

Are we the light of the world?

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Let us turn to **John 8: 12**

John 8: 12

Then Jesus again 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."

These are important words from the Lord Jesus and if we want to appreciate Him, know Him, it is good for us to ponder over the meaning of what He said and the implications for our lives.

He said, "I am the Light of the world". We have seen that the "Light" here is not just a reference to something bright, something that shines. The Light here comes from the life of the Lord Jesus: In Him was life, and the life was the Light of men. So when the Lord Jesus lived on earth, His life was the Light that was shining in this world and whoever follows Him, becomes His disciple, will not walk in the darkness, but will have the Light of life.

"...walk in the darkness" here is not just a reference to "unable to see things", but "walk in the darkness" refers to living in the realm of moral darkness.

“...the darkness” in this context is a contrast between the Light from God and the darkness of evil. So if we truly follow the Lord Jesus, we will not walk in the darkness; instead, we will have the Light of life. So here the contrast is between the Light of life and the darkness of death.

So when we think of the Lord Jesus, it is important for us to concentrate on this aspect: life and death.

When we want to know the Lord Jesus, we must make sure that our lives concentrate on the realm of spiritual life: not just experiences that we can go through, things that we can do and accomplish, but the presence of the Life of God in us is the primary and ultimate issue that will determine whether there is meaning in our lives.

What is the implication for us? The Lord Jesus is the Light of life. What about us? What does it mean to us?

Matthew 5: 14-16

- 14 "You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden;
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.
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.

The Lord Jesus said to His disciples, "You are the light of the world." The Lord Jesus is the Light of the world; we are also called the light of the world. What is the similarity; what is the difference?

We know that the Lord Jesus is Light Himself. In Him there is Life and that Life shines as Light. For us, we have no life in ourselves and therefore there cannot be any light in ourselves. In a sense we can say we are like the moon: the moon has no light in itself but the moon is very bright because of the light from the sun. When the sun shines on the moon, the moon gives light and so it becomes bright. So in one sense we are like the moon: we have no light in ourselves but when the Lord shines on us, we can reflect that light and bring light to the world.

But it is very important to recognize that we are not meant to be like the moon only – in the sense of reflecting the light. God has called us not only to be able to reflect light from Him but also to shine from within ourselves, that there should be light in us. The moon does not have light in itself; the sun has light. So we are also to become like the sun. How is that possible?

It is possible when the Life of the Lord Jesus becomes part of us: that Life will shine as Light in us and through us.

So we must have that Life. If we do not have that Life, the best we can do is like the moon, just to reflect that Light: when the Lord shines and He goes through us and we can communicate something. But the Lord wants us to have His Life so that we can transmit that Life from within ourselves – the Life that we receive from God, the eternal life, the Life that transforms us – that Christ is formed in us. So in that state we can be transformed from glory to glory.

This passage tells us to shine as light in the world. If you pause for a moment, you may wonder: Does this not sound quite different from what the Lord Jesus said later on in **Matthew 6** when He said, “Do not do your good works in front of people... do not pray so that people will see and hear you pray, so that they may regard you as spiritual... do not sound a trumpet before you when you give alms, so that people will think you are very generous; no, do it in secret and your Father who sees in secret will reward you”?

So why is it here He says, “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”? The light is meant to shine so that all can see. So He says, “Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works...” So, your good works are meant to be seen.

Well, if we pause further, consider the meaning behind His words, we can appreciate that when the Lord Jesus said, “Do not sound a trumpet when you give”, He is talking about your attitude – the attitude behind the things that you do. Do you pray so that people can see and say you are spiritual? Do you give so that people can say you are generous? Do you serve God so that people can say you are a good servant of God? Are these the things that motivate you when you live your life? If that is so then the Lord Jesus says, “You have your reward – from men, from this world, but not from the Father.”

So first we must make sure that our spirit is right. The things that we do must arise from genuineness in our love for God, our love for what is good, our love for people. That is what should motivate us. If that is so, if that is genuine, if that is pure, if that is good then there will be a light that will shine forth. There is no need to hide; there is no need to be afraid of the life that you live, that people may see that you are a Christian, that you have these values that are different from people of the world.

"Let your light shine" – we are meant to be a testimony in this world, we are meant to lead people to life. So why is it that so many Christians are so afraid to be known that they have these values, that they take this stand, that they are different from other people? Why should we be so apologetic about our faith, so afraid of what others may think or say about us?

Of course there are those who are the other extreme: they are very proud that they are Christians, they say that non-Christians have no hope, their lives are meaningless and they speak without genuine love and concern. That is not what it ought to be either. But if we truly love what is good, we really care for the well-being of others, then we want the light to shine.

So first, when we come to know the Lord Jesus, the first thing is we must know that Life for ourselves. If we do not know that Life for ourselves, there will be no light that can shine to help other people. Many people may concentrate on wanting to help others but there is not sufficient of that reality in their lives that they can give and contribute to others.

Of course, we can always contribute even when we are young Christians, when we know very little. If we are humble, we know how to look to God, we share in sincerity, appropriately according to our stage of development, we can always contribute.

But we need to be careful how we do so because there is a vast difference between the Lord Jesus as the Light of the world and we being the light of the world. The Lord Jesus as the Light of the world is absolute; there is Life and Light within Him without limit. He is the almighty God of moral perfection in absolute greatness. For us, we are created beings. Let us be very grateful that God has created us so that we can be like Him but our being like Him is in different measures, different degrees of that glory, of that meaning, of that substance.

So, "You are the light of the world", but we are not like the Lord Jesus in many ways. In many ways, Christians can often be a stumbling block to people coming to know the Lord because of the self-life that is so evident within them – the way we live our lives, while we profess to love God and love what is good, we may also be pursuing the things of the world, we may indulge in the things for our self-seeking ways; how then can we be a light in the world?

So the Lord Jesus says, "You are the light of the world". This applies to all believers. But what then does that mean?

We can say "You are the light of the world" is a statement of our calling. When we become Christians, we become lights in the world. It is our calling: When we are born again and we begin that journey, we begin that life, there will be Light in us because there is the Life from God. So, because we are born again, there is Life, there will be Light, but that light can be very dim. We may have a little bit of Light and if we do not nurture it properly, if we do not develop our lives well, that Light can be snuffed out, it can be no more.

So we need to be very careful. We are called to be the light of the world and we must make sure we develop well so that that light will grow in intensity, in brightness, in quality; we become more and more like the Lord Jesus in His glory, in His brightness, in His goodness.

So He says: "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..." What does He mean by that?

He is saying that when you light a lamp, your intention is to put it on a lampstand so that it will serve a good purpose: it will give light to all who are in the house. You do not light a lamp and then put it under a basket to cover up that light. Is this not a picture of many a Christian life? We are the light of the world but we are often covered up by a basket. People cannot see that light because we are afraid, because we are afraid to live by what we believe; we are afraid for the light to shine. That is one kind of situation.

Another kind of situation is that we are not shining the true light; we are shining a wrong kind of light.

In **John 1: 9** we are told:

John 1: 9

There was the true Light which, coming into the world, enlightens every man.

That is a reference to the Lord Jesus: He is the true Light. Why is there a need to say “true Light”? It is because there is such a thing as false light. The evil one is a source of false light: he pretends, he looks like the true light but he is not. The Lord Jesus is the true Light.

So, for our lives, we must be careful that our lives are so identified with the Lord Jesus that when we speak, when we live, when we shine, it will be the true light and this will bring **light to all who are in the house.**

How can we tell whether it is the true light or not? There are many ways in which we can come to appreciate that but one of the features that can help us to recognize it is in **verse 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."**

Notice: it is your good works but glorifying your Father who is in heaven.

The problem with a lot of good works is that it glorifies the person who does the good work without meaningfully glorifying God. The focus is on the person doing the works: the person is praised; the person is given whatever that may bring glory.

But the Lord Jesus says, **"... that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven."** Ultimately, a truly good work will bring glory to God. What does that mean?

Is it because God wants all the glory, He wants all of us to praise him?

No, glorifying God is not primarily saying, “God, You are very great.” Glorifying God through our good works is a manifestation of the goodness of God as we live out our lives, and when men see the goodness of God, they will glorify God, they will worship Him, they will praise Him because they appreciate how good God is.

So that is one way that we can tell. As we consider our lives, the way we live: Will it help people to genuinely draw close to God? Will it help people to appreciate Him, to love Him in a genuine sincere form? If it does not do that but they pledge allegiance to God without depth of meaning, then we are not truly contributing to their lives.

So the first thing that we need to do if we want to benefit from what the Lord Jesus has done for us and who He is, is to follow Him and not walk in the darkness but have the Light of life. This is the part that is often lacking in Christian lives. So because this part is lacking, there is not that light that will shine. That is the reason why it is very important for us to ensure that we develop our lives well. It is very important that we understand the meaning of following the Lord Jesus.

Following the Lord Jesus is not just a question of agreeing with His views, saying that what He has taught and done are very good, we acknowledge and we are grateful. Following the Lord Jesus has at its heart a commitment to walk in His ways, to live for Him, to be identified with what He wants to accomplish and to do all things in accordance with His instructions and by His power, by His life.

So unless we do that, we may be transmitting false light. But if we follow the Lord Jesus, we will not only have the Light of life for ourselves but that Light will shine before men. And as that Light shines, it will be God speaking to the people. God will be transmitting His message to the people who watch your life.

So it is possible then that as ambassadors for Christ, we can truly represent Him and when men hear us speak, they can hear the voice of the Lord speaking because that is the Source of that message - not in a literal physical sense but in terms of its moral meaning, the spiritual message that the Lord wants to communicate.

So as we come before the Lord, let us ask Him to help us to evaluate our lives.

Are we truly following Him?

Is there the Light of life within us, and it is growing in quality, intensity and substance?

Are we the light of the world shining in this world to help men to see the path of life and to follow the Lord as well? Will people looking at our lives see the good works that will lead them to glorify our Father who is in Heaven?

These are the aspects that are helpful for us to ponder over as we seek to worship the Lord and to live for Him.