

Sunday February 13, 2022
Lesson 11: Making God's Light Visible
Scripture: Matthew 5: 14-16

Context:

The winter Adult Bible Studies Curriculum continues its focus on engaging the world with the unit entitled "Wonder." This set of lessons in the season of Epiphany will focus on how we are called to a sense of wonder in our faith. As we look to the glory of God, we are transformed and can engage in the world in new ways as disciples of Jesus. Today we explore how our actions make God's glory and love for the world evident.

The scripture lesson today is found in what is known as the beatitudes. The beatitudes were a set of blessings given alongside several programmatic statements following the blessings.¹ The two verses for today are given in between as a transition for those listening to Jesus. Jesus uses "you" language to drive home the point about the way those who listen are called to live and are expected to act as followers of Jesus.

There are several important observations concerning these metaphors used when it comes to light. The first is the imperative nature of saying "You are the light of the world" as those listening are given a mission.² Jesus is not giving those listening a choice. He is telling them a fundamental truth about their identity as those who follow his words.

The second is how it is not just the identity of the individual to count in this call to action. The "you" is corporate, calling the whole community to fulfill the corporate mission of being light in the world.³ This huge task cannot rest upon the shoulders of just a few individuals as everyone must work together to be part of the "city on top of a hill." Cities are rarely inhabited by a sole occupant. Cities are full of different people living beside one another.

The power of the light metaphor comes from how the religion of ancient Israel understood light. In ancient Israel, it was assumed God was not only the source of life for daily life, God was light itself.⁴ There are numerous descriptions of such belief in both the Old Testament and the New Testament as Paul talked of the light and glory of Christ.

This is not to paint the church as perfect or to say the church itself is the light. It is is but a window for people to look and see the glory of God. Only in dire times must the church be invisible. In all other seasons of life, the church is called to be visible, reaching out in good works to glorify God. As the light of the good works comes about, God is honored.

¹ Hare, Douglas R.A. "Matthew." *Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching* (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 2009), 44.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid. 45.

Application

I will never forget one of the lessons we learned in American history was the nature of how when the Europeans came to the continent, they carried with them the hopes and dreams to be a “city on the hill.” Or at least this was the hope of the Puritans, a group of individuals fleeing the established Church of England as they settled in what is present day Massachusetts. And while there were indeed many good and wonderful things the Puritans gave our country, we also know the blatant as well as hidden transgressions which occurred during their time. Whether it was the conversations with the Native American populations there before them, or the hypocrisy discovered in events such as the Salem Witch Trials, we discovered how even those who sought to be a “city on a hill” struggled.

Nevertheless, their desire and the scriptures today remind us of who the true light comes from in life. God is the source of all goodness and light in this world. One of the things God calls for the people of God to remember is their attentiveness to being light in the world and being like a city upon the hill. It does not mean we will not struggle or fall short. It does not mean we will always be perfect or get everything right. And it does not mean we have a monopoly on truth or who is worthy in God’s sight.

Instead, we are called to share the good news and live our lives as a testament to God. When in doubt, it is a reminder for us to see our calling to glorify God in word and deed. We are called to be involved positively in the lives of those around us both in our churches and our communities. As we respond to God’s calling on our lives, God is glorified and honored.

A question which often goes around in church circles is the question of what purpose does your church serve in the community where you live. One way it is phrased is “if your church were gone tomorrow, how would it impact the community where you lived?” The focus is on how the church is a community of people called to interact with those around them. It is not a second place for one’s membership to the local country club. It is not a place where the local fashion shows occur or where the pretty people gather to celebrate themselves. The church is a body of believers in the Lord Jesus Christ who are seeking transformation and renewal to love, give, and serve like Jesus.

For all of us, it is a reminder of how we are called to give something of ourselves to both the church and the communities where we live. Often, when I hear people complain about how a church, whatever denomination or background it may be, did not meet their needs in this or that regard so they left, part of me wants to ask them a question. I want to ask them: “So what did you do before you left to make the situation better?” For some, maybe they could give an excellent response. For others, I would imagine there would be defensiveness or excuses. And yet I still think it is a valid question.

God calls for us to be the light of the world. It is meant in an individual and a corporate sense. Any time we come to believe the church exists only for us to use or for our own means, we have begun to miss the calling God has placed on our lives to be in this world. Jesus came in the flesh not just for the final moments of his life on the cross to make us feel better with a cure-all for eternal life. Jesus came to heal, to teach, to bless, to love, and to serve those around him. His ministry demonstrated to his followers a pattern for how to live and engage with those around him. Jesus repeated over and over of how others would know him by how those who followed him show love and grace to the world. Jesus wanted people to see their calling of how they were called to be the light of the world.

How should the church be visible wherever you live? Why do you think Jesus is so

insistent with the “you” aspect in these scriptures? What is the importance of the church being a “city on the hill?” How do you contribute to being the light in your church or your community? How have you seen the actions of Christians point to the goodness of God?

Rev. Dr. E. Hunter Pugh
Pastor of Brantley – Brunson Chapel Charge
PO Box 71
Brantley, AL 36009