

## THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD

Matthew 5:14-16

**Intro:** We have been learning in the Beatitudes about *the character of a true Christian*. I use the word *true* of a Christian because there are many people who call themselves Christians who are not in reality what the Word of God means when it speaks of *what a Christian is*. Actually the term *Christian* is not the best word to describe one who has been born again, one who is a child of God through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. The expression *Christian*, or *Christians* (plural), is only found three times in all of the Bible.

Soon after the martyrdom of Stephen, followed by the salvation of Saul of Tarsus on the road to Damascus, and the preaching of Peter to the Gentiles in the house of Cornelius, some of the disciples went as far north as Antioch in Syria preaching the Gospel. A mighty work was done there, and many people were saved. Barnabas was sent up to Antioch by the church in Jerusalem to see what was going on. When he arrived, he became thoroughly convinced that God had done a work there. He left Antioch and went farther north to Tarsus to get Saul of Tarsus. The two of them came back to Antioch and spent a whole year teaching the new believers in Antioch. And it is concerning those believers that it is recorded for us by Luke in Acts 11:26b, “And the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch.” So it seems that it was a word which was given to the those who were trusting in Christ by those who did not believe. The word actually means *one who follows Christ*. It evidently was originally a term of reproach by which the people of the world identified those who became followers of Christ. It was only after many years that the people who loved the Lord used this word to describe themselves.

When Paul preached the Gospel to Agrippa and his wife Bernice, you will remember that Agrippa said to Paul, “Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian” (Acts 26:28). How sincere Agrippa was, we do not know, but probably his persuasion was not very deep.

The third and last time that the word is used we find in 1 Pet. 4:16 where we have these words, reading verse 15 with it:

15 But let none of you suffer as a murderer, or as a thief, or as an evildoer, or as a busybody in other men's matters.

16 Yet if any man suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed; but let him glorify God on this behalf (1 Pet. 4:15-16).

It is very likely that Peter was using the word as it was used in the first

century. If so, he meant that if any of them suffered as a despised follower of Jesus Christ, then “let him glorify God on this behalf.”

But now the word has become so generally accepted that it is used almost by anybody and everybody. To show how far the word has been stretched out, some people even speak of the United States as “a Christian nation” when it is anything but truly Christian.

So we in dealing with the Beatitudes are dealing with those who are *truly* Christian, those who really believe in the Lord Jesus Christ as their Savior from sin. The early Christians were called *saints*. They were people who were characterized by holy living. They were holy people. They had been transformed by the new birth. They were new creatures in Christ. They were sons of God.

And so we can say that the people who are characterized by the Beatitudes which our Lord gave at this time were, as the Lord went on to say beginning with verse 13, “salt,” and then in our text for today in verses 14 through 16, “the light of the world.”

Let us examine this expression, and be assured that if you really know the Lord Jesus Christ as your Savior, this describes you. A true Christian is:

### **I. THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD (Matt. 5:14a).**

The Lord was indicating that His disciples, all of them, were “the light of the world” – not *a light*, but “the light.” It is true that the Psalmist said, “Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path” (Psa. 119: 105), and he also said that “the entrance of Thy Word giveth light; it giveth understanding to the simple” (Psa. 119:130). And we as the people of God must preach the Word. We must bear testimony to the Word of God, *but it also must be true that we who carry the Word to the people of the world must be*, can I say it this way? the embodiment of the message we proclaim. Our Lord said, “Ye,” all of you who know me and love me because you have been changed by Me, “ye are the light of the world.” And I repeat: not *a light*, one among many different kinds of light in the world, but “the light.”

What does this tell us about “the world”? It tells us that the world is in darkness, but that the world also is darkness. And Scripture bears this out.

And so this brings us to ask a question:

## II. WHAT IS THE MEANING OF DARKNESS?

I have already quoted to you Psalm 119:130 where we learn that the coming of God's Word gives light, "it gives understanding to the simple." So in that verse we are taught that since the light gives understanding, it is at least implied that darkness speaks of *ignorance*. And how true that is! We didn't know much more about God than that He existed, and that He is the Creator, before the Lord opened our eyes to the Word. We didn't know about His greatness and His majesty, His holiness and His power, until the Word of God was given to us. We didn't know what our need is, nor what the remedy for that need was. We were darkness and we were in darkness. The Apostle Paul told the people of God in Ephesus,

For ye were sometimes darkness, but now are ye light in the Lord: walk as children of light (Eph. 5:8).

Another way that the Bible describes our former ignorance is by pointing out that darkness means blindness. The Apostle John tells us that the one who hates is brother "walketh in darkness, and knoweth not whither he goeth because that darkness hath blinded his eyes" (1 John 2:11). Now John was talking about our spiritual blindness.

You see evidence of this every day. People think that they have the right to do anything that they want to do, and they are ignorant of the fact that God is the One Who is sovereign in the earth. They think that they can determine for themselves what is right and what is wrong, and the person who feels that way is only revealing his own ignorance. We all were spiritually blind at one time, and it is only God Who can give us sight, the eyes to see the truth about God and the truth about ourselves and the truth about truth. Whether people want to believe it or not, truth is not relative; truth is absolute! And right and wrong are determined by God Who never changes. So what has always been wrong in God's sight, is still wrong today. And what has always been right in God's sight, is still right today! Our cultures may change, and people may accept things today which were rejected generations ago, but man's acceptance does not change the truth! And people who think that the truth changes, are only displaying their ignorance. And it is an ignorance which has eternal consequences – dire consequences, worse than people can possibly imagine!

Well, how did we ever get out of the darkness we were in. Who is the only One Who can give us sight?

## III. ONLY GOD CAN GIVE SIGHT TO THE BLIND.

Creation itself can teach us a great deal about salvation. In Gen. 1:2 we

are told that originally “the earth was without form and void, and darkness was upon the face of the deep.” Where, then, did the light come from? On the first day of creation, “God said, Let there be light: and there was light.” God gave light to this universe in which we live, and what is so amazing about what I have just read to you is that He gave light before there was a sun, or a moon, or stars. Don’t ask me how that could be, but it was! Read your Bible and you will find that there was no sun, moon, nor stars until the fourth day of creation, but there was light on the first day, and the second day, and the third day.

Let me give you an illustration from our Lord’s ministry on earth.

John 9 gives us the account of a man who had been blind from birth. We don’t know how old he was, but he was a man! Jewish boys were considered to be “of age” when they were thirteen, but the account in John 9 gives us the impression that this person was a man, not just a boy. And he had never seen. But the Lord did something which had never been done before. In John 9:32 we read what the man said to the Jewish leaders who were questioning him about what had happened. This is what he said,

Since the world began was it not heard that any man opened the eyes of one that was born blind.

I can’t say for sure how this man knew this, but I can imagine that he had talked to people, asking them questions about this, perhaps had his parents read to him from sources that were available at the time, to find out if there had ever been a person in any nation at any time who had been born blind, but later had been able to see. And he could not find a single instance where that had happened, but it had happened to him! The Lord had put clay on his eyes, and just told him to go wash in the pool of Siloam. He went, and he washed, and he came back *seeing!* The Lord Who had created man in the beginning gave him his sight.

This story is given in Scripture to illustrate a great spiritual truth. The Apostle Paul stated it in 2 Cor. 4:5-7. Listen to what we read in those three verses:

5 For we preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord; and ourselves your servants for Jesus' sake.

6 For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

7 But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us.

That is how every person becomes a child of God. God shines the truth into our hearts. And just as He commanded the light to shine on that first

day of creation, and suddenly it shone, so when God intends to save anyone, He shines the truth of His Word into that person's heart, and for the first time in their lives *they see – they see the truth about how blinded, guilty sinners, can be saved!*

Let me give you another verse which says essentially the same thing. The Apostle Paul, in writing to the church at Colosse, told them that they should be continually “giving thanks unto the Father ... who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of His dear Son” (Col. 1:12-13). You see, in addition to our natural spiritual blindness, Satan, who is “the power of darkness,” “hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious Gospel of Christ, Who is the image of God, should shine unto them” (2 Cor. 4:4).

So for anyone here today who is still blinded to the truth of the Gospel, the message of salvation, pray that the Lord will give you eyes to see, and ears to hear, and a heart to understand, so that by God's grace you can believe, and see, and be saved. And pray that prayer right where you are, and expect that the Lord will hear your prayer and save you before you leave this place today.

But now let me go back to the words at the beginning of our text.

#### **IV. THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD (Matt. 5:14).**

Most of you know that the Lord spoke these words to His disciples, and that these words speak equally to us. Those of us who are saved, are this very day “the light of the world.”

But someone says, “Isn't this a title that the Lord claimed for Himself?” And I will have to answer, “Yes, it is!” And you will find where He claimed it in John 8:12:

Then spake Jesus again unto them, saying, I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life.

And you will find that He said the same thing in John 9, the chapter which tells us of the man who was born blind to whom the Lord gave sight. But here the Lord made His statement in a slightly different, and very interesting way. You will find it in John 9:5, and this is what the Lord said,

As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world.

What did He mean, “As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world”? This ought to lead us to ask, “What happens, Lord, when you are

no longer in the world?” Isn’t the Lord still the light of the world? Of course He is! But people do not see Him today. He is spiritually present in us and with us, but not visibly present. So what happened to the light when the Lord went back to heaven? This is where our text for today gives us our answer.

How are people who are in darkness, blinded from their very conception, going to see the light if the Lord Jesus is in heaven? This is what makes our role in this life so very important. Everywhere there is a child of God, there is a light. And everywhere there is a church, there is a concentration of that light. That is why the Lord Jesus said, “Ye are the light of the world.” We don’t really take His place, but we are His instruments to carry the light to the people in our generation. We are the light of the world by what we are, and we are the light of the world by the truth of the Gospel which we proclaim.

But now let us look at the rest of our text as it applies to us as “the light of the world.”

The Lord likened His disciples to a city which is set on a hill. And then he likened them to a candle, or lamp, which is in a house.

In the first figure of speech we have the united testimony, or light, which we give as the people of God. In the second, the candle, or lamp, pictures us individually at home. In both cases we have the idea that we cannot be hidden. Unitedly, and we can apply this to us as a church, the Lord has placed us where we are, like a city on a hill, and we cannot be hidden. We are going to be seen. In fact, attention will be drawn to us by the very fact that we are lights shining in a dark place.

The disciples of our Lord were like a city which is set on a hill. People were watching them, just as they were watching the Lord. And people noticed the difference between our Lord and His disciples, as compared with their scribes and Pharisees. Their lives were different, and so was their message. And Christians in every generation are like a city which is set on a hill.

**Illus:** During college days, preaching in the country where it was night it was very dark. No lights in the homes, nor on the country roads. But as I drove back into Waco after church on Sunday night, the lights of the city were seen first of all reflected in the night sky, and then the lights themselves could be seen as I got nearer the city. Waco was not set on a hill, but I remember how good it was to get out of that intense darkness

back into the light of the city.

In the same way, all of us are like candles, or portable lamps, in our homes. I am sure that thousands upon thousands of times since I went away from home to go to college I have reflected upon the light that my Dad was and the light that my mother was.

In both cases which our Lord was speaking about, His comments were based upon what we are. If we know Christ, we are lights whether we know it or not, and whether we like it or not. Sometimes because of sin in our lives, the light may be very dim. In fact, it may be so dim at times that people may wonder if we are really saved. But whether we are with others in a situation like a church, or in our homes where we may be one among many who know the Lord, or we might even be the only Christian, God has placed us where we are to shine. And how do we shine? By making sure that the Beatitudes are descriptive of us, that is, by maintaining the closest possible fellowship with the Lord.

Now the emphasis in this illustration is upon the fact that we are seen. And so our Lord was talking about our character and our conduct. What we have to say is secondary here. It is by our character and conduct as “the light of the world” that God will work through us to get other people to pay attention to the message that we have to give.

And so our Lord concluded with the exhortation that we have in verse 16. (Read.) Remember that “good works” in Scripture do not just mean service of some kind, but they include the whole of our lives. The emphasis is on the word “see.”

And we don't live so as to attract attention to ourselves, but that we might “glorify” our “Father which is in heaven.” People can't see Him, but they can see us, and what they see in us always reflects upon Him, either positively or negatively. Let us live to glorify, to magnify Him.

**Concl:** Can there possibly be any more important ministry that you and I have in this world than to be “the salt of the earth” and “the light of the world?” Remember we don't choose what we are to be, nor we choose where we are to be. If we are saved, we are “salt,” and we are “light.” The point is, how are we doing as “salt,” and how are we doing as “the light”? Are we walking in such close fellowship with the Lord that our very lives confirm that we belong to the Lord, and do our lives cause others to want to know Him? Do we by our lives give an accurate picture of what our Lord is like? Only God can possibly make us sufficient for

the ministry the God has given to each one of us.

I conclude by reminding you of Peter's exhortation to the people of God in his own day who had been scattered throughout the Empire, away from their homes, and some away from their families. This is what he said:

9 But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light:

10 Which in time past were not a people, but are now the people of God: which had not obtained mercy, but now have obtained mercy.

11 Dearly beloved, I beseech you as strangers and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul;

12 Having your conversation honest among the Gentiles: that, whereas they speak against you as evildoers, they may by your good works, which they shall behold, glorify God in the day of visitation (1 Pet. 2:9-12).

May God enable us to be salt with a rich flavor, and lights that shine brightly in this world which has much darkness and little true light, that even in these evil days we may see many special evidences of the blessing of God, and may it all be for His glory alone.