christ and understand that that's going to manifest itself in life as we go about life in this world, and the purpose is not for you to get popularity or prosperity in the process of that happening. The purpose is fulfilled when you have that testimony to those around you and sometimes it brings opposition and hatred. Jesus talked about that in verses 10 through 12. Sometimes it brings blessing. But, beloved, all of the consequences are incidental to embracing and understanding the purpose. "Christ saved me, appointed a life for me to live that would manifest His light in the years that He gives me to a dark and dying world around me." That's why you exist. That's why we exist. As the people of God, broadly, universally, it's why this church exists corporately. Not to fulfill people's social calendars. Not to just give self-help groups to everybody. The purpose is greater than that. The purpose is to be light, to reflect the Light of the world to the world to the glory of that Light. That's the role that we have.

Turn back to Matthew 5 and we'll wrap this up. With the role, with that purpose comes a responsibility. The role is that you are a light, to be the light, the responsibility is to shine the light. To shine the light, that's the responsibility. And at the end of verse 16, Jesus finally gets to the command. Having said, "You are the light," now he says in verse 16, "Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven." And Jesus goes on later to explain that this is not about making yourself known in a way that attracts praise to you. He says in Matthew

6:1, in fact, look over at that with me. I look forward to the time in three or four months when we get to this verse. Jesus said in verse 1, "Beware of practicing your righteousness before men to be noticed by them; otherwise you have no reward with your Father who is in heaven." So Jesus isn't telling us when he says, "Let your light shine before the world," he's not telling us to do it in a way that attracts attention to self, rather it is the simplicity of a faithful life that is devoted to truth and obedience to truth that gives this natural overflow. Like the city on the hill, it can't help but give the witness. It can't help but be on display. That's what the character of the Beatitudes leads to. Jesus says, "Since you are the light of the world, shine the light to the world." Since you belong to Christ, reflect Christ. Others will glorify God because of your life.

One writer said this – remember, the context is life in the Beatitudes – one writer said this, "Men will recognize disciples and for some, they will come to praise the Father in the process." The teaching, the evangelism, the holiness of life speaks from a position of light to those who are in darkness and God will use that in some for them to say, "Oh, I am in darkness. I need to come to that light." And as they do that, as men come to Christ in salvation, they glorify your Father who is in heaven and they forget the channel, in the words of the hymn writer, "May they forget the channel and see only the true Light, and let my reflected light and my name be forgotten in the process." As long as the purpose of God is fulfilled and some in the world come to the light through our testimony and witness, that's why we exist.

Beloved, there is something very encouraging about this, something very humbling about it. God saved us in order to use us. There is a divine meaning to your life as a Christian even if you're living it out in a fairly small realm where not too many people seem to notice. There is a divine purpose to that. There is an eternal meaning to that. This is what God has for you to do even if it seems like, "I don't know if anybody is realizing this." You can just relax and say, "Okay, I'm not the most famous Christian in the world. I don't even like to be up front," some would say. "I'm just quietly living my life for Christ." And what the Scripture would say, "Yes. Precisely." And as you do that, and as you develop godly character, as you walk with Christ, you are manifesting light. You are shining light that is fulfilling the divine purpose and the divine reason that you exist because God saved you to use you. And the underlining purpose is the same for all of us even though the roles and the resources that we bring to the task may be vastly different.

So let me ask three questions as I close here. First of all to all of you: do you have a sense that you are distinct from the world? Because that is fundamental to this passage. Jesus says you are the salt of the earth, you are the light of the world. Salt, earth, light, world, separate, distinct, one having an influence on the other. Are you conscious, my friend, are you conscious of a sense that as you go through this world saying, "You know, I just don't quite fit here. The things that the world loves and the things that the world teaches, I just don't abide in that. That's not me. I find myself drawn to Christ and drawn to Scripture and a lover of truth even though the world hates it." Do you have a sense of something like that in your life? That's the mark of the real deal. If that has never occurred to you, a man who can just go about in the world and be comfortable with its philosophies and priorities and its entertainment and comfortable and never think about

that, needs to realize that he is probably not a Christian because you don't belong to that realm. You are an outside testimony into that realm. So do you have a sense that you are distinct from the world? That question will give you a great barometer of where you're at spiritually.

Secondly, kind of got ahead of myself without even intending to but I'll ask the question anyway since it's in my notes: have such thoughts never occurred to you? Has it never occurred to you that your purpose of life was to be a servant of Christ? Has it never occurred to you, has it never been a desire of yours to fulfill his purpose in your life? Do you realize, beloved, that whatever you've thought about Christianity in the past, that in light of the Scriptures that we've seen here today, that you couldn't possibly be a Christian if you're not somehow conscious of being under the Lordship of Christ, belonging to him and existing to serve his purpose? I say this to help you. If it has never occurred to you that that's the meaning of life, you're not a Christian no matter how many times you've darkened the door of a church. Remember, Jesus said, "Why do you call Me Lord, Lord and do not do what I say?" If that's you, Christ brought you here this morning in order to warn you, in order to awaken you, for you to see that is not your life. You are in spiritual danger and Christ says, "Come to me that you might be saved." A gracious gift of God to awaken and to disturb and to rock your worldview so much that you would say, "There must be something wrong with me," to which Scripture would say, "Yes. Precisely. Therefore come to Christ and be saved so that you might be made right with a holy God."

Thirdly, finally, speaking to everybody but here at this point speaking especially to young people, college, high school, on the front end of life, thinking through, "What do I want to do? Where do I want to go to school? What kind of person do I want to be? What kind of job do I want to have?" Thinking through all of those things. "Do I want to be married? Do I not want to be married? What kind of person would I like to marry?" All of those things are important but, my young people friends, they are not the main thing in the way that you're framing your thought about life. That's not the main thing. There is a lot to think about there but it's not the main thing. What I beg of you and I mean I am begging you right now is this, I am begging you to take seriously what Christ has said through his word here this morning. Think strategically about your future and about your life and what you're going to do with it. Don't simply think superficially about relationships or education or careers, to say nothing else about squandering it on lesser things. I'm assuming a pretty high level here by the standards of which society lives its life. I realize and I thank God if you're thinking about relationships and careers and education and you're thinking about life in that way, thank God for that, for that much. What I'm saying to you is that's not far enough for you to go in your thinking. That's the wrong way to think about life. That's a completely world-centered approach to thinking. Don't do that. Please, don't do that because you will squander your life if you think that way and that's all that you think about. You'll waste it all because there is more to it than that.

Young people, think about your life this way: take your desires, take your abilities, take your relationships, take all of that great wonderful stew of life that God has given to you

and put it in a bigger context and ask yourself this one question in light of Jesus' statement that you are the light of the world if you're Christian, young people, ask yourself this one question informed by the teaching of Scripture here this morning and you ask yourself this one thing: how can my one life be best used to glorify Christ? It is not about you maximizing profit. It is not about you maximizing fun. It is not about you maximizing friends. That's not why God created you and it is not why he saved you as a Christian. And while you have opportunity on the front end of life, on the front end of those decisions, frame everything in your mind with the question: how can I take my one life, I only get one shot at this, I only have one opportunity, how can I use that one opportunity to be the light that Jesus has called me to?

Don't answer that question in an hour, in a day, in a month. You don't answer that question in a year. You sift through life this way. And then as you do that, as you make your commitments, as you make your choices, then let your light shine until Jesus comes.

Let's pray together.

Father, as we sift through these things in our hearts, in our priorities, bless those who have been convicted that they do not belong to Christ that they might turn to him for salvation. Those of us who are a little further along in life and we have more years behind us than we have ahead of us, let the urgency of short time renew our focus, our commitment, our devotion to the purposes of God in our lives. And Father, for these dear sweet young people, some of them 8, 10 years old, some of them in college and just making choices that are on the very cutting-edge of what their lives will become, Father, bless them in their desires, bless them in their aspirations, bless the steps that they take, bless every aspect of their relationships and their education and their careers. Bless it all, Father, but as you bless it, work deep in their heart a sense that the ultimate purpose of these things are not about self, they are about Christ. They are a gift to offer back to Christ in service to him. Raise up many out of our midst here today that would define their life ambition in light of the purposes of the God who saved them from sin through the sacrifice of Christ on the cross. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

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