

Sermon on the Mount (14)  
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Sermon Text: Matthew 5:14-16 NKJV

14 “You are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden. 15 Nor do they light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house. 16 Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven.”

One of the surest indications that saving grace has entered a heart, is there now exists a burden for lost sinners—a compassion for the rotten, fallen, and sinful world—but what happens is, we become appalled with world but fail to feel any compassion for it—its relatively easy to look at it with disgust—but my brethren, we must equally look at it with remorse—we are the only salt and light that it will ever know—without us it will rotten and perish in outer darkness—thus I think it’s interesting to notice that here, near the outset of our Savior’s first public sermon, He makes some of the clearest statements found in Scripture concerning the church’s influence upon the world...

Let me put it like this—not only is our Savior concerned with clearly defining the character of true Christians—He’s equally concerned to define the mission or purpose of His people—thus the need to “have salt in ourselves” and “keep our lamps burning...”—if we are really concerned for lost sinners, the best thing we can do for them is to remain different from them—only salt can preserve meat from decaying and only light can dispel the darkness—and salt that has lost its flavor and a lamp without oil is useless...

Cornelius Tyree (The Living Epistle, 1859)—“The best commentary on the Bible the world has ever seen is a holy life. The most eloquent sermon in behalf of the gospel that the world has ever heard is a uniform, active piety. The best version of the written truth that has ever been made is a consistent religious example. The Christian whose light thus shines not only correctly renders, but beautifies the sacred text...While the truth is being read from the Bible, and proclaimed from the pulpit, let all the members of our churches second and enforce that truth by the silent eloquence of holy lives, and the world’s conversion will move forward at home and abroad, with primitive speed...”

Thus having considered v13 last week, we come this morning to vv14-16—a passage that has a similar purpose—having explained what we are in vv3-12, our Savior now describes what we are in relation to the world—in other words—we are blessed (vv1-12) that we might be a blessing (vv13-16)...

Now before we come to v14 directly, I want to say a few things about how these two metaphors differ—as the salt of the earth we are to preserve it from moral decay [this is largely a negative concept]—as the light of the world we are to pierce the darkness and provide light [this is largely a positive concept]—Hendriksen—“...in the main salt has a negative function and acts secretly. Light, on the other hand, has a positive function and shines openly and publicly...”—to summarize, while salt hinders moral decay light positively illumines and promotes life...

- I. A Simple Declaration—v14a
- II. A Twofold Illustration—vv14b,15
- III. A Practical Exhortation—v16 [considered this afternoon]

I. A Simple Declaration—v14a

- 1. Our Savior makes a similar statement as He did in v13—“you are the salt of the earth...” here in v14—“you are the light of the world...”
- 2. Thus the question I want to here answer is—What does our Savior mean, when He calls His people “light”...

3. Or perhaps I can phrase the question like this—What is now true of Christians, that makes them light and no longer darkness like the world...
4. Well the Scriptures suggest two closely related concepts that are essential to the imagery of light—[1] spiritual understanding, and [2] moral purity...
5. Let's consider these briefly in turn—[1] spiritual knowledge or understanding—by nature our hearts are darkened and without understanding...
6. Ps.82:5—“they do not know, nor do they understand; they walk about in darkness...”—that is, in ignorance of the truth...
7. By nature we are all in the dark—we do not know, we do not understand—we may understand intellectually—but not savingly...
8. Thus if to be in darkness is to be without understanding—to be in the light is to have our eyes opened to the truth concerning God, ourselves, and the gospel...
9. Lk.1:76-79—“and you, child, will be called the prophet of the Highest; for you will go before the face of the Lord to prepare His ways, to give knowledge of salvation to His people by the remission of their sins, through the tender mercy of our God, with which the Dayspring from on high has visited us; to give light to those who sit in darkness and the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace...”
10. Notice the ministry of John the Baptist and our Savior are one—John would come—“to give knowledge of salvation” Christ came—“to give light to those who sit in darkness...”
11. In other words—John the Baptist would pave the way for Christ—his purpose was one and the same with Christ...
12. Thus—“giving knowledge of salvation” is synonymous with—“giving light to those who sit in darkness...”
13. Notice [2] moral purity—the second imagery associated with light is moral and ethical purity, 1Jn.1:5—“God is light and in Him is no darkness at all...”
14. That is—God is perfectly and inherently pure—there is not even the shadow of moral darkness or impurity within Him...
15. This of course is in total contrast to native man, Prov.2:13-14—“...who leave the paths of uprightness to walk in the ways of darkness; who rejoice in doing evil...”
16. Thus to be “light” means that we no longer walk in moral impurity but are now characterized by uprightness and moral purity...
17. Eph.5:8-9—“for you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light (for the fruit of the Spirit is in all goodness, righteousness, and truth...”
18. Here “light” largely refers to moral purity as is clear from the surrounding context—both vv7 and 11 speak of the deeds of darkness...
19. In contrast to this, Paul exhorts us—“to walk as children of light...”—and then adds—“for the fruit of the Spirit is in all goodness, righteousness, and truth...”
20. In other words—to walk in light is to walk by the Spirit, or to manifest the fruit of the Spirit, which is partially defined as—“goodness, righteousness, and truth...”
21. What is it to walk as children of light?—it is to walk in all goodness, righteousness, and truth [that is truthfulness]...
22. Thus necessary to the imagery of light are the two related themes of understanding and purity—Christians are light in both ways...

## II. A Twofold Illustration—vv14b,15

1. Here our Savior uses two similar illustrations or imageries to make His point—[1] v14b, a city on a hill, and [2] v15 a lamp within a house...
2. Notice [1] a city on a hill—the point of this imagery is that of visibility and accessibility—a city can be seen by many from a great distance...
3. D.A. Carson—“Often built of white limestone, ancient towns gleamed in the sun and could not easily be hidden...”
4. The Scriptures often liken the people of God to a city, elevated, and lifted up on a high mountain, and visible to the whole world...

5. For example, Ps.48:1-3—“Great is the LORD, and greatly to be praised in the city of our God, in His holy mountain. Beautiful in elevation, the joy of the whole earth, is Mount Zion on the sides of the north, the city of the great King. God is in her palaces; He is known as her refuge...”
6. Notice the phrases—“the city of our God” “His holy mountain” “Mount Zion” and “the city of the great King” are all synonymous—referring to God’s people...
7. But there are two phrases that are very relevant to our study—[a] “beautiful in elevation” and [b] “the joy of the whole earth...”
8. Notice [a] “beautiful in elevation”—literally—“beautiful in height”—it looks fair and beautiful as it is elevated on a mountain—or—it is a city set on a hill...
9. Notice [b] “the joy of the whole earth”—this means it is the only true source of joy for the entire earth—it is the light of the world...
10. Notice [2] a lamp within a house—this imagery is similar to the former with the concept of radiance being the dominant thought...
11. The purpose of a lamp is to provide light to the house—thus to light it and hide it under a basket is pointless...
12. By “lamp” our Savior refers to a portable lantern—and by “lampstand” is meant a rock sticking out of the wall upon which the lamp is placed...
13. Such lamps were filled with oil and had a wick pushed down its spout, and thus, it would give light—“to all who are in the house...”
14. Matt.25:7—“then all those virgins arose and trimmed their lamps. And the foolish said to the wise, Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out...”
15. Thus essential to the lighting of lamps, is not only the trimming of the wicks, but the filling and replenishing of oil...
16. But the point of our Savior here makes is to underscore the purpose of lamps—they are designed to communicate light to those in the house...
17. Thus Christians are to serve as lights to a dark house—a house filled with spiritual ignorance and moral depravity...
18. CHS—“We are to remove the darkness of ignorance, sin, and sorrow. Christ has lighted us that we may enlighten the world. It is not ours to lie in concealment as to our religion. God intends his grace to be as conspicuous as a city built on the mountain’s brow. To attempt to conceal his Spirit is as foolish as to put a lamp under a bushel; the lamp should be seen by all that are in the house, and so should the Christian’s graces...”

### III. Observations

#### A. Christians are bold lights

1. By “bold” I mean—light is daring, courageous, and even intrusive—it pierces and penetrates the darkness...
2. Christians are bold lights—lights that penetrate into the darkness which surrounds them—lights that engages and overpowers the darkness...
3. Thus our Savior says—“a city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden...”—it will stick out and be seen by all who walk by...
4. So too—light will be seen—it must be seen—and it will, eventually, overpower or overcome the darkness...
5. Let me suggest two ways in which this is true—[1] light exposes sin and error—this is a necessary consequence of the nature of light...
6. Sin is bold and invasive—where ever it goes it exposes the darkness—where ever it exists it reveals what’s in the dark...
7. Eph.5:11-13—“and have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather expose them. For it is shameful even to speak of those things which are done by them in secret. 13 But all things that are exposed are made manifest by the light, for whatever makes manifest is light...”
8. Notice two things—[a] what we are to do, v11—“have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather expose them...”

9. Instead of being a partaker of their deeds, we to “expose them”—that is, we are to make their sinfulness evident or obvious...
10. Notice [b] how we are to do it, v13—“but all things that are exposed are made manifest by the light, for whatever makes manifest is light...”
11. How we are to expose the darkness is by being light—we are to live in such a way that our lives would expose the darkness around us...
12. Notice [2] light reveals truth—not only does light expose what is in the darkness but it also reveals or illuminates truth...
13. Thus Simeon said of Christ in Lk.2:32—“my eyes have seen your salvation...a light to bring revelation to the Gentiles...”
14. Simeon was a just and devout man, who the Lord had promised he would not see death until he had seen the Lord’s Christ...
15. Thus when Joseph and Mary brought Christ to the temple—“to do for Him according to the custom of the law...”
16. V28 says—“he [Simeon] took Him [Christ] up in his arms and blessed God and said: Lord, now you are letting your servant depart in peace...for my eyes have seen your salvation...a light to bring revelation to the Gentiles...”
17. Christ would be a light to bring revelation to the Gentiles—Christ, through the gospel, would make salvation known to Gentiles [largely through the ministry of the church]...
18. This of course would be done by their life [a life characterized by righteousness] but foremostly by their speech as they would communicate the gospel...
19. Thus Christians are “the light of the world” as their lives radiate light byway of a righteous life—and they are also “light of the world” as they communicate light byway of speech...
20. Phil.2:14-16—“do all things without complaining and disputing, 15 that you may become blameless and harmless, children of God without fault in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world, 16 holding fast [forth] the word of life, so that I may rejoice in the day of Christ that I have not run in vain or labored in vain...”
21. Notice two ways in which Christians are to shine in the world—[a] by their lives, vv14-15—“do all things without complaining and disputing, that you may become blameless and harmless, children of God without fault...”
22. Notice [b] by their words, v16—“holding fast [forth] the word of life...”—that is—one way we shine as lights in that we hold forth the word of life to others...

#### B. Christians are broad lights

1. By this I mean they are intended to shine their lights over a wide or large terrain—they are the light of the world...
2. I think we can at times overlook or take for granted various statements of Scripture—for example, here we can overlook the radical nature of our Savior’s statement...
3. We are the light of the world—not merely the nation of Israel—not merely the land of Palestine or the city of Jerusalem—but the world...
4. This is all the more amazing if we consider that when our Savior spoke these words the church was comprised of a handful of mostly Jewish converts...
5. And yet this little remnant—would become the means to take the light of the gospel to the deepest darkness of Gentile territory...
6. Isa.60:1-3—“arise, shine; for your light has come! And the glory of the LORD is risen upon you. 2 For behold, the darkness shall cover the earth, and deep darkness the people; But the LORD will arise over you, and His glory will be seen upon you. 3 The Gentiles shall come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your rising...”
7. Notice three things—[a] the light would dawn, v1—“arise, shine; for you light has come? And the glory of the LORD is risen upon you...”
8. This refers to the coming of the Messiah, His public ministry in His disciples, and the initial formation of the church...

9. Barns—“...when the prophet says that that light ‘is come,’ he throws himself into future times, and sees in vision the Messiah as having already come, and as pouring the light of salvation on a darkened church and world...”
10. Notice [b] the darkness shall spread, v2—“for behold, the darkness shall cover the earth, and deep darkness the people...”
11. This refers to the pervasive nature of man’s native depravity as would be especially founding the first century...
12. Notice [c] the Gentles will come, v3—“the Gentiles shall come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your rising...”
13. Here the Gentiles are spoken of as coming to the light while our Savior speaks about the light going to the darkness...
14. The point being—the Gentiles are converted by seeing the light of the church and in the words of our text—come to glorify our Father in heaven...

### C. Christians are borrowed lights

1. By this I mean—the light that is within us is from Christ—we by nature have nothing in us but darkness—and any light that’s within us is there by grace...
2. Christ is natively and inherently light—we are the light as He is us by His Spirit—thus the light that we radiant is borrowed from Him...
3. For example—think of the sun—which radiates light of and from itself—but in contrast to this the moon only reflects the light of the sun...
4. So too—we are the light of the world to the degree we reflect the light of Christ—the closer we are to Him the more light we radiate...
5. Eph.5:8—“for you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord...”—here we find what we are by nature [darkness] and by grace [light in the Lord]...
6. Jn.8:12—“then Jesus spoke to them again, saying, I am the light of the world. He who follows me shall not walk in darkness, but have the light of life...”
7. Notice [a] Christ Himself is the light of the world—His is the source of light—it originates or is derived from Him...
8. Christ is the light of the world in the fullest sense—He is essentially light—it is His very essence or nature...
9. In fact the construction of this phrase equates the words “I” and “light”—we could say—Jesus is the light and the light is Jesus...
10. He is light just as John said—“God is light, and in Him there is no darkness...”—“I am the light”—“I am natively and essentially light...”
11. Notice [b] to follow Christ is to have the light of life—“He who follows me shall not walk in darkness, but have the light of life...”
12. To follow Christ begins in conversion—turning away from following ourselves and come to Him as our Savior and Master...
13. This is seen in the phrase—“he who follows me shall not walk in darkness...”—to follow Christ entails being removed from darkness and put into the light...
14. Thus Christ continues to be the light of the world in and through His people—it is through them His light is taken to the ends of the earth...
15. Isa.49:6—“indeed He says, 'It is too small a thing that You should be My Servant To raise up the tribes of Jacob, And to restore the preserved ones of Israel; I will also give You as a light to the Gentiles, that You should be My salvation to the ends of the earth...'”
16. Notice the Father says of Christ—“I will also give you as a light to the Gentiles, that you should by salvation to the ends of the earth...”
17. Christ is the light given for the life of the world—but because He goes forth and is proclaimed by His people—they too are the light of the world...
18. Thus while it is a borrowed light—it is the same light—it differs only in degree—Christ and His bride are made one...

19. Now this fact should shed great light upon our text—in being the light of the world we are to set forth Jesus Christ...
20. Because He is the light of the world—we are to communicate Him both with our works and words—He is God’s salvation—“to the ends of the earth...”