

THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD

I. Introduction

Let's read Matthew 5:3-9.

In sermon on the mount Jesus teaches us, what kind of people we must be, what qualities we must acquire, in order that we may spend eternity in presence of God in His Kingdom of Heaven. Poor in spirit (i.e. humble), mourning (i.e. repenting), meek, hungering and thirsting after righteousness (i.e. desiring for holiness), merciful, pure in heart, peacemakers. The existence of these good qualities in our life is evidence that Christ lives in us and that we are children of God.

Although these qualities are the best one can have, the paradox is that their bearer will be persecuted for righteousness' sake - Matthew 5:10. This verse about persecution is not added here by an accident. The consequence of this righteousness is persecution. The reason of persecution is neither one's good qualities, nor good deeds that are produced by good qualities.

Ancient gentile Greco-Roman world did not have anything against humble, unselfish, honest and good people. Even today's atheistic world does not have anything against such good people. However, a good person, who is good because it is the will of God, good person who teaches people that they can be saved only if they submit themselves to Christ, as slaves unto their Lord, whereas the eternal condemnation will befall all who reject Christ, is perceived by people of this world with uneasiness. Namely, such person does not promote mere human righteousness, but God's righteousness, which is based on the redeeming sacrifice of Christ and obedience to God's Word. People in the world who oppose true God will try to eliminate such person even by persecution, not because of his/her good deeds and good qualities, but because of Jesus Christ whom they rejected - Matthew 5:11, John 15:18.

If you remember Jews took up stones to throw them on Jesus not because of His good deeds, but because He claimed to be God - John 10:30-33. Crucified Savior became a stumbling block for Jews and a foolishness for gentiles - 1 Corinthians 1:23.

Once a year Christians from different countries attend a summer Bible lectureship that takes place in the Czech Republic. In 2006, we had about 50 attendants, Christians and their children from the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Lithuania, USA, Belgium and The Netherlands. One series of the lectures was on subject of Archaeology and Bible given by brother Ferrell Jenkins. He showed us a picture of a graffiti from early centuries of Christianity depicting a young man worshiping a human figure with a donkey head on the cross. This is the way how some people in the world view Jesus' followers, not because of their good deeds and good qualities, but because they have a problem with Jesus.

II. Christians and the world

Is it really necessary for Christians to make people in the world uneasy? Is it really necessary for us to confront people in the world with the message of Jesus and thus invite possible attacks against us? Could we not be secret disciples of Jesus like Joseph of Arimathea, or maybe Nicodemus who once visited Jesus by night - John 19:38-39.

We could assemble behind the shut doors like apostles did after Jesus' crucifixion for fear of Jews - John 20:19. We could worship God in secret so that no one could learn that we are Christians.

The human logic commands: "Live and let live!". In other words: "Believe what you want and do what you want, but do not tell others what they should believe and what they should do." This way one won't make enemies of people, no one will persecute such person. This is not mere human logic, it is devil's strategy to use persecution as threat to eliminate spreading biblical Christianity in society and to keep majority of society in spiritual darkness.

However, our Lord Jesus Christ commands us the very opposite! Matthew 5:14-16

III. ***Christians are the light of the world***

"Ye are the light of the world?" Why does Jesus use such comparison? What does He mean by that?

First of all, the **light in physical sense** is absolutely essential for our physical life. Design and beauty of God's creation work, passing nature of the physical world: life x death or simply things that we need for our everyday physical life - none of this we could see, admire, think about or properly use without light in physical sense. Further, physical life is dependant on light in physical sense. Plants, animals and humans need light in physical sense for their physical life. Man was not designed to live in physical darkness. Before God created man, He said: "Let there be light". (Genesis 1:3) Light in physical sense is opposite to physical darkness. Physical darkness is everywhere, where there is no light in physical sense.

Likewise the **light in spiritual sense** is absolutely essential for our spiritual life. Purpose of God's creation work, eternal nature of spiritual world: eternal life x eternal death or simply things we need for our everyday spiritual life - none of this we could see, admire, think about or properly use without light in spiritual sense. Further, spiritual life is dependant on light in spiritual sense. Humans need light in spiritual sense for their spiritual life. Man was not designed to live in spiritual darkness. John 1:1-9 Light in spiritual sense is opposite to spiritual darkness. Spiritual darkness is everywhere, where there is no light in spiritual sense.

Light in spiritual sense is the true knowledge of God's will, or truth that saves. Jesus having nature of God as well as of man (God who became flesh) is mediator of the truth between God and men, source of the truth as the Son of God and executor of the truth as the Son of man who died for sins of men unto their eternal life. Thus Jesus identifies Himself as the way, truth and life (John 14:6) or simply as the light of the world - John 8:12. The message of what Jesus did for us is identified simply as gospel - a good news.

As we have read Jesus says to those who are saved (in Matthew 5:3-12 yet under OT, but Jesus' sacrifice is soon to come and with it NT): "Ye are the light of the world". From what was said about light, we can see that this is not just a random meaningless phrase.

Such comparison of those who are saved (now, under NT) with light of the world denotes their importance for the people in the world who are lost because of their sins. Christians are as important for the lost people as the light in physical sense is important for their physical life and as the light in spiritual sense is important for their spiritual life, because Christians have **gospel - the truth that**

saved them from their sins and transformed their life for better.

Now, it is great that Christians have gospel, but this gospel must be delivered to other people who are lost in sight of God because of their sins. This is a part of God's plan of salvation of humans from sins. This is what apostles did in 1st. century AD. This is what Christ's followers did in following centuries. This is how one day we ourselves heard and obeyed gospel of Jesus Christ and were saved from our sins.

There are many lost souls in the spiritual darkness of this world who need to know how they can be saved from their sins and live for ever in the Kingdom of Heaven. Now it is our turn to be the light of the world for them. It is our turn to tell them the truth of salvation from sins through Christ as well as of judgement and eternal destruction for those who reject Christ. Why? Because the gospel of Christ by which we have been saved, is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, not just for us. (Romans 1:16) And because we are commanded by Jesus to make Him disciples and to teach them. (Matthew 28:19-20)

To sum it up, "Ye are the light of the world" is a commission that Jesus gave to each of us to teach gospel to those who are lost.

IV. How the light of Christians should shine?

How the light of Christians should shine? First of all, **our light cannot be hidden** likewise a city set atop a hill cannot be hidden. In the past the cities were build on hills to have natural protection against enemies.

Good example is the city of Samaria. King Omri (Ahab's father) bought the Hill of Shemer in the territory of Manasseh and had a city built on it. For the next 160 years, the city of Samaria was the capital of the northern kingdom. Samaria was well situated with steep slopes on all sides and withstood sieges by the Arameans (2.Kings 6) and also Assyrians for 3 years before it fell (2.Kings 17).

Cities like Samaria, Jerusalem, Lachish and others were built on hills for defensive purpose and therefore they could not be hidden from the rest of the world. In like manner, our light cannot be hidden from the rest of the world.

Secondly, **our light must be put on a high place** like a lamp is put on the stand in order to shine before other men.

Because our light cannot be hidden and it must be put on the high place, **we cannot be any secret disciples of Jesus.**

If we fear to follow and confess Jesus in our words and actions before men we have to overcome that fear. Good examples for us are Joseph from Arimathea and Nicodemus who had to overcome their fear to publicly show their respect to Jesus by granting him due burial in accordance with the custom of his nation at time when most of Jesus' followers were hiding. This could not be done in secret. Joseph of Arimathea had to ask Pilate who had Jesus executed for permission to take away his body and he buried Jesus' body in his own new tomb. This was witnessed by other people. Mark 15:42-47 (Matthew 27:57-61, John 19:39-42)

Such action did not escape attention of Jesus' enemies who achieved Jesus' execution. They knew very well where Jesus' body was buried and had the tomb guarded. (Matthew 27:62-64)

Apostles also overcame their fear of Jews when Jesus appeared to them after His resurrection. From that time on they publicly proclaimed Jesus' resurrection regardless of opposition and persecution from hands of Jews and gentiles. Based on tradition most of the apostles but John died violent death for Christ's cause.

In order that the light of Christians could shine brightly, we must constantly draw strength from God and His great power using whole armor of God in our battle against devil, because devil's goal is a) to frighten us with persecution in order to hide our light and b) to destroy our light completely. Ephesians 6:10-17

The purpose is that our light shines like a halogene lamp and not like a flickering flashlight with almost dead battery. And certainly not like a light bulb painted in black because of sins.

V.

Why should our light shine?

Why should our light shine? When we turn on light switch at our home we do not do it to stare in the light for the rest of our day, but the light helps us to see other things we need for our life. ***Likewise our light should shine before people in the world that they may see something as well - our transformation by gospel, our good works.***

However, our motive for doing the good works cannot be to get praises for ourself from others. On the contrary, Jesus is warning against such attitude - Matthew 6:1-4. Our motive for doing good works must be God's love for us in which He sacrificed His Son Jesus Christ for our sins that we might be saved.

Our ultimate goal should be to help other people **to understand** that there is something very important they must know and do in order to be able to spend eternity in presence of God in His Kingdom of Heaven, and that is to glorify our Father who is in heaven. They can glorify God only by obeying the call of gospel of Jesus Christ and becoming Christians.

Once I heard that life of a Christian may be the only Bible people in the world might be willing to read. The words that we say and our deeds we do through Jesus who lives in us, may touch lives of other people and give us good opportunities to tell them that what we did, we did for Jesus, because He saved us from our sins and the same salvation Jesus offers to everyone who believes.

This may result in our persecution from those who reject Jesus, but it may also result in salvation of lost souls and that is worthy even of persecution.

Therefore, let our light shine brightly before others that they may see our good works and glorify our Father who is in heaven by becoming Christians.

VI.
Invitation

Are you out of Christ? Are you tossed at sea of spiritual darkness? There is a light here that can guide you through it to a safe haven in heaven. That light is Jesus, who died for your sins in order that you might live for ever and His message – gospel is recorded for you in New Testament Scriptures. Obey gospel today and be saved by Jesus! This is the only way how you can glorify your Father in heaven.

Prague, August 26 and 27, 2006
Last revision June 6, 2010

Robert Hodanko

based on the outline of Tommy Lewis Andrews