

## Sermon on the Mount Light of the World Matthew 5:14-16

### Introduction

Today we are continuing a study on the most well-known teaching Jesus ever gave, the often-called "Sermon on the Mount." Jesus preached this message from the top of a hill next to the Sea of Galilee. The theme of his teaching is the kingdom of heaven. Jesus invites his hearers into God's kingdom and explains how a life lived under God's loving rule is radically different from a life lived under religious and secular power structures.

In the Beatitudes, Jesus tells his followers they can have the kind of happiness God created us to have. Now he turns to instruction to the kind of impact God wants us to have on the world and our society. It's another famous passage--many of you are probably familiar with it--but let's read it carefully.

Matthew 5:14-16, "You are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden. 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. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven." (Matthew 5:14-16 NKJV)

When Jesus describes his followers as light, He says that we possess the essential spiritual resources the rest of human society needs. We have these resources, not because we are so good or spiritual, but because we belong to the One who is the source of spiritual life. Jesus said in John 8:12, "I am the light of the world. He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness, but have the light of life." (John 8:12 NKJV)

Those who follow Jesus are the light of the world because His light shines through us. When Jesus describes humanity as lacking light, He is saying that we are spiritually dead and lost without Him. Despite any human greatness, people who don't know God are in a desperate spiritual condition.

In verse 13, Jesus uses the analogy that they are tasteless meat and subject to decay; because they live in the confusion and deception of spiritual darkness. Only when we are reconciled to God by accepting Jesus can we become spiritually alive. God wants to reconcile all sinners to Him. That is why God reaches out to all people through Jesus and his followers.

Jesus calls his followers to be the light of the world. That is His strategy for reaching out to those who don't know Him. It is a strategy of involvement and distinctiveness. In John 17, Jesus calls this being "in" the world but not "of" it. (Jn. 17:15-17) It is why Jesus calls his followers to involvement, not isolation. Jesus calls us to be in close contact with and personally involved with people who don't know Christ.

So what should our relationship with the world be like? He says we are to be salt and light. Whereas salt is hidden, light is visible. Salt works undetected, while light works out in the open. Salt works from within, light from without. Spiritually, salt is more like the indirect influence of the gospel, while light is a more direct form of communication. Salt could be a picture of our behaviors, while light is more an example of our words, what we teach and preach.

This metaphor was not just an application for the disciples but for all believers. We are the light of the world. We are the light of the world because Jesus is the light of the world, and Christ lives in us. In John 8:12, Jesus says, **"I am the light of the world. He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness, but have the light of life."** (John 8:12 NKJV)

Jesus is the Light. When Christ shines upon us, miraculous things happen. Marriages are restored, a person can turn from a life of destruction to a life of purpose, miracles of healing happen, and problems are solved. As the light of Christ shines through us, it lightens the world. But this light is more than a reflection of Christ because Jesus actually indwells us.

We are no longer living in darkness; we are vessels that contain the light of Christ.

## **I. Light of the Word**

In Scripture, light is used to describe the mental and the moral aspects of a relationship with God. Intellectually it represents truth, and morally it represents holiness. Intellectually, darkness represents ignorance and falsehood, but morally darkness represents evil. Psalm 119:105 says, "Your word *is* a lamp to my feet And a light to my path." (Psalms 119:105 NKJV)

In Romans 13:12, light refers to moral deeds, and darkness refers to immoral deeds. It says, "The night is far spent, the day is at hand. Therefore let us cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armor of light. Let us walk properly, as in the day, not in revelry and drunkenness, not in lewdness and lust, not in strife and envy. But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to *fulfill its lusts.*" (Romans 13:12-14 NKJV)

Isaiah 5:20 says, "Woe to those who call evil good, and good evil; Who put darkness for light, and light for darkness; Who put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter!" (Isaiah 5:20 NKJV)

The light of Christ changes us intellectually and morally, and these changes are significant. They make believers like a town on a hill, which brightens the sky for hundreds of miles. The light from believers cannot be hidden.

Believers are light because they know God, and the world is dark because they reject the true God. Romans 1:21-23 says the world is intellectually darkened when it comes to knowing God, the Creator. Paul writes, "Although they knew

God, they did not glorify *Him* as God, nor were thankful, but became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened. Professing to be wise, they became fools, and changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like corruptible man—and birds and four-footed animals and creeping things. Therefore God also gave them up to uncleanness, in the lusts of their hearts, to dishonor their bodies among themselves.” (Romans 1:21-24 NKJV)

Psalms 14:1 says the fool says in his heart there is no God. The world is dark because they do not know or acknowledge God. Believers are light because they know the Light—they know God. The world is darkness because they reject God’s revelation. Second Corinthians 4:4 says, “whose minds the god of this age has blinded, who do not believe, lest the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine on them.” (2 Corinthians 4:4 NKJV)

The world is blind to the light of the gospel. 1 Corinthians 1:18 says, “For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.” (1 Corinthians 1:18 NKJV)

To the believer, the gospel is the power and wisdom of God. First Corinthians 2:14 says, “But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know *them*, because they are spiritually discerned.” (1 Corinthians 2:14 NKJV)

Believers are light because they practice righteousness, and the world is darkness because it doesn’t. We are called to put aside the deeds of darkness and to clothe ourselves with Christ. 1 John 3:10 says, “In this the children of God and the children of the devil are manifest: Whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God.” (1 John 3:10 NKJV)

The children of God obey God but unbelievers are identified by disobedience.

The world is darkness, but believers are light. We know the truth about creation, the gospel, and God, and we live in view of these realities.

## **II. The Function of Light**

What are typical functions of light, and how do they apply to believers?

As light, believers expose darkness. While Christ was on the earth, he exposed the false teaching of the Pharisees and scribes. He exposed the corruption taking place in the temple. It should be the same with us. Christ calls upon us to shine the light on dishonest practices, gossip, corruption amongst leaders, and discrimination. Of course, this often angers people some people. But, Christians should always be the ethical lights within a friendship, a family, a business, an education system, or a government.

We do this out of a spirit of compassion and concern, not in judgment. The question is, are you willing to expose the darkness? We expose darkness indirectly

simply by living a moral life, but we also expose it directly by calling sin as it is. We should be ethical light when we are in the office, in the classroom, in the shop, and even in the Church. We must be willing to risk being called “negative,” “narrow,” “judgmental,” “puritanical,” or “bigoted.” If God’s Spirit calls us to stand up against wrong, it is up to us to be faithful.

Believers give off light. Ephesians 5:13 says: “But all things that are exposed are made manifest by the light, for whatever makes manifest is light.” (Ephesians 5:13 NKJV)

Everything exposed to the light becomes visible. When light touches something, it gives off light itself. It is converted and changed. In the same way, a believer’s life often changes a work environment. Jesus changes a person’s life when they repent and begin to follow Him. Light, by its very nature, is much more powerful than darkness. It impacts every environment. The Apostle Peter says, “having your conduct honorable among the Gentiles, that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may, by *your* good works which they observe, glorify God in the day of visitation.” (1 Peter 2:12 NKJV)

When Christ comes, many will glorify God for the witness of a Christian co-worker, friend, or family member who led them to Christ.

As light, believers also help others grow. We know that plants can grow in a dark cave as long as light is present. Medical researchers say that broken bones heal faster when they are soaking up sunlight. It is also true that Christians who shine their lights in a dark world will cause their friends, family, and co-workers to grow spiritually. Does your life cause the people around you to want to get to know God better?

The light from a believer’s life will even wake some people out of slumber. Why is it easier to wake up in the spring and summer than it is in winter? Could it have something to do with the light? It’s true that if you immediately turn on the lights while a person is sleeping, it will often quickly wake them up. In the same way, the spiritual light of a believer on fire for Christ often awakens those who are spiritually disconnected or asleep. Does your light stir up a zeal in those who are spiritually lazy and help restore those on the verge of spiritual death?

Light not only illuminates, but it also warms. When people are cold from standing in the shadows, they will move to a place with more sunlight to get warm. When you come in from the cold in winter, who doesn’t love a fireplace? Light emits heat. Therefore, believers should warm people’s hearts with a love and awe of being in God’s presence. The impact of a believer’s warmth can help others to repent of bitterness and anger.

It can also help them learn to show acts of kindness and generosity instead. The crowds ran to Jesus to find fellowship, comfort, and encouragement. What makes exposing darkness so difficult? How can we do this wisely?

### III. Growth as Light

Jesus said, "You are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden. 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. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven."  
(Matthew 5:14-16 NKJV)

How can we grow as light? How can we be most effective? To grow in light, we must stay near Christ, who is the Light. Second Corinthians 3:18 says, "But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord." (2 Corinthians 3:18 NKJV)

As we walk with the Lord, we are transformed into his image and glory. If we're going to grow as light, we must spend time with the Light!

To grow as light, we must regularly gather together with other godly believers. When you place many burning coals together, the light becomes more intense, hotter, and burns longer. When Jesus says "you are the light of the world," the word "you" is plural and refers not just to Christians individually but corporately. We are always more effective as lights together. Our light is strengthened by being around other godly believers who are on fire. Proverbs 13:20 says, "He who walks with wise *men* will be wise, the companion of fools will be destroyed." (Proverbs 13:20 NKJV)

To grow in light, we must fight the tendencies to hide our light. Are there times when you hide your light? Some believers are afraid to shine their light in the workplace because they fear it will hinder their career advancement. What about neighbors? Friends? Family? Jesus would say, "Don't hide your light under that bushel."

Some tend to hide their light simply because they're too lazy to be proactive saints. It requires discipline to go to church regularly, read your Bible daily, serve in the church or on missions outreaches, or share the gospel with others. But the bible says no wise person puts a lamp under a basket or a bed. The light of Christ is much more important than any other lamp in the house.

To grow as lights, we must put ourselves in the most strategic positions to experience growth. In verse 15, Jesus talked about putting a lamp on a stand. We usually place lamps in the most strategic place in the house. We should eliminate things that might dim our light or make it ineffective so we can put our light out there for others to see.

To grow as light, we must be balanced. Some believers give their best at work but neglect giving their best at home. Some of us work really hard at a hobby or something we really enjoy but aren't very faithful or dependable when it comes to more challenging things. A balanced life does not display its light intermittently.

In verse 16, Jesus says, "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven."  
(Matthew 5:16 NKJV)

This is really a command, not a suggestion. Do you let your light shine, so your good works glorify God? That kind of growth requires the right motive. We live our life in Christ so that the people around us can glorify God. Most people in our world are living to make a name for themselves instead of God. It's something that has been true since the beginning of time. Without the right motive, our light will grow dim and ineffective.

Psalms 115:1 says, "Not unto us, O LORD, not unto us, But to Your name give glory, Because of Your mercy, Because of Your truth." (Psalms 115:1 NKJV)

### **Conclusion**

Sometimes the greatest barrier to winning people to Christ in our culture is other Christians! Would your non-Christian neighbors and friends, and work associates say that you are a genuine and authentic Christian regardless of how much they may disagree with your beliefs?

People who live in total darkness don't really know how to live and relate to others. They get confused, lost, and damaged. What they need is light--someone who demonstrates how to live life in a way that works.

Does your boss wish they had more employees like you? Are you committed to love and invest in your spouse and family members? What about your non-Christian friends?

The point Jesus is making is not perfection but direction. Are you being a light in the world—drawing people to God by your words and actions? "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven." (Matthew 5:16 NKJV)