

IS YOUR LIGHT TURNED ON?

Matthew 5:13-20 Text vs. 16 *"Let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven."* Let me read it again. *"Let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven."* Jesus said that. And then He said, *"You are the salt of the world"*, and then added, *"if the salt loses its saltiness, can it be made salty again? Because it's no longer good for anything except to be thrown out and trampled underfoot"*. He also said, *"you are the light of the world. You're like a town built on a hill"* which means you can't be hidden! *"You don't light a lamp and put it under a bowl. You put it on its stand to give light to the whole house"*.

And that's this church. God's light shining into a dark world through us! We're kinda' like the little chorus we learned in Sunday School, *"This little light of mine, I'm going to make it shine, make it shine, make it shine!"* 97 years ago, God placed this little church here, on this circle, in Everglades City, Florida to shine and be a beacon of hope. To be a witness of His love. To be a witness for His mercy and His grace. Yes, this church's light has been turned on 97 years. But is your light turned on? Your spiritual light? Imagine going into a darkened room where you can't see very much. Your eyes have to adjust to the darkness before you can see where you are. That's how a lot of people are about sin. They must be in it for a while before they really see, and realize, they *are* in sin.

Joseph Stowell, retired President of Cornerstone University, and author of over twenty Christian books wrote in his book The Dawn's Early Light, *"We have watched, wondered, and worked. Yet, our work is like trying to stop the tide with a pitchfork. A 'new day is dawning.' But it's the 'dawning of night.' Because that which was right, is now wrong. And that which was wrong, is now right. Values and principles that made our nation great, are now hated."*

And it's true! Look at all those who want to abolish our police! Thieves walking out of stores unchallenged. Shootings for no reason. Car jackings. Rioting in the streets. There's total disregard for our laws! And that's our challenge. We're being challenged to bring the *"light of the Gospel"* back into our nation as described in John 3:19: *"Light is come into the world, but men love darkness rather than light."* Jesus was referring to *spiritual light*, since people prefer darkness *"because their deeds are evil."* They don't want God shining a *"spotlight"* on them! Their sinful nature has them dressed in black, wearing black hoodies and covering their faces with black masks so they can't be identified. It was true when Jesus said it.

And it's true today. People prefer darkness. It covers their sins. And the level of sin in the world has risen to such a point that it's affecting the Church! Church leaders and church members are choosing sinful paths: Selfishness. Self-righteousness. Lack of patriotism by failing to celebrate American values. Not understanding how blessed we are to live here. 1 John 4:18 says, *"There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear. . ."*

And, God is love! He loved you enough to send His Son to die for your sins. His love is perfect. You have nothing to fear, but your own Pride. You don't realize it, but every time you refuse to forgive someone, you're doing it out of Pride. Every time you argue with a friend, a family member, or spouse, and insist you won't be the first one to apologize, you're doing it because of your pride. Remember, the grace Jesus Christ is for you to do away with your pride and extend that same grace and forgiveness to others. Then, there's Greed, which is closely related to Pride. You bury yourself in debt making sure you have the best and newest things. How about Gossip? Hatred? Hatred's connected with fear. You fear people you don't understand. You hate them without any reason. And Judgment? It will be the death of your faith and your influence. But unfortunately, many churches today don't any of see this. With the result being the church is undermined by those who don't take the Bible seriously. Christ's message is cast in doubt. If the Bible says Christians don't do *X*, but Christians in the church are *doing X*, then those who are outside the church wonder whether, or not, the Bible is being taken seriously by those in the church. But where do you draw the line? The Bible says. *"Those elders who are sinning, you are to reprove them before everyone, so that the others may take warning."* (1 Timothy 5:20)

Sin is sending shockwaves through our society. Sin is destroying the morals and the values of our society. The time has come to change the way we live. Change the way we view sin. No longer can we accept the declining levels of morals, because as they go "downward," we're taken down with them. It causes us to lower our standards. *"If the salt loses its saltiness, can it be made salty again, because it's no longer good for anything except to be thrown out and trampled underfoot."* Remember, Jesus said, *"a city set on a hill cannot be hid."* He didn't want us to lower ourselves from what we have been called to be! He wants us to be committed to a higher level of holiness and righteousness.

Again, Joseph Stowell challenged the Church when he said, *"Now is the time to challenge the deepening darkness, and begin to penetrate the night with the light of a new dawn!"* We need more than "HIGH" standards. We need "HIS" standards. We need GOD'S STANDARDS! We need to *"challenge the night of wrong with a life of light that's committed to right."* That's the constant challenge every church needs! It's what every church member needs. By teaching the *Beatitudes*, Jesus set a different path for His people to follow. He showed you how to live in the Kingdom of God. He showed you the blessings that come with it. And He taught if you are broken and hurting, you can find hope and renewal in Him.

I met Desmond Tutu, the Anglican Archbishop of Cape Town, South Africa in the early 80's when he was deeply involved in the struggle against Apartheid in South Africa. For his struggle for freedom, He received the 1986 Nobel peace prize. In a 1992 interview with the magazine Christianity Today, Bishop Tutu was asked if he was hopeful about the future.

He said, *"I am always hopeful. A Christian is a prisoner of hope."* Yes, he said he was a prisoner of hope. And you as a Christian should be ***a prisoner of hope!***

. . . A lot of people have felt they were prisoners of hope. Paul of Tarsus. . . . Christian men and women suffering persecution under ancient Rome. . . . Martin Luther who was excommunicated by the Pope yet started the Protestant Reformation. . . . Martin Luther King. A bullet silenced his voice, but it didn't silence his hope and spirit of having "a dream". Or Mother Teresa's commitment to the poor. Yes, there's always hope! Prisoners of hope refuse to accept the customary way of doing things. They always think there might be a better, more truthful way in a world which screams, *"You can't. We've tried that. It won't work!"* And the church says, *"But have you tried Jesus?"*

I'm going to ask you again, is your light turned on? Turned on to the wonderful hope in Jesus? The angel Gabriel approached Jesus in heaven after His resurrection from the dead when He had ascended back into heaven said, *"Master, you must have suffered terribly for humanity down there."* *"I did!"* said Jesus. Then Gabriel said, *"Do they know all about how you loved them and what you did for them?"* *"No, not yet. Only a handful know."* Gabriel was puzzled. He said, *"Well then, what have you done to let everyone know about your love for them?"* Jesus said, *"I asked Peter, James, John, and a few friends, to tell people about me. After those are told, they will tell other people about Me. My story will spread to the farthest reaches of the world. And in the end, everyone will have heard about My life and what I have done."* Gabriel frowned. Looking skeptical, he said *"But what if Peter and James and John grow weary? What if the people who come after them forget?"*

And that's where we are today? Have we forgotten? Billy Graham said we are living in an increasingly secular and non-religious society. People today never think about God. Or even make Him a part of their lives. Why? One reason is we have failed to pass our faith in Christ on to the next generation. Not only have we failed to explain the Gospel to them and urged them to commit their lives to Christ, but we also haven't demonstrated Christ's love by the way we live. We have forgotten Jesus' words: *"You are the light of the world. Let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven"*. (Matthew 5:14, 16) There are a lot of reasons why our world seems to be less and less religious. Growing materialism. Preoccupation with pleasure. Money. Status. Politics. Pressures from a secular press and TV. The weakening of family ties. Growing immorality. The list is endless. And the Apostle Paul said of the last days, *"People will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boastful, proud, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful ... lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God."* (2 Timothy 3:2,4)

But in many parts of the world today, God's still at work and people are coming to Christ in record numbers, because only Christ can satisfy the deepest longings of the human heart. Only God can change their lives and give them hope for the future. Is this happening to you? Are you a person of hope? Are you finding hope when it seems there's none to be found? It can be extremely difficult. But it's possible! Hope is there! Choose Hope! You're not a locked into to your circumstances. You have the Spirit of God who created the heavens and the earth living inside of you. You can choose to hope. So, stop trying to live out your life on your own. Allow God to help you. Allow others to help you. And make sure you help others! You want hope? Listen to God's Spirit and know that a Spirit-filled life is not a life that's sitting alone in the dark. It's an active life of being in the presence of God's light and Spirit. It's a life of serving others, because you have been filled with the Holy Spirit of hope. It's because you believe in the God of miracles that you will never give up on yourself, or anyone!

You *can* become a person full of hope and light, if you try. Let God be in your life, daily. Let Him fill you with joy, daily! And *"may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in Him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit."* (Romans 15:13) Then, you will know for sure, your light is turned on! AMEN