

The Sermon on the Mount
The Power of Your Influence (Part 3)

Matthew 5:13-16

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Well, I invite you to turn with me this morning, back to Matthew's gospel, and to the Sermon on the Mount. We come again to that picture Jesus gives of our influence. He says it's like light. Genesis 1 tells us that God Himself created light. And so, by divine design, we are surrounded with light, whether it's from the sun and the moon and the stars, or whether it's from the firelight or candle light, or from the artificial sources of light that through allowing man to uncover it, man has created. However you look at it, light permeates our daily lives.

What amazes me about that is that something that is so much a part of our everyday lives, something we so much take for granted—we walk into a room and we turn on the light switch and we expect there to be light. We walk outside in the morning and there's light. There's light streaming through even the skylights of this room. Even though it is so much a part of our lives, it still remains shrouded in mystery. What exactly is light? Have you ever thought about that question? What is light? Perhaps the first truly scientific theory of light was that of Isaac Newton. Newton believed that light was composed of particles, and his particle theory dominated scientific thought until the early 1800s. For more than a hundred years that theory reigned. But in the early 1800s Thomas Young hypothesized that instead of particles, light was composed of waves. And that theory reigned for about a hundred years or more as well. Until, last century, the birth of quantum mechanics. And with the birth of that view of the world, the general consensus among the scientific community today is that light is neither particle nor wave, but instead it is a combination of the two—of both waves and particles. It is a duality. However, there may be a general consensus, but what is clear from the scientific literature, to whatever extent I may (the very small extent I may understand it) is, the issue is far from fully resolved. The nature of light is still a mystery. It's interesting, because God Himself speaks of the mystery of light to Job. Job lived at the time of the patriarchs, 2000 years before Christ, and God said this to Job, as He corrected his thinking. God said, in Job 38 "Where is the way to the dwelling of light? And darkness, where is its place, that you may take it to its territory and that you may discern the paths to its home?"

In Scripture, light is often connected to the person of God. Psalm 104:2 describes God as covering Himself with light as a cloak. 1 Timothy 6, Paul says that God possesses immortality and dwells in unapproachable light. Light so blazing that we couldn't exist in its presence apart

from His grace. We would be instantly incinerated. 1 John 1 says that God is light, and in Him there is no darkness at all. So it shouldn't surprise us, should it, when God is described and connected in such a way with light, that when Jesus came into the world, He called Himself the light of the world. We saw that last week in John 8:12. "Jesus spoke to them, saying, I am the light of the world; he who follows Me will not walk in the darkness, but will have the light of life" Jesus essentially stood in that magnificent temple court with those huge massive candelabras around Him that had been set ablaze the night before, and He said I and I alone am the light of the entire world. With that statement, Jesus said that the entire world lives in perpetual darkness. That He Himself is the only true source of light, both the source of truth and the source of purity. That He Himself is the only source of truth and purity in all places, at all times, and for all people, including for you, for me. So in the ultimate sense, then, Christ alone is the true light of the world. That makes it remarkable I think, that in the passage we're turned to today in Matthew's gospel, Jesus says His followers, *we* are also the light of the world.

Look at Matthew 5:13. Jesus said:

"You are the salt of the earth; but if the salt has become tasteless, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled under foot by men. You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden; nor does anyone light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house. 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 that paragraph Jesus essentially makes this point. If you belong to Me, Jesus says, if you're a part of My spiritual kingdom, if you're a true follower of Mine; then God has given you a powerful influence on the world around you. And He uses two images to communicate the power of our influence, the image of salt, and the image of light. So we looked at verse 13 a couple of weeks ago. We are the salt of the earth. As I pointed out at the time, the major use of salt in the ancient world was as a preservative, to keep meat from rotting and decaying, to arrest its decay. Jesus calls us salt to show the power of our preserving, purifying influence in the world. By our very presence, by being Christians, and being in the rottenness of the world, we combat the moral and spiritual decay all around us.

Last week we began just to examine the second illustration—to look at the background of it. But in verses 14 to 16, Jesus tells us that we are the light of the world. Now, understand, Jesus is not changing subjects here. He is still talking about the power of Christian influence. Here is a second illustration, essentially making the same basic point. So what are the similarities between these two illustrations, between salt and light? What do they have in common? Well, both are

common items in every home, would have been in the first century. Every home would have had salt. Every home would have had some kind of a little lamp that provided light at night time.

Both of these, salt and light, were made by God. Both must be placed by a third party in order to work. Someone must place the salt on the meat and someone must light the lamp and place it on the lampstand within the home. Both of them have limited impact alone. A single grain of salt must be joined with others to have any significant impact. And for a city set on a hill to be seen at night, a single lamp must be joined with other lamps. Both salt and light are completely unlike what they influence. And both of them describe the world in horrific terms. Salt describes it as rotten and decaying, and light describes the world as complete and utter darkness. So those are the similarities between these two illustrations. But there's also one notable difference. Salt is primarily negative. It arrests decay and rottenness. Light also has a negative side, we'll talk about that. But it is significantly positive. So in our time together this morning, I want us to take a close look at this picture of our influence as light.

In verses 14-16, Jesus tells us four specific truths about the power of our influence. The first truth is this. Our influence is illuminating. Notice the beginning of verse 14. "You are the light of the world." Again, as with the first metaphor, the word *you* in the Greek text is emphatic. You, my disciples, and you alone are the light of the world. This is true of all genuine Christians without exception. If you're a true believer, you are light. You can't change that. That's who you are. And it is only true of genuine Christians.

Now, when Jesus compares us to light here, what kind of light is He referring to? Clearly, in this context, Jesus is not comparing us to the sun or to the moon, or as Paul does in another place as we'll see in a few minutes--to stars. That's not what Jesus does here. Instead, He compares us to two specific kinds of light that are really one and the same. The first is found in the second half of verse 14. It is the collective light from the lamps of an entire city at night. And then in verse 15 He compares us to the light of an individual lamp in a one room home. What is this lamp? Well, Jesus was referring to a small terracotta bowl that held a small amount of olive oil. It was often enclosed and it had a hole to pour oil into it (the oil that it burned.) It had a wick and sometimes it had a little handle at the back for transporting it around the home. Like with salt in the first metaphor, notice where we're to give this lamplight. The sphere of our collective influence as Christians is the entire world. We are the salt of the earth. We are the light of the world. In other words, He was telling His disciples, listen, I'm not talking about your just being an influence in this little tiny nation of Israel to the Jewish people. Instead, I'm going to spread you around the world and you will be salt and light everywhere you go.

Now, by being Christians, Jesus says, we serve as light to the entire world. The question is how? As with salt, light is a metaphor. Just to dissect it a little, that means (in this metaphor) all Christians are the topic, that's what Jesus is talking about. Light is the image. So the key question

then, is, what is the point of similarity? What quality or qualities do light and Christians have in common? Well, let's start answering that question by looking at the function of an oil lamp in the first century, which is the image Jesus is using. What did it do? How did it function? Well, essentially, an actual lamp's light in the first century served two primary functions. First of all, it exposed what was hidden in the darkness. Growing up, as you know if you've been a part of our church any time at all, you know I grew up in Mobile Alabama. And in Mobile, we were there by the coast, I was about 17 miles from Mobile Bay and from the Gulf of Mexico, and it was very humid and it never was too cold, and so it was an atmosphere in which not only did humidity thrive, but so did insects. So we had a serious problem with roaches. I mean serious roaches and lots of them. And it was practically impossible to get rid of them. And when it was dark, you couldn't see them, but you knew they were there. And if you turned on the light, huh, then you could see them. I remember turning on the light in my dad's garage and watching the roaches scatter. In fact, sometimes it was so bad they'd be lined up in groups of 25 doing calisthenics and pushups. That's what light does. A room may look fine in the darkness, but turn on all the lights and the dirt and the clutter and the insects become apparent. And ladies, if you really want to gross yourselves out, go out and buy a black light. Turn off all the lights in your home, and go around with that black light because it shows up bodily fluids. I know, those of you who are clean freaks, you're going to spend the next three weeks doing that.

So, but light does that. Light exposes those things you really don't want to see that are hidden in the darkness. But light also, a second function of a lamp or a light, is to enable you to see more clearly those things that you do want to see, those things that are beautiful and attractive. Those are not two distinct purposes, but really they are two aspects of the same purpose. One is negative, to expose that which is dirty and filthy and undesirable. The other is positive, to allow you to see those things that are beautiful and attractive and desirable. So light, then, we could put it like this. Light allows us to see reality, to see things as they really are, to see those things that are dirty and filthy, but also to see those things that are beautiful and attractive and desirable. As Christians, we serve both of those functions in a dark world. By our presence we expose that which is sinful, and by our presence we point to that which is beautiful and excellent and desirable.

This was true even in the life of our Lord. He was light in this way. Let me show you that. Turn to John 3. As light, He served both that negative purpose, exposing the sinfulness of people, but also making that which was attractive to be seen as well. Look at John 3:19. Here, John the apostle, writing of our Lord says: "This is the judgment (*or this is the reason that judgment is going to come*) The light has come into the world (*the light here is Jesus—has come into the world, that's the incarnation. He came into the world*) and men loved the darkness rather than the light (*why?*) for their deeds were evil." Why would that make them hate the light? Look at verse 20."For every one who does evil hates the Light, and does not come to the light (*here's the issue*) for fear that his deeds will be exposed." He doesn't want the light because in the light, he

sees who he really is. He sees his sin. The light shows him for what he is. When you and I live as Christians in the world, when we're what we ought to be in Christ (our pursuit of God and holiness, our desire to love God and love one another) it turns the light on the darkness of the sin of the people around us. The contrast becomes obvious.

This year I'm using a plan. I'm reading through a Bible I've not used before, and thoroughly enjoying it. It's the plan of Robert Murray M'Cheyne. And you start at five places in the scripture, five different places, and you're reading through different sections each day. And yesterday, I was catching up a little bit in Genesis and I read the story of Sodom and Gomorrah and Lot. And you know, Lot was certainly not the light he should have been in that culture, right? I mean obviously not. And yet, what happened that night when the angels arrived and the men of Sodom showed up and Lot refused to give his guests to these Sodomites? What did they say? You are acting as a what? a judge. You are judging us. Really? I don't think Lot had ever judged them like he ought to have. What were they saying? They were saying, Lot, by the very fact that you won't go along and participate in this sin with us, it's like you're judging us. What was happening there? His unwillingness to sin in that way was a light that showed up the roaches in their souls. And that's how we are. When we live as we ought to live, when we do what we ought to do, it's a light that shows the people around us the darkness of their lives—the sin and filth in their lives, by contrast. But it doesn't stop there. Look at verse 21. Here's how John finishes. "But he who practices the truth comes to the Light, so that his deeds (*that is his good, his excellent deeds*) might be manifested as having been wrought in God" In other words, light serves both purposes. Jesus served both purposes. His light showed the filth and sin in some lives, but it also showed that which was good and excellent and desirable and attractive. And we serve the same purpose in the world. When you and I are what we ought to be, our lives expose the sin in other people's lives—not because we're sitting in judgment on them. Simply because we are different than they are, and that difference turns on the light to who they are. And they don't like what they see. And so we get accused of being super pious even though we've never done that. We've never sat in judgment in the negative pejorative sense. And our presence shows that which is beautiful. It shows Christ and the gospel.

Now, again, in this metaphor, Jesus paints a very unflattering picture of the world. In the salt metaphor, Jesus describes the world as rotten and decaying. And remember, we're not talking about the planet, although that may be true. That is true as well, according to Romans 8. But we're talking about people here—the people of the world. They're rotten and decaying. In the metaphor of light, Jesus describes the world as characterized by complete and utter darkness. It's ironic, isn't it, how often the world champions its enlightenment? Jesus says, there's no enlightenment. It's dark. Jesus says the people of our world—the people of the Dallas/Fort Worth Metroplex not only live in the darkness, but the darkness lives in them. They live in the darkness of spiritual error and ignorance and blindness. They live in the darkness of slavery to sin. And it is in that darkness that you and I are to be light. We are to bring the light of the truth.

We are to bring the light of moral purity. And when we are light in that way, we expose what is hidden in the darkness that people don't want to see about themselves, and we also turn a light on the beauty of Jesus Christ and the gospel. And here's the remarkable thing. Only Christians bring light into the world. Have you ever thought about that? No assembly of world leaders, no group of the great minds of our world, not the scholars, the academics, the intellectuals, no one else can bring light into the world, Jesus says. You are the light of the world. Lloyd-Jones put it this way. "There is obviously no light at all in this world apart from the light that is provided by Christian people and the Christian faith." That's it. The only light this world has. Everything else is darkness.

The second truth about our influence. Not only is our influence illuminating, but Jesus goes on to say it is inevitable. Look at the second half of verse 14. "A city set on a hill cannot be hidden". Now, understand, here, Jesus didn't get lost in His own thoughts. He's not changing subjects. He's not mixing metaphors, nor is he changing metaphors. He is still comparing us and our influence to light. So why does He bring up a city on a hill? Well, understand that before there were fighter jets, before there were bombers, before there were air forces, the safest place to build a city was on the top of a hill. It was the most easily defended position. In addition to that, before there were air conditioners, building on the top of a hill or a mountain insured that in the afternoon and evening, you got the cool breezes that would sweep across the land. And so that's how most ancient cities were built. In fact, even today if you go to the land of Israel, or even some European countries like Italy for example, a lot of the medieval towns are built on the top of hills. And at night time, in the first century when all the lamps and torches in a given town or a city were ablaze, you could literally navigate through the countryside by following the light from those hilltop cities. And many of those cities were built with native white limestone, which caused whatever lamps were lit in that city to be reflected and to shed their light far afield.

What you could not do was hide the light cast through the darkness from one of those hilltop cities. In fact, in more modern times, one of the greatest difficulties during war is hiding the lights of cities. We've all read about the blackout restrictions that were in place in Europe during World War II to try to shield them from the bombers that came at night. It's really hard to hide the lights of a city. Jesus is saying, if you are a true follower of His, it is as difficult to hide your light of influence as it is to hide the light of a city that's built on a hill. It's virtually impossible. And just as, at night, you cannot hide the lights from a city on a mountain, neither can you hide your influence as a Christian. Do you understand that about yourself? Do you understand the power of your influence? It's not a question of whether or not you have influence. It's a question of how you use that influence. How do you influence others? Does your influence point the people around you to Christ and the gospel and to your heavenly Father? Or does your influence point them somewhere else. Our influence is illuminating. Our influence is inevitable.

Thirdly, verse 15 says our influence is predetermined. Look at verse 15: "nor does anyone light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house." God made us light, and He placed us in a prominent place in the darkness so that our light would be seen. We collectively spread light across the world. Now look at what Jesus says here. He says you don't light one of those little oil lamps and put it under a basket. The Greek word translated basket comes from a Latin word that refers to a dry measurement of grain. Eventually, the word came to describe not only the measurement of grain but the vessel that you use to make the measurement. And so it refers either to a tightly woven basket, which is why the translators chose that word here, or sometimes the measuring device was a clay pot. So either a basket or a pot. It held about two gallons of grain. Jesus' point is that no one lights a lamp in order to hide it. You don't put the lamp you just lit under that measuring device for grain and hide its light. Verse 15 goes on to say, instead you put it on the lampstand and it gives light to all who are in the house. You put it up on a lampstand. You wanted then, you still want today, your source of light to be up so that it spreads the most possible light. That's why, even today, we put our lamps on tables, or we get a floor lamp that's taller so that it casts light more broadly. Or we even attach them to the ceiling.

Now many first century homes had one room. That's the home of the poor people, just one room in which they lived. And there would have been in that room, (and in archeology I've actually seen) an example of this from the time of Jesus. There would have been like a stone shelf, just a small little carved out stone shelf that stuck out into the room, or sometimes they would put an actual lampstand in the center of the room. And as darkness fell, they would take that lone lamp with its olive oil, they'd light the wick, and set it on the lampstand, up high so that it gave light for that entire little one-room house. Jesus says, of course, if you light an oil lamp you do so in order to make the light seen as far as possible. You don't light it and hide it.

What do you do when the power goes out at your house? Well, if you're like me, you feel your way along to the drawer where you've put the flashlights, and you break out the flashlight and you turn it on, and then if you have a lantern of some kind you go find that lantern with the flashlight and you take that lantern if you expect the power to be out any time at all, and you place it in a strategic place in the room where your family's going to be together. So that it provides the most possible light. The *raison d'etre* for a lamp is to be visible and to give light. And so it's ridiculous to hide it. It's ridiculous to make it obscure in some way. And Jesus is saying the person who lit this lamp didn't do that. Now what's Jesus talking about? Who is Jesus talking about? In this metaphor, who lit the lamp and didn't put it under a bushel? I know the children's song we sing, you know, I'm not going to put my lamp under a bushel. That's not the point of this verse, okay? The point of this verse is God did this. God is the one who made us a lamp. God is the one who made us light. And He's done so with a specific purpose in mind. He intended to set us in a particular place so that we would give a light to all of those around us. Do you realize God has sovereignly placed you where He's placed you? He's placed you in your

own little corner of the dark world to be a light. You are still on earth for a purpose. You are to be salt to stop the decay, and you're to be a light to those around you. That is the divine plan. Do you realize everything else we do as Christians, we'll do better in heaven? Our worship will be perfect in heaven. Our sanctification will be complete in heaven. Our prayers will be face to face in heaven. Everything else we do, we'll do better in heaven, so why doesn't God take us the moment we trust in Him, to Himself? We are still here on this planet not primarily for ourselves, but for the world. One commentator writes, the job description of a disciple is not fulfilled by private personal holiness, but the witness of public exposure. Your Christian life is not about your warm and fuzzy personal devotion time. You're here on this planet. . . and by the way, I'm not being critical of that, you need that time. We'll talk about that in a little bit. I'm just saying that's not the reason you're here. You'll do that better in heaven. You're here on this planet for the world. Is that how you see your life? Is that the lens through which you see your existence? It's how God sees you. It's how Jesus sees you. You are the salt of the earth. You are the light of the world, and that's why you're here.

There's one final truth about our influence. It comes in verse 16. Our influence is prescribed. Look at verse 16. In light of all that, Jesus says: "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." Jesus doesn't allow us to decide how we're going to apply this metaphor of light. He finishes His paragraph with a command—with a prescription for our behavior. What a lamp is to a house, you and I are to be to the world. Jesus says, if you're a Christian, God has made you to be light, and so let your shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works and glorify your Father. Now, a very important distinction needs to be made here. The goal is not for them to see our good works. In fact, look over at chapter 6. Matthew 6:1. We're going to come here. Jesus says "Beware of practicing your righteousness before men to be noticed by them;" In other words, your motive cannot be to be seen, and to be admired. Otherwise you have no reward with your Father who is in heaven. Look at verse 2. The hypocrites give in the synagogues and in the streets. They give their alms visibly and openly where everybody sees it so that they may be honored by men. "Truly, I say to you they have their reward in full." If your motive is to let your light shine so that people see your light shine, you've missed the whole point. Look down at 6:5. The hypocrites "love to stand and pray in the synagogues and on the street corners so that they may be seen by men. Truly, I say to you, they have their reward in full" Listen, if you approach what 5:16 commands of us with the desire that your reputation would grow, that you would be thought super-religious and pious and pure and holy and a wonderful person, you've missed the point entirely. In fact I'd go so far as to say you've perverted the point. You turned it on its head.

So, how do we reconcile what we just saw in Matthew 6 with what Jesus says in Matthew 5:16, "let your light shine so that others may see your good works" How do you reconcile those? I can't do better than Matthew Henry, the old puritan commentator. Listen to what he writes. "we

must do good works that may be seen to the edification of others, but not that they may be seen to our own ostentation. We are bid to pray in secret, and what lies between God and our souls must be kept to ourselves, but that which is of itself open and obvious to the sight of men, we must study to make congruous to our profession. Those about us must not only hear our good words, but see our good works, that they may be convinced that religion is more than a bare name, and that we do not only make a profession of it but abide under the power of it" Seeing our good works isn't the goal, it is merely the means to the true goal. The real goal, the only legitimate goal is that the people around us glorify our Father who is in heaven. In other words, do you understand this? The goal of our good works in this passage is not to make life better for the world-let's make it a nicer planet on which to live. The goal is not to make our lives better-if we can just change the way unbelievers act and behave, our lives will be a whole lot easier. The goal is not so that they imitate our virtue. The goal is not so they think we're great-wow, don't you love our neighbors, they are just wonderful people. The goal is that they will come to recognize the sole source of the difference in us, and that is our Father who is in heaven.

Look at Titus 2. Titus is all about adorning the gospel, living in such a way as to make the gospel attractive, turning the light on the beauty of the gospel and of Jesus by how we live. The first few verses of chapter 2 talk about how older men are to behave, and younger men, older women, younger women. But look at the reasons that are given. Look at verse 8. "so that the opponent will be put to shame, having nothing bad to say about us" And look at the end of verse 10. So that when we live as we ought to live, in whatever circumstance we find ourselves, "so that they will adorn the doctrine of God our Savior in every respect." In other words, when we live like we ought to live, it makes the doctrine of the rescuer attractive, because it's clear we've been rescued. We've been changed. We're different. We're not the people we used to be. 1 Peter 2:11,12. "Beloved, I urge you as aliens and strangers to abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul" You're an alien. You're a stranger here. You don't belong here. This is not your permanent home. This is your temporary home, so remember that. And verse 12. "Keep your behavior excellent (*I love that word excellent. It means morally beautiful and attractive. Keep your behavior excellent*) among the Gentiles, (*that is, among unbelievers is the idea*) so that in the thing in which they slander you as evildoers, they may because of your good deeds, as they observe them, glorify God in the day of visitation.". When God visits, they glorify Him. That might be when He visits them in their lives and they come to Christ because of our testimony, and they glorify Him in that. Or it might be at the judgment when they have to say God you gave me light. You gave me light in conscience, You gave me light in Your word, and you even gave me the light of those Christians you scattered throughout my life who showed the beauty of the gospel, and showed me my sin by how they lived. That's what we're to do.

But how, exactly, do we shine as lights to the people around us? In the New Testament, there are three primary ways that we as Christians serve as lights to the world, and I'm just going to give you an outline of them today because I'm going to come back to this issue next week. Because

Christians have become very convoluted in their thinking about this issue. And I want to give you a little history and sort of unravel some of that for you, the whole liberal approach, the fundamentalist approach, and now the emergent approach. I want you to see why you're reading the things you're reading on blogs and in Christian books, and give you some context for it. But today, let me just give you a brief outline. How do we shine as lights? There are three primary ways in the New Testament. One of them is here in this text. There are two others. First of all, we shine in our characters by being a picture of Jesus and the gospel. By who we are. This is the beatitudes. We just went through them. By being the person we ought to be, we shine, we expose the sin of the people around us because we're pursuing righteousness. And we show the beauty of Christ and the gospel because we're different, because of how we are. John Chrysostom, one of the great expositors in the history of the church wrote "nothing makes a man so illustrious as the manifestation of virtue, for he shines as if clad with sunbeams." Isn't that true. We've all known people who weren't falsely pious. They were just genuine Christian people, and they were winsome and they made the gospel and Christ winsome by how they lived. We shine by being a picture in our characters of Jesus and the gospel. You see, when we live out the beatitudes, or in Pauline language, when we live out the fruit of the Spirit, love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, etc. we are reflecting the character of Jesus Christ. That's who He is. And we're shining then, not to the same intensity, but shining in the same way that He shone.

A second way that we serve as a light to the world is not only by our character, but by our good works. By living out the implications of the gospel. That's what Jesus says in Matthew 5:16. "that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven." This has always been true. Even in Old Testament times there was a proverb. Proverbs 4:18 says "the path of the righteous is like the light of dawn, that shines brighter and brighter until the full day. The way of the wicked is like darkness; and they do not know over what they stumble." This has always been true. The righteous are on the path of light. What does that mean? Well, Jesus says it means good works. Let me show you this in other passages in the New Testament. Again, on some of these I'll come back to in a little more detail next week, but let me just give you an outline. Ephesians 2:10. As Paul finishes a paragraph about our being regenerated, why God has rescued us from sin, he gives several reasons, and in verse 10 he give this reason. Here's one reason why God made us alive. "for we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we should walk in them." Listen, God saved you in order that you would reproduce the life of Christ in your own. That you would do good works, and that those good works would shine and reveal His glory. Over in Ephesians 5:8, he says "You were formerly darkness, but now you are light in the Lord; walk as children of light". By our good deeds we reveal the light, and in context of Ephesians 5, it's talking about our sexual purity. By remaining sexually pure in our language, by remaining sexually pure in our thoughts, by remaining sexually pure in our actions, we're light. Now you talk about something that exposes the sin of the world. When a Christian is pure it exposes that sin. But it also makes the purity and holiness of Christ attractive as well.

Look at Philippians 2. Paul continues this theme, and you're not going to like the application of this. Let me just tell you. Philippians 2:14 "Do all things without grumbling or disputing" Uh oh. He's saying, in context, face the circumstances of your life without grumbling about them and complaining about them. And when you do that, first of all, you'll prove yourselves to be blameless and innocent, children of God. In other words it will be an evidence of your salvation, because unbelievers don't do that. Unbelievers complain and grouse about their circumstances if they don't suit them. And, notice what else he says. In the midst of a crooked and perverse generation you will appear as lights in the world. And here the image is of us being stars in the middle of a dark night sky. You'll be like stars in the darkness if you will face your circumstances without grumbling and complaining. Think about it. Can you really tell someone else "I serve a great and sovereign God" when in the next breath you're complaining about what that sovereign God has brought into your life? We're to glorify Him by our behavior—by no complaining.

But notice Philippians 2 goes one step further. Verse 16. We also glorify Him, we also are lights by "holding (*probably better forth, you see the marginal note there*) holding forth the word of life." Both by our good works, not complaining against God's sovereignty in our circumstances (in His providence in our circumstances) but also by communicating the truth of the Gospel. Look over at Titus 2:14. "Christ gave Himself for us to redeem us from every lawless deed, and to purify for Himself a people for His own possession, who will be zealous for good deeds." That's why He redeemed us. Titus 3:1. "remind the believers (*Paul says to Titus*) to be subject to rulers (*to authorities, to be obedient*) to be ready for every good deed." Verse 8. "this is a trustworthy statement; and concerning these things I want you to speak confidently, so that those who have believed God will be careful to engage in good deeds." Down to verse 14. "our people must also learn to engage in good deeds to meet pressing needs, so that they will not be unfruitful."

Hebrews even tells us that when we gather together on the Lord's Day, part of the intention of that, according to Hebrews 10:24, is that we would stimulate one another to good deeds. We would encourage one another to do good deeds. Lloyd-Jones puts it this way. "Whether we like it or not, our lives should always be the first thing to speak. And if our lips speak more than our lives, it will avail very little." So often the tragedy has been that people proclaim the gospel in words, but their whole life and demeanor has been a denial of it. We shine as lights by our character. When we are in ourselves a picture, in our character is a picture of Jesus and the gospel. By our good works, when we live out in our lives the implications of the gospel.

There's one final way that we shine as lights and that is by our message. By proclaiming Jesus and the gospel. Look at 2 Corinthians 4. Paul says in verse 2 that we're manifesting the truth. We're making the truth obvious.

"commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God. (*He's saying we teach the truth of the gospel*) . . .if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing, in whose case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelieving so that they might not see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ."

One of the ways we shine as lights in the world is just like Paul. We manifest the truth of the gospel, commending it to every man's conscience. We put the light of the truth of the gospel in front of them. You say, well, Paul says here they can't see it because they're blind. Yeah, that's not our business. Our business is to communicate the light of the truth of the gospel. It's God's business, look at verse 6, to say let there be light. Just like He had to say that at creation, He has to say that in every human heart. And that person you're sharing the truth with won't see the light until God says (snap) let there be light. But our responsibility is to set the light before them. The light of the gospel of the glory of Jesus Christ.

So what Jesus means by good works, then, includes all of those. It's a three-legged stool. Remove one of those legs and the entire stool collapses. For example, we can be what we ought to be, and we can do what we ought to do in good works, but if we fail to proclaim Jesus and the gospel, we've not been a light to the world around us. On the other hand, if we share the gospel but we fail to be what we ought to be and to do what we ought to do, we undermine the very gospel we proclaim. As one author puts it, we are called both to spread the gospel and to frame our manner of life in a way that it's worthy of the gospel. Balancing all of that has proven to be a real challenge to the church over the last 150 years, and today, it is a huge issue. So next week I want to address my entire message to this issue.

But as we finish our time today, I want to remind you of something that's very important. Listen closely. We're only light because of Jesus. Jesus is the sun, and we, like the moon, only shine because we reflect His light. But unlike the moon, our light is not solely a reflected light. He has also made us light, according to Ephesians 5:8. But we can only shine when we're connected to Him. When I was in college--high school, college, and seminary, I supported myself by being an electrician. But you don't have to be an electrician to appreciate this illustration. You've got light bulbs in your pantry, or in your garage, or in a closet somewhere in your house—light bulbs you haven't used. You can take one of those light bulbs out of the package and you can hold it and wish that it would give light all you want. You can hold it until you go to sleep at night, and there'll be no light from that light bulb, because that light bulb doesn't have the capacity to shine on its own. The same is true for us. We have no capacity to generate light ourselves. We're only light when we're connected to the power source—when we're connected to the true light, and it's from Him we receive the light to shine. And we are to shine for Him, right now, today. You are to be a light in the way we talked about, in your home, and in your school, and in your

workplace, and in your neighborhood, and in the organizations of which you're a part. You must be the gospel by being a different person than they are. You must live out the implications of the gospel by obeying what Christ has taught us and letting them see a changed life and good works. And you must open your mouth and share the gospel. But let's just be honest. Even if we do all those things today, our light is just a flicker. Let me tell you something very encouraging. That won't always be true. Someday, your light will be a massive flame. Jesus, in Matthew 13 says this. "in the kingdom of their Father, then the righteous will shine forth as the sun" That's not Christ. That's you. Until then, may God help us to flicker where we are.

Lets pray together. Father, thank You. I pray that you would help us to live out the implications of what we studied this morning. Father, help us to be light. We are light. You've made us light and You've set us sovereignly in unique places where you intend for us to be the source of light. Father, that light will expose ugly things in the lives of others, and they won't like it in us any more than they liked it in our Lord. That light will also make things that are beautiful to be seen. Christ and the beauty of the gospel. Father, I pray that You would help us. Help our lights to shine through our characters by being a picture of Jesus and the gospel in how we are. How we are in our characters. Father, help us to live out the implications of the gospel in our actions and in our good works, and Lord, help us even as we frame up what that means and doesn't mean next week. Father, I pray that You would help us to open our mouths and share the gospel, and in so doing, be a light in the darkness. And Father, I pray for someone here this morning, perhaps a number, who are still living in the darkness and have the darkness within them. May this be the day, O God, when You say, let there be light. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen