

FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH OF VILLA RICA, PCA

The Light of the World

By
Todd W. Allen

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Matthew 5:13-16

(Mat 5:13-16 NASB) **"You are the salt of the earth; but if the salt has become tasteless, how will it be made salty again? It is good for nothing anymore, 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 do men light a lamp, and put it under the peck-measure, 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.**

In the Sermon on the Mount our Lord is addressing the common people and his words are really quite astonishing. I say astonishing because these disciples would seem to be the most unlikely people in the world to impart light. Salt, perhaps, but not light. Why? Because for the most part they were poorly educated. I doubt that most of them had the equivalent of an eighth grade education. One does not necessarily have to be very smart to be salt but to be called light in a world that had Greek culture and Roman law would be an invitation to be laughed at by the intelligentsia then and even more so now.

Since the first century much has happened. Today in the twenty First Century there has been such a proliferation of knowledge that one can scarcely keep up with it. In our computer age no one can stay abreast of the rapid advances in every field of science, medicine and technology. Corporations must constantly update their employees by way of seminars and courses to compete in a world that is bursting with information and knowledge. Some of you here have gone back to school simply keep up with this computer chip age in which we live. This week I had to take my computer to Gateway and the person who did the work called me and we had a conversation. He certainly was more knowledgeable than I was about my computer problem. When I went to pick up the computer I met him in person and just as I expected he was a young man. Young people today are smarter than their elders in computer science. We didn't even have computers until a few years ago, so how could we have learned what they are teaching in school today?

Many people would read these words of Christ and say, well, perhaps those disciples were the light of the world in the first century but that couldn't apply today. They were in an age of no public education and illiteracy abounded. After all we are in an age that is far beyond the First Century. But wait, the Light of Christ is needed because without it we will perish. The spiritual darkness is just as dense today, even more so because we have more people who are living in the dark than were on the earth in the First Century.

The captain of the ship looked into the dark night and saw faint lights in the distance. Immediately he told his signalman to send a message: "Alter your course 10 degrees south." Promptly a return message was received: "Alter your course 10 degrees north."

The captain was angered; his command had been ignored. So he sent a second message: "Alter your course 10 degrees south, I am the captain!" Soon another message was received: "Alter your course 10 degrees north, I am a seaman third class Jones."

Immediately the captain sent a third message, knowing the fear it would evoke: "Alter your course 10 degrees south --I am a battleship." Then the reply came: "Alter your course 10 degrees north --I am a lighthouse."

In the midst of our dark and foggy times, all sorts of voices are shouting orders into the night, telling us what to do, how to adjust our lives. Out of the darkness, one voice signals something quite opposite to the rest --something almost absurd. But the voice happens to be the Light of the World, and we ignore it at our peril. -- Paul Aiello, Jr., *Leadership*, Vol. 4, no. 2.

I. Christ' Words Are Timeless

A. What Christ said was true then and it is just as true today. The rationale for all that Christ said is that Christ Himself is the light of the world. The only reason any person can be light in this world is because the new birth has brought Christ into his life. Religious instruction, however sound, is not enough by itself. It brings light, but it cannot impart sight. The assumption that light and sight are synonymous has brought spiritual tragedy to millions. The Pharisees looked straight at the Light of the World for three years, but not one ray of light reached their inner beings. Light is not enough. The inward operation of the Holy Spirit is necessary to saving faith. The gospel is light but only the Spirit can give sight. -- A.W. Tozer, *Born After Midnight*. *Christianity Today*, Vol. 41, no. 5.

The darkness Christ is speaking of is not the lack of natural light, scientific light, the kind of light that enables a person to enter a profession or be a business man or a scientist or mathematician. No. He is speaking of the darkness that keeps men from understanding who he really is and what life is all about and where he is going from here. When you step into the field of the ultimate meaning of life and man's destiny there is darkness. Man cannot go beyond pure speculation. And in the area of inter-personal relationships men are groping for light. We have never had more divorces, more broken homes, more runaway children, more drug and alcohol abuse, more trouble in educating our children, more disruption in our classrooms than we have today. We do not seem to have any answers to how to live satisfying, fulfilling lives. With all of our knowledge we still have a gross darkness. And it is not only here in America it is even worse in other places. Some countries and nations seem to never be able to have a stable government and to be able to get a handle on their economy and the ecology. Instead of getting better with more knowledge and information they seem to get worse. So the darkness of the First Century was not any worse than it is today. It was safer to live then than it is now. There was less crime, fewer family breakups than today.

B. What, after all, is the function of light? Why we all know that it is to enable us to see, to see where we are going.

One night some years ago Judy arose in the middle of the night and made her way down the hallway. In the darkness she did not see a door standing open and she walked right into it. This gave her a black eye. The next day she went to see our ophthalmologist about her eye. He questioned her rather carefully about how she came to have that shiner and the bump on her head. This was before Farra Faucett starred in the movie *The Burning Bed*. You may remember that in that movie she had to wear sun glasses most of the time because of the black eyes her husband gave her.

We learned something from Judy's black eye. Now we always keep lights burning at night in our hallways. We have wall lights in the hall and in our bedroom so that when we get up in the middle of the night we can see where we are going.

The Christian is a person who knows who he is and where he is going. He has an Inner Light that tells him that he is a sinner who is incompetent to recover himself from his sinfulness apart from Jesus Christ. So he has turned to Christ and found in him the answer to his sin problem and the answer to the true and ultimate meaning of life. He has found out that Christ is the Creator and Redeemer of mankind who loves him and lifts him up out of the depths of degradation and who establishes his feet on the solid rock. Eternity is now in his soul as a living hope. Life now has purpose and meaning, and his interpersonal relationships can be rewarding and fulfilling in this present life.

II. The Christian Manifests His New Christ Nature as Salt and Light.

A. The Christian is a changed person. He has had a new birth, which gives him a Christ-like nature. And that will manifest itself in being salt and light. Remember, if I am a Christian I am developing a beatitudinal character. I know myself to be poor in spirit and I repent of my sin. I am no longer that proud, self-sufficient, autonomous person that I was before. Now I have a true understanding of my sin problem that has been making me miserable. This has begun to produce meekness in my soul. I am teachable and I have developed a hunger and thirst for righteousness that was not there before. I now can be understanding and compassionate toward others in a way I never was before. Having been the recipient of mercy I can look at others through eyes of mercy and forgiveness. I even begin to develop more and more a peacemaker attitude. I now have peace with God and I desire to have peace in all my relationships, so as much as in me lies I try to live at peace with all men.

B. But strangely enough this causes adverse reaction from others. As I walk in the light and now have a love for Christ and righteousness. I find that men in the world resent me. This is as Christ said it would be. **(John 3:19-21 NASB) "And this is the judgment, that the light is come into the world, and men loved the darkness rather than the light; for their deeds were evil. {20} "For everyone who does evil hates the light, and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed. {21} "But he who practices the truth comes to the light, that his deeds may be manifested as having been wrought in God." "And this is the judgment, that the light is come into the world, and men loved the darkness rather than the light; for their deeds were evil. {20} "For everyone who does evil hates the light, and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed. {21} "But he who practices the truth comes to the light, that his deeds may be manifested as having been wrought in God."**

We can easily forgive a child who is afraid of the dark: the real tragedy of life is when men are afraid of the light.

The Pharisees, the most educated men of the day, hated Jesus when he appeared among them. Why? Not because he taught some new religion or because he criticized them, for in the beginning he had little to say about them. His denunciation of them came toward the end of his ministry. These men could find nothing whereby they might accuse him, though they tried hard. What angered them was his purity and holiness of life and speech. They were jealous of him and despised him because his ministry was attracting large crowds and he was working miracles that convinced the people that he was someone more worthy of their respect and trust than themselves.

It is no different today. When we let Christ shine out of our lives and preach a gospel that demands repentance and offers Christ as the only answer to their sin problem we are resented and misunderstood. We are labeled self-righteous hypocrites. We are called narrow-minded bigots. The world resents being told that it needs saving, that without the mercy of God they are hell bound sinners. That infuriates people.

But light, by its very nature, must shine out. Having been enlightened by the gospel we ourselves become lights in a sin-darkened world. Christ in the follow-up to his teaching on the beatitudes explains that believers are transformed into vessels of salt and light. The salt purifies and preserves the world and culture around us and the light shines in a darkened world to show the way to true life and ultimate eternal joy..

A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. {15} "Nor do men light a lamp, and put it under the peck-measure, 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.

Christ is telling us that light defeats the darkness. It is an illumination to everyone. We are salt, meaning we are manifesting the new life in Christ by cleaning up our act. We do not run with the world. We have within us a Spirit of righteousness. We have been born into a heavenly citizenship. We put off the trappings of a life of sin and lust, pride and prejudice, envy and jealousy, lying and stealing. These things belong to the old life not the new. We are told to put off that old man with his evil habits and lusts. But when you do that you irritate and anger the unsaved sinner. So we find that being a Christian in this fallen world is not appreciated except by other Christians. The world at large is aroused to resentment and reaction. As Christ says in John 3 **"And this is the judgment, that the light is come into the world, and men loved the darkness rather than the light; for their deeds were evil. {20} "For everyone who does evil hates the light, and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed. {21} "But he who practices the truth comes to the light, that his deeds may be manifested as having been wrought in God."**

C. We are called to a life of faith and obedience. We are saved by the grace of God because of the redemptive work done by Jesus Christ. But once a person is regenerated, given a new heart, a new affection, he ceases to live as he did before. He now desires to please God and live in submission to the Word of God.

Wilbur Chapman had a rule he lived by for his changed life. He wrote, *"The rule that governs my life is this: anything that dims my vision of Christ, or takes away my taste of Bible study, or cramps my prayer life, or makes Christian work difficult, is wrong for me, and I must as a Christian, turn away from it."*

That certainly is good advice. When we embark on the Christian life there must be this desire to press on. I must fasten my eyes on Christ and follow him daily, taking up my cross and letting him teach me, concentrating on his word. That means daily reading of the Bible, daily prayer time, and regular worship, being willing to own him and witness for him at any and all times. Never to be ashamed to speak for him or say that I belong to him. The more I do that the easier it is. The less I do that the harder it may become.

We have to press on. It is not just a one-time decision to receive Jesus Christ and then a drifting without any follow-up to that decision. To begin with Christ involves perseverance. We have to recognize that there is this expectation by our Lord that we be salt and light in the world. Salt is placed first in the order of priority because if you are not living for Christ you certainly won't have the light of Christ shining out of your life.

How is it with you today? Are you in Christ? Is he your Savior and Lord? Are you salt and light? Or have you been waiting for a more convenient time? Let today be the day of your coming to the light of the world, Jesus Christ. Make him your personal Savior and Lord today.

**FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH OF VILLA RICA
519 MAIN STREET
VILLA RICA, GA. 30180
770-459-5276**

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