

## PONDERING THE PARABLES\_6

In today's lesson from our series entitled "**Pondering the Parables**," we'll look at two very short parables with a singular meaning. They are found in Matthew 5:14-16 and referred to as "**The Parables of Light**." Jesus is teaching kingdom principles in what we call "*The Sermon on the Mount*." The audience is a large crowd made up of both Jews and Gentiles\_ men, women and children from all walks of life. To them He says...

<sup>14</sup> **"You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden.** We can relate, can't we? A city on a hill could be seen from quite a distance away in the daytime. But, even today, approaching a big city on ground level at night, can't we see the lights illuminating the sky from miles away? <sup>15</sup> **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.** Once more, simple principle. Covering a light nullifies it's potential to brighten a room. Bring it out and lift it high and everyone can benefit from it. Jesus concludes: <sup>16</sup> **In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven."**

The Jews would likely nod in agreement. As I've stressed before, God had chosen them to be a light to the nations. Christ's followers would likely see this as acknowledgement that they were to be part of a movement to enlighten the whole world – Jew and Gentile alike - clarifying misconceptions about God and His plan and purpose for mankind. The others would probably understand that they were to be positive influences in their families and communities. And they would all be right – but none of them would be all right.

When Jesus told them that they were the light of the world, He did not mean they were the source of light – only the vessels for the light. In the Gospel of John, we read: <sup>1</sup> **In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.** <sup>2</sup> **He was with God in the beginning.** <sup>3</sup> **Through Him all things were made; without Him nothing was made that has been made.** <sup>4</sup> **In Him was life, and that life was the light of men.** <sup>5</sup> **The light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not understood it.** <sup>6</sup> **There came a man who was sent from God; his name was John.** <sup>7</sup> **He came as a witness to testify concerning that light, so that through Him all men might believe.** <sup>8</sup> **He himself was not the light; he came only as a witness to the light.** <sup>9</sup> **The true light that gives light to every man was coming into the world.** Later, Jesus would also say, **"I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life."** (John 8:12)

We introduced a theme song for March called "**My Lighthouse**." We've sang it a few times over the past two weeks. Though I've heard of churches being referred to as lighthouses, the song encourages us to recognize Jesus as our Lighthouse. I like that concept, but could only find one scripture to support that precise imagery – and that is in THE MESSAGE. Here is how it renders Isaiah 42:6-7:

The LORD said: **"I have set you among my people to bind them to me, and provided you as a lighthouse to the nations to make a start at bringing people into the open, into light: opening blind eyes, releasing prisoners from dungeons, emptying the dark prisons."** Clearly this was a prophecy of the promised Messiah.

Perhaps, one reason the lighthouse motif is otherwise absent from Scripture is because lighthouses were few and far between in Jesus' day. The first one of any reputation was built in Alexandria Egypt around 250 BC. Signal fires on hilltops would have been most commonly used around the sea of Galilee. Still, once lighthouses became more and prevalent, they have served well to illustrate what Jesus did for us.

When we were lost in the storms of life caused by sin and rebellion, He cast out the Light of hope. And as David said the word was a light to his path, Jesus' word has shed light into the darkness to direct us to safe harbor. Those of us who follow Him have been saved from the eternal consequence of our sins and been freed from their control to live new lives now. And that is a glorious picture, is it not? Of course, not everyone has responded to Jesus quite that way.

The story is told of a captain of a battleship who, in the middle of the night saw the light of what he thought to be another ship in His path. He ordered a radio signal be sent telling whomever it was in his way to change course immediately. The response came back, *"I'm afraid I can't do that, sir. You will need to alter your heading."* Furiously, the captain radioed back, *"This is a battleship and I am Admiral Butler. I command you to get out of my way."* The response? *"I am sorry sir, but even though I'm just a lowly radio operator, I cannot comply. The light you see in your path is the lighthouse that I am manning. I'd suggest you change your course right away."* And guess what? He did. Sooner or later, everyone must decide what they're going to do when they see the Light.

Yet, now I'm off course – for in the parable of light, Jesus said it was His followers who were the light of the world. He was telling them that their purpose on earth was to project God's light in the darkness by doing good deeds for the praise of the Father. So, those who choose to follow Him must readily accept that challenge. As Paul tells us in 2<sup>nd</sup> Corinthians 4: <sup>6</sup> **"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. <sup>7</sup> But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us."** Here's a replica of a first century lamp that nearly everyone would have had in their home. They were fueled with olive oil and wicks were made of hemp. In Jesus parable, we are the lamps, but the Spirit of Christ is what fuels us. He is to fill our hearts – enabling us to burn brightly in the darkest of places. Let that sink in. So often I hear Christ followers complain about this cold, cruel world we live in. But as the saying goes, *"Rather than curse the darkness, we should light a lamp."* How do we do that?

Imagine two people are fighting. Earlier in this sermon on the mount, Jesus said “*Blessed are the peacemakers.*” He Himself was the Prince of Peace. What do we do? Pick a side and root for them to win? Or urge both sides to stop? Which choice allows Jesus to shine?

A single woman with a child is struggling to make ends meet. She’s not panhandling, she’s not even complaining – but it’s evident that she can barely hold on. What do we do? Pray for her, but personally do nothing to help? Or come alongside and genuinely offer to assist in whatever way we can? A neighbor is in the hospital with a serious injury. He has no family nearby. Do we just feel sorry for him or do we visit him? Do we lament about what a shame it is that he can’t take care of his lawn, or offer to “*keep an eye*” on things until he’s back on his feet – and I don’t mean just watching the grass grow or the leaves pile up? Jesus said when we neglect the poor and needy, it’s as if we’re neglecting Him. (Matthew 25:45) It’s time to hold high the Light of the World.

A relative is living apart from God, harming herself and wounding those around her by her selfish and foolish choices. A brother or sister in Christ is straying from the path, living more like those in the world than one in the kingdom. Jesus called such people to Himself, to find healing and hope – but also always called for them to repent, to leave lives of darkness and turn back toward the Light. In John 4 He told a woman with a very checkered past to satisfy her thirst in a relationship with Him. And in John 8 He told someone who had been caught in adultery that though He did not condemn her, she needed to “**Go and sin no more.**”

As we lift up the Light of the world, many will be drawn to Him and praise Him for inviting them to come close. Yet, there will be others who not like the shameful things they do to be exposed and will withdraw still deeper into the dark. We cannot help that - and will not be held responsible for that.

Our job is to follow the Light, be filled with the Light and let the Light be seen by others. It is what we were made for.