



Shining Like a Lighthouse

by Dale Fincher

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"I am the light of the world," said Jesus. "What a stupendous phrase," reflected Malcolm Muggeridge, "especially when one is conscious of so much darkness in the world." In another passage, Jesus turns the phrase on his disciples and says, "You are the light of the world."

This passage in Matthew 5 has sent ripples through the centuries for a Christian's place in the world as evangelist and reformer. Jesus is deep and direct that salt and light are to be, not hidden, but distributed. That distribution is to have a specific result. Let's look at the passage and its implications.

The context is verses 13-16. Jesus tells his disciples they are salt and light. But to what end? "That they may see your good works." If "good works" were the final goal, Christianity would be reduced to a moral religion without a unique relationship with God. To

what end are those "good works"? "To glorify your Father in heaven." That, indeed, is the ultimate goal.

But what does "glory" mean? When I was growing up, I used to picture "glory" as "shining like a light bulb." But when Jesus is using this phrase, he isn't saying, "If you do good deeds, others will see God shining like a light bulb." This misses the point.

The word "glory" carries the idea of "weight, majesty, and power." And someone "glorifies" God when they view God as one of great and awesome character. In short, to "glorify God" is to see what God is like, majestic and worthy of all honor.

This is a vital concept to understand in sharing God with others. Our goal, says Jesus, is for others to truly see God the Father as He is. In this way, not only are we accomplishing one of our roles as image bearers of God, but we are also guiding others to see that God is worthy of worship.

Light-shining has many qualities to it. I do not want to stretch metaphors into a long list of unintended meanings, but I want to highlight an aspect of light-shining that I believe is warranted in the passage.

In the last few years of my mother's life, as she eyed death squarely in the face, a certain clarity came to her that I had never seen in all my years growing up. One of the images she referred to frequently was that of the lighthouse. It was her symbol. As she fought hard against cancer, being a lighthouse was a top priority for her.

A lighthouse cannot steer a ship, she would say. It cannot board the boat and turn the wheel. It cannot demand any response from the captain. All it can do is shine.

The shining itself has a message: "Don't come over here onto the rocks! Steer toward the harbor!" It is up to the captain to make the choice whether to heed the message or not.

In the same way, those who are in Christ are also lighthouses, shining forth what God is like. We cannot command others to worship God. At best, our role is to keep letting others know where the harbor is, where the channels lead home.

The opposite is also true. Our actions done out of a bad character can lead people to have a wrong view

of God. Sadly, many have rejected Christ simply because they saw a false representation of Him.

Showing others what God is like not only involves being a messenger of God's salvation, but also sharing truth into the lives of others on a everyday level, including relationships, virtue, philosophical and theological conversations, as well as wise decision-making. All of this is shining out. Everywhere we exhibit God's ideas and God's character, we bring awareness of God's greatness into that sphere. The more we shine God's character, the more people see Him for who He is. And, hence, He is glorified in the earth.

May the light that Jesus Christ has shone in our hearts as the light of the world, shine unto our neighbors, co-workers, family, and friends so that they may see what God is like and join us in worshiping Him.

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