

Are there any Olympic fans here this morning? Did anybody, like me, stay up a little too late watching synchronized diving? Anybody? No? I've never watched it in my life, but I could not stop watching it yesterday. I noticed that all throughout the opening of the Olympics, they kept referencing Paris by its nickname—The City of Lights.

It got me thinking a little bit as to why it is called The City of Lights. Now, I would assume it's the city of lights because of its opulent beauty. When we think of Paris, we think of beauty, but there is a much different reason. The origin story goes all the way back to 1660 when Paris was actually the crime capital of all of Europe. King Louis XIV was tired of that moniker. There was a new police chief at the time, and the king gave him the explicit purpose to clean up the city of Paris.

So this new police chief came into power and had all sorts of different tactics to change it. But the first tactic he did was to install almost 3000 street lanterns throughout Paris. His idea was that if they could light up the city, the criminals would not be able to hide in the shadows. It was the first city in all of Europe that had a lighting feature throughout its entire city limits. Thus, The City of Lights was born.

Now, light has that effect. The policy chief understood that light, when shined into darkness, has the purpose of exposing that which is there. It brings hope. It brings joy. It has a clarifying effect. The purpose of light is to bring life and hope. It's no wonder that this imagery of light became one of the consistent themes from Genesis to Revelation, in which God would speak about not only his own presence but the presence of the people of God.

From the very beginning, this concept of light has been one that God is fond of. This imagery of joy, as light, enters into darkness. When we get to Matthew 4, we see this imagery of light at the very beginning of Jesus' ministry. In the Gospel of Matthew, up until this point, Jesus has been behind the scenes. He hadn't begun his public ministry. And for the first four chapters, he's doing all sorts of different things as he prepares to go out into the world and begin public ministry. Then you arrive at Matthew 4:17.

From that time on Jesus began to preach, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near." v. 17

I reference this verse a lot because I believe this is the most succinct summary of what the good news of the gospel is. It's that Jesus came to proclaim the availability and the nearness of the kingdom of heaven or the kingdom of God. So when Jesus comes on the scene, it's no wonder that this is where he begins his public ministry. It says he begins to preach, and then we see this word: repent.

I want to do a little work on the word repent, because we can get confused. We have all sorts of different ideas that we bring to this word, but at its most basic form, the word repent just means to change one's mind, to change the inner person, to repent. So, you would repent in light of something that completely reshaped what you understood about the world. Now, for us as Christians, this often means it comes with a process of confession, with contriteness before God, because we've been living contrary to what Jesus has announced about the world. So, there is a response in that sense in which repentance comes with seeking the forgiveness of God.

But when Jesus comes on the scene, he says, repent, rethink, reorient everything you know about the world. "Because the kingdom of heaven has come near." Now, this nearness is not what we typically think of as chronological, but think of it more as spatial, meaning it's right here. As one author said, "It's like the kingdom of God is as close as the air that's touching your skin." The kingdom of heaven has come near.

Right after this moment, Jesus climbs up onto a mountain and gives the greatest sermon that's ever been preached called the Sermon on the Mount. He begins this sermon by reorienting all that we understand about who is blessed and who isn't blessed. It's the first part of us rethinking everything. Matthew 5:1-10

Now when Jesus saw the crowds, he went up on a mountainside and sat down. His disciples came to him, and he began to teach them.

He said:

**"Blessed are the poor in spirit,
for theirs is the kingdom of
heaven.**

**Blessed are those who mourn,
for they will be comforted.**

**Blessed are the meek,
for they will inherit the earth.**

**Blessed are those who hunger and
thirst for righteousness,
for they will be filled.**

**Blessed are the merciful,
for they will be shown mercy.**

**Blessed are the pure in heart,
for they will see God.**

**Blessed are the peacemakers,
for they will be called children of
God.**

**Blessed are those who are perse-
cuted because of righteousness,
for theirs is the kingdom of
heaven.**

See, he opens with this rethink everything. The kingdom of God is here. He essentially says every single person, those who we

typically view as on the outside, the poor, those who are longing or hungering and thirsting for righteousness and justice, meaning they don't have it. It's the lowly. It's all the opposite of what we assume is on the outside. Jesus states that because the kingdom of heaven has come here, those who we thought once were outside are inside. Everyone is welcome in the kingdom of heaven. This is how he begins. Then here's the radical thing.

He looks at that group right in front of him and says that all those who we usually think are outside are now welcome into the kingdom of heaven.

**You are the light of the world.
A town built on a hill cannot be
hidden. Matthew 5:14**

Now, the word "you" in this verse is not the individual form. If we were from the South, we'd say, "Y'all are the light of the world." It's a plural "you." In the Greek, the word is not individual, but y'all are the light of the world. And so Jesus, after reorienting everything about what we understand about the kingdom of heaven being available, here says y'all are the light of the world.

Hold this imagery of light in our heads. The imagery of light is one that breaks into darkness and brings hope and light. From the very beginning of the story, it's been an image that is symbolic of the presence of God. Think about our series in Exodus right now, where there's the cloud and the pillar of fire, guiding the people through the wilderness. It's an imagery of light.

The prophet Isaiah would talk often from that famous text. We hear that the people walking in a great darkness have seen a great light. This is Isaiah hundreds of years before pointing to the fact of Jesus' presence, a hope that one day a Messiah would come and reset and reorient everything. Jesus then comes on the scene. In other places, he equates himself with the light, but did you notice what he did here? It's not I am the light. He does that in other places that we'll look at it. But here he says, "Y'all are the light now." What does he mean by

that? Before we get to that, he'll give us instructions.

I want you to get inside the metaphor he uses. Imagine you're walking down a dark road. I remember years ago, I was working at a summer camp down in the Santa Cruz Mountains. I was on one side of the mountain with the middle school and high school students, and on the other side was the elementary school. So, the middle school and high school camp had a significantly smaller staff, and it was over the Fourth of July weekend. So we were gathering on the other side of the mountain to do a staff function.

I'll never forget it because I had to find my way from that side of the mountain over the hill to the other side by myself. I forgot why I was by myself, but I was walking across this whole mountain, and it was absolutely terrifying. I had a little flashlight trying to guide my way through, but it was pitch black for that 30 minutes or so I had to walk. I'll never forget that as I got over the hill and began to see off in the distance the light of camp, I thought, "Okay, I'm going to survive."

Jesus uses the same imagery. Imagine, in the first century, you're walking through a wilderness, a dark desert, and it's pitch black. The darkness that's hard for us to understand because of light pollution. But if you have been out in the mountains in the middle of the night, you know that disorienting darkness. And imagine you're walking through that, and Jesus says, "A city on a hill cannot easily be hidden; remember, y'all are the light." You are the community that reflects the light and the goodness of God. Jesus was saying that it's similar to if you were walking down that dark path and you see out in the distance that light, like when I saw that camp. The hope swelled up in me, and it brought me joy. It brought me hope. It brought me life.

Jesus says that these are the same sorts of things. We all can recognize that there's darkness in this world. At times, it feels pretty dark. Maybe it's friends that we have

who are walking through difficult seasons or loved ones experiencing some illness. Whatever that darkness is, we can sense a brokenness in the world. Often, I wonder if what the world desires is for y'all to be the light, to shine in the midst of all of that, to illuminate hope, life, and joy.

It's Jesus who says, you are the light. But then he goes on, and he talks about this a little more.

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" Matthew 5:15

Now, this is basic logic. Jesus might be trying to be a little funny here, but it's not like you light a lamp and then cover it up. That's antithetical to the purpose of a light.

The purpose of a light is to shine. So, you light the lamp in order for everything to be seen. You see, the imagery of the light is that it's calling the Church and us as the people of God to be visible to the world. There can be a tendency to want to hide off and tuck ourselves away and essentially put a bowl over our light. But Jesus says not to because the very intention of the light is to shine. And this unique visibility of our light is partnering with God in his mission to bring about that salvation story, the gospel message, to all people. So God has, in his own sovereignty, chosen us, his people, to be the light to the world. He's invited us in to carry that message into the darkness.

In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven. Matthew 5:16

See, Jesus moves from the metaphorical up here, like a city on a hill, like a light that's on a stand, and he gets down to what it means to shine the light, and he says it's so that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven. Is it any wonder that from this point, Jesus then preaches

for three chapters on how to live in the kingdom of God?

He says, your light is that you live in such a different way to the world organized by the presence of the kingdom of God, that you exemplify light in the midst of darkness. He goes on to preach about what that means, what it looks like with anger, what it would look like with greed, and how we work in relationship to one another. He gives very practical instruction in which we take on a different being so that it will shine a light that causes those to say that this is a different community that seems to be like a city on a hill.

Notice, however, that there is direction in which we do that. It's not just so that we can be seen or posted on social media. It's not that we do our good deeds for our own glory but for the glory of our Father in heaven. It's a directional visibility. The light is aimed at something in particular because here's the truth about light. It's strange, but the purpose of light is actually not to be to see light. It's meant to expose everything else.

The purpose of the light isn't so you look at light and think, this is a great thing, but rather so we can see one another, so we can go about the other things that it points to something. It's never the end unto itself. A little bit later in the New Testament, in 1 Peter, as the disciples were working out what it means to live in the way of Jesus, Peter would say,

Dear friends, I urge you, as foreigners and exiles, to abstain from sinful desires, which wage war against your soul. Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us. 1 Peter 2:11-12

Peter says that as the Church, working out these teachings of Jesus, goes about this to abstain from the sinful desires, the things that are counter to the way of Jesus. Avoid those things. Those are like the bowls

covering the light. They diminish our witness. He says to abstain from those, but rather live in such a way amongst the world around you.

He uses the word "pagans," and we tend to think of this word as a put-down. That's not what it means. It just means non-Jews. It just means that the other people outside the people of God, not a negative connotation, but he says, live such good lives among the world around you that even though they may misconstrue what you do, it glorifies God, it brings and illuminates God.

Do Not Hide The Light

So what do we do with this concept? I want to maybe zoom out one layer and look at three different things that help us understand this metaphor of life. The first thing is countering the temptation we have to hide the light. It can be easy for us to gather here on a Sunday, hide inside this Church, and keep the light here. Maybe it's in a hope of not polluting the light, not associating from those who are outside the way of Jesus.

But the first point that we want to make in wielding the light well is that we don't hide the light. Jesus says to put it on a stand so that everyone in the house can see it. Meaning we follow Jesus, not privately tucked away in a corner, but right in the natural contours of our life. We don't hide the light. It seems basic, but the purpose of light isn't to be hidden.

Don't Blind People With The Light

Second, we have to avoid blinding people with the light. If you ever had a kid play with a flashlight, there could be a tendency to not just shine the light at the sky or at the footpath in front of you but right in the eyes of your brother or sister. There's a way in which you can wield the light and do harm. If the light is that good, that means it can be quite bright. There are times when Christians have taken the posture, instead of shining the light on God to glorify him, to blind people with the light by focusing on their bad behavior. We can shine it in

a way that is a counter-witness. We judge others and blare the light at them. But Jesus seems to shine the light, so it glorifies our Father in heaven. This means that light is the actions and the way in which you live in light of who Jesus is, and then you point it and give all that glory to God, who works in that.

So we don't hide the light. We don't blind the people with the light. We shine the light. You shine the light. The light is used to make visible to the world what would typically remain hidden. And so, as we go about our lives, we shine the light through living in this counter-cultural way of Jesus. As we shine the light, it helps people to see by shining the light on our good deeds and giving glory to our Father in heaven. This light depicts what it means to live in light of the kingdom of God that Jesus began with in Matthew 5. Isaiah uses this imagery, too, which was hundreds of years before the story of Jesus.

he says: "It is too small a thing for you to be my servant to restore the tribes of Jacob and bring back those of Israel I have kept. I will also make you a light for the Gentiles, that my salvation may reach to the ends of the earth."
Isaiah 49:6

Now, he's speaking in a time in which darkness descended on the people of God. He's giving this message to help the people have hope in the midst of this dark moment. What he says here is it's too small to focus on just the people of God. Listen to where he goes on. He's reminding the people of Israel of their calling, that they will become that light, that city on a hill that shines to all nations and gives the hope of who Jesus is. He is saying that it's not just that you're there to reconstitute the Church, but rather you go out, and your salvation story goes to the very ends of the earth through "Y'all being the light." This is the invitation of God.

If I were to shine a flashlight right now with the lights on, it's not as effective as if the lights were off. If we turn the lights off, the

flashlight functions a little better. There's a way in which we, as the light, can function. It's helpful, but a better use of the light is a little bit in the way that Jesus said. First of all, Jesus talks about glorifying our Father in heaven. So it's not just that we light this up and aim it randomly, but we actually point it at God, and it illuminates a little better.

The point is that when you aim it at God, he uses it with a much greater impact. In which that light, as was said in Isaiah, spreads to all the ends of the earth. But we all are just one church. What happens when God takes the collective global Church and turns the lights on? We see an even greater impact. Y'all are the light of the world.

This imagery impacts the world through that gospel message. We are called to be the light, and as Jesus said in John 8,

When Jesus spoke again to the people, he said, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life." John 8:12

Church, our hope, our mission is we are called to partner with Jesus in this. And in many ways, we experience that walking with Jesus, that never walking in the darkness. We have that light.

However, the goal is never for us to hold and hoard the light, but as we point to Jesus, the gospel message begins to spread. Just as it says that whoever follows him will never walk in darkness. Rich Villodas, who wrote a beautiful book on the Sermon of the Mount called *The Narrow Path*, says this.

The world longs to behold God. Humanity was created to live in his light. While sin darkens the world, there are traces of light that exist to point people to the True Light: We shine our lights not for ourselves but to glorify God. As we do, we will find ourselves journeying through the narrow but fulfilling way of his kingdom. Villodas

Church, we were created to shine the light, to start the party, to invite others in so they can see the goodness of what it means to walk with Jesus. So as I close, my question for you is who could God be calling you to be a light to? Who is it that you tend to avoid? Maybe you don't enjoy encountering these people, but God might have them in your life so that you can shine the light. People tend to come to mind when you ask these questions, and I wonder if there's an opportunity for you this week to shine the light for those around you. That's the invitation.

This manuscript represents the bulk of what was preached at CPC. For further detail, please refer to the audio recording of this sermon.

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