

Why Christians Exist

The Beatitudes

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Bible Verse: Matthew 5:14-16
Preached on: Tuesday, October 17, 2023

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I'd ask you to turn in your Bibles to Matthew 5 for our text this evening. I'm going to read verses 13 through 16, but we'll be focusing on the last three verses here this evening. After teaching the Beatitudes and all of the remarkable, commendable things about the spiritual character that the new birth produces in a man, Jesus said this in verse 13, and the "you's" here are plural "you's." That will become important later on. You, plural, y'all.

13 You are the salt of the earth, but if salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything except to be thrown out and trampled under people's feet. 14 You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. 15 Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. 16 In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.

Christianity makes an exclusive truth claim, saying that it is true and all other religions are false. The God of the Bible is the only true God. Jesus Christ is his only Son. The gospel is the only message of salvation from sin that the world has and ever will have. Only those who repent and believe in Christ will be saved. Only, only, only, there's just this exclusivity about it that is quite remarkable, especially in our pluralistic age. The Bible says in Acts 4:12 that, "there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved." And so there's this exclusivity about biblical Christianity totally contrary to the spirit of our culture.

Now our passage here this evening contributes to this crucial theme of exclusivity and after Jesus taught the Beatitudes, and by the way I should just reiterate what I said so many times along, everything about the Beatitudes is exclusive also. Look at the end of verse 3. We've said this so many times that I don't want to read the entire verse but theirs and theirs alone is the kingdom of heaven. They and they alone shall be comforted. They and they alone shall inherit the earth. And on it goes. Jesus, speaking to his disciples, describes these spiritual characteristics and says that these people and only these people will be in the kingdom of God in the end. The others will be left outside with their nose pressed against the window, watching as the kingdom goes by and they are left behind. And so there's this exclusivity that is true generally about Christianity, and then there is

this exclusivity taught in the Beatitudes as well that, by the way, makes it impossible for Christians to work together in spiritual enterprises with unbelievers. Whether it's a spiritual enterprise in evangelism, that would not be right, the church working together with unsaved politicians to advance a secular agenda, that's not right for the church to do that because there's this exclusivity and Christ intends it to be that way.

You know, in 2 Corinthians 6:14, why don't you turn over there with me for just a moment because it's pertinent to the spirit of what is happening in some sectors of Christianity. You know, we should not be partnering together with the Ben Shapiro's of the world. Whatever else we might have to say by way of appreciation for the human things that someone like him says, for the church we have to understand that the word of God commands us and compels us to be distinct and so it says in verse 14, "Do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers. For what partnership has righteousness with lawlessness? Or what fellowship has light with darkness?" Whenever in these kinds of spheres that Christians try to join together with unbelievers, there's something that gets sacrificed. Every single time it's absolutely unavoidable, especially in the political realm. What gets sacrificed is the gospel, you know, because the gospel says there's in and there's out. There's the exclusive people of God, there's the only one way of salvation in Christ, and that is not a message that you're going to gather a lot of people around and win political victories over. And so we have to know that in advance, that our goal is not to gather as many people around as possible with the lowest common denominated message as possible and silence Christ and silence the gospel, that's not at all what we're called to do. If we're going to be faithful to Christ, we realize that there's an exclusivity that we have to be faithful to and what the effect of that is, is that rather than looking for political influence, we realize where the true influence comes and that's what Jesus is teaching in verses 13 through 16.

Christians, as we said last time, are like salt to unsaved humanity. Christians hinder spiritual decay like salt was used to preserve meat in the first century before the days of refrigeration. Now as we move on, and that was a very important message last week, if you haven't heard that, I really encourage you to get it and to listen to it a time or two or three, because it's just very foundational to so many, many things. But today we move on in verses 14 to 16, and Jesus uses another metaphor. In verse 13, he had said that Christians are like salt, in the world, their influence is like salt in that they hinder decay, they retard spiritual decay, they hold it back, they prevent it from getting worse, and they delay the natural process of decay. Well, beloved, just think in the simplest of terms, if you've got a society that is predominantly unregenerate people, in an Ephesians 2:1 to 3 kind of way, a Romans 3:10 to 18 kind of way, there's no fear of God before their eyes, they don't seek God, they don't want to know God, the poison of asps is under their lips, well, if there's nothing to control that, to hinder that, to direct that, the process and the rate of decay is going to be exceedingly rapid indeed. Those of you that in your former life used to hang out in bars or be with people that were eager to indulge the desires of their flesh, you know how deeply things can get dark in a real big hurry when people give vent to their sinfulness; unless there's something to restrain that, it gets out of hand in a hurry, on a personal individual level as well as on a larger corporate level.

Well, the whole point of Jesus' teaching is the whole world is like that, but because God has placed his born-again disciples into the kingdom, or into the world, I should say, then that process is slowed down because the effect of believers is to restrain the conscience of people. We have a restraining impact. People recognize that there's something holy and it holds them back a little bit, or going even further as we preach the gospel and as people are converted out of darkness, transferred from the kingdom of Satan into the kingdom of light, their whole inner man changes and that retards the process of decay as salt is to meat and, beloved, we just have to realize that that is the kind of influence that Christ has appointed us for. That's the kind of influence that the church is primarily and preeminently appointed for, and everything in the epistles, everything in the gospels, points you in the same direction. You don't find the epistles talking about how you can redeem art for Christ or anything like that. You know, there was nothing about redeeming the Roman Empire for the sake of the kingdom of God. That kind of teaching isn't there and the reason it's not there is because that's not the purpose of the church, and the sooner we realize that and are anchored in it, then the more that we're going to be protected from voices that are beckoning us to do other things and to substitute the true spiritual power that is in the word of God and in the Holy Spirit for a false, cheap, tawdry substitute of outward political influence. You have to choose. You cannot have it both ways. And that's what Jesus is saying, is there's just this exclusivity and the influence is based on the character found in the Beatitudes, not in numerical voting majorities that you can conjure up by teaming up with people who hate your Christ. We just have to have this exceedingly clear in our minds and it's going to become more and more important in the coming year for us to keep these things in mind, so it's a blessing for us to be able to even discuss these things from the word of God before the heat of political campaigns really ramps up and everybody on your social media feed is agitated politically, having completely bypassed the spiritual things that are found here in the Sermon on the Mount. Jesus says you're the salt of the earth.

Now he goes on with another metaphor in verse 14 and he says, "You are the light of the world." He's making a very similar point just using a different metaphor. It's important enough that it needed to be stated twice and what he says here in verse 14, you are the light of the world, in the original language it would jump out at you, he's saying that you, meaning the followers of Christ, you and you alone, you and no one else, are the light of the world. Christians are the light of the world. Unlike others, we have the truth. Unlike others, we have that which is of enduring eternal value, not of temporary political influence, for example. And the result of that is, beloved, is that corporately together, again, the "you" is plural, and so we shouldn't be thinking preeminently individual here about how I myself am the light of the world, Jesus alone is the light of the world that way, but his people are the light of the world. It is through his people that God mediates his truth, proclaims his truth in a Matthew 28 kind of way and that's the point that Jesus is making here, and what you and I need to understand in the fear of God, in the love of God, what you and I need to understand is that to be the light of the world is to be in a very noble position and under no circumstances would any right-thinking Christian who has anything of the Spirit in him and any kind of biblical understanding, would any right-thinking Christian exchange that privileged spiritual position of spiritual power from the

word of God, from the Spirit of God, in the promise of God, exchange that for something else that the world might offer to us.

And so we're looking tonight, if you're taking notes, you want a title to the message, "Why Christians Exist." Why Christians exist is explained in this passage. This exclusive position that we have as followers of Christ, being the salt of the world, those who alone have the kingdom of heaven, those who alone shall see God, those who alone shall receive mercy, that exclusive position that we enjoy in the body of Christ comes with great responsibility as we live it out in the world around us. And so we're going to look at the role and at the responsibility that Jesus lays before us. The role and the responsibility, that's the two points for this evening. And the role is to be a light. The role is to be a light.

Now, beloved, here is the most foundational thing that we could understand: it is up to Jesus, the Lord and head of the church, to define for us what that light is and how we are to be a light. We should not try to come up with our own ideas of what it means to be a light, that it's important for us to have a coffee shop or something like that, not that there's anything intrinsically wrong with coffee shops, but we shouldn't start by thinking in earthly terms. We want to see what Jesus says and get into the flow of his thinking and let that shape our thinking. As we said on Sunday in a slightly different context, we were born into a realm that belongs to God. God decreed the world, he created the world, he sustains the world, one day he will consummate the world. God is a God of truth and everything about truth comes from God, belongs to him. We don't get to make up our own truth. We don't get to make up our own reality. Reality is what God created, what God is, and what he defines it to be. And so our goal is not to be clever in our own minds and come up with our own things. God has given us more than enough in his revelation that we want to see what he says and then think his thoughts after him. This is the way God thinks. We have the mind of Christ. We want our individual and corporate minds to operate like theirs do, rather than thinking independently or in contradiction to it. That is fundamental. I take that, beloved, as the preeminent principle by which we would order thought and by which we would order corporate life, is that we don't want to be clever. We don't want to come up with our own stuff. God has given us more than enough in his word. So what we want to understand is what he says, think like that and do and behave in response to that, and then we'll be in a position of blessing and then, beloved, we will be doing what we were created to do, then we will be fulfilling the purpose for which we exist as we operate biblically rather than politically.

And so point number one here tonight, the role is to be a light. The role is to be a light. Notice that Jesus does not command us to be the light of the world, and this is one of the things that some of these other philosophies have a terrible effect and as a pastor why I'm so concerned about it, is that people are more than happy to bind you with your conscience and tell you this is what you must do if you're going to be the light of the world and it always involves you doing something to advance the agenda that they are promoting. That's not good, and blessed are those who run from that kind of manipulation and that kind of teaching because, beloved, Jesus does not command us to do anything here in this verse. He's explaining what reality is. He's saying, you are this. You are the light of the world. And the "you" of which he speaks, again, is the "you" that he was

describing in the Beatitudes in verses 3 through 12. That's the "you." "You" is a pronoun, a pronoun, you need to know what the antecedent of the pronoun was. Who is the "you" that he's talking about? Well, the "you" are those that he pronounced blessing on in verses 3 through 12 and so he's pronouncing blessing on those that have been born again, he's pronouncing blessing on those that belong to the kingdom of heaven, and that carries over into verses 13 through 16. If you miss that point, if you ever hear anyone talking about being the salt of the earth or the light of the world, independent of the context of the Beatitudes, you can know that they're missing the point as well, and that they're injecting something that Christ did not intend. Jesus is speaking to an exclusive circle of people and he says, "You are the light of the world."

Now, why would he use the light metaphor? Well, the Bible teaches that the world is dark and dwells in darkness. Men are slaves to sin. They actively refuse the truth, John 3:19-20. To paraphrase a little bit, Romans 3:10-12, "None is righteous. No one understands. No one seeks for God. No one does good, not even one." Beloved, that's dark. And don't you understand that politics can't fix that? You can't legislate a change in someone's heart that would remove the darkness that is within them. The only hope is our Lord Jesus Christ and Christ said this about himself in John 8:12 when he said, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in the darkness, but will have the light of life." Now, what a stunning claim of exclusivity that our Lord makes there. For anyone else to say anything remotely like this would be utter insanity but when Christ says it, he merely speaks the truth. He's not speaking out of pride here. He's declaring the truth of God when Christ says, "I am the light of the world." It is in Christ that slaves to sin find their release. It is in Christ that the unrighteous can find a righteous standing with God. It is in Christ that those who do not understand can find understanding and have their minds illumined. It is in Christ that we seek for God. It is in Christ that good can come. And so Christ himself, Christ alone is the light of the world and then those who follow him will have the light of life within them as 2 Corinthians, I believe it's 4:6 says, that God has shined the light of the knowledge of God into our hearts by his Holy Spirit. In the new birth, God places within us light and understanding and spiritual discernment. And so Christ is the preeminent light of the world. Think of the sun having a light that emanates from its own intrinsic glory, and then the moon. We see the moon at night from just an earthly perspective, it might seem like the moon is shining light, but it's not its own light, it's just a reflected light that the moon gives. There's no light in the moon itself. It's reflecting the light of something else. Well, in a like manner, disciples are the light of the world in a secondary sense. Christ, the light of the world, shines through his people. We have the privilege of enlightening sinners when we bring the word of God to them. We enlighten sinners when we preach the gospel to them. We display the truth and power of God in our lives and in our love, but it's a love and a life that comes from outside of us that's not intrinsic to our own hearts because Christ alone is the light of the world.

Now, as we're doing this, we're fulfilling what Jesus said when he said, "You are the light of the world." God uses his people to testify to men about his exclusive truth. Men may close their eyes, but the light is still shining. Men may close their ears, but the light is still speaking, if I can mix metaphors like that. And that's the predominant way that people respond, is that they reject it but that doesn't change the fact that the light is shining.

Beloved, it's so simplistic, but sometimes we need to just grasp these things on the most basic level. The fact that you close your eyes in the middle of the day and you can't see anything because you've covered your eyes up, and it's dark with relation to your own eyes, the sun is still shining. Well, in like manner, men may refuse the truth that we proclaim, but that does not mean the light is not shining. They're just rejecting that which is shining all around them, as the light surrounded Paul on the road to Damascus. But the blessed privilege that we have is that as we do what we do, as we live as we live, some will heed the witness as Christians point them to Christ. Now isn't that true with you? Someone through spoken word, through a relationship, in a family, a parent, through a book, someone told you about Christ, right, and then you believed. You know, maybe it's a process and all that, but someone told you. Someone was shining the light to you and God opened your heart to respond and to receive it.

Well, so it is and what happened to us is how God now uses us going forward. That's why we exist. But what we need to understand, beloved, and what I'm about to say has profound ramifications for philosophy of ministry in every way. Our role is not to be like the world and by trying to be as much like the world and hope that they like us and we can kind of inject a little bit of Jesus along the way. That's not the way that it works. That's called worldliness, it's called unfaithfulness. Our role is to be distinct from the world and to enlighten it. We are to be separate from the world and then from that position of distinction, to be used by God to advance his kingdom. Now look, if you're to understand anything, I'm already repeating myself at this point, what I plead for you to understand, to recognize, and to embrace is that that position is a noble position. It is an exalted, noble thing to be a Spirit-filled Christian in this wicked world and to represent Christ and to belong to him, and to know that he is ours and we are his. That's the blessing of being a Christian, not obtaining worldly prosperity from it, not obtaining worldly passing influence from it but to be people like what Jesus pronounces blessing on in the Beatitudes, and to belong to him, that's the most noble thing in the world. To be a Christian is to have the most high and lofty position that any man could ever have in this world. Whether you're working with your hands in the dirt of Mexico to try to get out subsistence crops, or whether you have a prosperous business or you have some kind of other career, the preeminent thing is to belong to Christ and that is the noble position and everything we do is ennobled by our relationship to Christ and to be his and to belong to him is the thing that most captivates the truly believing heart, not lusting after worldly prestige or worldly power. Our role is to be distinct.

Now, Jesus, in our passage here in verses 14 and 16, he uses two illustrations to show what that role is like, and if you look at verse 14, he compares it to a city, later he compares it to a lamp. He says, verse 14, "You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden." There's a little bit of Bible background here that's helpful to understand the picture that Jesus is using. Ancient towns, ancient cities in those days were often built of white limestone so that from a distance, if you'd see them from a distance, they literally gleamed in the sun during the day; they would just pop out from the drab dreary landscape because the light shining on the city sparkled with great visibility. At night, those cities would have oil lamps that would be glowing over the surrounding area. Think about being out in the country, maybe out far east on the 32 and

you're out away from all of the city lights and then there's just a home that's lit up and you have that warm sense of home through the lights that are shining through the window. Well, in a similar manner, multiplied by a number of times, the oil lamps in those homes would glow over the surrounding area and you could not miss it. In the day, you could not miss the city on the hill. At night, you could not miss the city that was lit up by the oil lamps of the homes that were around. And here's the thing, here's what you're to see from this, this is what Jesus is teaching us from that very simple illustration: by their very nature, by the very physical nature of these cities, especially those set up on a hill, you could not hide them. There was no way to shut off the display of whiteness, the display of light in contrast to the dark area around them and the dark landscape around them. By its very nature, that city stood out. By its very nature. Not by what it did, by what it was. The point that Jesus is making here that everyone in this day would have understood, cities like that, you can't hide them. You can't hide them.

Now, he's using that to tell us something about what his followers are like, what collectively we are like, and by their very nature then, beloved, the disciples of Christ, true Christians, those who have been born again, those who are truly repentant, I'm using synonyms here, not distinguishing them, I'm just using different labels to describe the same people, beloved, by their very nature, Christians stand out. Christians stand out by their very nature, just like a city on a hill stands out. And so that's the way it is. Remember, he's making a spiritual point. As he teaches in a dark world, the whole world is lost in the judgment of sin, the darkness of sin, the light of the world is Jesus, he's making a point about his disciples. By our very nature, we stand out and we're meant to stand out. That is our role. That is why we exist, is to be something distinct from the world.

We're not to be like the world. We're not to try to get the world to like us. Jesus had just said it's worth reminding ourselves of this, go back to verse 10 there in 5, as we just remind ourselves of the context, the world does not like true Christians. Unsaved family members will not like family members who are true Christians. There's a distinction there. It's why we exist, and that's why Jesus told us in advance in verse 10, "Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you." Beloved, in the immediately preceding context, Jesus had drawn a very distinct dichotomy between his disciples and what people would do to them and with them. They would persecute them. They would hate them. They would lie about them. They would revile them. It's because they're two completely distinct realms meant to be understood as distinct, not having that distinction blurred.

It's so basic. It's so fundamental. That's why a church needs to stand out and be different. There's something wrong. There's something terribly, horribly wrong with a church that an unsaved person can walk in and feel perfectly comfortable in and at home. Something's terribly wrong there. The theme of the music should be different than what they're used to. What is done inside the walls of a church should be something that is

alien to the unsaved man walking in off the street, for example. Say, "I've not seen anything like this." Precisely. It's because, we would say to the person, we would say it lovingly, generously, graciously, trying to help them understand is to say, "My unsaved friend, you see, you're in a realm that is distinct, it's completely different from anything that you've ever known in your life apart from Christ. And so of course it's different, of course it feels odd to you, perhaps you feel uncomfortable here. There's a reason for that. You've stepped out of your realm into a different realm altogether." You see, beloved, why do Christians exist? Why do we exist? Well, we need to understand that we exist to be distinct. We exist to be a light and as a result of that, as a result of that, it cannot be our goal to just try to get the unsaved world to like us. That can't be the goal because Jesus says they will not like us, they will persecute us. He said in John 15, "If the world hated me, know that they will hate you." And so we can't have it both ways. We either follow Christ and we stand apart from the world, maybe we stand alone before the world. That's okay. Wouldn't you rather be with Christ than be with the world? Wouldn't you rather know the blessing of Christ and the fellowship of his sufferings being conformed to his death, wouldn't you rather have that than to be loved by the world that hates the one you proclaim as your Savior? We really have to think through these things at a very simple, basic, fundamental level so that it takes deep, deep root in our heart and then we can respond appropriately.

Now, going on to verse 15, Jesus makes a similar point in verse 15. Again, the role is to be a light. That's the point that we're considering here, the role is to be a light. And Jesus says he's continuing his point, "A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do," so he's continuing the point. He'd made a negative statement there in verse 14. He's continuing it with a parallel negative statement here in verse 15, "Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house." Beloved, what do lamps do? What do lamps do? They provide light. That's what they are supposed to do. It's the very nature of their existence is that they provide light in a room. The point is so simple. Lamps provide light, it's what they do. It would be contrary to the purpose of a lamp to cover it up so that the light did not go out. That would be a self-contradiction. You don't do those kinds of things.

Now, those simple illustrations about the city and the lamp, they explain why we exist as Christians. Beloved, God saved you, God saved you so that you would belong to him. He took you out from the realm of Satan, out from the realm of sin and self and sin, I guess I'm really repeating myself at that point, but God saved you so that you would be his. In one sense, you had no choice in the matter. God just sovereignly selected you, put, if you're a Christian, he put his hand on you and said, in essence, "You will belong to me, come follow me." And you came and the Spirit worked in your heart and you rose and you followed him because God chose you to be his and to belong to him. Now as part of that, he saved you so that you would be light, together we would be light to a dark world. As a result of being a Christian, you no longer exist to serve yourself. All of your personal goals die when you come to Christ in the sense that they are no longer preeminent. There is something else that has displaced all of your other priorities and goals and life ambitions, your ambition of, and I can speak about this from personal experience, and when this all started to dawn on me as a brand new Christian, all of the

reasons that I had existed, wanting power, wanting prestige, wanting money, wanting all of that worldly stuff, shortly after I became a Christian, it just started to dawn on me, all of those goals and ambitions and priorities have died. They're dead. I am dead to those because now I belong to Christ and he is the preeminent priority in my life and I belong to him and what he wants is what my life must serve. Now, you establish that in principle, you work it out in daily life, sometimes you succeed, sometimes you fail, but what we're talking about here is at a fundamental level, at a most fundamental understanding of the reason we exist, we exist for the purposes of God, we exist for his glory, we exist to do what he wants and to be what he wants us to be. Whether he gives us a short life or a long life, whether he gives us prominence or obscurity, none of that matters, just so long as we belong to him. "Whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God."

So as a result of that, we realize that we exist for reasons that transcend ourselves, that transcend this world. We belong to God to serve him and to do what he's called us to do, and even more what he has appointed for us to do. So let's look at some other Scriptures to help make this point even more abundantly clear than it already is. Turn to John 15 with me. John 15, if you turn to verses 16 and 17 there, Jesus speaking to his disciples, the original band of disciples, but the principle expands beyond to us today. John 15 verse 16, "You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide, so that whatever you ask the Father in my name, he may give it to you. These things I command you, so that you will love one another." "You didn't choose me," Jesus said, "I chose you." He's sovereign. He's Lord. He's the Master, we're the slave. The slave does what the master says. The slave exists to further the master's purpose. That's why we exist and he's called us to be a light distinct from the world, not to join in the world or to be like the world.

Consider Acts 1 just turning to the next book in the Bible, Acts 1. Verse 8, again speaking to that band of disciples that was around him just immediately prior to his ascension, Jesus said, "you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses," notice the possessive pronoun there. "You will be my witnesses. You belong to me and because you belong to me, you will witness on my behalf as I command you to do." There is an authority over true disciples that they must respond to, that we are not at liberty to accept or reject. We simply belong to him and he gives us instructions and we do and we are what he calls us to be. That's why we exist and it's a complete reversal of the idea of using Jesus to further your own personal ambitions. I'm never too impressed when athletes praise God after a big victory and, "You know, I just want to thank God for giving me the strength to do this or that." Well, you know, God doesn't exist to further your athletic ambitions. You exist to further his purposes. And sometimes God saves us and uses us in ways that do not lead to glory in a human sense. They lead to suffering. They lead to sorrow. They lead to lack and difficulty, as Paul described in 2 Corinthians 11.

So we just have to think through these things, beloved, and understand that God called us, individually and corporately, and we stand before his throne of majesty, before his throne

of authority, before his throne of grace, as subjects of the King, ready to be used as he wishes. Only an instrument, as Philip Bliss said,

"Only an instrument ready
His praises to sound at His will—
Willing, should He not require me,
In silence to wait on Him still."

Look at Ephesians 2:10. Ephesians 2:10. I expect us to come back to this verse in a few weeks in our series on the Christian mind. Ephesians 2:10, "For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which," look at that phrase there, stunning, "which," look at it again, "which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them." God not only chose you before the foundation of the world that you would belong to him, God also before the foundation of the world laid out the course of your life so that you would walk in the works that he appointed for you to do.

I said recently in another setting, when I'm preaching, I have a sense that I'm doing what God created me to do. Now that might sound like a boastful phrase, but it's really not. It's really just a recognition of the providence of God. God prepared beforehand the course of our lives. If we find ourselves in a teaching, preaching kind of position, it's because that's what God prepared for us beforehand to do, and whatever role God gives to you in your Christian life, in your place of service, in your place of activity, this is what God has given you to do. You have the life that God has given you. He prepared it beforehand, whether it's one of suffering or one of ease or whatever the case may be, God has given you the life that he prepared beforehand so that you'd live for his glory in the midst of that realm that he's given to you, so that you would be light in the realm that he's given to you. Noble cause, noble call to be a Christian mother wiping the same nose again and again, day after day after day. Noble call to be a Christian mechanic. Noble call to be a Christian student doing your studies to the glory of God and living unstained by the world. Noble call to be a single person dealing with the sometimes occasional loneliness, if that's what God's given to you for this point in life, and finding your contentment in Christ. That's noble. That's glorious. And understand that you have the life right now that God has given to you, and that there are good works that he has for you to do right now in this position, and that that's the works that he prepared beforehand that you would walk in them. And so everything is elevated. Everything is transformed. Everything that once seemed mundane, the same activities done for his glory and recognition of his sovereign Lordship over our lives now becomes an act of worship that we can render to him because it's what he's given us to do. What is worship if it's not somehow related to being obedient to God? This changes everything.

One more, look at the book of Titus 2. Keep turning to the right in your New Testament. You'll go past 1 Timothy, 2 Timothy, and come up over the hill to the city of Titus. Titus 2 verse 11. Let's read a little extended portion of the Scriptures here. Titus 2:11, "For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions," do you see it, separation from the world, "and to live," and what are we to live? To live as those influencing the Roman Empire and

changing the course of its policies? Nothing like that. The very thought would have been absurd to Christians that were running from Nero at the time, or about to run from Nero at the time. No, "to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age." Godly lives, Beatitudes. Verse 13, "waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works." God redeemed you from your prior life, to purify you from within, to make you his own so that you would live to gladly pursue the good works that he sets before you to do, to be the light. You see, Christ saved us to separate us and so we testify, we testify to the world from new life and new priorities that are alien to the world. The world understands the quest and the lust for political power, the world is all about that, the world is all about that and grasps at it by any means that it can possibly lay hold of it. The Christian life, the Christian existence is something distinct. We testify to the world from new life within, from new priorities, from new affections that come from belonging to a new Lord. Rather than ourselves, Jesus is Lord, not Caesar. And so we let this out, we let it shine.

Now, over the years, some have claimed to be Christians, but they refuse to talk about their faith. They'll say something like, "You know, it's a private matter between me and God. I don't want to talk about that." That's utterly foreign to Christian experience. How could you have the light and then, you know, take some kind of cover and put it over yourself to make sure the light doesn't go out? A true Christian wants nothing to do with that. A true Christian, let's put it in terms of baptism, okay? If you're a believer in Christ and you haven't been baptized, blue folder on the table out, that's what you need to grab and deal with. You need to come to grips with this. We've had people that said, "You know, I don't like the idea of being baptized. Do I have to be baptized this way? I don't want to give my testimony to people. I don't want to be up in front." Now, there's a little sliver of that that I can understand and sympathize with. Somebody that says, "Well, you know, it's hard for me to be in front of people." I could get that and understand that but in a true Christian, beloved, there's going to be a greater, more controlling desire that says, "I'll put aside the uncomfortable feelings and I will take delight in the ability and the opportunity to declare my loyalty to Jesus Christ who saved me from my sins, who has given me joy and new life, who will take me to heaven. How could I not want to speak on his behalf?" You see, there's more to it than just saying I'm not comfortable in front of people. Okay, but isn't there something in you that says the Lord of glory has saved my soul and I've got to tell anyone that'll listen. I have to let that out. I can't hide that, I can't keep it to myself. There's something bigger than me that's going on inside me. And like Jeremiah who said, you know, it's like fire in my bones, it's got to come out. I don't accept, I don't accept, just speaking personally here, I don't accept at face value that sense that, "Yeah, I'm a Christian, but I don't want to tell anybody. If I have to stand up in front of people to testify, I'm not going to get baptized." There's something grossly wrong with that. That's not the mark of new life, and see, this idea of I want to keep it private, I want to do the least I possibly can for Christ and still check the box, out on the thought, out on the suggestion. This is not the way believers think. Believers say, "I've been saved, the light is within me, I've got to let the light out, it's why I exist. A city on a hill can't be

hidden, a lamp can't be put under a shade." The whole point of the lamp is to let the light shine to everybody. So it's a good test for where we're really at.

If you don't mind just one little thing. You've heard me talk about my dad in the past. I don't say this part of it too much. When it came time for me to be baptized as a new Christian, I was going to be out in a river or a lake someplace over outside of Bloomington, Indiana, and I knew that this meant testifying in front of my dad, who was hostile to my conversion and there was a tension there for a bit about that. Do I do this? Do I not? You know, what's it going to be like? My dad's kind of an intimidating guy, blah, blah, blah. In the end, it was easy. It was an easy decision. It was easy to do because the Lord gave me help and strength. And what a joy to stand in front of hostile people, let alone sympathetic people in a setting like this, what a joy to stand in front of hostile, skeptical people and boldly, unashamedly declare, "Jesus Christ has saved me, I belong to him, and I want everybody to know it." That's the mark of a believing heart in one way or another.

Our dear brother, Martyn Lloyd-Jones, says this, and I quote, kind of an extended quote, but that's all right. You won't go anywhere until I'm done, right? Most of you anyway. He says, "The true Christian does not even desire to hide his light. He sees how ridiculous it is to claim to be a Christian and yet deliberately try to hide the fact. A man who truly realizes what it means to be a Christian, understands that ultimately God has done this in order that he may influence others. The true Christian is a man who cannot conceal it. Not only that, he does not desire to conceal it because he says, ultimately, the purpose of it all is that I might be a light to the lost."

That's the role, be a light. That's why we exist, we exist to be a light. In whatever realm the Lord gives to us, we exist to be a light. Now that leads to point number two, the responsibility. The responsibility to shine the light. To shine the light. Go back to Matthew 5:16. In Matthew 5:16, we read this. Jesus says, "In the same way, let your light shine before others." Let it out. It's a command, but there's a sense of let this happen, "so that," here it is, there's the purpose clause, "let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven." Just thinking about people that because of their pride don't want to be baptized. What about the people that would hear your testimony if it was real and be helped by it? What about the believers that would be encouraged to see you speaking out, either if you came to Christ in your older age and you unashamedly declared Christ in the waters of baptism. The whole baptism thing is just an illustration, beloved. That's all that it is. People look and say, "Wow, look at that. That man's in his 70s. He's unashamed of Christ." Or a young person, young adult, saying, "Wow, the Lord is working in the generation to come up and while it's going to be my time to exit stage left soon enough, the Lord's work is continuing. What an encouragement." Or for the Lord to use your testimony in the eyes of somebody that wanders in, not a Christian, and they hear your testimony and they sense something different. They see a spark of light in your voice and in your eyes and the humility of speaking about your prior life of sin and loving Christ because he died for you and rose again and saved you and how he's changed you and my life is just so full of joy, and for an unbelieving person to hear that and realize there's something distinct here.

There's something that I need here. Why, if you're truly a Christian and you understand that you are to be light in the world, why in the world would you not want to do that? It reminds me, can't remember exactly who it was, there was someone in California in the ministry that I had there in the early years. So funny in retrospect. She was 70s, 80s. She didn't want to get baptized. You know why? Didn't want to ruin her hair. "I get my hair done on Saturday. If I get baptized, I'm baptized by immersion, that's just going to mess my hair up for the whole week." The things that people think about when these things aren't clear in their minds. Maybe Nancy will remind me of who that was when the day comes afterwards.

Anyway, Jesus gives this command, "Let your light shine so that they may see your works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven." Let your light shine so that it would influence the world in the direction of the glory of God. Let your light shine that it might edify others in the church. Let your light shine that it might testify to unbelieving people. The logic of what Jesus is saying is, since you are the light of the world, let the light out. In whatever providential circumstances the Lord gives you, whatever opportunities he gives you, let it out. If there's an opportunity to speak for Christ that comes up unexpectedly in a conversation, speak. Let it out. Don't hide it. Don't artificially restrain that which the conversation naturally gives you opportunity to speak in. Speak it out. I need to hear that too. Since you belong to Christ, reflect Christ and others will glorify God because of your testimony, because of your life. One writer said this, "Men will recognize true disciples and some of those that recognize the true disciples will come to praise the Father in the process."

So beloved, why do we exist as Christians? We exist for the glory of God. God saved us in order to use us. He gifts us differently. He gives us different opportunities, different resources, different personalities, but he gives us a realm in which the light can shine. The underlying purpose is the same even though our roles and resources in life may be vastly, vastly different. Charles Spurgeon said this and with this I'll close. "If there were nothing to be done in this world for Christians, there would be no reason for the church to linger here below. She would just be immediately transported to the better land if there were not great ends to be accomplished by tarrying here. The church is put here because the world needs her and because God's glory is to be revealed through her. She is to be salt to a society which else would be putrid, light to a people who else would sit in darkness." Why do Christians exist? We exist to be light to the glory of God. We exist not for ourselves, but for the glory of God as a testimony to men.

Let's pray together.

Gracious Lord, we thank you, first of all, for your Son Jesus Christ, the light of the world, sacrificed on the cross, buried on the third day, raised on the third day for our sins, with the call going out that whoever repents and believes in Christ will be eternally saved and once saved, saved to be the light of the world. God, I pray that you would protect this church and its testimony, that we would be the light that you call us to be corporately and individually. I pray that you would grant great discernment to us as we sift through competing voices, competing philosophies, competing calls on our life, and

Father, to sift through it all to find the purpose that you have for us laid out so clearly in your word. I pray for those perhaps that have lacked courage, that perhaps have been ashamed of the gospel, ashamed of Christ, perhaps truly born again but, Father, in an immature state. I pray that by your great Holy Spirit, you would inflame their hearts with great courage, with great love, with great repentance, and say, "No, from this day forward, I will be the light I've been called to be. Lord, forgive me for hiding my light. No more. Grant me grace and opportunity to shine as you would have me to shine until Jesus comes." As we sift through these things, Father, it's always so challenging to be under the authority of the words of Jesus. It's convicting. It shows us our weaknesses. The light shows where the dirt still lies on the floor, the closet of our lives. But Lord, help us to embrace that light that we would respond and that henceforth and forevermore we would fulfill the purpose, the reason that we exist, to be the light of the world, to be the salt of the earth, to be disciples of Christ uniquely and exclusively desiring in the seat of our affections the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ, our Lord. We pray in his name. Amen.

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