

This is No Time for Sby Christians

WEEKLY BIBLE STUDY

Last in a five-part series

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Matthew 5:14–16 (NIV)

¹⁴“You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden. ¹⁵Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. ¹⁶In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.

Matthew 28:16–20 (NIV)

¹⁶Then the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go. ¹⁷When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted. ¹⁸Then Jesus came to them and said, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. ¹⁹Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”

John 8:12-20 (NRSV)

¹²Again Jesus spoke to them, saying, “I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life.” ¹³Then the Pharisees said to him, “You are testifying on your own behalf; your testimony is not valid.” ¹⁴Jesus answered, “Even if I testify on my own behalf, my testimony is valid because I know where I have come from and where I am going, but you do not know where I come from or where I am going. ¹⁵You judge by human standards; I judge no one. ¹⁶Yet even if I do judge, my judgment is valid; for it is not I alone who judge, but I and the Father who sent me. ¹⁷In your law it is written that the testimony of two witnesses is valid. ¹⁸I testify on my own behalf, and the Father who sent me testifies on my behalf.” ¹⁹Then they said to him, “Where is your Father?” Jesus answered, “You know neither me nor my Father. If you knew me, you would know my Father also.” ²⁰He spoke these words while he was teaching in the treasury of the temple, but no one arrested him, because his hour had not yet come.

*How sby a Christian are you? The light of Christ sbines within you.
Can others see it? Do you help them to see it?*

Jesus’ brief metaphor early in the Sermon on the Mount has come to be one of my favorite passages. I can hear Jesus asking his disciples, “How can you be the light of the world if you are hiding?” Or, “How can you be the light of the world if you refuse to help?”

We know we are to be the light to the world but we are often unsure as to how to go about it. Sometimes we think it means we have to pull people out of their homes or stand on street corners passing out tracts. Of course, some of us invite our neighbors and friends to church with us. A few of us might even share the Good News with strangers. But the biblical understanding of invitation, of being the light to the world, extends to every part of our lives. We invite when we worship, when we learn, when we love, when we care, when we serve, when we work, when we play – every part of our life is to be an invitation and a witness to others.

Let me give you one example. We often don’t think of our own worship as an act of invitation. But when a person who is not a churchgoer visits our worship service, they are looking for three things.

- (1) They want to feel the presence of God.
- (2) They want to see the Christian church living out its faith – kindness, love, patience, service to others, and so on.
- (3) They want to see the relevance of the faith for their lives.

Every Sunday, each of us, as a member of the St. Andrew community, is an important witness to the reality of Christ’s love and an invitation to all persons. Just as sports heroes are unavoidably role models for our youth, we are always, at all times, and in all

places, witnesses to the living reality and glory of Christ's sacrificial love. Leon Morris reminds us that none of this is for our own glory; that is not the reason we seek to be role models. We do so for the glory of the one whose light we bear:

“The point of all this is explicitly brought out. Your light is, of course, a borrowed light. It is because they have received light from Jesus that the disciples can shine in the world. So refers back to the preceding: ‘let your light shine in the aforementioned way.’ This light will issue in good works that are seen by people, a provision that must be understood carefully, for there were people like the Pharisees who made sure that their good deeds were seen by others and it is not this Pharisaic attitude that Jesus is commending. The good works are to be seen, not in order that the doers may be congratulated as fine, upstanding servants of God, but in such a way that the observers will give glory to your Father. There is to be no parade of virtue, no attempt to win praise for oneself. It is the light that is to shine, not those privileged to be the bearers of the light. People will always see the deeds that disciples do, and disciples are to make sure that when that takes place it is the light that they will see. And that they will see it in such a way that they will praise God.”¹

This is the life to which Jesus' *summons* each of us, just as he summoned his disciples when he urged them to be the light to the world.

Summons??

Summons is a bit of a harsh word. It seems rather demanding. The Merriam-Webster Collegiate Dictionary says “summon implies the exercise of authority.” I guess that is the rub. But it is also the point. Jesus does summon us, his disciples, with all the authority of a Lord and Master. It is a summons, not a request. Jesus is not asking nicely; he is not asking at all. Further, this is not a summons of a few or only of the ordained or only of those who work for a church . . . it is a summons of all those who claim to be followers of Jesus. Plainly put, we cannot claim to be disciples of the Christ and ignore the summons.

To what are we summoned? The truest expression of what it means to be the light to the world can be found in what we call the Great Commission from Matthew 28. Jesus summons us to be his helpers. We, his disciples, are to go out into the world and make more disciples, baptizing and teaching. Sometimes “mission statements” can get pretty long and abstract. This one is neither. We are to make disciples. Indeed, the stated

A Festival of Light

The festival of Booths (aka Tabernacles; see Leviticus 23:39-43) was a joyous time in ancient Jerusalem. It was part of the Exodus story that the Jews lived out each year in their festivals. Passover festival in the spring was a party to celebrate God's rescue of their enslaved forebears. Booths, an agricultural harvest festival in the fall, was a celebration of God's care of those former slaves in the Sinai wilderness. Families were to live in temporary shelters (hence, “booths”) during the seven-day festival, so that they would never forget God's graciousness in the wilderness.

The ancient Jews used light to express the joy of the great festival of Booths. They lit four giant golden lamps in the temple courtyards that were so bright, it was said they lit up the entire city. But that wasn't all. The evening Booths celebrations also creatively incorporated the use of light . . . lots of light.

Why so much light? Because the festival was all about God and God's saving grace, and God is the light that overcomes the darkness. “It is you who lights up my lamp; the LORD, my God, lights up my darkness” (Ps. 18:28); “The LORD is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear” (Ps. 27:1). God's Law is the light: “Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path” (Ps. 119:105). Even God's servant is the light: “I am the Lord, I have called you in righteousness and I have taken you by the hand and kept you; I have given you as a covenant to the people, a light to the nations” (Isaiah 42:6).

¹ Morris, L. (1992). *The Gospel according to Matthew* (p. 106). Grand Rapids, MI; Leicester, England: W.B. Eerdmans; Inter-Varsity Press.

mission of the UMC is exactly that: “to make disciples for Jesus Christ.” In the NT, “disciple” translates the Greek word, *mathete*, which connotes a master and pupil relationship. A disciple, a *mathete*, is an apprentice or student, more than merely a follower or fan. The *mathete* seeks to learn from and emulate the Master. In the Great Commission, the Master summons his disciples to help in the Master’s work.

Baptizing?

It isn’t hard to understand why we might think that Jesus is speaking to someone other than to us. We are to make disciples by baptizing and teaching (v. 19 & 20). I’ve certainly never baptized anyone and, in all likelihood, neither have you. But it would be a profound mistake here to think that Jesus is speaking only to Robert or Arthur or Pam or other ordained clergy.

Baptism signifies our entrance into the body of Christ. Robert may be the one who lays on hands, but all of us are summoned by Jesus to do all we can to build up the community of God’s people. It is we who invite. It is we who welcome. It is we who promote harmony and unity in the body. It is we who are to be the light.

We are not spectators at the baptisms on Sunday mornings; we are participants. This is the whole point of the baptismal response: “Now it is our joy to welcome . . .” When Jesus tells his disciples to baptize “in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” it is a summons meant for us all.

Teaching

Jesus’ summons to teach may seem more straightforward than his summons to baptize, but even here we can get off track. We can fail to grasp that we teach others in everything we say and do. The teaching Jesus speaks of is far more than the teaching that goes on in a classroom, as important as that is. If others are going to learn the faith-obedience of a disciple, it is going to be through us, through Jesus’ helpers . . . through you and me, just as we learn from each other.

Imagine a person who enters our faith community with no prior understanding of Jesus or of our faith, or worse, someone who thinks they understand, but do not. If they are to begin learning what it truly means to be a disciple, they are going to learn it through us . . . and we will learn through them. Yes, thankfully, God’s Holy Spirit leads and guides us all in this. But still, God wants to work with us, not in spite of us nor without us.

Head . . . Heart . . . Hands

We are so used to needing Jesus that we can fail to see Jesus’ own “Help Wanted” sign. Being the light to the world means that we are part of God’s great project. We are privileged to build for his kingdom. This is no better exemplified than in the life of John Wesley. He preached thousands of sermons, evangelized on two continents, and called Christians everywhere to lives of holiness and service.

Wesley’s solidarity with the poor had always distinguished his ministry and threatened his reputation among the “respectable” folks. One of Wesley’s regrets in his old age was that he himself had become “respectable” among the upper circles of London society.

But Wesley knew that we are called to serve – to feed, to clothe, and to care (see Matt. 25:31-46). If that means we are viewed as odd or disreputable by the world, then so be it. Christianity is not just about what we believe or what we feel, but also what we do – the head, the heart, and the hands.

Wesley’s commitment to bring the Good News and a warm meal to society’s outcasts still permeates the UMC. We remain committed to social justice. We understand that we are not just to wait for the full realization of God’s kingdom; we are to work toward it – every day and in every way and for all persons. And in all this, others will see the light of Christ in us. Now is not the time for shy Christians!

More on the Light – by Kent Hughes

Our Lord dramatizes the function of light by giving two examples—a city perched on a hill and a light set in a home. First, believers are to function like a city set on a hill. Jesus says, “A city on a hill cannot be hidden” (v. 14b). . . . There is no way to obscure a city on the crest of a hill. Believers are like this. They are visible. There is no such thing as an invisible believer. As Dr. Lloyd-Jones said, “If we find in ourselves a tendency to put the light under a bushel, we must begin to examine ourselves and make sure that it really is ‘light.’ ”

That is good, gracious advice! Do we hide our light? And if so, are we really light? Christians are visible, and this visibility makes them like the beckoning lights of a city on a hill. Inside there is light and what goes with it—warmth and safety.

In addition to being like a hilltop city, Christians are like an ancient household lamp. Jesus goes on to say, “Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house” (v. 15).

The point is unmistakable: The principal function of a household lamp, and of a believer, is to provide illumination to all around. This simple metaphor tells us so much. Light reveals things as they really are. All of us have at some time walked into an unfamiliar room and have felt our way to the lamp and turned the light on, discovering a room far different from what we imagined. Light also promotes life. In metropolitan Chicago where I live and minister, summer patio plants flourish in the basement all winter if we provide them with enough light—even if it is artificial. Even broken bones mend faster if we can soak up some sunlight. Light is persistent. It constantly assaults the surface of the earth and will penetrate the slightest crack. The darkest place is not safe from it if the tiniest opening appears. Light also awakens us.

Jesus, our Captain and Model, did all of these things and more by bringing spiritual light into the world. He did not make the darkness darker—he simply made it felt. His life was such that men and women were made to feel what they could not feel before—their sin, imperfection, and impurity. Christ made possible a clearer distinction between good and evil. He eliminated the option of thinking ourselves good by comparison with others. He was and is the standard! At the same time his perfectly beautiful life drew men and women to him. We are lamps, and the Householder places us strategically. “Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand.” The light is placed strategically so it can shine to best advantage. And God does the placing. We are simply to shine where we are placed. In fact, it is in the darker and less promising places that light has the greatest effect.”

¹ Hughes, R. K. (2001). *The sermon on the mount: the message of the kingdom* (pp. 86–87). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books.

Questions for Discussion and Reflection

Jesus with a “Help Wanted” sign. That is quite a mental image. We are used to speaking of our need for Jesus, but we don’t very often speak of Jesus’ need for us. But if the work of God’s kingdom is going to move forward, it is going to be through us, as we are strengthened and led by God’s Spirit. But Jesus is not simply asking for help, he is summoning us to go out into the world and make disciples of Jesus Christ. You might begin by discussing what you think it means to “make disciples for Jesus Christ.”

John Wesley was never afraid of making others angry with him – for what he said, whom he said it to, or what he did. Wesley took the Gospel to the poorest, the neediest, and the outcasts of polite society. Late in his life, Wesley worried that he had become respectable! In contrast, many of us can hardly make ourselves say the “J” word in public, say grace in a restaurant, or even invite a friend to church with us. Why are we so timid? Are we afraid of offending or seeming “intolerant?” Are we embarrassed? Are we afraid of being made outcasts? Are we afraid that we are too ignorant about our faith to answer the most basic questions that might be posed to us? What are some concrete steps our congregation could take to help us all be bolder in being the light to the world? How can we help each other? What have you done today to witness to Jesus Christ? In the last week? In the last month? In the last year? What will you do? These questions make us pretty uncomfortable, don’t they. Why?

Daily Bible Readings

Before reading each passage, take a few minutes to get a sense of the context. Your study bible should help. Jot down a few questions that come to mind from your reading of the passage.

<p>Monday, Matthew 10 Jesus sends out his twelve disciples (apprentices) as apostles (messengers)</p>	<p>Tuesday, Mark 8:34-9:1 The summons has a cost.</p>
<p>Wednesday, 1 Corinthians 1:10-17 Some surprising words from Paul about baptism. What could he mean? (Remember, Paul wrote this letter 20 years or so before Matthew wrote his gospel.)</p>	<p>Thursday, 1 Corinthians 3 There is simply no place for divisions in the body of Christ.</p>
<p>Friday, 1 Timothy 6:2b-10 The dangers of false teaching and the fruitless path</p>	<p>Prayer List</p>

