

Bright Lights in a Dark World

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Main Scripture Text: Matthew 5:14–16

“Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hid.”

MATTHEW 5:14

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Introduction

Find in God’s Word Matthew chapter 5. In a moment, we’re going to begin reading in verse 14. The title of the message today: “Bright Lights in a Dark World.” Last week, we talked about the fact that Jesus said “[we] are the salt of the earth.” (Matthew 5:13) In this passage of Scripture Jesus is going to tell us we are the light of the world.

Now, both salt and light have to be applied. When salt is applied, it goes inward and disappears. Light comes from within and always appears. The salt speaks of character; the light speaks of testimony. And, what the world needs is both penetration and illumination, both character and confession. These are astounding words from the lips of Jesus; listen to them. Jesus says in verse 14: “*Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hid. Neither do men light a candle, and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick; and it giveth light unto all that are in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.*” (Matthew 5:14–16) Now, I want us to think of three simple little words today: *who*, *what*, and *why*. Now, that’s an easy outline for us to follow.

I. Who?

Who? Jesus Christ, in verse 14, says, “*Ye are the light of the world.*” (Matthew 5:14) Now, to whom was He speaking? Well, this is the Sermon on the Mount. And, where was the mount? Well, that was in northern Galilee, by the shore of Galilee. To whom was He speaking? To the villagers there; to His disciples, fisher-folk, a motley crew. And, He’s saying to them, “*[You] are the light of the world.*” (Matthew 5:14) Now, He’s not in Athens, speaking to the intelligentsia. He’s not in Rome, speaking to those with imperial and military might. Already Plato and Socrates and Aristotle and the others, the philosophers, had taught. And, Jesus is saying to these people, “*[You] are the light of the world.*” (Matthew 5:14)

Now, can you imagine that? On a hillside in Galilee? The Galileans, my dear friend, were the hillbillies of that day. They were the country cousins, the bumpkins, of that day. It is to these people that Jesus is saying, “*[You] are the light of the world.*” (Matthew 5:14) Now, either that’s one of the greatest statements ever made or a great statement of megalomania, where somebody is saying something that is absolutely absurd and ridiculous. And, I can just imagine them saying, if they were thinking at all, “Who...me? us? Are you talking to us? We are the light of the world?” Amazing! But, my dear friend, that’s exactly what Jesus is saying. As a matter of fact, the Greek scholars tell us that the word *you* is emphatic. It means “you and nobody else.” “*[You] are the light of the world.*” (Matthew 5:14) Do you know how God intends to get His work done, dear friend, in this world today? If Jesus Christ were to stand here on this pulpit platform this morning, He could very well say the same thing to those of you who are sitting in this place. He could look you right in the face and say, “*[You] are the light of the world.*” (Matthew 5:14)

You say, “Now, wait a minute, pastor. You may be the light, but I’m not the light. I’m excused.” Oh, no. My dear friend, you are the light of the world. And, what happens, so many times, is that our members don’t understand that.

☞ *It’s like a general who calls his army together, and he lectures to them on the principles of war and tells them all about warfare. And then, he sends them off to eat a chicken dinner while he puts his rifle on his shoulder and goes off to war.*☞

Somehow we have the idea that there are just a few people who are the light of the world, or just a few people who are to preach the gospel. But that is not so. God’s plan is to take ordinary people just like you, just like me, and through us to do extraordinary things.

Now, the world thinks it lives in light. The world brags about being so enlightened. We have the high muckety-mucks of this world. But, the Apostle Paul, with a sense of sarcasm, said in 1 Corinthians chapter 1 and verse 20: “*Where is the wise? where is the*

scribe? where is the disputer of this world?" (1 Corinthians 1:20) What he is saying is, "All right, all of you statesmen, and you movers and shakers, and you philosophers, and you thinkers, and you scientists, and you educators, and you people in the think tank, where have you gotten us to?"

I was thinking the other day about the technology of our age, folks. The technology of today is the science fiction of when I was a boy. And, I leave this place to go home; I get in an automobile that is regulated by a computer. And, I put a tape in my tape deck, and I listen to music that comes from a little sliver of plastic—beautiful music—while I'm driving down a superhighway. I remember I'm supposed to say something to my secretary. I can pick up a telephone and talk to her while I'm driving down the highway. I get home; I walk into a house that has climate control—it is air-conditioned. I go and sit down, and sit down in front of a thing called a television set, and I have a space command—at least I used to have it before my grandson hid it, I have no idea where—and I can change the channels without ever having to get up. And, what kind of channels? Well, my dear friend, the news can happen across the ocean, and some sort of a television signal goes from the earth to a satellite, and comes out of that satellite down into my living room, and I'm in touch with the entire world. And, I'm doing this while my tea is being heated in the microwave. It's incredible.

But yet, we're in deeper difficulty than we've ever been. We call it an "enlightened age," but we're sinking lower and lower. The question is, if we're so smart and if we have so much light, why are we in the difficulty that we're in? And, everybody that comes along, he has a new idea. Now, if you've lived very long, you remember the New Deal. The New Deal was exchanged for the Fair Deal, the Fair Deal for the Great Society. And then, we had Camelot; and then, we had Camp David. And then, we had Reaganomics; and then, we had detente. And then, we had Glasnost; and then, we had "A Thousand Points of Light." And now, a fellow's come along proposing a New Covenant. And, we sink slower, and slower do we sink. What is happening, my dear friend, is that we have substituted intelligence for wisdom.

Somebody wrote these words: "Thus did Western man decide to abolish himself, creating his own boredom out of his own affluence, his own vulnerability out of his own strength, his own impotence out of his own erotomania, himself blowing the trumpet that brought the walls of his own city tumbling down, and having convinced himself that he is too numerous, labors with pill and scalpel and syringe to make himself fewer, until at last, having educated himself into imbecility and polluted and drugged himself into stupefaction, he keels over, a weary, battered old brontosaurus, and becomes extinct." That's poignant, isn't it? That's society today. That's enlightenment today.

And, Jesus says to common people—not to the statesmen and the philosophers, but to the common folks like us—"*[we] are the light of the world.*" (Matthew 5:14) That's the

wonderful thing about the gospel. You know, Jesus said, “I’ve hidden these things from the wise and the prudent, and I have revealed them unto babes.” (Matthew 11:25; Luke 10:21)

Do you know the wisdom of God? The Bible says, *“In the wisdom of God the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe.”* (1 Corinthians 1:21) Now, *“foolishness of preaching”* (1 Corinthians 1:21)—what is it? He said, *“We preach Christ crucified.”* (1 Corinthians 1:23) You see, through the cross. Let me give you the wisdom of God; let me tell you why we have the light of the world: through the cross. Through the cross even a little child can know the heart of God. Is there any greater wisdom than knowing the heart of God? And, even a little child can understand, my dear friend, the mysteries of life and death.

“[We] are the light of the world.” (Matthew 5:14) Now, the world doesn’t understand this. The world looks at us, and the world says, “They don’t count.” The world puts the emphasis upon beauty, upon brawn, and upon brains, and upon bucks, but Jesus puts the emphasis upon character. *“[You’re] the salt of the earth.”* (Matthew 5:13) He puts the emphasis upon revelation. *“[You] are the light of the world.”* (Matthew 5:13) How wonderful that is!

Now, sometime ago, I was in Moscow. You prayed for me, and I want to thank you for that. I’ll be going back at the close of our trip to Romania. But, I preached in a beautiful music hall. And, after I preached there—there was a very fine congregation; some of the leaders in the city of Moscow were there, and they came to the platform and wanted to talk. A man stood there and said, “May I have a few moments with you?” And, I said, “Yes.” He said, “I am a philosopher.” He said, “I study philosophy, and I belong to a philosophical society.” I said, “That’s very nice.” He said, “Could you come and lecture to our philosophical society?” I said, “I would like to, but my schedule will not allow it. I cannot come.” He said, “May I ask you a question?” I said, “Certainly.” He said, “It seems to me that there are two ecologies: a higher ecology and lower ecology. Would you agree?” I said, “Yes, sir, I would.” He said, “It seems to me that these two ecologies are in conflict with each other. Would you agree?” I said, “Yes, sir, I would.” He said, “It seems that there’s a constant struggle between the higher ecology and the lower ecology.” I said, “That is correct.” And then, I just broke in, and I said, “Sir, what you call the ‘higher ecology’ is God, and what you call the ‘lower ecology’ is the power of Satan. And, these are in constant conflict one with the other. But,” I said, “sir, the Bible teaches that the Son of God is Jesus Christ, who died for our sins. And, the Bible teaches that if we will repent of our sins and receive Christ into our hearts as our personal Savior, then Christ lives on the inside. And then, the Bible says, *‘Greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world.’* (1 John 4:4) And, I said, “You can overcome the lower ecology because the One who is the Lord of the higher ecology, Jesus Christ

Himself, lives in your heart and gives you power day by day.” And, I said, “He lives in my heart. He wants to live in your heart.” “Oh?” He got out his pad, started to write. He said, “Give me that again. I want to hear that.” It was amazing because the boys and girls in our Sunday school know that, but he didn’t know it. He didn’t know it.

You know why he didn’t know it? The same reason you wouldn’t have known it unless somebody had taught you. You see? You didn’t figure it out. We don’t have anything we haven’t received. But see, that was such good news to a man who had lived all of his life, even though a philosopher, being taught there is no God, not understanding what we understand—very simple to understand.

So, that was the first man I talked with. I turned around. There was another man standing behind me. He had his card already out. It was his business card. He said, “Sir, I am a space scientist.” He was with the space agency there. He handed me his card. He said, “I want to talk with you.” He said, “I’ve been a scientist all of my life, and,” he said, “I want to tell you that, through the study of science and the laws of the universe, I have come to believe that there is a higher power. I have come to believe that there must be some supernatural higher power because all of this could not have happened—the intricate laws of the universe could not operate—unless there is some controlling force.” I said, “That’s very good, sir, and I agree with you that all of this world shows the marks of its Creator, Almighty God. But,” I said, “sir, all you can do is know about God through the study of science. You can see how God works, but you cannot understand who God is until God reveals Himself to you. And,” I said, “God has revealed Himself to you in a book called the Bible.” And, I said, “The Bible tells you that this God who made everything is a God of love. He sent His Son to die for you on the cross to redeem you from your sins.” And, I gave to that space scientist two big black Bibles. He hugged them to his chest and went off with those Bibles like he had received the grand prize. A scientist, but he needed to know Jesus.

I turned from him, and it’s almost like these three had been choreographed. And, they were standing right over there. Somebody said, “There is a lady who wants to speak to you.” She was about thirty-five, beautiful. Her eyes glistened with tears. She said, “Sir, I’m a lawyer.” She was a lawyer for the GUM department stores. She said, “This is the first religious service I’ve ever been to in my life.” She said, “Tonight, I’ve given my heart to Jesus Christ.” I had the joy of sharing with her and helping her to get started in the Christian life.

And, I thought to myself, “Isn’t it wonderful? Isn’t it wonderful that God can take people like we are, just plain ordinary folks, and yet fill us with the Lord Jesus Christ and give us His Word?” My dear friend, I want to say to every philosopher and to every scientist and to every lawyer that Jesus Christ is the light of the world. And, His light shines in us; and then, His light shines through us. And, God just takes normal people,

ordinary people—people like me, people like you—and Jesus says to you and to me, “You have the answer. *[You] are the light of the world.*” (Matthew 5:14)

II. What?

And so, the very first question that we want to ask and answer is, “Who?” The answer: you—you. You say, “Not me, pastor.” Yes, you. Now, many of us, therefore, we try to get out of it. So, let’s go on and answer it a little bit further—not only who, but what: *“[You] are the light of the world.”* (Matthew 5:14) Now, you don’t light light. You don’t salt salt. The idea is that we are to get outside the four walls of the church, and we are to be the light of the world. And, our Lord, the Master Teacher, gives three illustrations here, and I want you to look at them.

A. The Foolishness of Concealed Light

First of all, He talks about the foolishness of concealed light. Look in verses 14 and 15: *“Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on an hill cannot be hid. Neither do men light a candle, and put it under a bushel”*—now, the bushel, of course, is like our bushel basket. It was something that you carried commodities in. Now, what I think our Lord is saying is, “You shouldn’t let business and possessions and things hide your light.” They don’t—*“put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick; and it giveth light unto all that are in the house. Let your light so shine.”* (Matthew 5:14–16)

Now, what is He saying? He’s talking about, first of all, the foolishness of concealed light. You don’t light a lamp and put it under a bushel basket. And, my dear friend, when you got saved, you were saved to shine. Don’t hide your testimony. Are you ashamed to carry a Bible to work? Are you a businessman without a Bible on your desk? Are you a student who does not carry at least the New Testament? Sir, when you go out to lunch tomorrow and those other buddies are there around that table, do you bow your head and thank God for the food? Do you invite them to do so? Do people know that you are a Christian? Or, are you hiding your lamp under a bushel? Are you ashamed of the One who died for you? Oh, the light is burning; you love the Lord. But, you are hiding your light; you’re smothering your light. You have it under a bushel. The foolishness of concealed light. What’s a light for? A light is to shine. You say, “I love the Lord Jesus.” I know you do. You even have that “Jesus Saves” lapel pin. The only problem is you wear it on your underwear. You hide your light. You don’t let others know that you love the Lord Jesus Christ. Be bold! Be bold! The foolishness of concealed light.

B. The Faithfulness of Courageous Light

And then, oh, my dear friend, there is the faithfulness of courageous light. He said, “You are to take your light and put it on a candlestick” (Matthew 5:15); that is, lift it up that it will give light to all that are in the house. You say, “But pastor, you don’t know where I

work. I work with a lot of pagans.” “Hey, pastor, if you only knew the dirty jokes, the things that are Xeroxed and passed around in our office; if you only knew the gossip; if you only knew the blasphemy, you’d understand why I want to get another job. I want to get out of this place. I’m just so oppressed there. There’s nobody saved there where I am. I want to go to an office that’s full of Christians.” You know what you want to do? You just want to light light, don’t you? You just want to salt salt, don’t you? Why do you think God put you where He put you? Why do you think you’re in that place?

I remember reading the book of Titus, and Titus is complaining about the Cretians, and he says something about the people who lived in Crete: “*The Cretians are [always] slow bellies.*” (Titus 1:12) Now, I don’t know what the word “slow belly” means, but that doesn’t sound good to me. “[*They*] are...*slow bellies.*” (Titus 1:12) And, Paul says to Titus, “*For this cause left I thee in Crete.*” (Titus 1:5) That’s why you are there—because of the way these people are. My dear friend, the Bible says we are to shine as lights in a dark world. That’s why we’re there. That’s why we’re there.

You say, “I’m not much, Brother Rogers. I can’t sing. I don’t have a lot of money. I’m not good looking. I didn’t make high grades in school.” It doesn’t make any difference. Just let your light shine. It’s not your light; it’s His light anyway. Christ is the light of the world, (John 9:5) and it is Him shining in you. I want to ask you a question: What is most important in a house—the chandelier in the foyer or the single light bulb that keeps you from breaking your neck on the basement steps? I mean, it’s not the ornamentation; it’s who you are. It’s where you are. You are a light in a dark place.

C. The Forcefulness of Collective Light

There’s the foolishness of concealed light: you don’t light a light and put it under a bushel. My dear friend, there is the faithfulness of courageous light. You let your light shine, and it gives light to all that are in the house. There’s somebody—there is somebody—that you can influence for the Lord Jesus Christ. And then, my dear friend, look at it again—there is the forcefulness of collective light. Look, if you will, at verse 14: “*Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hid.*” (Matthew 5:14)

Now, what is a city? A city that is full of light is where men have lighted a light. They have not put it under a bushel; they have put it on a candlestick. But, this light has light. That house has a light. That house has a light. That house has a light. That house has a light. And, all over, first thing you know, there is a glow across the sky, because that city is an elevated place; it is up on a hill. What’s our Lord talking about? He’s talking about the Church. He’s talking about us now, collectively. He’s not talking about concealed light. He’s not talking only about courageous light. He’s talking about collective light. Did you see what happened when they started to pass that light up there in the choir? My dear friend, many of us together can glow for the Lord Jesus Christ and make an impact

that we cannot make by ourselves. We need one another, and we shine brightest when we shine together. And, a city that is set on a hill, it can't be hid. And, the Church is the city of God, and we are to be living in an elevated place.

I have gone to Israel and been there where Jesus gave the Sermon on the Mount. And, you go out at nighttime and stand on those hills at Galilee, and there is a city in the distance. Its name is Safed, and you can see the lights of that city even today. And, it surely must have been the city when Jesus was talking about when he said, "*A city...set on [a] hill cannot be hid.*" (Matthew 5:14)

Oh, my dear friend, this is the what? "*[We] are the light of the world.*" (Matthew 5:14) If we don't shine, who is going to? It is our privilege, it is our duty, it is our responsibility to shine for the Lord Jesus Christ.

III. How?

Now, last of all, how are we going to do it? How are we going to do it? Look, if you will, in verse 16: "*Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.*" (Matthew 5:16) Now, here, my dear friend, is the *how*. How are you going to do it?

A. Surrender

Well, first of all, there is going to have to be surrender—there's going to have to be surrender. Look at the little word *let*. Do you see it? Let it happen. You see, when you get right with God, when you get saved, when you get filled with the Holy Spirit of God, you don't have to make yourself shine; you will shine. Just let yourself shine. If you force it, it will be a glare and not a glow. You just let yourself shine. It's just your willingness to cooperate with God. It's not that difficult. "*Let your light so shine.*" (Matthew 5:16) Manley Beasley, who is now in heaven, used to say, "You get right with God—truly, thoroughly right with God—and you'll have to backslide to keep from winning souls to Jesus Christ." It's just automatic. You are going to shine if you are full of the Lord Jesus Christ.

The Bible tells about Stephen, who was stoned. Remember, Stephen was stoned for his testimony. And, the Bible says that while they were stoning him, he looked up into heaven, and, the Bible says, his face shone like the face of an angel. (Acts 6:15) I don't think that Stephen had been to a seminar on face-shining. I don't think he had studied and said, "Now I'm going to make my face shine." He's just so full of Jesus, you just let Him shine. It's just surrender to Him.

† A little boy asked his daddy, I'm told, "Daddy, how tall am I?" And, the dad said, "Well, son, I don't know...about four-and-a-half feet." He said, "Daddy, how tall is Jesus?" "Well," he said, "son, I don't know. Maybe He's six feet tall." He said, "I'm four-

and-a-half, and He's six feet tall?" He said, "Well, then, if Jesus is in me, He'll stick out, won't He?" He really will. If Jesus is in you, He will stick out.†

My dear friend, you just let your light shine. You see, there has to be surrender. Just say, "Here I am, Lord Jesus." The Christ in you will not be contained if you will just let Him be Jesus in you.

B. Sacrifice

But, not only will it be surrender; hey, there has to be sacrifice, because He said, "Let your light shine"—"shine." Did you know there is no shining without burning? No shining without burning. It was said of John the Baptist, "*He was a burning and a shining light.*" (John 5:35) You see, if we're willing to be consumed, if we're willing to be fuel for the Master's fire, that as it was on the Day of Pentecost, there set on every man's head a flickering flame of fire... They were like human candles burning for the Lord—"a burning and a shining light." (John 5:35) Are you willing to be consumed for Christ? Are you willing to burn out for the Lord Jesus Christ? There can be no shining without burning.

C. Sanctification

And then, last of all, not only must there be that surrender, not only must there be that sacrifice, but all of these speak primarily about that sanctification. You see, what He says is this: "*that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.*" (Matthew 5:16) That's sanctification. That's the Christ life. The life you live is Jesus in you, and they can see that.

†Hudson Taylor, the great missionary who founded the China Inland Mission, Hudson Taylor came back, and a newspaperman said, "Hudson Taylor, did you know that they are comparing you to the Apostle Paul? How does that make you feel?" He said, "That makes me feel really bad." He said, "I wanted to remind them of Jesus." Of Jesus, see?†

Let them see your good works, which is Christ in you. "*And the life which I now live...I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me.*" (Galatians 2:20) And, it's not my life, but it is His life—not only a changed life, but an exchanged life. And, people see Jesus Christ in me and in you.

Conclusion

Now folks, listen—listen. We're coming to the end of an age. There is more darkness today than there has ever been in history, in my estimation. We know more science. We have more abilities. We have more technology. But, our world—our whole world—is lost in the darkness of sin. The light of the world is Jesus. Do you believe that? Do you? That was a weak *amen*. Do you believe that? Amen? The light of the world is Jesus.

¶ Some years ago in South Carolina, there was a terrible fire in a schoolhouse. Seventy children were burned to death. The people in that South Carolina community came to stand around that schoolhouse to do what they could do, but the raging inferno was such that they could not get in there to rescue the children from that terrible holocaust. There was a father who came there and looked in through the window. He could see his son in the flames. The son recognized the dad, and the dad recognized the son. And, the boy said to his daddy, “Daddy! Daddy! Save me, Daddy! Save me!” And, the dad began to go into the flames, and strong men held him back. There was no way. It was totally impossible. It was too late.

And, the little boy saw what was happening. He began to cry, and he said, “Daddy, can’t you save me? Daddy, can’t you save me? Daddy, daddy, save me!” And, that father watched his son wither like a flower with an acetylene torch turned on him. Night and day after that, that father could see with his eyes his son in those flames, could hear with his ears the pitiful cry of his son: “Daddy, can’t you save me? Daddy, can’t you save me?” He lived about two years after that. He died prematurely because he died of such an anguish of heart and soul.

Now friend, I want to say something about this world in which we live: this world is in a perishing state. And, this world looks at science, and this world says to science, “Science, can’t you save me?” And, science says, “No, I can’t save you. I can tell you how far it is from Earth to the sun, but I cannot tell you how to remove sin from your heart. I can’t save you.” And, the world looks at philosophy, and the world says, “Philosophy, can’t you save me?” And, philosophy says, “I can’t save you. I can tell you more and more about less and less until you know everything about very little, but I can’t save you.” The world looks at education and says, “Education, can’t you save me?” Education says, “I can make you smart, but I can’t make you wise. I can’t save you.” The world looks to culture, and the world says, “Culture, can’t you save me?” And, culture says, “I can’t save you. All I can do is make the world a better place to go to hell from, but I can’t save you.” Friend, there’s only One who can save, and He’s mighty to save. And His name is Jesus. He’s the light of the world.¶

In your home, you’ve tried everything. You need Jesus. In your life, you’ve tried everything: you’ve tried religion; you’ve tried church membership; you’ve tried turning over a new leaf, but you’ve never ever bowed at the feet of Jesus. You’ve never truly received Christ into your heart. I am telling you, my dear friend, that Jesus, and Jesus alone, is the answer to your heart hunger. Jesus Christ, who saved me when I was a teenage boy, is the Jesus who wants to save you. And, He will save you today if you’ll trust Him. The light of the world is Jesus, and He is light for you, for your darkness.¶