

The Sermon on the Mount

DEVOTIONAL STUDIES FROM THE
MEN'S MORNING FELLOWSHIP

Matthew 5:13 "You are the salt of the earth; but if the salt loses its flavor, how shall it be seasoned? It is then good for nothing but to be thrown out and trampled underfoot by men.

Matthew 5:14 "You are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden.

Matthew 5:15 Nor do they light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a lampstand, and it gives light to all *who are in the house*.

Matthew 5:16 Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven.

Jesus said that He was the light of the world (John 8:12; 12:35-36; 12:46). It's a great metaphor. If Jesus is the light, then the world is in darkness.

Jesus assumes His hearers understand the world is in a kind of spiritual darkness. Religion; philosophy; even the sciences, to a certain extent, are mankind's attempts to illuminate the spiritual darkness.

People and their vain philosophies remind me of the bio-luminescent creatures that exist in the deep depths of the oceans. Sure, they generate a tiny bit of light from within themselves. But it's nothing compared to the vastness of the darkness surrounding them. And, living in that darkness, those creatures take on a hideous appearance.

Jesus' comments weren't about the darkness in the world. That was assumed. His comments were about the light for the dark world. You – His followers – would reflect His light within the surrounding darkness.

It's a sun-moon situation. The sun is our source of light. The moon reflects the sun's light. So Jesus is the source; you are the reflection.

Jesus moves to a second illustration: **A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden**. I can't help but think of the movie, *The Return of the King*. There's a scene when Gandalf and Pippin, riding Shadowfax, turn a corner and there, before them in a resplendent glory, is the city of Gondor. In it's case, it is the entire hill! It's carved out of the mountain itself. But it's breathtaking.

A city on a hill is elevated. You look up to it. Some suppose that Jesus was able to point to a city in the vicinity, as a visual aid. His hearers would have understood even without the visual – but sometimes those can be powerful aids to understanding, and Jesus was the Master at utilizing His surroundings.

The symbolism is that the city is higher, somehow safer as it is above its surroundings. It is less vulnerable to attack because the approach of enemies can be seen. But the primary emphasis seems to be that a weary night-traveler suddenly looks up, sees it, and is guided to safety and security along his way.

Matthew 5:15 Nor do they light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a lampstand, and it gives light to all *who are in the house*.

Notice a progression: **World... City... House**. There's the whole world, with a city in it, and houses in the city. The light is emanating from the lamps in the houses, filling the city, which illuminates the world around it.

No one would **light a lamp** only to **put it under a basket** to keep it from being seen. Thus it follows that, if you are the lit-lamp, you should be shining right where you are; and the light emanates from you into the surrounding darkness.

I would add that there may be symbolism in the lamp itself. These were oil lamps; oil is ever the symbol of the Holy Spirit.

Jesus then makes His point:

Matthew 5:16 Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven.

The sense is, Even as the lamp just mentioned, so let your light shine.

What are your **good works**? The word for **good** doesn't emphasize quality, but attractiveness. In the context of the Sermon on the Mount, it is first and foremost your Christian character. It is the characteristics true of you because you are a believer. It is the beatitudes shining through you in a dark world. It is showing others the beauty that Jesus has created within us.

The supernatural transformation of your character as a Christian can only be attributed to the work of God. That's why it can be said that men will **glorify your Father in Heaven**. Just as you have genetic traits from your earthly parents (for better or worse!), so when these spiritual character traits are evident, people see God the Father reflected in you.

You have the indwelling Holy Spirit. You have an unlimited, renewable spiritual energy resource. As you spend time with Jesus, you absorb some of his glory – like Moses with God. **But yours doesn't fade.**

Jesus seems to indicate that you will shine forth... **Unless you actively take steps to hide your light!** A hidden light is, after all, still a light; it's just useless to others who are lost and need to see it to guide them.

Right after Pam and I got saved, we were at a garage sale. An older woman came up to us, excused herself, and asked, "Are you Christians?" We were too young in the Lord to have Christian clothing... So I wondered how she knew. She said it was the way Pam talked to me. But not the words; the tone, to love, the joy.

Another time a guy I'd known in business for many years was walking by. He stopped, said "Hi," then asked what had happened to me. I was puzzled. He said I looked almost radiant!

I think it was just to show Pam and I that God can shine through us.

It's been a long while since anyone has said something like that – to me, at least! Maybe no one ever will again. But that doesn't mean I – we – can't still shine.

