

The Light of the World

by Martyn-Lloyd Jones

Martyn-Lloyd Jones emphasizes that Christians are called to be the light of the world, reflecting Christ's truth amidst the darkness of society.

Scripture: Matthew 5:14

Topics: "Christian Identity", "Light Of The World"

Description

Martyn-Lloyd Jones emphasizes the profound statement made by Jesus that Christians are 'the light of the world,' highlighting the stark contrast between the darkness of the world and the light that believers bring. He explains that while the world boasts of enlightenment through knowledge, it remains in moral and spiritual darkness, and only Christians can provide true understanding and guidance. The sermon calls Christians to recognize their identity and responsibility to reflect Christ's light in their lives, exposing darkness and offering hope through the gospel. Jones urges believers to live authentically as salt and light, demonstrating the transformative power of Christ in a world desperately in need of illumination.

Transcript

In verse 14 we have, surely, one of the most astounding and extraordinary statements about the Christian that was ever made, even by our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ Himself. When you consider the setting, and remember the people to whom our Lord uttered these words, they do indeed become most remarkable. It is a statement full of significance and profound implications with regard to an understanding of the nature of the Christian life. It is a great characteristic of scriptural truth that it can compress, as it were, the whole content of our entire position into a pregnant verse such as this. "Ye", said our Lord, looking out upon those simple people, those entirely unimportant people from the standpoint of the world, "Ye are the light of the world." It is one of those statements which should always have the effect upon us of making us lift up our heads, causing us to realize once more what a remarkable and glorious thing it is to be a Christian. And of course it thus becomes, as all such statements inevitably become, a very good and thorough test as to our position and our experience. All these statements that are thus made about the Christian always come back to us in that form, and we should always be careful to see that they do this for us. The "ye" referred to in this statement means simply ourselves. The danger always is that we may read a statement like this and think about somebody else, the first Christians, or Christian people in general. But it is ourselves to whom it refers if we truly claim to be Christian.

A statement such as this, then, obviously calls for a detailed analysis. Before attempting this, however, we shall consider it in general and try to draw out from it some of its most obvious implications.

First of all let us look at its negative import or claim. For the real force of the statement is this: "Ye, and ye alone, are the light of the world"; the "ye" is emphatic and it carries that suggestion. Now at once you see there are certain things implied. The first is that the world is in a state of darkness. This, indeed, is always one of the first statements that the Christian gospel has to make. There is no point, perhaps, at which we see this striking contrast between the Christian view of life and all other views more clearly than in a verse such as this. The world is always talking about its enlightenment. That is one of its favourite phrases, particularly since the Renaissance of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries when men began to take a new interest in knowledge. That is regarded by all thinkers as a great turning-point in history, a great watershed which divides the history of civilizations, and all are agreed that modern civilization, as you and I know it, really did begin then. There was a kind of rebirth of knowledge and learning. The Greek classics were rediscovered; and their teaching, and knowledge, in a purely philosophical sense, and still more in a scientific sense, really emerged and began to control the outlook and the lives of many.

Then there was, as you know, a similar revival in the eighteenth century, which actually gave itself this very name of the "Enlightenment". Any who are interested in the history of the Christian Church and of the Christian faith must reckon with that movement. It was the beginning, in a sense, of the attack upon the authority of the Bible, for it put philosophy and human thought in the position of the authoritative divine revelation and the declaration of God's truth to man. Now that has continued up to this present hour, and the point I am emphasizing is that it always represents itself in terms of light, and men who are interested in that kind of movement always refer to it as "enlightenment". Knowledge, they say, is that which brings light, and, of course, in so many respects it does. It would be foolish to dispute that. The increase in knowledge about the processes of nature and about physical illnesses and diseases and many other subjects has been truly phenomenal. New knowledge has also thrown greater light upon the working of the whole cosmos, and has given greater understanding with regard to so many different aspects of life. That is why people commonly talk about being "enlightened" as the result of knowledge and of culture. And yet, in spite of all that, this is still the scriptural statement: "Ye, and ye alone, are the light of the world."

Scripture still proclaims that the world as such is in a state of gross darkness, and the moment you begin to look at things seriously you can easily prove that this is nothing but the simple truth. The tragedy of our century has been that we have concentrated solely upon one aspect of knowledge. Our knowledge has been a knowledge of things, mechanical things, scientific things, a knowledge of life in more or less purely biological or mechanical sense. But our knowledge of the real factors that make life life, has not increased at all. That is why the world is in such a predicament today. For, as has often been pointed out, in spite of our having discovered all this great and new knowledge, we have failed to discover the most important thing of all, namely, what to do with our knowledge. That is the essence of the whole problem with regard to atomic power at this moment. There is nothing wrong in discovering atomic power. The tragedy is that we have not yet a sufficient knowledge of ourselves to be able to know what to do with this power now that we have discovered it.

That is the difficulty. Our knowledge has been mechanical and scientific in that pure sense. But when you come back to the great basic and fundamental problems of life and living, of being and existence, is it not obvious that our Lord's statement is still true, that the world is in a state of terrible darkness? Think of it in the realm of personal life and conduct and behaviour. There are many men with great knowledge in many

departments of thought who are just tragic failures in their own personal lives. Look at it in the realm of relationships between person and person. At the very time when we have been boasting of our enlightenment and knowledge and understanding, there is this tragic breakdown in personal relationships. It is one of the major moral and social problems of society. Observe how we have multiplied our institutions and organizations. We have to give instruction now concerning things about which people were never instructed in the past. For instance, we now have to have Marriage Guidance classes. Up to this century men and women were married without this expert advice which now seems to be so essential. It all proclaims very eloquently that as regards the great momentous questions of how to live, how to avoid evil, and sin, and all that is base and unworthy, how to be clean, and straight, and pure, and chaste, and wholesome, there is gross darkness. Then, as you come up the scale and look at the relationships between group and group, there is obviously again the same condition and so we have these great industrial and economic problems. On a still higher level, look at the relationships between nation and nation. This century, of all centuries, when we talk so much about our knowledge and enlightenment, is proving that the world is in a state of unutterable darkness with regard to these vital and fundamental problems.

We must go even further than that, however. Our Lord not only pronounces that the world is in a state of darkness, He goes so far as to say that nobody but a Christian can give any helpful advice, knowledge or instruction with respect to it. That is our proud claim and boast as Christian people. The greatest thinkers and philosophers are completely baffled at this present time and I could easily give you many quotations from their writings to prove that. I care not where you look in the realm of pure science or philosophy with regard to these ultimate questions; the writers are completely at a loss to explain or understand their own century. This is because their controlling theory was that all man needed was more knowledge. They believed that if man had knowledge he would inevitably apply it to the solution of his difficulties. But, patently, man is not doing that. He has the knowledge, but he is not applying it; and that is exactly where the "thinkers" are baffled. They do not understand the real problem of man; they are not able to tell us what is responsible for the present state of the world, and still less, therefore, are they able to tell us what can be done about it.

I remember some years ago, reading a review by a well-known teacher of philosophy in this country of a book which was meant to deal with these problems. He put it very significantly like this. "This book as regards analysis is very good, but it does not go beyond analysis and therefore it does not help. We can all analyse, but the vital question we want answered is, What is the ultimate source of the trouble? What can be done about it? There it has nothing to say," he said, "though it bears the imposing title of *The Condition of Man*." Now that is very true. You can turn today to the greatest philosophers and thinkers and again and again you will find they will never take you beyond analysis. They are very good at laying out the problem and showing the various factors which operate. But when you ask them what is ultimately responsible for this, and what they propose to do, they just leave you unanswered. Clearly they have nothing to say. There is obviously no light at all in this world apart from the light that is provided by Christian people and the Christian faith. That is no exaggeration. I am suggesting that if we want to be realistic we just have to face that, and realize that when our Lord spoke, nearly two thousand years ago, He not only spoke the simple, startling truth about His own age, but He also spoke the truth with regard to every subsequent age. Let us never forget that Plato, Socrates, Aristotle, and the rest, had given their full teaching several centuries before these words were uttered. It was after that amazing flowering of the mind and the intellect that our Lord made this statement. He looked at this band of ordinary, insignificant people and said, "You and you alone are the light of the world." Now this is a tremendous and most thrilling statement; and I

would say again that there are many respects in which I thank God that I am preaching this gospel today and not a hundred years ago. If I had made that statement a hundred years ago people would have smiled, but they do not smile today. History itself is now proving, more and more, the truth of the gospel. The darkness of the world has never been more evident than it is now, and here comes this astonishing and startling statement. That, then, is the negative implication of our text.

Now let us consider its positive implications. It says "ye". In other words its claim is that the ordinary Christian, though he may never have read any philosophy at all, knows and understands more about life than the greatest expert who is not a Christian. This is one of the great major themes of the New Testament. The apostle Paul in writing to the Corinthians puts it quite explicitly when he says, "the world by wisdom knew not God," and therefore "it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe". This -thing that appears to be utterly ridiculous to the world is the pure wisdom of God. This is the extraordinary paradox with which we are confronted. Its implication must be quite obvious; it shows that we are called to do something positive. This is the second statement which our Lord makes with regard to the function of the Christian in this world. Having described the Christian in general in the Beatitudes, the first thing He then says is, "You are the salt of the earth." Now He says, "You are the light of the world, and you alone." But let us always remember that it is a statement concerning the ordinary, average Christian, not certain Christians only. It is applicable to all who rightly claim this name.

Immediately the question arises, How, then, is it to become true of us? Once again we are led immediately into the teaching concerning the nature of the Christian man. The best way to understand it, I think, is this. The Lord who said, "Ye are the light of the world," also said, "I am the light of the world." These two statements must always be taken together, since the Christian is only "the light of the world" because of his relationship to Him who is Himself "the light of the world". Our Lord's claim was that He had come to bring light. His promise is that "he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life". Here, however, He also says, "ye are the light of the world." It comes to this, therefore, that He and He alone gives us this vital light with respect to life. But He does not stop at that; He also makes us "light". You remember how the apostle Paul put it in Ephesians v, where he says, "For ye were sometimes darkness, but now are ye light in the Lord". So not only have we received light, we have been made light; we become transmitters of light. In other words, it is this extraordinary teaching of the mystical union between the believer and his Lord. His nature enters into us so that we become, in a sense, what He Himself is. It is essential that we bear in mind both aspects of this matter. As those who believe the gospel we have received light and knowledge and instruction. But, in addition, it has become part of us. It has become our life, so that we thus become reflectors of it. The remarkable thing, therefore, of which we are reminded here is our intimate relationship with Him. The Christian is a man who has received and has become a partaker of the divine nature. The light that is Christ Himself the light that is ultimately God, is the light that is in the Christian. "God is light, and in him is no darkness at all." "I am the light of the world." "Ye are the light of the world." The way to understand this is to grasp our Lord's teaching concerning the Holy Spirit in John xiv-xvi where He says, in effect, "The result of His coming will be this: My Father and I will take up Our abode in you; We will be in you and you will be in Us." God, who is "the Father of lights", is the light that is in us; He is in us, and we are in Him, and thus it can be said of the Christian, "Ye are the light of the world."

It is interesting to observe that, according to our Lord, this is the second great result of our being the kind of Christian man He has already described in the Beatitudes. We should consider also the order in which these statements are made. The first thing our Lord said of us was, "Ye are the salt of the earth"; and it is

only after this that He says, "Ye are the light of the world". Why does He put it in that order instead of the reverse? This is a very interesting and important practical point. The first effect of the Christian on the world is a general one; in other words, it is more or less negative. Here is a man who has become a Christian; he lives in society, in his office or workshop. Because he is a Christian he immediately has a certain effect, a controlling effect, which we considered together earlier. It is only after that, that he has this specific and particular function of acting as light. In other words Scripture, in dealing with the Christian, always emphasizes first what he is, before it begins to speak of what he does. As a Christian, I should always have this general effect upon men before I have this specific effect. Wherever I may find myself, immediately that "something different" about me should have its effect; and that in turn ought to lead men and women to look at me and to say, "There is something unusual about that man." Then, as they watch my conduct and behaviour, they begin to ask me questions. Here, the element of "light" comes out; I am able to speak and to teach them. Far too often we Christians tend to reverse the order. We have spoken in a very enlightened manner, but we have not always lived as the salt of the earth. Whether we like it or not, our lives should always be the first thing to speak; and if our lips speak more than our lives it will avail very little. So often the tragedy has been that people proclaim the gospel in words, but their whole life and demeanour has been a denial of it. The world does not pay much attention to them. Let us never forget this order deliberately chosen by our Lord; "the salt of the earth" before "the light of the world". We are something before we begin to act as something. The two things should always go together, but the order and sequence should be the one which He sets down here.

Bearing that in mind, let us now look at it practically. How is the Christian to show that he is indeed "the light of the world"? That resolves itself into a simple question: What is the effect of light? What does it really do? There can, be no doubt that the first thing light does is to expose the darkness and the things that belong to darkness. Imagine a room in darkness, and then suddenly the light is switched on. Or think of the headlights of a motor-car coming along a dark country road. As the Scripture puts it, "Whatsoever doth make manifest is light". There is a sense in which we are not truly aware of darkness until the light appears, and this is something that is fundamental. Speaking of the coming of the Lord into this world, Matthew says, "The people which sat in darkness saw great light". The coming of Christ and the gospel is so fundamental that it can be put in that way; and the first effect of His coming into the world is that He has exposed the darkness of the life of the world. That is something that is always, and inevitably, done by any good or saintly person. We always need something to show us the difference, and the best way of revealing a thing is to provide a contrast. The gospel does that, and everyone who is a Christian does that. As the apostle Paul puts it, the light exposes "the hidden things of darkness", and so he says, "They that be drunken are drunken in the night." The whole world is divided into "children of light" and "children of darkness". So much of the life of the world is life under a kind of shroud of darkness. The worst things always happen under cover of darkness; even the natural man, degenerate and in a state of sin, would be ashamed of such things in the glare of light. Why? Because light exposes; "Whatsoever doth make manifest is light."

Now the Christian is "the light of the world" in that way. It is quite inevitable, he cannot help it. just by being Christian he shows a different type of life, and that immediately reveals the true character and nature of the other way of living. In the world, therefore, he is like a light being put on, and immediately people begin to think, and wonder, and feel ashamed. The more saintly the person, of course, the more obviously will this take place. He need not say a word; just by being what he is he makes people feel ashamed of what they are doing, and in that way he is truly functioning as light. He is providing a standard, he is showing that there is another kind of life which is possible to mankind. He therefore brings out the error and the

failure of man's way of thinking and of living. As we saw in dealing with the Christian as "the salt of the earth", the same thing can be said of him as "the light of the world". Every true revival has always had this effect. A number of Christian people in any district or society will tend to affect the life of the whole. Whether other people agree with their principles or not, they just make them feel that the Christian way is right after all, and the other way unworthy. The world has discovered that "honesty is the best policy". As someone puts it, that is the kind of tribute that hypocrisy always pays to truth; it has to admit in its heart of hearts that truth is right. The influence the Christian has as light in the world is to show that these other things belong to darkness. They thrive in darkness, and somehow or other they cannot stand the light. This is stated explicitly in John iii, where the apostle says, "This is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil." Our Lord goes on to say that such men do not come into the light because they know that, if they do, their deeds will be reproved, and they do not want that.

That, of course, was really the ultimate cause of the antagonism of the Pharisees and the scribes to our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Here were these men, who were teachers of the law, these men who were experts, in a sense, on the religious life. Why did they so hate and persecute Him? The only adequate explanation is His utter purity, His utter holiness. Without His saying a word against them at the beginning-for He did not denounce them until the end-His purity made them see themselves as they really were, and they hated Him for it. thus they persecuted Him, and finally crucified Him, just because He was "the light of the world". It revealed and manifested the hidden things of darkness that were within them. Now you and I have to be like that in this world: by just living the Christian life we are to have that effect.

Let us now go a step further and say that light not only reveals the hidden things of darkness, it also explains the cause of the darkness. That is where it becomes so practical and important at the present time. I have already reminded you that the best and greatest academic thinkers in the world today are entirely baffled with regard to what is wrong with the world. Two lectures were broadcast some years ago on the wireless by men who were described as humanists, Dr. Julian Huxley and Professor Gilbert Murray. Both admitted quite frankly in their talks that they could not explain life as it is. Dr. Julian Huxley said he could not see any end or purpose in life. The whole thing to him was fortuitous. Professor Gilbert Murray, also, could not explain the second world war and the failure of the League of Nations. He had nothing to offer as a corrective but the "culture" that has been available for centuries, and which has already failed.

It is just here that we Christians have the light which explains the situation. The sole cause of the troubles of the world at this moment, from the personal to the international level, is nothing but man's estrangement from God. That is the light which only Christians have, and which they can give to the world. Man has been so made by God that he cannot truly live unless he is in the right relationship to God. He was made like that. He was made by God; he was made for God. And God has put certain rules in his nature and being and existence, and unless he conforms to them he is bound to go wrong. That is the whole cause of the trouble. Every difficulty in the world today can be traced back, in the last analysis, to sin, selfishness and self-seeking. All the quarrels, disputes and misunderstandings, all the jealousy, envy and malice, all these things come back to that and nothing else. So we are "the light of the world" in a very real sense at this present time; we alone have an adequate explanation of the cause of the state of the world. It can all be traced to the fall; the whole trouble arises from that. I want to quote again John iii. 19: "This is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil." "This is the condemnation" and nothing else. This is the cause of the trouble. What, then, is the matter? If light is come into the world in the face of Jesus Christ, what is wrong with the world

in the middle of this twentieth century? The verse we have just quoted gives the answer. In spite of all the knowledge that has been amassed in the last two hundred years since the beginning of the enlightenment half-way through the eighteenth century, fallen man by nature still "loves darkness rather than light". The result is that, though he knows what is right, he prefers and does what is evil. He has a conscience which warns him before he does anything he knows to be wrong. Nevertheless he does it. He may regret it, but he still does it. Why? Because he likes it. The trouble with man is not in his intellect, it is in his nature-the passions and the lusts. That is the dominating factor. And though you try to educate and control man it will avail nothing as long as his nature is sinful and fallen and he is a creature of passion and dishonour.

That, then, is the condemnation; and there is no-one to warn the modern world except the Christian. The philosopher not only does not speak; he resents such teaching. Such a man does not like to be told that he, with his wide knowledge, is still nothing but a lump of ordinary human clay like everybody else, and that he himself is a creature of passions and lusts and desires. But that is the simple truth concerning him. As was the case in the time of our Lord with many of those philosophers in that ancient world, who went out of life by that forbidden gate of suicide, so it is often the case today. Baffled, bewildered, feeling frustrated, having tried all their psychological and other treatments, but still going from bad to worse, men give up in despair. The gospel offends in that it makes a man face himself, and it always tells him that self-same thing, "The fault, dear Brutus, is not in our stars, but in ourselves, that we are underlings. "Men love darkness rather than light", that is the trouble, and the gospel alone proclaims it. It stands as a light in the heavens and it should be revealing itself through all of us amidst the problems of this dark, miserable, unhappy world of men.

But thank God we do not stop at that. Light not only exposes the darkness; it shows and provides the only way out of the darkness. This is where every Christian should be jumping to the task. The problem of man is the problem of a fallen, sinful, polluted nature. Can nothing be done about it? We have tried knowledge, we have tried education, we have tried political enactments, we have tried international conferences, we have tried them all but nothing avails. Is there no hope? Yes, there is abundant and everlasting hope: "Ye must be born again". What man needs is not more light; he needs a nature that will love the light and hate the darkness-the exact opposite of his loving the darkness and hating the light. Man needs to be taken hold of, and he needs to get back to God. It is not enough just to tell him that, because, if we do, we are leaving him in a still greater state of hopelessness. He will never find his way to God, try as he may. But the Christian is here to tell him that there is a way to God, a very simple one. It is to know one Person called Jesus Christ of Nazareth. He is the Son of God and He came from heaven to earth to "seek and to save that which was lost". He came to illumine the darkness, to expose the cause of the darkness, and to make a new and living way out of it all back to God and to heaven. He has not only borne the guilt of this terrible sinfulness that has involved us in such trouble, He offers us new life and a new nature. He does not merely give us new teaching or a new understanding of the problem; He does not merely procure pardon for our past sins; He makes us new men with new desires, new aspirations, a new outlook and a new orientation. But above all He gives us that new life, the life that loves the light and hates the darkness, instead of loving the darkness and hating the light.

Christian people, you and I are living in the midst of men and women who are in a state of gross darkness. They will never have any light anywhere in this world except from you and from me and the gospel we believe and teach. They are watching us. Do they see something different about us? Are our lives a silent rebuke to them? Do we so live as to lead them to come and ask us, "Why do you always look so peaceful?- How is it you are so balanced? How can you stand up to things as you do? Why is it you are

not dependent upon artificial aids and pleasures as we are? What is this thing that you have got?" If they do we can then tell them that wondrous, amazing, but tragically neglected news, that "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners", and to give men a new nature and a new life and to make them children of God. Christian people alone are the light of the world today. Let us live and function as children of the light.

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