



TRUTH IN LOVE

Shedding Light on the Word of God

SHINE

Matthew 5:15

Nor do they light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house.

In Matthew 5:13-15, Jesus said that disciples who follow the pattern laid out in Matthew 5:3-12 will be the salt of the earth and the light of the world. But what does it mean to be a light? As lights, where is it that our light should shine? Who are the primary people who should see our light? Is it your sinful neighbor? Is it the starving people in Africa? Is it the homeless people on skid row? Is it people of other religions?

Most Christians think that it is all of these people. “Christians are to shine before an unbelieving world,” we are told. And there is much truth to this. In fact Jesus hinted at that very thing in 5:14. But we learned in our previous study that the picture He uses of a city on a hill is not of individual Christians, but of all the lights *together* in one place. When the people of God shine *together* by loving each other, we create a beacon of light that invites the world to come and see what God is doing among us.

But now Jesus transitions from talking about the lights of a city on a hill to **a lamp**. Jesus is intentionally showing the differences between the collective lights of a city, and the individual light of a lamp. A city only shines brightly when individual lights are shining.

Which brings us to the question of why individual lamps are lit. What is the purpose of turning on a light in a house? Is it because each family knows that if they light their individual lamps, a lost and weary traveler out in the wilderness can find his way in the night? No. People have lights in their house so their own household can see. It is the same today as it was then. When you turn on your lights in your house, it is so you and your family can see. I doubt that when you turn on lights it is so people flying overhead or driving toward your city can see lights. That thought never enters your mind.

In fact, when we understand what kind of light Jesus was talking about, this idea becomes clear. Michael Wilkins writes:

The lamp used in a typical Palestinian home was a partially closed reservoir made of clay. It had a hole on top to pour oil in and a spout on one end into which a wick of flax or cotton was set. It was a fairly small lamp, which gave off only a modest light; thus, to give maximum illumination it was placed on a lampstand.¹

A lamp had a very modest purpose. It was placed in a strategic location **in the house** so as to bring light to the few people in close proximity to it. The most strategic location for such a small lamp was not **under a basket, but on a lampstand**. Lamps “were placed under a measuring bowl only to extinguish the light.”² But on a lampstand, the lamp could give light to anybody in the room.

Here’s the point. God is not calling you to bring light to the entire world, or even to an entire city. God does not call us to be spotlights for all to see from miles away. When Christ called us to be lamps in the *house*, He is telling us to steadily give off a modest light so that those in our immediate vicinity can receive illumination. Being a light is not necessarily carried out in “dramatic ways as we preach, witness, or go on a short-term mission,”³ but as we live in a Christ-like way among those whom God has placed in our day-to-day lives.

But more than that, by referring to a lamp in a *house*, Christ indicated who should be the primary recipients of our light. His audience was mostly (if not completely) Jewish, most of whom were very

¹ Michael Wilkins, *The NIV Application Commentary: Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003), 215.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid, 225.

familiar with the Hebrew Scriptures, which we call the Old Testament. And when used symbolically as Christ does here, *the earth* refers to the Gentiles, while *the house* referred to Israel herself, or more specifically, to the community of God's people (cf. Num 12:7; Eph 2:19-22; Heb 3:1-6; 1 Pet 4:17).⁴ Israel, as God's house, was called by God to live in holiness before Him and in love with their fellow Israelites so that their individual lights would shine among one another. In such a way, the collective nation of Israel as a whole would be a light to the world of the Gentiles (cf. Isa 42:6; 49:6). That is the exact idea Jesus is passing on to His disciples here.

As disciples live in loving relationships with those who are of the household of God and live in purity before Him, our lights will shine in our house. And as our individual lights shine, we will become a brilliant city on a hill which cannot be hidden.

So where does shining like lights begin? You must shine among your family of fellow believers before you can shine among unbelievers. Encourage your pastor this month by buying him a book, or getting him a gift certificate so he can take his wife out for dinner (It is Pastor's Appreciation month after all). Ask the elderly widow in your church if you can mow her lawn or fix her sink. Tell the young parents that you are going to watch their baby while they go out on a date. Invite the single men from the college group over for a home-cooked meal. Take the kids of a Christian single mother for a day so she can breathe and relax alone. Look around your church, asking the Lord to show you who needs help or encouragement, and what you can do about it. Then you will be a light set on a lampstand, providing light for everyone in the house.

⁴ J. Goetzmann, "House" in *NIDNTT*, Colin Brown, ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1976), II:247-249.

Family and Ministry Update

by Wendy

Where did September go? Kahlea is now six months old and she is amazing. She is happy all of the time, except when she gets a little fussy because of teething. She is such a great baby, I can't possibly get enough hugs and kisses in each day. She adores her older sisters, especially Taylor because Taylor is old enough to really play with her and entertain her. She also gives Selah the sweetest smiles.

Selah is enjoying the cooler weather (down to 85 degrees now!), and wants to spend all her time outside. She wants to run and pick every "flower" (i.e., weed) that she sees. She makes beautiful bouquets out of anything. She walks around all day on her toes, and is becoming my little helper in the kitchen.

Taylor still amazes me with her creativity. Since we don't get snow in Texas, she made "sand angels" the other day. That led her to toss sand in the air to show how it falls from the sky like snow. She and Selah tried this with pebbles earlier, and got a few scratches, but loved it anyway. They also made sand castles. I'm hoping she doesn't ask to make "sandmen." I don't know if I'm that talented!

Both girls also love our Tuesdays and Thursdays when Daddy is gone all day—not because he is gone—but because we do special things on those days to make them fun. They especially enjoy our dinners of air-popped popcorn, sugar-free hot cocoa, and homemade pie. I love trying out new pies too!

We could use prayer for all of us to make it through this semester as Jeremy is now taking 18 credits plus working 24 hours per week and preaching at least two times every month. This wasn't ideal, but necessary so that Jeremy can finish his Th. M. in three years. He won't have to take this many credits again. Thank you in advance for your prayers, since through them, God upholds us daily.



Taylor, Selah, and Kahlea—the three cutest girls in the world (in my opinion)