

Shining Lights: What it means to let your light shine

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Let your light so shine among men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in Heaven." Matt. 5:16

This familiar scripture verse rings out a challenge that is undiminished through the ages. It is taken from a passage that is traditionally called The Sermon on The Mount. This sermon or teaching has a beauty and directness that has been appreciated and honoured by Christians of all times. Every Sunday school student hears it and preachers have done series based on it forever.

In fact, it may have become so familiar that we have missed a deeper truth here or there, and in that spirit, we will look at a portion of The Sermon On The Mount today.

First some background often overlooked. The first verse says, "*And seeing the multitudes, He went up on a mountain, and when He was seated His disciples came to Him. Then He opened His mouth and taught them saying..*"

The impression that is most common concerning this session is that of Jesus teaching the masses. Obviously, this is not so. He spoke The Sermon On The Mount to His disciples, the very ones He chose to be His closest earthly associates, friends, and students. The ones to whom the trust in propagating His Word was to be given. These words are exemplary of the most intimate teaching that Jesus did.

Today, we are the inheritors of the mission of those first disciples. The words of Jesus have been passed to us and the call of our Lord is upon our lives as it was upon theirs. We are present day disciples, living just as they did after Jesus returned to Heaven and sent His Spirit to be with them, in them.

As they were workingmen, so are we. Tradesmen, tax collectors, fishermen, and so on. As far as we know, none of them had been to seminary. They were not religious professionals, they were people like you and me. When Jesus went back to Heaven, they continued to live their lives on earth for a season serving Jesus wherever He, by His Spirit, sent them. They worked and served and, as they did, God turned the world upside down through them.

The words spoken so long ago to our spiritual fathers are now ours. The intimate words of instruction and illumination that Jesus spoke to them, He is now speaking to you and me.

In order for them to be operative, a couple of things need to be established in our hearts.

First, these teachings are not limited to our life in the marketplace, but they include it. In the same sense, they are not limited to our life in church, but they include it.

Jesus never taught a divided life. His words were, and are, for all of life. It is truly said, "He is Lord of all, or He's not Lord at all."

Second, there are not two classes of Christians, one a professional clergy, and the other the rest of us. This concept is heresy and probably no other has hindered and damaged the cause of Christ in modern times as much. The call of God to be a pastor or a missionary is no more holy than the call of God to be a president of a company or a janitor. The position doesn't define its holiness; it is the call of God that defines it. What and whom He calls is the measure, not the title. God has not called

you and me to labour in the marketplace to provide support for the professional clergy. His call on our lives is the same as theirs. He didn't say, "Pastors and Missionaries go into all the world", He just said, "GO." His call to go into all of the world, including the marketplace, and to make disciples is universal to all believers, not only those in specifically church related or religious professions.

Obedience to His call will be the measure of your success and mine, not our job title or anything else. The only thing that changes in God's call on the life of His children is the venue in which He places them. Some He calls to serve Him in the Church, some in professions, some to labour with their hands, some to bear children, and some to teach children. But His purpose and call for each is the same. Some He makes rich, some He calls to remain poor. Rich or poor is not the measure, in the life to come, those things will have no significance at all. Obedience will matter. Obedience and faithfulness IN His call on and for our lives.

Let's pause for a minute right here. Let me ask you a sober question. It is a question that, depending on your answer, will have eternal significance to you. The question is, "Do you really, in your heart of hearts, believe that you and your place in life, are every bit as holy in God's eyes as that of your pastor or any other leader in the formal church?" Deep down in the very core of your being, do you see yourself, and your work in your business Monday through Friday as just as important to God as whatever goes on in your church on Sundays and Wednesday nights? Just as holy?

My brothers and sisters I can tell you that until and unless you do, you will never be all that God has called you to be. As long as you and I think that somehow the work that God has given us to do is less a call and less holy than the call given to professional religious people, we will never be what God has designed us to be and the Body of Christ will never be all it is intended to be.

The reason for this strong statement is that as long as we think that we are involved in "secular" work while in business and "sacred" work in the church, we will continue to believe that there are two standards for living that we can use; one for work and another for church.

How does this relate to our subject for today, letting our light shine before men? It relates in this way. In the Bible, light is used to represent God or God's truth. It is contrasted to darkness, which represents the evil in the world or the false system of Satan. Our "light" in this sense is our "good works."

They are to shine in the world in such a way that others will see them and give credit or glory to God. This is to be true in all areas of our lives.

When our paradigm is that of a divided, or "sacred/secular" world, we don't apply the same values to one as to the other. We will look for sacred things in the church setting and secular things in the work world. We don't seek to demonstrate the contrast between our light and the world's darkness at work because we don't see the necessity. We tend to blend in to the darkness rather than to shine brightly and contrast to it. We can even buy into the lie that in order to succeed we must do so, and since our work is "secular" and not holy, it won't make a difference.

This, of course, is the exact opposite of the truth. The truth is that we let our light shine the brightest when the contrast is the greatest. In order for light to be noticed, it must shine in darkness. When you turn on a powerful flashlight on a sunny day, it can hardly be seen, but in the dark of the night, it is a bright beacon. So it is with us. When we do the works of righteousness in church, they are good but they don't stand out as the same acts would outside the church. Remember we said that the scripture doesn't apply only to the marketplace, but that it does include it.

Our light shines when we act or react to life in ways that contrast to the ways of the world. Jesus said that He is "*The light of the world.*"(John 8:12) His life contrasted sharply with the lives of the Pharisees and the other religious leaders. The things He said and the things He did were in stark contrast to the acts of the others. His "light" shone brightly. The people could easily see a difference between Him and the others. They could see it in His acts and they could hear it in His words.

For us, the marketplace provides perhaps the greatest opportunity to demonstrate the difference that having Christ in our lives makes. When we act or react in ways that are consistent with Him, His teachings, and His ways, and in contrast to the world and its ways, our light shines. Men see it. It is noticed.

- When we turn the other cheek when we are attacked, our light shines.
- When we respond in kindness to our enemies (read competitors), our light shines.
- When we give erring employees another chance when the world wouldn't, our light shines.
- When we tell others that the most important thing in our lives is Jesus Christ and not success, and then live so they can see that it's true, our light shines.
- When we go the second mile when others wouldn't, our light shines.
- When we risk looking the fool for Christ where others dare not, our light shines.
- When we wish genuine good to all men, with the greatest good being their salvation, our light shines.
- When we would rather see men saved than to make a profit from them, our light shines.
- When we keep our word in spite of the fact that it costs us dearly to do so, our light shines.
- When we honor all men, even those of much lower place than God has called us to, our light shines.
- When we don't demand the privilege that our position affords us in the eyes of the world, our light shines.
- When we take no advantage for ourselves even when we could, our light shines.
- When we use our money to build people, rather than our people to build money, our light shines.
- When we do just what Jesus would do in the same circumstances, our light shines, and He lives. Jesus is still The Light. He lives as we let him shine in our good works.

This is our spiritual heritage. We have inherited it from those first disciples who sat on the hill with Jesus. He told them to let their light shine and, through them, the charge comes to us. We are they who believe in Him through their word. (John 17:20)

Is our call holy? Yes it is, as holy as ever has been. You and I, as we live daily, even moment-by-moment in the marketplace, are involved in a holy calling and work. We have not been called to the pulpit of a church, but to the "bully pulpit" of a business. We don't prepare sermons - we prepare budgets. We don't exegete the scriptures - we live them. We are the front line troops. If it can't happen through us, it won't happen at all. If God's Word isn't as valid and binding on Monday as it is on Sunday, it isn't valid at all.

Is this a hard word? Perhaps it is. So many have opted not to live in this world with their hearts in the next, that perhaps it seems too hard. The question shouldn't be, is it hard, rather, is it true?

In C12, we are committed not to perpetuating mediocrity, but to striving for greatness. This is as true in the pursuit of excellence in the ministry aspect of our business lives as it is in the business function and, in the eternal sense, infinitely more important.

We start where we are and work to grow from that point. No one has arrived. We are all in process. The point is to press on toward the high mark of the upward call of God in Christ. May your light so shine among men, that they may see your good works and glorify your father in Heaven.