

Sermon Title: The Light of the World

Speaker: Jim Harris

Scripture Text: Matt. 5:14-16 (Sermon on the Mount #11)

Date: 9-20-20

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Come back with me to our studies in the Sermon on the Mount. You probably know by now that even though there are pieces of it in Mark and in Luke, in Matthew is the major record of this sermon—the longest consecutive record of anything that Jesus taught in one place at one time. I'm sure it was not every word that He said; this is the inspired "edited version," if you will, that is here for our edification until we are with the Lord.

Now, so far in the Sermon on the Mount, we've taken our sweet time to go one verse at a time through the so-called "Beatitudes"—or, the "Blessings." That's where Jesus gives the basic, sort of composite drawing of what true disciples look like (see Ps. 145:18; 2 Cor. 13:5; 1 Jn. 2:29; 3:10). The whole sermon has rightly been described as Jesus's exposition on the theme: "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Matt. 4:17; NASB, and throughout, unless otherwise noted). That's what He started preaching when He came on the scene. That's what John the Baptist had preached (Matt. 3:1) when he was the "forerunner" of the Savior (Lk. 1:17).

Those who "repent" are the ones touched by God, who have responded to Him in faith (Acts 16:14), and those people begin to manifest the characteristics that He described as "blessed" (Phil. 2:13). We've worked our way through the list. True disciples are those who are "poor in spirit" (Matt. 5:3); who "mourn" over sin (vs. 4); who are "gentle"—or, "meek" (vs. 5); they "hunger and thirst for righteousness" (vs. 6); they are "merciful" (vs. 7); they are "pure in heart" (vs. 8); and they are "peacemakers" (vs. 9).

And then the final blessing that Jesus pronounced was on people who endure persecution and false accusation (vss. 10-12) for living the kind of lives described by that array of character qualities that He has described there. So, those final verses of the Beatitudes describe how the *world* reacts to *Christians*. Now we move into how Jesus intends for *Christians* to interact with the *world*—how we should affect the world. And He brings to conclusion this description, this picture of spiritual life related to the Kingdom of Heaven, in two metaphors that He used to describe our impact on the world.

Both metaphors connote the concept of influence, but each describes a different kind of influence. We saw the first one last week in Matthew Chapter 5, Verse 13. We are like "salt." Jesus says: "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." In the culture of that time, salt was precious. It wasn't what we think of as salt; it was still the same compound, but theirs was not used anywhere near as much for a seasoning as it was a preservative. It would be rubbed into meat in order to retard the decay process. If you didn't have a freezer or a refrigerator, you had to have some way to keep your meat from spoiling rather quickly.

And so, Jesus is saying that we are like that in the world. He says "you"—plural—and He's talking to the people who were His genuine disciples. Remember: just that morning, He had named the Twelve Apostles, so He's addressing Himself to the Apostles and the true believers; and listening in are the ones that He's going to theologially skewer and dismantle in the rest of this sermon—"the scribes and Pharisees" (Matt. 5:20).

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And He says: "You folks, *you* who are following Me—not some elite group hyper-spiritual super-saints—*you are the ones* who are to be My instruments in the world, My influence for righteousness that will slow down the tidal wave of moral corruption that is coming.

The salt with which the original listeners to this sermon were familiar was salt mined around the Dead Sea—a sea that had no outflow, so as the water evaporated, it became saltier and saltier; hence, it's the "Dead Sea." It's so salty, you can lay on your back and float there without anything inflated underneath you. If you go to Israel, you've got to get your picture taken, bobbing around in the Dead Sea. This salt was not completely pure, because it was infiltrated with other compounds that caused it to have a limited shelf-life; the other components would interact with the moisture in the air and with other things, and the salt would lose its saltiness—lose its effectiveness as a preservative. And when it got to that point, they would throw it out into the street. You would never put in your garden, because then nothing would grow. You would put it in the street to keep the street clear of weeds, and keep it dry, and keep it as smooth as you possibly could.

By calling attention to *that* aspect of salt—that the salt they understood could lose its saltiness—I think it's pretty obvious that Jesus was making an application to the misplaced pseudo-spirituality of the scribes and the Pharisees, those religious leaders who had the right information—they had the Word; they had the Scriptures (Rom. 3:2)—but they had twisted it and perverted it so much that they, spiritually speaking, were as useless as unsalty so-called "salt." When it comes to changing people's lives for the glory of God, they truly were worthless, because they were putting people in bondage, not setting them free (see Matt. 23:4).

Jesus made it clear: the *regular folks* who responded to His message were the ones that He was going to use to influence the world (1 Cor. 1:26-29; Jas. 2:5). And remember: "you" is emphatic—"you *and you alone*," just like the "you" or the "they" in all of the Beatitudes. *Only people like this* are "the salt of the earth."

Well, today we're going to "fill out" that analogy—the metaphors for "influence." The second of the two metaphors is where Jesus says: "You are the light of the world" (Matt. 5:14). Fasten your seatbelts; we're going to equal our record for the most verses in one week, so far in the Sermon on the Mount—three of them today! And we're actually going to take bigger paragraphs on coming Lord's Days as we work our way through this.

This is very simple. Verses 14 and 15—You Are Light; You Cannot Hide. And then Verse 16—Your Mission Is To Shine For The Glory Of God. It's really not a difficult passage. It's the *application* of this passage that you have to work on for the rest of your life, and it has to continually be tweaked and refined and adjusted and responded to with sensitivity and wisdom as you work through the various situations of your life.

Let's dive in. You Are Light; You Cannot Hide, starting in Verse 14—"You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden." Do you perceive that behind both of these metaphors—"salt" and "light"—there's a presupposition? The presupposition behind the metaphor of being "salt" is that the world is in the grips of corruption (1 Jn. 5:19).

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The presupposition behind the metaphor "you are the light" is that the world is in "darkness" (Jn. 12:35). The world is corrupt, and it is further decaying; and it is dark, and it is darkening (see Rom. 6:19). The world has no innate goodness to build upon! The world is populated by several billion totally-depraved inhabitants who, given time, make it worse and worse simply by living according to their nature (1 Sam. 24:13). It is corrupt, and it is dark (Eph. 6:12).

There *are* temporary aberrations to the contrary—I mean, people *can* do nice things every once in a while—but the world cannot, overall, do anything except get worse and worse. Remember how Paul warned Timothy about his ministry in the city of Ephesus? In Second Timothy 3:13, he says: "But evil men and impostors will proceed from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived." He left Timothy there to "instruct certain men not to teach strange doctrines" (1 Tim. 1:3). And he said, "And by the way—that's *really important* that you take care of that in the church, because *they* are not going to soften their message—they're *only* going to get worse; *you* have to ameliorate their influence on the people of God!" My friends, do you understand that salvation is nothing less than deliverance from total "darkness to light" (Acts 26:18)?

I'm going to give you several cross-references today, just to reinforce what Jesus is saying. Colossians Chapter 1, Verse 13 says this: "For He rescued us from the domain of darkness"—Satan is called the "Prince of Darkness," "the prince of the power of the air" (Eph. 2:2), "the god of this world" (2 Cor. 4:4)—"and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son." You've come out of an existence that was enveloped in spiritual "darkness" (Matt. 4:16); that's the dullness and the depravity and the despair of the ways of the world, and it's replaced by the light of the "true knowledge" of God (2 Pet. 1:3)—goodness, righteousness, joy, love, laughter, peace, hope, encouragement. It's a transformation! In God's marvelous plan, He has not only "rescued us from the domain of darkness," but He has actually designed that we would be the representatives of His light in the darkness of the world (Rom. 10:14-15; 2 Cor. 5:20).

Now, understand: Jesus is the "light" (Jn. 1:4-5; cf. Lk. 2:32). As you work your way through the Gospel of John, it only takes you nine verses to get to John 1:9, where John writes, contrasting Jesus with John the Baptist: "There was the true Light which, coming into the world, enlightens every man." The *only One* who can rescue anyone from darkness is Jesus, who is "the true Light." Now, we are *lamps* which are lit by the Light Himself. To live the life of "Christ in you" (Col. 1:27)—to live that out in the world (Gal. 2:20)—is to be light in the backdrop of the darkness of the world.

Move along to John 3:19, where John writes: "This is the judgment, that the Light has come into the world, and men loved the darkness rather than the Light, for their deeds were evil."

And then, John 8:12. This was spoken by Jesus at one of the feasts that He attended in Jerusalem—probably at the Festival of Lights. He probably spoke this in the Outer Court of the temple, against the backdrop of this massive candelabra. "Then Jesus again spoke to them, saying, 'I am the Light of the world' "—and besides saying He is the Light of the

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world, He used that phrase *ego eimi*, the Greek translation of Exodus 3:14-15, the name of God: "I Am." "I am Yahweh!" (cf. Jn. 8:58) "*I am* the Light of the world; he who follows Me will not walk in the darkness, but will have the Light of life."

In John 12:46, He said it again this way: "I have come as Light into the world, so that everyone who believes in Me will not remain in darkness."

And now that you've come to Christ, did you know that your testimony is recorded in the New Testament? It is! It's right here in Ephesians Chapter 5, Verse 8—"For you were formerly darkness"—don't you love how he doesn't say, "you were *in* darkness," like you were this innocent victim? No! You were the *embodiment* of darkness! Apart from Christ, you were "dead" (Eph. 2:1)! You were dark (Eph. 4:18). "You were formerly darkness, but now you are Light in the Lord; walk as children of Light." That's your testimony! If you belong to Christ, it's no less of a transformation than "darkness to light." A Christian loves "the Light" (Jn. 3:21). Look over at First John Chapter 1, Verse 6—"If we say that we have fellowship with Him"—you say you belong to Christ—"and yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth."

I don't remember who said it, but some Bible commentator more clever than I put it this way: "Jesus is the Light *lighting*. We are the light *lighted*." He *is* the Light—He's the source of the light. In us, His light shines. And collectively, *believers* are the light. People should be able to look at us like "a city set on a hill," and they ought to be able to see us. And then, as we scatter, we go into the world and we become, *individually*, little luminaries—little *bearers of light*, if you will (Acts 8:4; cf. Lk. 8:39; Jn. 4:28-29).

Philippians Chapter 2, Verses 14 and 15, puts it this way: "Do all things without grumbling or disputing"—the difference between "grumbling" and "disputing" is: one of them, you mutter it; the other one, you don't get it out—you just think it. "Do all things without grumbling or disputing"—Why?—"so that you will prove yourselves to be blameless and innocent, children of God above reproach in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation"—here it is—"among whom you appear as lights in the world." So that's why Jesus says: "A city set on a hill cannot be hidden." His design is that we be visible! The "city on a hill" is visible at all times.

I don't know if you noticed today, but I looked out, and besides there being this weird brightness outside my house, did you know that on the horizon, there are some irregular, bumpy, ridgy kinds of things? I think they used to be called "mountains." We haven't seen them for how many days. Well, you can see *the city on the hill*! By night, its lights can be seen for miles. Even in those days, without electric lights, all the lights of all the oil lamps in all the houses could be seen. By day, you can see the skyline of the city that's up on the hill.

Here's the analogy: Like "a city on a hill," a Christian is *meant to be seen*. Everyone you contact has an opportunity to see what you're made of! And they really ought to see *light* (Col. 4:5-6; 1 Thess. 4:12; Titus 2:10; 1 Pet. 1:15; 2:12).

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The same is true when we are together collectively. A church is meant to be seen. Remember: Jesus said to the Apostles, the night before He went to the Cross—John 13:35—"By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another." In other words, "They'll know you belong to Me when they see how you interact with each other." We are *meant* to be seen.

In Matthew 5:15, Jesus says that not only are you like "a city on a hill," but He says: "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." Now, He's painting a word-picture here—using an analogy, a metaphor. Jesus has designed that His followers be both *visible*—people can see you—and *radiant*—you provide light wherever you go.

So He uses the illustration of a lamp—the perfect illustration of what a Christian is to be. A lamp does not produce light by itself (cf. Jn. 15:5). A lamp is a vessel *through which* light shines. Jesus is the Light; we are the individual lamps in which His Light shines.

Lamps from those days, and that culture, are very well understood; archaeologists have uncovered a whole bunch of them. As a matter of fact, go to Israel with me next year and, Lord willing, I'll take you to the village of Nazareth; and if they're still doing what they've been doing as long as I've known, they will actually give you your very own little oil lamp as a souvenir. I used one on Christmas Eve here a year or two ago, to start our candle-lighting service.

They're little clay things; they're small enough to easily be held in your hand; they're kind of saucer-shaped; about six inches long, about four inches wide, a couple inches high. On one end is a handle, so you can carry it around. On the other end is a nozzle-shaped extension—or, if it was a teapot, you would call it the spout—with a hole for a wick to pass through. On the top are a couple of holes—one for adding oil, one for making sure that it can draw air to help burn the oil through the wick. The wick extends down into the little oil reservoir, and it draws it up to the end of the wick by capillary action. That exposed end of the wick is lit; and the amount of light is adjusted by how much wick you expose, which determines how big the flame is. That also determines how fast the oil burns. The process of trimming off the parts of the wick that have frayed so that it doesn't get smoky—that's called "trimming" the lamp. In Revelation Chapters 1, 2, and 3, Jesus is seen as trimming the various "lamps," which are the "churches" that are in existence at that time (Rev. 1:20).

Now, when you light a lamp like that—or, if you want to, think of lighting a candle in our world—you don't light it and then put a "basket" over it. The "basket" He refers to is a bowl with the capacity of roughly two gallons. For those of you who are fond of old-fashioned weights and measures—or maybe you've memorized verses in the King James Version—that "basket" that He refers to would hold a "peck." How many of you have done *anything* using the word "peck" that didn't involve a kiss, or a chicken? A "peck" is a measure of volume—and hence, the archaic translation of this is a "peck-measure." You don't light the lamp, and then *cover it up!* No, you light the lamp, and you put it up where it can do some good!

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Jesus is saying that no one would light a lamp, *designed to illuminate*, and then cover it up! The logical thing to do is to put the lamp where it will most effectively spread its light. There are those who believe that the most spiritual thing that they can do is to completely withdraw from society, live in a monastery. That is the *antithesis* of the design of Jesus for His people! (see 1 Cor. 5:9-11) We're not to *hide* from the world—we're to go out into the world and *illumine* what's there—dispelling the darkness, if you will (see Is. 58:10).

So, you put the light on a "lampstand." The lampstand could be a little shelf; if you had a room big enough, or a house big enough to have a beam across the center, you may have attached a little shelf so you could put the lamp up high and near that beam so it could illuminate the whole one-room house; and hence, everybody in the house could see it. The lampstand could also be a single stone that is left projecting inward from the wall; you'd set the lamp on there so it could illuminate the whole thing. It could be a piece of metal placed in the wall for the same purpose.

The point is that the lamp was lit *for the purpose* of being strategically placed to give as much light as possible to as many people as possible in as large an area as possible. And as I say, most of the houses were one room, so one lamp could literally give light to everyone who was in the house.

Now, what a lamp was to a house, a follower of Jesus is meant to be to the world. A lighted lamp dispels darkness. A lighted lamp exposes what is there, so you don't stumble over it in the darkness. A Christian is meant to dispel the darkness of sin (Eph. 5:11), to bring the light of truth. The idea of a secret Christian is an oxymoron—*theologically*, you could just say "moron"! That's a *contradiction*! It's *incongruous*! We are not to be "secret Christians" in the world! We are on a lamp-lighting mission.

Now, God wants you to have influence on the world *indirectly*—just your very presence, your testimony, your influence should slow down the rotting of things going on in the world. But your shining as light should expose what is there—reveal things, dispel darkness, bring truth.

So that leads to the command. You Are Light. The point of Verses 14 and 15 is: You Cannot Hide! You shouldn't *want* to hide! "You are the light of the world." Now, Verse 16—Your Mission Is To Shine For The Glory Of God. A very familiar verse: Matthew 5:16—"Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven."

"Let your light shine" is a command in the Greek. Our commands are usually not worded that way, but this is a command in the strongest imperative form; it expresses urgency and immediacy, because there is *never* a time when light is not useful in a situation.

And notice: He says, "Let your light shine *before men*." That's the *target*. People are meant to be able to see Christians, who are individually and collectively "the light of the world"—they should be able to see us. Men and women are born in darkness (Ps. 51:5;

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58:3). They are trapped there until they are liberated, their eyes are opened, they are enabled to see, by the grace of God (Acts 18:27; cf. Acts 3:16; 16:14).

Now, I want to show you something here. He says: "Let your light shine *before men*." The target is mankind—people. People should be able to see us. I want to show you something that Jesus is going to say very soon in this sermon. We have the advantage over the ones who initially heard this sermon—I've read these three chapters dozens and dozens and dozens of times; I know where He's going; I know who He is going to target here. He is going to leave the Pharisees and scribes in a theological *shambles*; He's going to expose them for what they are. But I want you to notice an important contrast here.

Move down to Matthew Chapter 6, Verse 1. Now, what did Jesus just say? "Let your light shine *before men*" so that they will glorify God. But in Matthew 6:1, Jesus says this: "Beware of practicing your righteousness before men *to be noticed by them*; otherwise you have no reward with your Father who is in heaven." Can you spot the contrast that I'm getting at?

The "good works"—the things done by believers that are good and attractive and useful and helpful, and they shine the light, and they slow down the decay—they are to be done out of *gratitude* for salvation (see Ps. 116:12; cf. Ps. 50:15). You can only obtain this salvation, you can only attain this standing with God "by grace...through faith" (Eph. 2:8). And those works that we do in that way are pleasing to God. They can only be done by people who walk in His grace, who stand in His grace, who live in His light. But the *abominable hypocrisy* that Jesus *condemns* just half a page down from where we are now—Chapter 6, Verse 1—is practicing acts of righteousness *in order to be seen by men* (cf. Matt. 23:5; Jn. 12:43; Rom. 2:29).

Now, they aren't *necessarily* fundamentally-different acts than the good deeds of Chapter 5, Verse 16. The *whole difference* is in the *motivation*. If you're doing them so that people will say, "Wow, aren't you good!"—your *full reward* for all of eternity is *if* somebody pats you on the back and says, "Wow, you're good! You're really righteous." Or, as Jesus will say: "Truly I say to you, they have their reward in full" (Matt. 6:2). The *right* motivation for doing those good things which serve other people—which an unbeliever could also do—is so that they will "glorify your Father who is in heaven"—which ultimately means that they would come to the Lord (cf. 1 Pet. 2:12).

We do them openly, before people who live in darkness, regardless of the response. Oh, and by the way: Some people will respond—even to the good things you say, and even to the good things you do—by persecuting you. "Blessed are those who have been persecuted *for the sake of righteousness*" (Matt. 5:10)—or, as Jesus says, "for My sake" (vs. 11, NKJV; cf. Matt. 19:29; Lk. 21:12; Jn. 15:21; Acts 9:16; Rev. 2:3).

So the *whole difference* is between whether you're doing it to gain honor for yourself, or you're seeking to bring glory to God. "Glorify your Father who is in heaven"—that can't be any more fully expressed than if somebody who you serve out of goodness, kindness, generosity—like giving "a cup of cold water," in Jesus' name (Matt. 10:42), to somebody

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who is thirsty, or visiting someone who is grieving; all of those things—that service brings them to hear the Gospel, and that brings them to faith; that brings them to salvation; that brings them out of darkness into light. Who gets the glory? God the Father.

So, "Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works..." That little adjective "good" that's attached to "works" there, implies "attractiveness." The way we live our lives—the things we say, the things we do—should be such that our lives attract people to God Himself, who is the ultimate Light, who is the source of Light. God has designed us to be the kind of people who live such that others are attracted to the Savior. Some will hate you (Jn. 15:18-19). Some will say evil things against you. Some will persecute you. And some will be changed (e.g., Acts 16:25-34).

Now, remember: the pronouns here are plural. "You" and "your" means that both individually and collectively, we are responsible to represent Christ as we work together, as we worship together, as we care for one another in the church—but then, just as much when we scatter and we go out; and instead of being a *roaring bonfire* together, we're a little lamp. "This little light of mine, I'm gonna let it shine." What verse was that? I know where it *came from!* "I'm going to shine in a way that dispels darkness." And when you think about it, that "bonfire" of testimony—that's nothing but the sum of the individuals who come together, that are all filled with the light of God.

I told you it's not a hard passage to interpret. I want to close by having us consider how to put this into *practice* (see Matt. 7:24-25; Jn. 13:17; Jas. 1:22-25). As I said, the command has a sense of urgency behind it. There are several different layers of ways to give commands in the New Testament Greek language, and this is the one with the greatest urgency, because we have to do this! It's our responsibility to go take the light to the world. There is nothing in the world that is liable to draw out of us, spontaneously, an explanation of what the source of the Light is all about. We have to be able to take the Light where the darkness is.

And remember: two kinds of influence. You are salt; like salt has to be rubbed into the meat, you have to be in the world. You being in the world will have a retarding effect on the rapidity of the decay toward total rottenness. We help slow down the decay.

But, as you think about this, don't be preoccupied with ways to *stay out* of the world! Think of ways to be *in* the world without letting the world into you! That's the old cliché: A boat in the water is a good thing; water in the boat is a bad thing. A Christian in the world is a good thing (Mk. 16:15; Acts 1:8); the world in the Christian—that's a bad thing (Jas. 1:27b; 4:4; 1 Jn. 2:15). We need to be *purposeful* about this, and we need to maintain that *purity* of our life so that the salt *hasn't* lost its saltiness (1 Cor. 9:27).

But also remember: We're supposed to be Light. We not only penetrate, we're supposed to be visible—*not* so that people will congratulate *us*, but so that people will see the Source of the Light. Christianity is *not* just a system that you can live by in order to get by in the world. It's not just a way of getting along. It is meant to be that we influence the world.



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So, let me ask you: What is the method that you are generally committed to, to bring people to Christ? What *is* your strategy? Is there any target-group of people that you believe that God wants you to influence? If you are the proverbial "Soccer-Mom," let me tell you what your mission field is: Soccer-Moms! That's where you are! I am not welcome in the world of Soccer-Moms! *You* might be. You might be the only Christian in your department at Micron—guess what your mission field is? You might be the only Christian that lives within two blocks of you—guess what your mission field is? How purposefully are you thinking about it?

It's really easy for us to forget how important this is, so let me get really practical with you. I don't expect you to be able to exuberantly say, "Oh, yeah—I've got this nailed!"—because we have to *constantly* think about it. But let me start asking you some questions. Suppose I said: Think about the people you know. You're not allowed to whip out your phone and go through the Contacts, but mentally think about that. Think about your extended family, your neighbors, your friends, your coworkers, the people with whom you share hobbies—whoever they are. And let me ask you to just think of at least one name among them, of somebody who doesn't know Christ. Who do you think of among your friends and acquaintances that doesn't know Christ? And when was the last time that you prayed for that person? That's a perfect point for pastoral manipulation: "You're not praying enough!" *I know that! I'm* not praying enough! *None of us* are praying enough! What is "enough" praying, if it's not "pray without ceasing" (1 Thess. 5:17)? When was the last time you *specifically* took some time to pray for that friend, or those friends, and ask God to lead them from darkness to Light? That's a *perfectly* good thing to pray! (see Rom. 10:1; cf. Acts 26:29; 1 Tim. 2:1-4) God is "not wishing for any to perish"—He's "patient," waiting "for all to come to repentance" (2 Pet. 3:9; cf. Ezek. 33:11).

Now, let's get more specific. You've thought of "who." *How* can you plan to get closer to people who need Christ? In the circles of Christianity in which we run, we tend to define spiritual maturity as spending more and more and more and more and more of your time with Christians—and that necessitates you spending less and less and less time with non-Christians. Who needs Christ? Now, I don't mean sever all your Christian friendships, and replace them all with non-Christian friendships. But there's got to be a place in your life to think about, and pray about, how you can use things that you have in common with people in order to get close enough to them to let the Light shine, to have the privilege to speak the words of the Gospel.

Let's get *more* specific. When do you think that you might be able to get to the point of talking to that person about Jesus—telling him or her just how important Christ is to you, and asking them for the privilege to share the Gospel? And you say, "Well, if I start doing stuff like that, I *might not have* as many Contacts on my phone! Some people won't like that." Yeah. See previous Beatitude! Some *won't* want to hear that (see Ezek. 2:7). But what kind of a friend are you, if you would *call yourself* a friend, and let that person slide off into the "lake of fire" for eternity, to be "tormented day and night, forever and ever" (Rev. 20:10)—without you ever telling them how they could avoid it? (see Ezek. 3:18; Acts 20:26-27) *This is important!* This is *who we are!* And Jesus is telling us: "Lay the foundation! Be the kind of person who is attractive to others!"

Sermon Title: The Light of the World

Speaker: Jim Harris

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And finally: What might you do to be able to arrange something in your relationship with this person, or these people, that will cause the subject of the Gospel to come up? Invite them to a Bible study. Invite them to a church service. Make a plan to spend some time together. Invite them over to your house. Cook some hotdogs; cook some hamburgers. Have a more formal meal, if you want to. Spend some time with them. And ask them: "Could I have five minutes to tell you what's the most important thing to me in this entire world? Would you be willing to listen?"

What if you were to go visit somebody who was feeling kind of isolated? I hear there are some people that way, in our world these days. How about picking up the phone and making a call? You say, "Well, I don't know if I'll get it right! I don't know what the best approach is. I don't know the best way to do evangelism." *There isn't one!* But the *worst* way to do it is *not do it!* The person who shared Christ with me knew *almost nothing*, and was used by God to save my soul. *That* is what we need to be all about.

A longtime evangelist from a previous generation—Leighton Ford—wrote this. It was quoted in the book I quoted a little bit from last week: "Lifestyle Evangelism" (Joe Aldrich, © 1981, Multnomah Books), which is one of my favorite things—the idea of using things that you have in common with people in the world to develop the relationships through which the Gospel can flow. Leighton Ford wrote this about a former generation to his. He says: "Before we criticize what the other man is doing"—in the realm of evangelism—"we ought to remember [D. L.] Moody's classic reply to a critic who disapproved of his methods. 'I don't like them too much, myself,' he admitted—'What method do you use?' When the critic said that he had used none, Moody tartly replied, 'Well, I think I like the way I do it better than the way you don't.' "

I mean, just what if you put yourself out there to tell somebody the Gospel, and they hear that, "All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Rom. 3:23), and, "The wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Rom. 6:23), and, "I have that eternal life, and I want *you* to have that eternal life! Are you willing to come to Him and call out to Him to save your soul? For 'as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name' (Jn. 1:12)." How long did it take to say that? You can even expand it. Spend a *whole five minutes* on it! And what if they walk away, and they never call you again? You've been faithful. But, what if you plant a seed of the Word of God that grows and sprouts and blossoms into eternal life? (see Matt. 13:3, 8, 23; 1 Cor. 3:6-7)

We have to be about the business of trimming the lamps, maintaining the saltiness, being the kind of influence we're supposed to be in the world around us. We have to attract people to Jesus Christ. Our lives have to be close enough to them for them to see the light, feel the warmth, hear our words, and deal with God. So, would you join me in that? I mean, who do you want to reach? Think of somebody, and do something about it! How are you going to make closer contact? When are you going to move close enough to earn the privilege to talk about Jesus? What are you doing to make that happen? Let's *do something!*

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And you might come back and say, "You know, I tried that, and wow, I was really uncomfortable." Good—you're probably normal! "Can you help me with that?" Well, yeah! By golly, we just brought a new man on the staff, and part of what we've said is: "When it comes to evangelism, Sic 'em! Help people learn! Help people grow!" Let's make that happen. We are collectively and individually "the light of the world."

Let's pray:

*Father, give us wisdom, that we might truly understand how to let our light shine in such a way that people around us might see our good works, and give You glory. We know that includes that they have to see our works and hear the words of the Gospel; but maybe our lives can be the melody that they hear, and then they'll want to know the words that go along with it. Use us to that end, we pray, for Your glory. In Jesus's name. Amen.*