

THE EARLY PARABLES OF JESUS

Message 3

Passage: Matthew 5:14-16

Words: 6172

INTRO: We are in the early parables of the Lord Jesus. I see three groups of parables and I see this first group as Jesus' preparing His disciples for the change that is coming. They do not know what is coming. They think He will set His kingdom up shortly. But in the parable of the salt, the implication is that believers will be scattered, and later we will learn that they will be scattered worldwide, and they will be the influence that preserves the world.

In the first part of this sermon, the Lord, in the beatitudes gives us the character of the true Christian. And these two parables of salt and then light give us the function of the Christian in the world. First, the true Christian will be the salt of the earth. He will preserve it so the Lord can take a people for His name out of the whole world. Then, in this parable He will show how the Christian will do this in an active sense. The Christian will be the light of the world.

So I introduce the parable of the Christian being the light of the world by quoting from Lloyd Jones again. He says of this parable:

It is interesting to observe that, according to our Lord, this is the second great result of our being the kind of Christian man He has already described in the Beatitudes. We should consider also the order in which these statements are made. The first thing our Lord said of us was, 'Ye are the salt of the earth'; and it is only after this that He says, 'Ye are the light of the world'. Why does He put it in that order instead of the reverse? This is a very interesting and important practical point. The first effect of the Christian on the world is a general one; in other words, it is more or less negative. Here is a man who has become a Christian; he lives in society, in his office or workshop. Because he is a Christian he immediately has a certain effect, a controlling effect, which we considered together earlier. It is only after that, that he has this specific and particular function of acting as light. In other words Scripture, in dealing with the Christian, always emphasizes first what he is, before it begins to speak of what he does.

As a Christian, I should always have this general effect upon men before I have this specific effect. Wherever I may find myself, immediately that 'something different' about me should have its effect; and that in turn ought to lead men and women to look at me and to say, 'There is something unusual about that man.' Then, as they watch my conduct and behaviour, they begin to ask me questions. Here, the element of 'light' comes out; I am able to speak and to teach them. Far too often we Christians tend to reverse the order.

[David Martyn Lloyd-Jones. *Studies in the Sermon on the Mount* (Kindle Locations 2411-2420). Kindle Edition.]

If one takes it like that, then one should live right before one seeks to teach what is right. According to him that is the order here; first salt then light. So, only after one is right and does right is one qualified to teach others what is right. This is the opposite of hypocrisy, the major problem of Judaism at that point. So the order is to live right first and then teach right. Luke, in Acts, speaks of all that Jesus began both to do and teach. That is the order. Do, then teach. And in these parables it is salt first and then light.

We turn then to the parable of the Christian as the light of the world.

II. THE LIGHT

A. The Parable

We begin by looking at the parable itself as it is given in Matthew 5:14-16:

14 *"You are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden.*

15 *"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.*

16 *"Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven.*

When I began with this parable I was tempted to violate my own principles of interpretation. You see, I wondered to myself, is there enough for a message in this verse, or should I just slip it in at the end of the first message. And so I was tempted to just read D. Martyn Lloyd Jones notes. When I used to teach hermeneutics, that is the rules for interpreting the Bible, I said there are two sins of the interpreter. The first is going to the commentaries before you have done your own study. The second is not going to the commentaries after you have done your own studies. And so I kept my own advice here.

But listen now to just a bit from Lloyd Jones. He has such a way of saying things. After I had done my studies I read him and others. Listen to what he says here:

In verse 14 we have, surely, one of the most astounding and extraordinary statements about the Christian that was ever made, even by our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ Himself. When you consider the setting, and remember the people to whom our Lord uttered these words, they do indeed become most remarkable. It is a statement full of significance and profound implications with regard to an understanding of the nature of the Christian life. It is a great characteristic of scriptural truth that it can compress, as it were, the whole content of our entire position into a pregnant verse such as this. 'Yea', said our Lord, looking out upon those simple people, those entirely unimportant people from the standpoint of the world, 'Ye are the light of the world.' It is one of those statements which should always have the effect upon us of making us lift up our heads, causing us to realize once more what a remarkable and glorious thing it is to be a Christian.

[David Martyn Lloyd-Jones. Studies in the Sermon on the Mount (Kindle Locations 2324-2330). Kindle Edition.]

Now notice what he said about the crowd Jesus was speaking to. He said: 'Yea', said our Lord, looking out upon those simple people, those entirely unimportant people from the standpoint of the world, 'Ye are the light of the world.' I want to propose to you that today, the hope

of the world rests, not on the educated and the intellectuals. It does not rest on doctorate degreed preachers; not on eloquent speakers; not on slick programs; not on large churches. I am convinced the hope of the world lies in very simple god-fearing Christians. It depends on godly fathers. It depends on godly mothers. It depends on faithful preachers who stick with the Word of God.

LEM, in his book, *Crowded To Christ*, writes about the simple people God uses. I didn't want to read through the book to find the quote so I'll put it in my own words. Some who came to visit Prairie Bible Institute and saw the farmers and the uneducated students in their classes mourned that the Lord was reduced to using such second rate workers. But Maxwell was undaunted and strengthened by such sayings as this: "God could mow a mountain with a worm, if He could get all the wiggle out of the worm." Some have called that worm theology. And there on the mountainside, at the feet of Jesus were just such worms, but on them hung the hope of the world.

I went to school there when Prairie finally caught on that you need teachers with doctorate degrees to teach intelligent students in order to get the evangelization of the world done. Well, no doubt I do not need to check the numbers of missionaries that went out years ago and those that go out now from that school. Now they are training more nurses and such like, but not disciplined soldiers for Christ as they did in the past.

B. The setting

What is the setting of this parable? We have covered the setting in the first parable. Jesus had just called His disciples. John the Baptist had by now been put into prison. And Jesus is giving His first major discourse.

C. The interpretation

We come then to the interpretation of the parable, or this metaphor. Jesus said, "You are the light of the world." Again, as in the earlier parable, I believe

this refers to those who are described in the beatitudes immediately preceding these parables. They began like this: *Blessed are the poor in spirit.* Not long ago we went through the seven churches of Asia. The last church was the lukewarm church. The lukewarm church is not one that is truly Christian. This church goes through all the motions and says all the right things, but it is unsaved. They thought they were rich and increased with goods and had need of nothing, but they were totally deceived. Jesus said to them, "You do not know that you are wretched, and miserable, and poor and blind and naked." And when He said they were poor, it was the word we have here for those who are poor in spirit. They are not just barely scraping by, they are beggarly poor.

The difference is the Laodiceans thought they had it all together but they were beggarly poor, spiritually. Those of this beatitude recognize they are beggarly poor. Only when we come to realize we are beggarly bankrupt do we begin to have a chance at all. I remember such a state in my own life. Oh, how bankrupt I was. And on a dark street between two lighted streets in Vancouver B.C. I surrendered my life to the Lord. I was so bankrupt that I became extremely miserable.

But there is a positive thing about realizing one is spiritually bankrupt, or beggarly poor. Such a person qualifies for salvation. That is what makes it a blessed state. The greatest need for the spiritually bankrupt is to come to realize that he or she is beggarly poor. That is the hard part, especially if that person is already a church member.

Only when one truly comes to that state does mourning one's putrefying condition begin. Thankfully many of our children have not lived in sins such as some of us have. But it is crucial for them to see that they are in a beggarly condition without Christ just as well as those who have lived in deep sin. No one is a Christian because they grew up in a Christian home. And once a person sees his or her true beggarly state and such a person mourns over that putrefying state, now they are ripe for true salvation. Well, that

process continues in the beatitudes and there we have the characteristics of the true Christian set out in a most perfect presentation.

According to our last message, the beatitudes give us the characteristic of the Christian. And in verses 13-16 we have the function of the Christian in the world. The first function was that of being salt in a decaying world. The second now is to be light in the world. And the person that comes through the beatitudes becomes the Christian who is the salt of the earth and the light of the world. And I believe Jones is right, the believer as salt and light speaks of the believer's function in the world that is in view here.

Consider the words now, "You are the light of the world." Verbs have three moods. The imperative mood makes a command. If this were a command it would say, "Be the light of the world." The subjunctive mood is the mood of possibility or wish. If that were the case here it would say, "You should be the light of the world." The indicative mood makes a statement and that is the case here. So it says, "You are the light of the world." Any true Christian is salt and is light, indicative mood. Anybody who is not salt or light is not a Christian.

If it is questionable if you are salt or light, then it is also questionable if you are a Christian. I understand that everybody has things to work with and I understand that younger Christians cannot be where mature believers are. I understand that. But if you are not salt and light, you need to do some serious soul searching and make your calling and election sure.

So with regard to the subject of light, go now to day one of creation in Genesis 1. Before the creation of angels we are at the time when God alone existed. We human beings are earth or material bound, so when we try to think of time before anything material existed, we are out of our realm and our little computers sputter and quit and we cannot imagine a time that had no matter. But before creation God was in such a time. Then He created the angels. And in order for them to have any

value to God, they had to be free moral agents. And then one day one of them sinned, and became the one we know as the devil, and he took a lot of angels with him, and they became those we know as demons. Well, God was no longer alone. But now He has sin to deal with. And I believe to deal with sin, He created the entire universe and man on planet earth.

And so here in Genesis 1:1 we at the very beginning of creation. And we begin in verse 1:

- 1 *In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.*
- 2 *The earth was without form, and void; and darkness was on the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters.*
- 3 *Then God said, "Let there be light"; and there was light.*
- 4 *And God saw the light, that it was good; and God divided the light from the darkness.*
- 5 *God called the light Day, and the darkness He called Night. So the evening and the morning were the first day.*

Now you can read all through creation, and you will never read that God created the darkness. He did not say, "Let there be darkness." Isaiah 45:7 says the Lord says, *I form the light, and create darkness: I make peace, and create evil: I the LORD do all these things.* That is truly a difficult verse. Matthew Poole says it means, in the context, *All men's comforts and calamities come from my hand.* I think too that this speaks of man's experience, not of creation.

What it seems like from Genesis 1 is that the natural state in which everything was created was in darkness, just like the earth was created without form and void. But what is very clear is that God created light. If you want to do a study that taxes the brain beyond limit, study what light is. It makes me tired just to think about it.

But notice that the sun is not the original source of light. God created light before He created the greater and lesser

lights. And after He created light, He then divided the light from the darkness. We observe from creation, first, that darkness existed before light was made. And God saw the light, that it was good. And when He saw it was good, He divided it from the darkness.

So we now ask, if the Christian is the light of the world, what is that light? Well, light pictures knowledge. When we gain insight into something it is called 'enlightenment'. Knowledge is enlightenment. You see the secular world had an age of enlightenment. It was an age where knowledge and reason were exalted. The hope of the world, in that age, lay in enlightenment. Our public schools base their hope in secular enlightenment. The problem with secular enlightenment is its inability, or unwillingness to acknowledge moral truth or knowledge, and it is this that the Christian is in the world.

Now knowledge is a mental understanding of some truth. And there are two realms of truth. There is truth that is related to the physical realm. That is natural revelation. We call that science, and science simply means knowledge. We call evolution science, but you cannot call something that is a theory science. You cannot know a theory. You can know what the theory is, but a theory has not been verified yet. If it was, it would no longer be a theory. There are many things that we call scientific that are verifiable, and therefore are truly scientific.

But when we enter the realm of moral truth, we have entered the spiritual realm. Evidence for truth in the spiritual realm is found in special revelation. And special revelation gives us spiritual and moral truth. And when Jesus said, "You are the light of the world", it is moral truth He is talking about. And I believe that is what it means when it says of the true Christian, "You are the light of the world."

I believe it is moral light. It is truth that shines like light and exposes that which is morally right and morally wrong. It is moral truth that gives a knowledge of right and wrong. For example, somebody tells an off-color joke and one person doesn't join in the

laughter, and an awkward silence wants to set in. Or even more convicting, someone says, "I don't think it is appropriate to tell those kinds of jokes." Well now, that bites.

Now, darkness is associated with moral evil and light with moral goodness. Consider in connection with this, 2 Corinthians 4. Turn to it. Paul has been speaking about the fact that God has made us ministers of the NT; ministers of the Spirit and not of the law. So he says in 4:1:

1 *Therefore seeing we have this ministry, as we have received mercy, we faint not;*

2 *But have renounced the hidden things of dishonesty, not walking in craftiness, nor handling the word of God deceitfully; but by manifestation of the truth commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God.*

3 *But if our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost:*

4 *In whom the god of this world 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.*

So, here we see that the glorious Gospel is the light to a lost world. And the darkness is in the mind of the lost because it has been darkened by the devil. It is the mind that must be enlightened. But that is difficult because man, by his very nature hates the light and the devil keeps him bound in this hatred. Verse 5:

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.*

When it says God commanded the light to shine out of darkness, there we are at Genesis 1. God commanded the light to

shine out of the darkness. We too were once darkness, and He shined out of the darkness of our hearts to give light there. Well, the heart is the mind. That is where the darkness exists. And what is this light? Knowledge of spiritual and moral truth.

This world came into an age called the age of enlightenment. It was the age where reason took top place. But every enlightenment of knowledge that does not have the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ at its heart, is a knowledge doomed to failure. We'll look at this later, but Jesus said, "If the light that is in you is darkness, how great is that darkness."

Now let us make another observation. Jesus said in our passage, "You are the light of the world." The word for light is *phos*. We get such words as *photography*, or *photons*, from this word. A photon, I read, is "...a particle representing a quantum of light or other electromagnetic radiation. A photon, they say, carries energy proportional to the radiation frequency but has zero rest mass." Well, that is beyond me almost as far as defining light itself. But this is what we are in the world, light.

But consider further that Jesus also said, "I am the light of the world." So who is the light, the Christian or Christ? Well, this works like the sun and the planets. The planets only reflect the light of the sun. The planets are luminaries.

Listen to Philippians, 2:14-15. Paul says here:

14 *Do all things without complaining and disputing,*

15 *that you may become blameless and harmless, children of God without fault in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world*

He says Christians shine as lights in the world. The word translated lights is *phostar*. Jamieson, Fauscett and Brown say this means *luminaries*. A luminary gives light, *phos*, but it is not the source of the light, it only reflects it. That is how we are lights in the

world. Luminaries reflect their light when the sun disappears. Jesus said in John 9:5, "As long as I am in the world I am the light of the world." But Christ is no longer in the world, and now the Christian reflects His light to the world.

So what is this light we are talking about? It is moral light, just like the darkness is moral darkness. To get out of our moral darkness we need moral light. And what is moral light? It is the knowledge of right and wrong. But we have a problem, we hate moral light! Turn to John 3. We are all familiar with verse 16:

16 *"For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.*

But look at verse 17:

17 *"For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved.*

18 *"He who believes in Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.*

19 *"And this is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil.*

Moral light is a problem thing in the world. It condemns darkness and drives it out. Wherever there is darkness, light condemns it. And so moral light causes opposition. Let me give you an example. You are with a group of professing Christians and a social drink is handed out, and you say, "No thanks." Immediately an amount of tension is set off. There is discomfort. But let us say in the same situation tea is offered and you say, "No thanks". No tension. Why? There is no darkness to dispel.

We go on in verse 20:

20 *"For everyone practicing evil hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed.*

Why do those who practice evil hate the light? Because light exposes their darkness and it condemns it! Oh we hate exposure of that which is wrong within us. We love when our positive is exposed. As a matter of fact, we may go out of our way to make it known. But the negative? We hide like black beetles under a rotting board. Have you ever watched these black beetles with that hard shell, that burrow underneath stuff and live in the dark? Take an old board, and lift it up sometime, and if you see one of those dark bugs, it so hates exposure and light that it will run hither and yon and seek to get back underneath something in which it can hide. It lives in constant fear in the light.

We, are like that. We, as people, can sit like nice Christians in church. We know we should be there. But behind that nice Christian face, may lurk this black beetle. And the beetle does not mind as long as you cannot expose him. But when exposure comes, back behind that face he goes and hides. And when church is over, he wants out. Men love darkness rather than light. That is our nature.

Keep your finger in John and turn to Ephesians 5. Paul has said in verses 11-12:

11 And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather expose them.

12 For it is shameful even to speak of those things which are done by them in secret.

We are not to fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness. But what are we then to do? We are to expose them! That is what light does. It exposes. It is interesting to watch robbers through the lens of night glasses. They are sneaking around, and somebody sees them clear as day. And then when they are exposed, it is something to watch. The gig is up. But woa to the light bearer. So how are those who sneak around in darkness exposed? Look now at verse 13:

13 But all things that are exposed are made manifest by the light, for whatever makes manifest is light.

The light exposes. It is moral truth that exposes and this is light. Anything that reveals any darkness in me, that is light. Anything that reveals darkness in me, is what I don't like. And so we go back to John 3 and verse 21 and look now at the contrast in verse 21:

21 *"But he who does the truth comes to the light, that his deeds may be clearly seen, that they have been done in God."*

Oh what a contrast! Light and darkness! Truth loves the light. Truth loves exposure! Darkness hates it because it reveals. Light is more powerful than darkness. Darkness cannot overcome the light. But when the light is turned off, darkness comes in like a flood. And what did Jesus say? You are the light of the world.

D. The Application

Now what is the application of being light? Well, we have seen some of that already just be describing what light is. So let me ask, if salt is first and foremost a preservative, and the Christian is a preserver of the world; what practical function does the believer have as the light of the world? How is this passage applicable to the life of the Christian?

We are talking about the function of the Christian as light in the world. Jesus said, "You are the light of the world." What light? Moral light, the light of moral knowledge, moral truth. In our public school education, enlightenment by education was to be the hope of the world. If you will study where our public school education was founded, and study the humanist manifestos of 1933 and 40 years later, and such men as John Dewey, you will see that public school enlightenment and Christian enlightenment, or what they call religious enlightenment are the difference between light and darkness. Man is not capable of diffusing the light of knowledge that will make man better. You can make a more educated sinner, but you cannot make saints this way. Humanism is incapable of producing that which is morally good, and all you have

to do is look at public education as it has developed over the years, and you will see why.

Consider Matthew 6:22-23. It says:

22 *"The lamp of the body is the eye. If therefore your eye is good, your whole body will be full of light.*

23 *"But if your eye is bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If therefore the light that is in you is darkness, how great is that darkness!"*

If you are using the KJV it says the light of the body is the eye. The NKJV says the lamp of the body is the eye. The word is not *phos*, but *luknos*. Bishop Trench says it is a hand-lamp fed with oil. (Show one). But the NKJV says *if your eye is good*, and the KJV says, *if your eye is single*. And here, the translation 'single' is more difficult to understand but it is correct according to the original word. And what does single mean? In the context the subject is that the Christian is to lay up treasure in heaven, not on earth. If he lays up treasure on earth while he is a Christian, he has double vision. His eye is not single. If his vision was single, he would keep focused on laying up treasure in heaven.

Now you see, there is our subject of light. The light we are talking about is moral and it is spiritual. It is then that Jesus says, "The lamp of the body is the eye." So if your eye is single, that means it is fixed on spiritual and moral truth, and your whole body will be full of light. But if your eye is evil, your whole body will be full of darkness. Now what is this evil eye? It is focused on the physical, material riches. And what will happen if you focus on the physical, the material? Your body will be filled with darkness. It will lead to moral decline. Why? The light has left! And then He says, "If the light that is in you is darkness, how great is that darkness!" If you are led by a knowledge that is based on the physical and material, it will lead to moral darkness. And if your light is the physical and material, how great will your darkness be?

Then He goes on to say that no man can serve two masters. If we lay up treasures on earth while we profess to be Christians we have double vision. And when you have double vision, you cannot follow both the things you see at the same time. As the lamp lights what you need to see physically, so the eye lets in knowledge of what you need to see morally. It lights up the mind to see moral truth.

And now Jesus said, "You are the light of the world." You are what dispels the darkness. Jesus shines on the believer and the believer reflects that light to the world. And if the light that is in us is darkness, how great is that darkness? Of the people in the Galilee area it was prophesied that the people that sat in darkness have seen a great light. That light was Christ.

What was it that so angered the scribes and Pharisees about Christ? Was it such things as healing on the Sabbath? No. That was their religious hideout. That was what they used to give the picture that their anger was justified, but that is not what angered them. You could go to our former church problems and you would see this same thing. You would see that what was given as the reasons for what was done and what the actual reasons were, you would find they were very different.

And to quote Jones, he says, *That, of course, was really the ultimate cause of the antagonism of the Pharisees and the scribes to our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Here were these men, who were teachers of the law, these men who were experts, in a sense, on the religious life. Why did they so hate and persecute Him? The only adequate explanation is His utter purity, His utter holiness. Without His saying a word against them at the beginning-for He did not denounce them until the end-His purity made them see themselves as they really were, and they hated Him for it. Thus they persecuted Him, and finally crucified Him, just because He was 'the light of the world'. It revealed and manifested the hidden things of darkness that were within them. Now you and I have to be like that in this world: by just living the Christian life we are to have that effect.*

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People cannot explain why we are the way we are. In the age of enlightenment we thought we could educate man and ultimately make man good morally. But we can go back to Genesis 3, and there we have the full explanation why we are the way we are.

Jones says: *Every difficulty in the world today can be traced back, in the last analysis, to sin, selfishness and self-seeking. All the quarrels, disputes and misunderstandings, all the jealousy, envy and malice, all these things come back to that and nothing else. So we are 'the light of the world' in a very real sense at this present time; we alone have an adequate explanation of the cause of the state of the world..*

In spite of all the knowledge that has been amassed in the last two hundred years since the beginning of the enlightenment half-way through the eighteenth century, fallen man by nature still 'loves darkness rather than light'. The result is that, though he knows what is right, he prefers and does what is evil. He has a conscience which warns him before he does anything he knows to be wrong. Nevertheless he does it. He may regret it, but he still does it. Why? Because he likes it. The trouble with man is not in his intellect, it is in his nature-the passions and the lusts. That is the dominating factor. And though you try to educate and control man it will avail nothing as long as his nature is sinful and fallen and he is a creature of passion and dishonor, end quote.

David Martyn Lloyd-Jones. Studies in the Sermon on the Mount
(Kindle Locations 2463-1465 and 2469-2473). Kindle Edition.

But we must make a further observation from our text. A true Christian is light. He is not supposed to be light, he is light. But look now at the last part of verse 14. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden. But a city can be hidden! If you put it in a valley, it lies

hidden to a large area though it still gives light. A city set on a hill gives light to a large area.

Notice this application even further. Jesus said people do not light a lamp and then set it underneath something. You see, you can have light that does not do anything of value. May I suggest we are often afraid to open our mouth? And then our light is hidden and just lights up the inside of the container which is overtop of it.

A man by name of Guy Dowd won teacher of the year in the United States one year. And he was a professing Christian and he lamented the failure of professing students to stand up for their faith. And then he said, facetiously that is, that one day it dawned on him that they were undercover agents. They were lighting up the inside of a basket.

So notice verse 16, "Let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven." Let me say first of all that this does not mean we go around doing good to attract others to become Christians. It means to not hide our light. We live it wherever we are. Let me give an example. You are in a restaurant and your meal has come, and others are sitting around you, are you going to hide your light or let it shine? If you let it shine, you will pray just like you do at home. And you don't do it with the purpose of drawing attention. That is not what Jesus is teaching here. What Jesus means, I have no doubt, is to live right for the glory of God no matter what the cost to you.

CONCL: And our application will have to be our conclusion as I've run out of time.