

(All lights out)

Darkness. Black. Gloom. Scripture says that the world is enshrouded in darkness. Humanity separated from their Creator. We've lost touch with our place and purpose. Unseeing, we grope about for a sense of meaning. According to Scripture, our thinking is veiled in darkness. Our motives are hidden in darkness. Our lives lived in darkness.

(Spotlight on cross)

But then God said, *"Let light shine out of the darkness."* So God sent his light into the world. The light shone in the darkness. In that light was life, but most people loved the darkness instead of the light.

There were some, though, who saw the light, and followed the light. They no longer walk in darkness, but instead became sons and daughters of light.

(Hold mirror to reflect light)

The sons and daughters of light were called to let their lights shine before men. They reflect the true light that God sent for all people to see. They are the light of the world.

(All lights back on)

As we continue our series on the Sermon on the Mount, we come to a passage where Jesus describes the kind of influence we as Christians should have on the world. You'll find this passage in Matthew 5:13-16.

Jesus doesn't call us to withdraw from the world and leave it, but neither does he call us to attack the world and conquer it. Becoming like the world is not an option either. Rather, Jesus calls us to to be salt and light. We are to season and purify. We are to illuminate and shine. We engage the world by being change agents that permeate the world, connect with the world, and ultimately transform the world around us.

To describe the kind of influence we have, Jesus uses two very vivid pictures- salt and light.

Matt 5:13-16

13 "You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled under people's feet.

14 "You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. 15 Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. 16 In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven. NIV

Both of these word pictures emphasize that there is to be a difference between followers of Jesus and the rest of the world. The world isn't like us, and we aren't to be like the world. But this difference isn't seen by withdrawing from the world, by keeping the salt in the saltshaker,

or hiding our light under basket, and it isn't to be forced on the world. Rather, like salting meat or turning a light on in a room, we are to allow our distinctiveness permeate and illuminate the world. We influence the world by allowing the flavor of our lives to season everything and everyone around us. We change things by allowing the light of our actions to brighten all around.

Only when salt is mixed in and is able to infuse its zestfulness, does salt fulfill its purpose. Only when light shines where it can be seen does light fulfill its purpose. And only when we get into the world and make a difference do we fulfill our purpose.

We make little positive difference cloistered behind the four walls of our church buildings. We make no difference disconnected and disengaged. We also have little positive influence when we are on the attack, when we draw battle lines against the world and see the people of the world as the enemy. The people of the world are not the enemy. They are victims of the enemy.

We make a difference when we get out there into the world and let our faith season and illuminate the world around us.

A couple of years ago I preached a sermon on verse 13 about being the salt of the earth, so I want to focus our attention this morning on verses 14 through 16 about being the light of the world.

Jesus says here, *"You are the light of the world."* This statement should bring both great significance and deep humility at the same time. Consider first, what this statement says about the significance our lives. Jesus says, *"YOU, are the light of the world"* You, not somebody else. You, not the president, or the missionary, or the preacher, or some other person, but you.

In this Sermon on the Mount, a large crowd had come to Jesus. Jesus went up on the mountain so they could hear him better, but don't forget that his primary audience – those he was teaching directly – were the disciples. Matthew 5:1 says, *"Seeing the crowds, he went up on the mountain, and when he sat down, his disciples came to him, and he opened his mouth and taught them, saying..."* So you have at least the 12 disciples there. You probably have some of the women who followed and supported Jesus. There were other followers that were a part of his entourage. It is to these followers to whom Jesus is speaking primarily.

By extension, Jesus is talking to all who would follow him. Jesus was talking about all who would be kingdom people. Through the words of Scripture, Jesus is talking to all of us. He is talking to **YOU**.

With that in mind, listen to what your Savior says here. *"You are the light of the world."* And notice he doesn't say, *"You are A light,"* or *"You are one of the lights."* No. What does he say? He says, *"You are the light."* You are the light. There is no other. If the church doesn't shine, no one else will. Let me say that again. If the church doesn't shine, no one else will. This puts

believers in a very unique position in the world, because we are the only lamps from which the light of Jesus shines. The light won't come from anyone else. It won't come from Government or Non-government organizations. It won't come from universities or scholarly think-tanks. It won't come from scientists or be discovered in a lab. It won't come from multi-national global corporations. It won't be released by Facebook, delivered by Amazon, or launched by Elon Musk. We either shine our lights, or the world sits in darkness.

But as soon as we realize this, we better also recognize the need of the deepest humility. Because the light we shine is not our own. Eph. 5:8 reminds us that we are light *in the Lord*. We only reflect the light that has been shone to us. What is that light? Where does it come from? **1 John 1:5 tells us that God is light. John 1:9 says that Jesus is the true light that gives light to us. And in John 8:12 Jesus declares, "I am the light of the world." 2 Cor 4:6 refers to the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives as light. And Psalm 119:105 says that God's word is like a lamp for a feet and a light on our path.** It's not our light that shines through our lives. This demands humility.

If it wasn't for the light of Jesus in our lives, we would have nothing but darkness. We are wholly dependant on the light he gives us. The moment we think we can go out into the world on our own we'll be walking in darkness ourselves, so we better have humility. When we hear Jesus' call to let our lights shine, we need to remember where that light comes from. Alexander MacLaren, a great Scottish preacher of the 19th Century said, "A sunbeam has no more power to shine if it be severed from the sun than a man has to give light in this dark world if He be parted from Jesus Christ."

Another question we must answer is what is the light? How do we let it shine? Jesus is speaking in a metaphor here. What's light a metaphor for? Thankfully, Jesus answers that question for us in verse 16. He says exactly what it is that people see when we let our lights shine. "*In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your father in heaven.*" Shining our lights is simply doing good works. It is acting kindly and lovingly. It is selflessly meeting the needs of others. It is doing ministry out in the world. And the ultimate purpose of these good deeds is not that people will think how good and wonderful we are, but it will draw them to a relationship with God; that they will see how good and wonderful He is. That is what Jesus means when he says they will praise your father in heaven. There's nothing mystical or mysterious about letting our lights shine, its simply loving people.

I. Light serves as a guide for those who have it.

When we let our lights shine, it accomplishes three things. Light serves three purposes. First, light serves as a guide for those who have it. As Jesus says here in verse 15, "*it gives light to all in the house.*" If you have light, you can see by it. You can see where you are and you can see where you are going.

Have you tripped your way through the basement to check your breakers when the power went out, and you didn't have batteries in your flashlight? Have you ever walked through the woods in the dark? You run into branches, trip over roots, and fall into holes. I remember one time I was going down a wooded trail and I didn't have a flashlight. The people behind me did, but I didn't. I was going merrily along, when the girl behind me screamed to stop. When I did I was this far from a huge spider web that had been built up across the trail, and right in front of my nose was this huge, hairy spider. I swear it was this big around. I let the girl with the flashlights go first.

When you have a light, you don't get lost and you can see what you're doing. In John 8:12 Jesus says, *"I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life."* His light guides us so that we better understand where we are in life and where we are going.

Knowing Jesus gives us a greater understanding of life. We are enlightened with a spiritual wisdom that illuminates our decisions, and helps us establish goals with more than earthly objectives. Listen to how Paul describes the purpose of his ministry in Col 2:2-4, *"My purpose is that they may be encouraged in heart and united in love, so that they may have the full riches of complete understanding, in order that they may know the mystery of God, namely, Christ, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge."* Col. 1:9 says that God will fill us with the knowledge of his will through all spiritual wisdom and understanding. Philemon 6 says that we will have a full understanding of every good thing we have in Christ.

This light enables us to make the right decisions. It helps us know the right things to say. It empowers us to do the right thing in all kinds of situations. We have a light to guide us. As Christians, we're the one with the flashlight. Light serves as a guide for those who have it.

II. Light serves as a beacon for those who want it.

Secondly, light serves as a beacon for those who want it. Now there are many who are lost in the darkness and don't know it or don't care, but there are some who are lost and know it. They are looking for a light. They want a guide. They want to see the way home. For those that are spiritually searching. For those that are seeking God, our light, our good deeds, our love, our ministry in the world, serves as a beacon.

The apostle Paul saw his own ministry as that of a beacon. In Acts 13:47 he says, *"This is what the Lord has commanded us: 'I have made you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring salvation to the ends of the earth.'"*

Go back to our group of people walking through the woods at night, with flashlights illuminating their trail. Now imagine someone is lost in the woods. There out there all alone at night. They don't know where they are or where they are going, and they are looking for the way back. As they are bumping into branches and stumbling over roots they see something in

the distance. They see a light peeking through the trees. They change direction and begin to head toward that light. As long as they are looking at that light they catch glimpses of silhouettes of trees and limbs and other obstacles and are able to see them in time. As they get closer to the light they hear voices. Soon they yell out and the people in the woods direct him to their path and the guidance of their light. The light is a beacon drawing them home.

For those who don't have the light, but are spiritually searching, our lives act as beacons showing them the way to Jesus. By looking at our lives they know they are in the dark, but they can also see the way to the light. As Jesus says here in verse 14, we are like a city on a hill. They lights of a city can be seen from miles away. You are still far out in the country in the dark of night, but up ahead, many miles away you can see the lights of the city. This would be a far more vivid picture in Jesus' day because they didn't have highways marked with signs and reflective paint. It's like when I was a kid growing up and we went fishing in Minnesota. It was always dark when we got done, and our campground was on the opposite side of the lake, and on an overcast night, it was very dark and you couldn't see a thing. The only way we knew our way back was a yellow light on the boat dock. That yellow light acted as a beacon. Just point the boat at the light and take her in. That's what we are as a church. That's who we are as Christians. We provide a light to guide people in.

III. Light serves as a warning to those who don't have it.

Light serves as a guide for those who have it. It serves as a beacon for those who want it. Thirdly, light serves as a warning to those who don't have it. Think of a lighthouse shining out its warning from a dangerous rocky peninsula. It warns of the dangers ahead. It keeps them going the wrong way. Christians fill the same role in a dark world. The light of our good deeds keeps the darkness at bay.

John 3:20 and Eph. 5:11 says that light exposes the deeds of darkness. 1 Cor. 4:5 says that God's light exposes the motives of men's hearts. The light of our lives serves as a warning to a dark world. Now it's not our voices raised in judgment that does this, nor does wagging our fingers in condemnation. The light comes from the way we live.

Even one light in a dark place can have a powerful impact over the powers of darkness. One of the basic principles of crime prevention is lighting. Lighting parking lots and illuminating dark corners discourage criminals. People behave differently in the light than they do in the dark. The same is true of spiritual light. Alexander MacLaren puts it this way, "The presence of a good man hinders the devil from having elbow room to do his work." And so our light serves as a warning to those who don't have it.

Extinguishing the Light

After calling us to let our lights shine, Jesus tells us not to hide our lights. How do we hide our lights? Well the first way is simply not to have light, to extinguish it. We don't let it shine. Jesus

is very clear that the way we let our lights shine is through our good deeds. But what happens if we don't live our lives any different from the people of the world. Too often our words say one thing, but our actions say another. Such hypocrisy doesn't provide light for anyone.

The church in modern America looks too much like the world. Josh McDowell, George Barna, and others have conducted major studies that have found that in many areas of life there is no discernable or statistical difference between the way Christians live their lives and that of non-Christians. We get divorced just as much as the world. We lie just as much as the world. We get trapped in sexual sin just as much as the world. We look at porn just as much as the world. We cheat in school just as much as the rest of the world. We compromise our business ethics just as much as the world. When we don't live any differently we have no light. We have lost our saltiness.

Hiding it under a Bowl

The second way we hide our lights is to hide it somewhere where no one can see it. Jesus says in verse 15, *"Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket..."* As long as all of our ministry is within the walls of the church then our light is hidden. Ministry can't just be church people doing church things in church for other church people. Salt in the saltshaker doesn't flavor anything. We shine our lights by being out there. We are salt when we rub ourselves into the world out there. This passage is one of the main reasons I have really been pushing community involvement. This is why we need to have ministries focused on the community. We are salt out there. We need to shine our lights out there. It doesn't do any good just to shine our lights in here amongst ourselves. We need to be doing good deeds in the community so that people can see our light.

The way we love our wives our or our husbands, should be a shining light. The way we love and parent our children should be a shining light. Young people, the way you honor your father and mother should be a shining light. The way you act at school should be a shining light. The way we work at our jobs and careers should be a shining light. The way we act on the golf course, or on the lake, or online on the computer should be a shining light.

(All Lights Off)

Even one light shining in a dark place can make a lot of difference. But two lights burn even more brightly. When more of us let our lights shine, the brightness is greater still. And if we all let our lights shine together, and we spread our lights to others, we can drive the darkness away.

(Turn Lights on after "This Little Light of Mine")