

## “Forever Lights” – Pr Jim Sprengle – Epiphany 5 – February 5, 2023

- I. **Matthew 5:14** – <sup>14</sup> “You are the light of the world.
- II. **Are you one of those people?**
  - a. If I came over to your house, would I find your Christmas lights still up?
  - b. I hate to admit it, but we still have our Christmas decorations and tree set up... but we do have our reasons – one being that we need newspapers to wrap everything to store it properly, and no one uses newspaper anymore!
  - c. I read a story from a couple of years ago, where a lady named Sara got an anonymous letter from a neighbor in February that read – “Take your Christmas lights down! It’s Valentine’s Day!!!!!!”
    - i. While the letter would have upset her in normal circumstances, this was terrible timing... Her dad and her aunt had both just died of Covid within a week of each other.
    - ii. Her dad, who lived with her, faithfully put up the Christmas decorations every year the day after Thanksgiving... and when he died on January 15, Sara just couldn’t bring herself to take the lights down... besides all the funeral planning!
    - iii. Sara posted the letter to a Facebook group, hoping the person who wrote the letter would see it and understand how much it hurt her... she wrote, “The family has been preoccupied with funeral arrangements, mortgage/utility payments, and just the grieving process of it all. So yes, we haven’t gotten around to taking down [my dad’s] Christmas decorations. Be kind to people because you never know what they are going through.”
    - iv. The post spread all throughout the community, and they were outraged for her... so they sent messages, cards, flowers, meals and even set up a GoFundMe to help with all the unexpected costs.
    - v. But maybe the best thing that happened was many neighbors dug out all the lights and decorations they had just put away a few weeks before and redecorated their yards and homes with Christmas lights.
    - vi. Can you imagine, driving around in February with people going to all the trouble of putting up their Christmas lights to let a hurting lady know that they care. <sup>1</sup>
  - d. As Christians, we are called to be the lights that shine into a world of death and decay... shine in a world of sin and darkness.
    - i. The light we shine is appealing and attractive to those around us – just like Christmas lights that attract the eye and bring attention.
    - ii. Jesus says His followers ARE the light – which is different than putting lights on and shining out – we are the light of Christ.
- III. **The Sermon on the Mount begins in our Gospel reading today.**
  - a. Last week we read the Beatitudes, or the blessings for His followers... and this week Jesus begins His sermon with a brief summary.

- i. “You all are that which salts the earth.” (vs 13)
  - 1. Directing these words to the people who are followers or disciples, Jesus is saying that their presence among people is a flavoring, is a preservative, and perhaps even makes the people around them thirsty for water – the water of life.
- ii. “You all are that which lights the world” (vs 14)
  - 1. Consider the normal lives of people in that day – darkness was difficult to overcome because it required fire – a light from candles, oil lamps, or torches.
    - a. Once it got dark out, most everything stopped or slowed down significantly.
  - 2. To be called a light implied that a follower of Jesus would shine forth and overcome the significant disadvantage that darkness meant... especially as it represents danger and evil.
- b. In simple terms, Jesus calls His followers the thing that will salt and light the world – that our presence is the presence of Jesus as He reveals the reign of heaven on earth.
- c. This light (more than shining, but He calls *us* the light) is a great example of the followers of Jesus changing from spiritual death and darkness to light.
- d. As we lead and live our lives, our thoughts, words, and actions naturally shine outward with the light of Christ.

IV. **The exception to shining outward is when we reject our identity.**

- a. Who are you as a believer in Jesus?
  - i. You are (just like me) a light.
- b. It seems absurd to think that you might cover that light because it would ruin the very purpose of it!
  - i. Yet, with no trouble at all, we shift our identity in Christ by going into camouflage mode – we just act and live like all the other people.
  - ii. We spend a few hours a week in “Christian” or “Follower of Jesus” mode, then set that aside for the “Normal” mode of living and acting like people who don’t know Jesus at all.
- c. What does knowing Jesus look like by the way?
  - i. Consider the utter devotion and love He showed toward His Father in heaven.
  - ii. Consider the love Jesus showed to the people around Him...
  - iii. Consider the ways that He had compassion on the lost.
  - iv. The life that Jesus led is the life we emulate or copy... as we are given the strength and ability by the Holy Spirit.
- d. Yet, how many of us cover our light because we don’t want to offend... or we don’t want to look silly... or we don’t want others to think we are too extreme in our beliefs?
  - i. It’s very common that Christians, in their desire to be relevant, simply live their lives just like the world around them – just like the darkness.

- e. As our Lenten journey begins with Ash Wednesday on February 22, I encourage all of us to think about the times and ways we try to fit into the darkness rather than shine like the light we are.
  - i. Does it mean more time in the Bible, learning about Jesus and God's plan of salvation?
  - ii. Could we set aside more time to seek the Father's will?
  - iii. Are certain sins getting in the way of loving our neighbor?
  - iv. Do we just want to fit in or do what we want rather than living our lives as followers of Jesus?
- f. In all these things, Lent is a great time to reset our habits and repent of our failure to live as the light we are.
  - i. Not that we can't do that every day (and we should!) but the season of Lent offers us a dedicated time of repentance and living for Jesus – as He lived and died for us.

V. **Christ's work on the cross and resurrection is our great source of light.**

- a. As Jesus says in our reading – the Law and Prophets spoke, and every commandment must be fulfilled perfectly – which is what He did.
- b. He lived the perfect life... the perfect life we fail to live time and time again.
- c. Jesus knows we tend to deny Him when the going gets tough, but He still went to the cross without denying us – He loves us through it all.
- d. You are forgiven, you are light.
- e. That is the heart of our faith – the sacrifice Jesus was willing to make on our behalf... to pay for our sin – and His resurrection to give us life and forgiveness.
  - i. With this gift of salvation, we become light – followers who bring this forgiveness, life, and salvation to others.

VI. **The light we are... the light we shine... is eternal.**

- a. Always remember that we don't put up our lights once a year and take them down when a certain season is over.
- b. We are the lights that shine forever in a world of darkness and sin – showing the mercy and love of a God who cares about the least of these.
- c. Jesus forever lights our lives with His death and resurrection, and we take that blessing into the world around us.
- d. Shine your light so that people around you give glory to God (vs 16) – the only source of life and freedom that they will ever know.
- e. You are a light – shining brightly in the darkness of the world – and nothing ever needs to cover your light – because you are covered in the righteousness of Christ! Amen.

<sup>1</sup> Sydney Page, "She Was Shamed for Still Having Christmas Lights Up. Neighbors are now putting theirs back up in solidarity," The Seattle Times (2-11-21)