

The Light of the World

Matt. 5: 14-16.

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(B.T. Vol. N5, p. 116-117.)

Here the character of the position for the disciples goes beyond "the salt of the earth." For this was expressive of righteousness; a righteousness not outward like that of the scribes and Pharisees (which sought reputation of man, and was little beyond the pride of a Stoic), but lowly and real as in God's sight. Whereas "the light of the world" is the shining forth of grace, and inseparable from the confession of Christ in that respect. Salt preserves, but does not make everything manifest as the light does.

"Ye are the light of the world: a city set upon a hill-top cannot be hid. Nor do they light a lamp, and put it under the dry measure but on the lamp-stand, and it shineth unto all that are in the house. Thus let your light shine before men, so that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father that is in the heavens" (vers. 14-16).

"The world" had no such special dealing of God as "the earth." There moral darkness had reigned, which the light was to dispel as far as He gave it scope and power. Redemption, Christ's death, resurrection, and ascension, would give the light a penetrating energy unknown before. For such was the deadly pall which overhung the favoured land during our Lord's earthly sojourn that, contrary to nature, the darkness resisted the light, and "comprehended not" even the True Light in His person. But when He rose victorious over all the power of the wicked one, the old commandment became the new, and was true not in Him only but in us, Christians, because the darkness is quite passing and the true light already shines.

This is confirmed by the figure which follows and carries the truth out farther. "A city set, or situated, upon a hill-top cannot be hid." The sphere is no longer the circumscribed area of the earth or land, but, as for another aspect we read, "the field is the world." The God and Father of the Lord Jesus Christ would make Himself known at least in testimony, before power effectuates His will far and wide. As perfect love He came down in Christ to man; but the world knew Him not, and His own people received Him not, yea insisted that He should be crucified. Now He sets Christ in the heavenlies above every principality and authority and power and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in that to come, and put all things under His feet, and gave Him as head over all things to the church which is His body, the fulness of Him that fills all in all. And they, His disciples, are the light of the world: a city set upon a hill-top cannot be hid. Once darkness, they are now light in the Lord, and responsible to walk as children of light, corporately as well as individually. For the fruit of light is in all goodness, and righteousness, and truth. They are to prove what is agreeable to the Lord, and to have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness but rather to reprove them.

Men treat their light more fairly than Christendom does the light of which our Lord spoke. Men shrink from natural darkness, its inconveniences, and its dangers; and when they light a lamp, they do not put it under the dry measure (which of course would quite hide it) but on the lampstand, and it shines to all that are in the house. But Christendom fears the light that exposes its neglect of scripture, and of the Holy Spirit's guidance, and of Christ who is and ought to be the all. Therefore, Christianity and the church being sadly misrepresented, all the privileges and duties suffer in the same proportion; as the Lord and the apostles prepare us to expect. But the faithful are bound with humility yet in

courage of faith to let the light shine; for it is not of self, but the confession of Christ in everything going forth as God has taught them, whether men hear or forbear. It is meant by our Lord to shine to all that are in the house, and beyond too.

Do we want to make known God as He is? Christ is His image and alone perfectly represents Him. Would we show Him as Father? He the Son declares Him and is the way to Him. Would we see man as he ought to be? It is not on the first man we must look but on the Second. Would we measure the true wickedness of Satan? It is in his direct, constant, personal hatred of and antagonism to Jesus the Son of God. Do you crave the sight of life eternal in the midst of this evil and guilty world? There it is in word and deed fully revealed in the same Lord Jesus. Would you consider death in all its solemn nature? It is He who manifests it. Would you look at life in risen power? Jesus alone and perfectly discloses it. Do you wish a true sight of the highest heaven? It is where the Father received Him with the fullest love and glory. Would we warn of hell? It is the everlasting fire, in which all that despise, hate and reject Him must have their portion with the devil and his angels. Christ is the light that makes every thing and one manifest.

So it might be shown in the whole range of privilege and duty and from the least thing to the greatest. He is the measure of love and holiness, of service and worship, of devotedness, of suffering, and of communion. He is the standard of sin and of judgment no less than of righteousness. And as the Father is only known through and in Him, so the Spirit acts to make all good in the believer, that we might be delivered from all our thoughts and imaginations, and be led into all truth and kept.

"Thus let your light shine before men, so that they may see your good (or, comely, καλὰ) works, and glorify your Father that is in the heavens." This is practical Christianity in its outgoing, as the salt is the preservative power of purity which we always need to have in ourselves. It is to confess and live Christ, not only in secret which is essential and so pressed elsewhere before Him who sees there, but also truly and unflinchingly before men. Benevolent works are no test, and are not what Christ looked for and here expresses. He spoke of works excellent in the sense of what suits the Father and the Son, and of which the Holy Spirit is the sole power in us. It is not His mind to let our good works shine before men, but our light, or confession of Himself in word and deed.

Nor can anything other or short of this secure the end He proposes. For I might dole out all my goods in what men call charity, or deliver up my body to be burned without confessing Christ, and therefore without in any way glorifying the Father. There is neither light nor love without the faith and the confession of Christ; and self might thereby be honoured, but not the Father. Whereas let the light of Christ shine in your confession; and when men see right works in accordance with the will of God, they glorify not you but the Father who is the spring and aim of what you do.