

Dark Christmas “From Receiving Light to Being Light” Matthew 5:13-16

Introduction

- Christmas is all about God sending his light into our darkness. That's the majesty and brilliance of incarnation; Jesus, the hope of God with us. He is God's light sent to save me from my own personal darkness. I mentioned this Christmas Eve, over and over Jesus' own testimony about himself is that he is light; that our world is full of darkness and that he has come to save us from that darkness called sin.¹
- **John 12:46**. *I have come into the world as a light, so that no one who believes in me should stay in darkness. Or **John 8:12**. Jesus said, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life."*
- The only hope that any of us have is that Jesus, *the true light that gives light to every man*, as he is called in **John 1:9**, will do for your darkness and my darkness what light always does to darkness. Light always wins. Again, we talked about this Christmas Eve, I have yet to walk in a room and flip on a light and have the darkness snuff out the light. The darkness always flees; light always wins.
- God's Christmas promise is that when we come into Christ's light he will free us from our darkness. *In [Jesus] was life, and the life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.* Your personal darkness, no matter how black, cannot overcome or extinguish Christ's light. Should you rest in Christ, trust in Christ, flee to Christ, his light wins, your darkness loses. *The LORD is my light and my salvation.*² *For with you is the fountain of life; in your light we see light.*³
- Personally, I've really tried to meditate and soak this truth in. Jesus is light. He's my light. Miriam and I have talked about Jesus in this way with the boys at the breakfast table. **John 1:4-5**, *in him was life and the life was the light of men*, is on our Christmas card this year. I've tried in my personal time of worship to focus on Jesus as my light of life.
- And in application, I've tried to ask myself some penetrating questions. If the light of Christ shining in my life is there not to judge my sin but free me from my darkness, what in my life does Jesus still need to shine his light on? What have I been holding back from Him? From what darkness does he want to

¹ Isaiah 60:1-2

² Psalm 27:1

³ Psalm 36:9

free me? It's been a month or more now of just thinking about this and just resting in this truth that Jesus is my light. He is the light of the world. He is my light. And it's been a really good Christmas season; and I've been especially grateful for God's light in my life.

- And then this week. I've been especially disorganized this week, more than normal with the holidays and such, and I was reading and praying and asking God what to preach on today because I didn't have any clear direction; I wasn't sure how to transition the whole Dark Christmas series to something else. And I was kind of reading through the Gospels looking for something that might help us transition from Christmas to the New Year. And I came across a few words of Jesus in **Matthew 5** that just floored me. These are words I've heard a thousand times before.
- Keep in mind, as I'm reading, in the back of my mind I'm still kind of ruminating on this truth that Jesus is the light of the world. **Matthew 5:14** Jesus says to his followers *you are the light of the world.*
- Wait a minute. I thought Jesus said he was the light of the world? He did. He is the light of the world. *In him was life and that life was the light of men.* I am the light of the world? I am the light of the world? And my honest, initial reaction was, "no I'm not. How can you say that Jesus? You are the light of the world, not me."
- I've known these passages for years. I grew up singing "This little light of mine" and "shine Jesus shine." But for some reason I've never read and connected these two passages like I did this week and it hit me like a ton of bricks. Christmas, in and of itself, is incomplete and unfinished. God didn't just send light so that we could admire that light from a distance. Ultimately, he sent light so that I might be light. God wants to shine the light of Jesus, the light of this world, through me to a hopelessly dark world. He is the light of the world so that I might become the light of the world through Him.

Transition

I want to invite you to turn to **Matthew 5:13-16**. If you're serious about shining the light of Christ to a dark world then there are several things I want you to consider.

- In **Matthew 5** Jesus speaks of the Christian's influence in the world in terms of two metaphors. Salt and light.
- Follow along. *"You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled by men. 14 "You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. 15 Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in*

the house. 16 In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.

- Jesus' point is fairly easy to grasp. In the ancient world few things were as useful as light and salt. Salt flavors food. It preserves food. In small doses it was used as fertilizer. Sometimes salt was mixed with soil and used on the flat roofs as a kind of sealant from rainwater; it would harden the roof. Incredibly useful stuff. Jesus' point is that salt is naturally useful. Salt that isn't like salt is supposed to be, salty, is useless.
- Christian believers are meant to be useful to the world around them. The world around us is rotting because of the painful, sinful choice to live life without God and apart from Him. Disciples are to have the same stimulating, preserving, flavorful effect on the world that salt has with food. If not, if we're not usefully salty, then Jesus says we're more deserving of the garbage heap.
- And as for light, lights are meant to shine. Brightly. You are the light of the world and you are meant to shine. A light's usefulness is tied to its ability to shine. The less a light shines the less useful it is. The least useful lights are the ones that barely flicker. And lights aren't meant to be hidden, are they? That would go against the whole principle of a light, wouldn't it? Who lights a light only to hide it?
- Again, Jesus' point is simple. If you are a Christian, God didn't light the pilot light of Jesus in your life so that you could hide that light from others. You are meant to be useful. You're meant to shine in the darkness. He is the light of the world—through you. Think about the weight of what Jesus says. It's on you. You are the light of the world. That's your calling.
- And if you're like, "but I don't want to be his light. Lights draw attention. People will notice me." Tough cookies. Part of the cost of being a Christian is burning brightly for him. You can't flee your call to shine. What a travesty to be called light, to be a light, but in actuality bring no light to others. As one person put it, "Flight into the invisible is a denial of the call. A community of Jesus which seeks to hide itself has ceased to follow him."⁴
- *For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light, Ephesians 5:8.* You are the light of the world. And to the extent that God, by his grace, shines the light of Christ on the dark places of your life in here will largely determine how bright your light shines out there. Maybe, if you don't want to shine in front of others, maybe it's because there isn't a whole lot of Jesus light shining in here.
- He is the light of the world. You are the light of the world. How? How? Jesus tells us. [Verse 16](#). *In the same way, let your light shine before me, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.*

⁴ Don Carson, *Matthew*, Expositors Bible Commentary.

- That's pretty clear, isn't it? Your light output is tied to good works. Not good works for the purpose of securing your status with God. Rather, good works as the result of your status with God—saved by grace through faith in Jesus Christ. *For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.* You are the light of this world. And you shine that light or hide that light by the good deeds you do or don't do in Jesus' name.
- As we move from Christmas to the New Year we move from Jesus, the light of the world, to you are the light of the world. You are the light of Richland Center. God's call to you this New Year is to blaze the light of Jesus in the darkest of dark places. Take your light to the darkness and shine. Find the dark places in this world, the places where no light is present, and shine. *The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.*⁵ Do what light is supposed to do. Overcome the darkness in Jesus' name.
- I believe that God has a usefulness, a purpose in store for you and me this year that exceeds the saltiness or light output we've had in the past. God is calling you to a greater usefulness in 2011. Because if we aren't making a difference on the darkness, what good are we really? God wants to use you. He wants to make a difference through you; he wants to brighten this sin darkened world through you. More than the weight and scariness of the responsibility of being the light of the world I want you to think of the privilege. You are the light of the world.
- And if on the inside you're thinking, if it's up to me it'll never happen. You're right. Have you ever used one of those hand cranked flashlights? The ones with no batteries? You've got to crank the handle to produce a light? They make absolutely terrible flashlights, don't they?
- You will never be able to produce light in Jesus' name, the kind of light that tames and overcomes darkness, if it is up to your human effort alone. The kind of light you need to be can't be self-generated. A self-generated light won't be bright enough. Your best efforts, trying to crank light out on your own, will produce a meager light at best. The light you need to be has to come from another power source. The darkness of this world requires a light greater than the one we can produce by ourselves.

Conclusion

- All of this discussion about light and being light begs the question; you have to know the light and have the light in order to be light. *For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ.*

⁵ 2 Corinthians 4:4

- This year, I want you to forget all the New Years resolutions except one. *I want to know the light of the glory of God in the face of Christ. I want to know Christ.* That's it. That's the only one. **Philippians 3:10**, *I want to know Christ.* Knowing Christ is the only way you and I will ever produce a light that makes a difference.
- Lord the Light or Your Love is shining,
In the midst of the darkness shining,
Jesus light of the world shine upon us,
Set us free by the truth You now bring us,
Shine on me.
- Lord I come to Your awesome presence,
From the shadows into Your radiance,
By the blood I may enter Your brightness,
Search me, try me, consume all my darkness,
Shine on me.
- As we gaze on Your kindly brightness.
So our faces display Your likeness.
Ever changing from glory to glory,
Mirrored here may our lives tell Your story.
Shine on me. Shine on me.
- Shine Jesus shine
Fill this land with the Father's glory
Blaze, Spirit blaze,
Set our hearts on fire
Flow, river flow
Flood the nations with grace and mercy
Send forth Your word
Lord and let there be light.⁶

⁶ Cliff Richard "Shine, Jesus, Shine."