

Shine, Jesus, Shine!

Matthew 5:14-16

A couple of weeks ago I received a hand written personal invitation in the mail from Justin Vincent Morgan, to attend his birthday party on June 26. Justin is our grandson, the youngest of our nine and I wouldn't have missed his birthday celebration for the world — even if it did involve having to endure Chuck E Cheese's for the umpteenth time.

As the party continued at his home and all six of his birthday candles were being lit — and just as we were all in the process of inhaling to sing the traditional "Happy Birthday," Justin abruptly stopped us, got up, ran over to a switch on the wall and turned out the lights. He wanted the candles on his birthday cake to shine brightly in the dark!

I want you to know that not only is my grandson the smartest kid on the block but he's a pretty spiritual kid, as well. Little did he and I know that what he did at his birthday party would give me the introduction and inspiration for the title of my sermon this morning, "Shine, Jesus, Shine!"

Today we continue our study in the parables of Jesus, as we examine one of the most profound, dynamic and complimentary statements our Lord ever made regarding us as his followers. He called us, *"the light of the world."* That pronouncement is monumental!

¹⁴ You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. ¹⁵ Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand and it gives light to everyone in the house. ¹⁶ In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.

The expression, *"the light of the world,"* is used three times in all of Scripture. Twice, Jesus made the claim about himself (Jn. 8:12; 9:5) — and once about his followers (Mt. 5:14).

The context of John 8:12 and John 9:5 is one of the most interesting in our Lord's ministry. Jesus went up to Jerusa-

lem for the last and most important feast of the Jewish year, the Feast of Tabernacles or Booths. It was held in October. Every male Jew was required to attend three major feasts of the year, if they lived within 15 miles of Jerusalem and this was one of them. Our Lord, residing in Capernaum in Galilee at the time, did not have to go, but what he was to do while there changed the tone of his ministry forever.

The Feast of Tabernacles was the most joyous of all the festive occasions because it marked the end of the harvest year. It followed the Day of Atonement. The people of Israel, having made their sin sacrifices and made things right with God, then gathered together to honor Him and thank Him for the bountiful harvests of the year. The celebration, which lasted a week, was marked by singing and dancing and living outside in colorful booths, known as sukka's. These booths were symbolic of the time when they had lived in the wilderness as they came out of Egypt. It was a reminder of how God had provided for them, even in their rebellion, as they came to the land of Israel, the promised land. You can read about the requirements and activities of this feast in Lev. 23:34-43; Dt. 16:13-15; Num. 29:12-40.

One of the ceremonies which took place in the temple in preparation for the Feast of Tabernacles, was called the illumination of the temple. We read about this in the Jewish *Mishnah*, which is an early collection of oral interpretations of the Jewish scriptures, our Old Testament. This ceremony consisted of the erection of four huge candelabras or torches that extended as high as the Temple walls. They were no doubt symbolic of the golden lampstand specified by God for the tabernacle (Exo. 25:31-40). Once lit, they would light up the whole Temple area and could be seen for miles. They symbolized the *Shekinah* glory of the Lord's presence and were considered, for the moment anyway, as *"the light of the world."*

The *Mishnah* tells us that once the torches were lit, the people, especially the priests, would take torches in their hands, and dance and sing praises to God, while the Levites played on harps, lyres, cymbals, trumpets and other instru-

ments of music. They would dance until dawn.

At the end of the Feast of Tabernacles, the Scriptures tell us that Jesus, before leaving Jerusalem, went into the Temple, into the same area where the celebration of the illumination of the Temple had been held. Perhaps, the charred remains of the torches were still in place. All the people gathered around him, including the teachers and the Pharisees (Jn. 8:1-3). Jesus said to them all, "*I am the light of the world*" (Jn. 8:12). What an incredible statement. No wonder the Jewish leaders wanted to kill him, to them he had committed the ultimate blasphemy, claiming to be only what God could be. Jesus claimed to be God!

The second claim Jesus made about himself is found in Jn. 9:5. Healing a man blind from birth, Jesus said in explanation, "*While I am in the world, I am the light of the world.*" Again, his claim was of his deity because of the miracle he had just performed. But he was also serving notice to his followers, that once he was gone from this world, the light of God would cease — unless . . .

In our study today the setting is once again the Sermon on the Mount. Jesus called his followers, "*the salt of the earth,*" indicating their prominence and influence in the world around them as believers in the Messiah. Now, he not only pronounces the importance of their future ministry, but he tells them how it will be accomplished. They will enjoy the indwelling presence of deity, God himself, as they go forth into the world to bring the light of the gospel, the love of God, the message of forgiveness and the hope of the kingdom to come, to their generation.

We know this became a reality on the day of Pentecost, as the Holy Spirit came to take up residence in every believer, empowering them to become "*the light of the world.*" Thousands experienced this light on that day and repented of their sins and gave their hearts to Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior and followed in baptism. "*The light of the world*" had returned to the world and God's presence has been manifested in every generation since that day. And the light continues.

Light illuminates. That's obvious. But the more light there is, the less the darkness. Jesus uses the illustration of a city set on a hill. It can't be hid because of its city lights. No doubt he was referring to Jerusalem, especially the Temple Mount, which could be seen for miles because it was so much higher in elevation than the area around it.

Jesus also uses the illustration of a house lamp, its purpose being to illuminate the room in a home, so that those within can see in the darkness. No one lights a lamp and then covers it up, for that would defeat the purpose.

If God truly dwells within each one of us as believers, and He does (1 Cor. 3:16; 2 Cor. 6:16) — and we are to be "*the light of the world*" in behalf of our Savior who now resides in heaven, as the title of Charles Colson's book inquires of us all, "How Now Shall We Live?"

Jesus said by letting our light shine before men through our good deeds and good works (works that are so good that they will not give any glory to us) but will bring all the glory to our "*Father in heaven.*" So how are we doing?

One Christian writer says of this parable that light is meant to be seen. The resulting good deeds should be seen through us by men while drawing the attention to God. A man or woman's Christianity should be visible. Comedian Flip Wilson had a famous line that he used when he went into a night club with his girlfriend. He would ask for the table in the corner . . . in the back . . . in the dark! Unfortunately many Christians are like Flip Wilson when it comes to their Christianity.

Christian light should act as a guide to those around us. You are being watched you know. Everyone who knows of your Christianity observes your behavior in every situation. Recently, while Dorothy and I were having breakfast at an out of town restaurant, we prayed over our food as we always do. Upon leaving a young lady at the next table stopped by our table and shared how she knew we were Christians because we prayed and thanked us for being a good witness. Supposing that she hadn't said anything after observing us. Wouldn't it have been terrible if we would have gotten into a shouting match with each other or cussed out the waiter — or skipped out on our check?

What about good deeds or works? Some Christians, even in our church, have an aversion for even saying "good works." They think if they seek to do good works, that some how they'll be labeled as believing that salvation is by works and not by faith so they never do anything that could be construed as "works." Let's remind ourselves at this point of what that beautiful faith passage in Eph. 2:8-10 says about that. "*For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith — and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God — not by works so that no one can boast. For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.*"

In closing, why not spend a portion of this day before it ends, asking God to direct you in how you can best let the light of Jesus shine through you. Ask our Lord to take the cover off your lampstand, if necessary, and add some fuel to your flame. And when he does just that — please remember to give him all the glory. He said he wouldn't share it with another — not even you! *Maranatha.* 7/8/01

1. Salt is a preservative—rubbed into meat it prevents the meat from decaying, and keeps it good to eat.

- Salt doesn't make something good*
- Salt can only keep something from going bad*

2. Salt is an antiseptic-dissolved in a glass of water it will help kill the germs that cause a sore throat.

- You don't gargle with salt water to stay healthy*
- You gargle to kill the germs*

3. Salt is a seasoning-sprinkled on plain food it will make it to taste better.

- Salt by it's self doesn't taste so good*
- Salt applied to food makes it better*