

## "LIGHTS IN A DARKENED WORLD"

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

There's a story told about a woman, who at a large public dinner found herself seated between a Rabbi and a Minister. She was determined that on this occasion she would be radiant, charming and full of witty conversation. When she discovered that she was sitting between a Jewish Rabbi, and a Christian minister, she remarked in quite a flutter, "Why I feel as though I were the page between the Old Testament and the New Testament". The minister, something of a wit himself, dryly remarked, "Why madam....that page is usually blank".

His deflating remark only serves to remind us that there are many people writing blank and empty pages in the book of life. The experiences of life have dulled the enthusiasm of many a person. Angry fears, and hidden concerns have dimmed the glowing spirits of many an individual. No longer can they radiate hope and confidence. Not longer can they shine as lights in a darkened world.

It is interesting to note that Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount urged people to live glowing and radiant lives. Bringing inspiration and confidence to those who gathered on the hillside to hear him, he said:

"Ye are the light of the world! A city that is set on a hill cannot be hid. Neither do men light a candle, and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick; and it gives light to all that are in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father who is in heaven....."

Jesus seems to be saying that God has given us the ability to glow and to radiate light. He is encouraging us to let this luminous quality of life have a chance. He warns us against hiding it, lest by so doing we will weaken our effectiveness as persons. In other words, Christians are to be lighted, shining persons, thus identifying themselves as belonging to the company of God's children.

Perhaps we need to recover this ability to shine - not in a cheap superficial way, but in a deep and real Christian sense. In this passage of Scripture, Jesus is telling us how we may shine as lights in a darkened world. He introduces us to three aspects of this radiant life which are also clues to its attainment.

JESUS IS SAYING THAT WE ARE IMPORTANT PERSONS.

In the first place, Jesus is saying that we are important persons. We often think of important people as those who have famous names - Christopher Columbus, George Washington, Abraham Lincoln, Winston Churchill. They're important people, we say. People with famous names. But do you know that Jesus in his Sermon on the Mount talked with people whose names were not recorded for us. They were plain, ordinary people. And yet Jesus called these people, "The light of the world". I think it was

his way of saying to them that they were important people, and that they mattered in the sight of God and man! Jesus was always interested in getting people to think highly of themselves. He knew that they would never shine like lights unless they did.

Even if our names are not famous, they are nevertheless important to us. Our names represent us to the world. A name takes on the reputation of the person who bears it. Sometimes we find this is carried to extremes. For instance in the Domesday Book, the census made by William the Conqueror of England in the 11th Century, there were English people by the name of Badneighbor, Blackinthemouth, Gotobed, and Losewit. On the early passenger lists of boats arriving at Plymouth, Massachusetts, there are such names as Lumphead, Styffchynn, and Inchbald.

We smile at these names and we're pleased that we aren't afflicted with them. But whatever our name is, it stands for something. It simply stands for us. If we're selfish and stingy, people think of this when our names are mentioned. If we're friendly and unselfish, our names stand for this.

Some 700 years ago there was a firm of merchants in Germany by the name of Easterling so upright in all their dealings that the gold and silver which they circulated became the standard for the correct quality and content of metal. Easterling became abbreviated to Sterling, and from that day to this all silver having a content of at least .925 fine silver, is marked as "sterling" silver.

Now this name "Christian" stands for something in this world that we live in. Anyone bearing this name is marked as an important person. The name Christian carries with it a sacred trust for it makes us representatives of Jesus of Nazareth. The name Christian stands for faith in God, for character that is strong and clean, for a spirit that is generous and courageous, for love and forgiveness, for hope and truth, and for the right, true, and good things in life. ~~These are the qualities that make us stand upright and give us faith in life and in ourselves. They help us to shine like lights in a darkened world.~~

~~The Christian therefore guards his name. He makes it stand for something fine and holy.~~ When we say, "I'm a Christian" we can hold our heads high and be proud of it. No other name means as much. "Ye are the light of the world". It was Jesus' way of saying that people are precious in the sight of God and man.

JESUS IS SAYING THAT WE SHOULD BE ATTRACTIVE PERSONS.

In the second place, Jesus is saying that we should be attractive persons.

Have you ever stopped to think about the personality of Jesus? From all accounts, people must have found him to be very attractive. The Bible gives no description of his appearance, but it's evident that he was the kind of man who was sought after by all sorts of people. There was a tenderness, and a meekness in his eyes, and in his face, but there was a rugged manliness and a dignity in his whole appearance that won the respect of all who saw him. The common people heard him gladly. He was a popular guest at dinner parties and was entertained by both rich and poor.

What was the source of his attractiveness? We can't give a completely adequate answer, but two facts need to be underscored. He sought to do the will of God, and he had a genuine love for people. His personal charm and attractiveness grew out of something deep within and which expressed itself in all that he was, said and did!

One doesn't have to be a Hollywood star in order to be attractive. People who have achieved distinction in life and who have been blessed with many friends represent all types. Some are tall, others are tubby. Some are fat, and others are thin. Some have been favored by fortune, and others have been handicapped. The point is that one's inner attitude and personal outlook on life are far more important than external appearance.

William Wilberforce, the great English philanthropist, was a hunchback. But his physical handicap didn't keep him from leading many a successful fight for the abolition of slavery in the England of one hundred years ago. When he arose in Parliament to plead the cause of the black man, he became a person transfigured. No one thought of his deformed body, for everybody gazed at the light on his face. He was greatly loved and admired by all Englishmen and lies buried in Westminster Abbey. The secret of his amazing hold on people was his complete forgetfulness of self and his devotion to the great causes of human justice.

It is our task as Christians to represent God in the world of human affairs. God has given all of us native abilities to become great in our role of life. We can develop a matchless attractiveness as we earnestly study the role of the Christian. We work at other things. Why not work at being a Christian. As we practice the Christian spirit, our lives become radiant and attractive.

One of the great Christians of our day is General Douglas MacArthur. Above his desk in Tokyo there used to be a framed message which read in part as follows:

"Years wrinkle the skin, but to give no enthusiasm, wrinkles the soul. Worry, doubt, self-distrust, fear and despair - these are the long, long years that bow the head and turn the growing spirit back to dust. Whether seventy or sixteen, there is in every being's heart the love of wonder, the sweet amazement of the stars and star like things and thoughts, the undaunted challenge of the events, the unfailing childlike appetite for what comes next, and the joy of the game of life. You are as young as your faith, as old as your doubt; as young as your self-confidence, as old as your fear; as young as your hope, as old as your despair."

These are the things that make life attractive and satisfying. They are the things of the spirit. "Let your light shine" said Jesus. The Christian should and can be the happiest, the most appealing, and the most attractive person in the world.

JESUS IS SAYING THAT WE CAN  
BE INFLUENTIAL PERSONS.

In the third place, Jesus is saying  
that we can be influential persons.

One Sunday in Plymouth Church, Brooklyn, before a great congregation, Henry Ward Beecher paid tribute to Charles Smith as a major influence in his boyhood life. The name of Charles Smith meant very little to the people in the congregation. They thought that perhaps he was a school teacher, or a college professor. Perhaps he had been an outstanding church man. They were quite surprised when they hear Beecher mention that this Charles Smith was a negro who for a time had worked as a hired man on a farm which belonged to Beecher's father. This is what Beecher said about him:

"He didn't try to influence me, he didn't even know that he did it, and I didn't know until a long time afterwards. He used to lie on his bed and read the New Testament, unconscious that I was in the room. He would talk about it, and chuckle over it. I had never heard the Bible really read before. It was a revelation and an impulse to me."

A negro servant read the Bible and a boy became a great man!

This is how the radiant life works. "~~Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works~~ and glorify your Father who is in heaven". Jesus is urging us to put our religion to work in quiet deeds of love and faith. He is saying that the most effective influence we have is not direct, but indirect.

The radiant Christian reflects the spirit of Jesus. He is high in faith and low in criticism. He lets the light of his religious convictions shine through. He stands out above the crowd for his actions and his attitudes are different.

In the Canadian Rockies there is a stream known as Kicking Horse Creek. It is located on the continental divide. Part of its water flows east to the Atlantic, and part to the west to the Pacific. Concrete runways have been built to channel the water in both directions. The slightest influence - a gentle ripple caused by a passing breeze - may determine whether the water flows east or west.

And so it is that there are times when lives are so delicately balanced that a chance remark will turn them to the right or to the left. What a wonderful opportunity we have to share our religious faith with others. All of us can do so very much to lift up the lives of those with whom we associate. ~~with~~ the serene soul, and the singing heart move with power upon doubting minds and weary spirits. Far too many people are living lives that are empty and blank. Too many are living in the shadows of sin and fear. They don't need arguments or blame. They need the example of radiant living. They need encouragement. And this is the high privilege of the Christian.

Back in the day of Queen Anne, every Englishman who lived in the village and owned property was compelled by law to put a lighted lamp in front of his house every evening from seven until eleven o'clock. Each person did his part in having a community where people could walk without stumbling. Put your light out where others can see it. You will be glorifying God, and helping others along the way.

LET US PRAY:

Our Father and our God, Thou who are the light of the world, we often forget that we are important in Thy sight. Help us to give ourselves in greater service to Thee and our fellow man so that we may grow in our attractiveness and influence as Christians.

Illumine our lives. Make us children of light, setting our light so shine in the darkened world around us so that others may see our good works and be led to Thee.  
Amen.

## "LIVING THE RADIANT LIFE"

There's a story told of a woman who at a large public dinner found herself seated between a rabbi and a minister. Determined that on this occasion she would be radiant, charming and full of witty conversation, she remarked in quite a flutter, "I FEEL AS THOUGH I WERE THE PAGE BETWEEN THE OLD TESTAMENT AND THE NEW TESTAMENT." To which the minister, with a twinkle in his eye, remarked, "WHY THAT PARTICULAR PAGE IS USUALLY BLANK!"

His deflating remark serves to remind us that there are many people writing blank and empty pages in the book of life.

The experiences of life have dulled the enthusiasm of many a person.....

Angry fears and ugly events have dimmed the glowing spirits of many an individual.....

No longer can they radiate hope and confidence.....

No longer can they shine as lights in a darkened room.....

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confidence to those who gathered on the hillside to hear him, he said:

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Perhaps we need to recover the ability to shine - not in a cheap, superficial way, BUT IN A DEEP and REAL CHRISTIAN SENSE. In this passage of Scripture, Jesus is telling us how we may live the radiant life. He introduces us to three aspects of the radiant life which are also clues to its attainment.

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We smile at these names and we're pleased that we aren't afflicted with them. But whatever our name is, IT STANDS FOR SOMETHING. It simply stands for us. If we're tight and stingy, people think of this when our names are mentioned. If we're mean and dishonorable, our names stand for this.

Some 700 years ago there was in Germany a firm of merchants by the name of Easterling so upright in all their dealings that the gold and silver which they circulated became the standard for the correct quality and content of metal. Easterling became abbreviated to Sterling, and from that day to this all silver having a content of at least .925 fine silver, is marked as "STERLING" silver. That's a fine reputation for honesty to attain.

The name "CHRISTIAN" stands for something in this world we live in. Anyone bearing this name is marked as an IMPORTANT person. The name CHRISTIAN carries with it a sacred trust for it makes us representatives of Jesus of Nazareth. The name Christian stands for  
faith in God.....

for character that is strong and clean....

for a spirit that is generous and courageous....

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These are the qualities that make us stand upright and give us faith in life and in ourselves. They make us shine like lights in a darkened world!

The Christian therefore guards his name. He makes it stand for something fine and holy. When we say, "I'm a Christian" we can hold our heads high and be proud of it. No other name means as much! Jesus is saying in the first place then: WE ARE IMPORTANT PERSONS.

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There are times when lives are so delicately balanced that a chance remark will turn them to the right or the left.

It is this radiant life that Jesus is talking about that can do so very much to lift up the lives of men. The serene soul and the singing heart move with power upon doubting minds and weary spirits. Too many people are living blank and empty lives.....too many are living in the shadows of sin and fear. They don't need arguments or blame. They need the encouragement and the example of radiant living. This is the high privilege of the Christian.

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Of such said Jesus, is the RADIANT LIFE!



LET US PRAY:

Thou who art the light of the world, we thank Thee for the assurance of Thy love and concern for us. We realize that we are important in Thy sight.

Help us to dedicate ourselves in greater service to Thee and our fellow man so that we may grow in our attractiveness and influence as Christians.

Illumine our lives. Make us children of light, bravely letting our light so shine in the darkened world around us so that others may see our good works and be led to glorify Thee. In Thy name, we pray.

Amen.