

Igniting Your Lamp with God's Word (Matt 5:14-20)



'You are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden. 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. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven.' (Matt 5:14-16)

1. The Light of the World

Jesus said, 'I am the light of the world.' (John 8:12). Now Jesus says you are the light of the world and that you are to let our light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify our Father in heaven.

- a. *What a challenge to the church!* This is one clear 'Mission Statement' of the Church! This verse is the paradigm for the rest of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount. Light vs darkness is one of the most powerful themes of the Bible. Our presence in the world is to be the constant reminder of our heavenly Father's goodness to the world groping in darkness, starved of the Father's love! (C.f. A clear picture of the heart of the Father in OT. Num 5:24-26). This is the greatest need in the world today.
- b. A lampstand (Gk. 'lukinia') is a prophetic picture of the *church in the last days* (Rev 1:20). Again, it is not about the number but the quality of our faith because *if we stand true to who we already are in Christ, then 'a city set on a hill cannot be hidden from our light.'*

2. How Do We Get There?

Our natural reaction would be to rush into thinking about what to do immediately. Jesus speaks of the four pillars of Jewish piety (Matt 6:1-34) (i) Serving (charitable deeds), (ii) Prayer, (iii) Fasting, (iv) Giving. They involve both the spiritual and the practical ministry, complementing each other.

But Jesus does not start with what we are to do, but what we to believe – i.e. our relationship to the word of God (Matt 5:17-20). Then He touches our character and personal life (Matt 5:21-48) before He talks about what we are to do. Because what we do (and why we do what we do) flows out of what we believe and who we are in private before God. What wisdom!

- a. Character & Purity [PUBLIC]:
 - i. Dealing with anger & offense (5:21-26)
 - ii. Sexual purity (5:27-30)
 - iii. Marriage covenant (5:31-32)
 - iv. Integrity with our words (5:33-37)
 - v. Spirit of retaliation & showing mercy (5:38-42)
 - vi. Walking in active love (5:43-48)
- b. Piety & Spiritual discipline [PRIVATE]:
 - i. Serving (6:1-4)
 - ii. Praying (6:5-14)
 - iii. Fasting (6:16-18)
 - iv. Giving (6:19-24)
- c. 'Our character & purity in personal life is to be open for the public to see, whereas our piety & spiritual discipline is to remain private and not to be flaunted.'

If we reverse this, it will be an offensive kind of witness and will ultimately work against Christian testimony in the long run! What is the world watching in Christians for the authenticity of our faith? Not our piety, but our purity & character.

3. Jesus' View of the Scripture – What We Believe

- a. Jesus & the Scripture (5:17) – What defines your faith more than anything is your attitude toward the Scripture. Our attitude toward the Word of God is the same as our attitude toward God.

'If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our home with him. He who does not love Me does not keep My words...' (John 14:23-24).

Jesus said, *'I came not to destroy [the law or the prophets] but to fulfil' (5:17)*

- i. This misunderstanding is the stumbling block for orthodox Jews, e.g. Is 53. Jesus is the 'Prophet like Moses' who came to fulfil the Scriptures (Deut 18:15-19). The OT is perfect – there is no error in it. Yet it is not the complete revelation without Jesus who IS the fulfilment. The animal sacrifice, the feasts, and the prophets all point to Jesus and His work on the cross. Jesus IS the Word of God (Rev 19:13).
 - ii. The Church also suffered from the same confusion in the past. E.g. Marcion (~110-160AD) the heretic claimed the God of love in the NT is different from the God of wrath in the OT! We are repeating the same mistake today. Have you heard people say, *'What the Bible says does not really matter. The only thing that the Bible is really saying is that we are to be kind to each other.'*
- b. Infallibility & Inerrancy (5:18) – *'For assuredly I say to you (emphasis), till heaven and earth pass away, not jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law till all is fulfilled.'* [Jot - yod. Tittle – vav]

There is not even the smallest error in all the Scriptures! Jesus said, *'The Scripture cannot be broken.'* (John 10:35) Today this would make Jesus a 'fundamentalist' – Jesus believed in the 'inerrancy' & 'infallibility' of the Scripture! We need to have the same confidence in the Word of God as Jesus had.

C.f. 2 Tim 3:16 - Every word written in the Scripture is divinely inspired by God. The Scripture is the sole authoritative standard of the truth to judge all truths. It is up-to-date, timeless, and does not need revision with the change of culture. Sadducees and Pharisees of Jesus' days would be equivalent to Liberals & Fundamentalists respectively of today.

- c. Invitation of Greatness (5:19-20) – *'Whoever therefore breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches men so, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever does and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven.'*

This is one of the most neglected and scariest verses in the Bible. Having firm faith in the Word of God is the starting point of our journey. One day we will all be judged by the word of God, even the least of the word. Therefore the primary purpose of studying the Word of God is to produce in us a life of obedience, not to teach others.

You will not be judged by how much you know or how well you taught others, but by how well you obeyed. You can be the greatest teacher of the word, yet if you constantly break or ignore or fail to live by even the least of Jesus' commands, you will be among the least in the kingdom of heaven.

In Jesus' days there was such prestige in teaching the law of God that teaching the law became the great pride and righteousness to the Scribes and Pharisees. V20 is a shocking warning: *'For I say to you, that unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven.'* (C.f. 1 Cor 1:30). The end goal of every Bible study is to produce a life of obedience to the word of God – the Incarnate Word in our life.

***'Don't study the Word to mast the Word, rather study the Word to be mastered by the Word.'* (John White)** This is Jesus' invitation to true greatness. One of the disturbing trends today - 'without due consideration to our obedience to His word, we quickly learn the technique on how to put it over to God to fulfil it.'

4. Reflection

1. *'Our character & purity in personal life is to be open for the public to see, whereas our piety & spiritual discipline is to remain private and not be flaunted.'* Are you tempted to reverse this order at times? *What are the Christian character & purity traits in Jesus' teaching (Matt 5:21-48)?*
2. Did Jesus have any doubt about the authority and the accuracy of the Scripture? What is your attitude toward the Scripture? Do you feel any cultural pressure to re-interpret the plain meaning of the Bible?
3. *'Unless your righteousness exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and the Pharisees, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven'* (Matt 5:20) What does this Scripture mean to you? What is the goal of your Bible study?