

## INTRODUCTION

We celebrate the resurrection of Jesus every day here at Green Acres, but Easter Sunday is especially exciting. We are a part of a couple of billion other followers of Jesus who are gathering today to say, "He is risen! He is risen, indeed!"

A children's Sunday School teacher was telling the Easter story to her class. As she talked about the crucifixion and the burial, the children's eyes were huge with interest. And then she told them that on Easter Sunday morning, the stone was rolled away and Jesus came forth from the tomb. She asked, "And who knows what Jesus said when He came out of that tomb?" Little Ashley raised her hand and waved it for the teacher to call on her. The teacher said, "Okay, Ashley, what did Jesus say when He came out of that tomb?" Ashley jumped out of her chair and extended both her arms into the air and sang, "Ta da!!" I love that because Easter IS a "ta da" day!

Every Sunday we open God's Word to read and study it. However, sometimes people use the Bible in a funny way. A country pastor regularly visited a certain widow in his church named Mrs. Jones, because she had a bountiful vegetable garden. She offered the pastor vegetables out of her garden, or fed him lunch. On one particular day the pastor arrived and walked through the garden calling her name and when he didn't find her, he knocked on her back door, but there was no answer. He was puzzled because her car was in the driveway, and he could see food cooking on the stove through the screen door. So he knocked again and said, "Mrs. Jones, Mrs. Jones, are you there?" There was no answer, so the pastor thought he'd do something clever. He took his business card and wrote Revelation 3:20 under his name. That verse says, "Behold I stand at the door and knock; if anyone hears my voice and I will come in and eat with them." He thought that was pretty cute. However, the reason Mrs. Jones didn't answer her door was because she was in the bathroom and had just taken off her clothes to take a shower and she was so embarrassed she didn't even answer the door. She found the pastor's card, and the next Sunday she left her card on the pastor's desk with this scripture reference: Genesis 3:10. When the pastor looked it up it said, "I heard your voice in the garden and I was afraid because I was naked, so I hid myself!" That's funny, but that's not the best way to use the Bible. God gave us this book to teach us how to we can have a personal relationship with Him.

This past week the cover of *Newsweek Magazine* featured what they called "The Decline and Fall of Christian America." Recent surveys reveal a larger percentage of Americans have no interest in religion. If they had asked me if I was interested in religion I would have said, "No." Religion divides and kills. Religion is the why thousands of people are being slaughtered in Darfur. Instead of religion, we embrace is a personal relationship with God.

In the late 1980s, there was a financial crisis often referred to as "the S&L crisis" as many savings and loans failed because of bad loans. We're facing another S&L crisis today, but I'm not talking about savings and loans, I'm talking about a Salt and Light crisis. Jesus has called us to be salt and light in a word that is decaying and dark. In the last message we talked about what it means to be the Salt of the Earth. In this message we'll examine what Jesus meant when He declared we are the light of the world in Matthew 5:14-16.

“You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. 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. In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.”

Jesus didn't say “*try* to be the Light of the World” or “*strive* to be light.” He just declared, “You *are* the light of the world.” As I said last week, being who you are in Christ is more important than doing something for God. Just BE who you are! Brennan Manning quotes an old preacher from Georgia who once told him, “You gotta' be who you is, because if you ain't who you is, then you is who you ain't.” There's a lot of truth in that. So, what does it mean for us to be the light of the world? Here are three spiritual principles that will help you Light Your World.

## **1. AS OUR WORLD GROWS DARKER, THE NEED FOR LIGHT INCREASES**

Jesus was a Master teacher, because He used ordinary concepts like salt, light, birds, and flowers to teach us about God. We all understand light and darkness. Alongside the literal truth of light and darkness, there is a spiritual truth as well. In the Bible, light is designated as truth and goodness, and darkness is used to characterize evil and deception. Hell is described as a place of outer darkness and the devil is called the Prince of Darkness. On the other hand the Bible says God is light, and that in Him is no darkness at all.

There has always been spiritual darkness, but it seems to me the darkness is increasing. We are witnessing a growing trend toward violence and wickedness in our nation. People have always been violent, but have you noticed incidents of random violence are becoming more common? In 1966, Charles Whitman climbed to the top of the tower at the University of Texas in Austin and started shooting, ultimately killing 14 people. That kind of random violence was a very rare occurrence. But today, hardly a week goes by without someone going on a shooting rampage. We live in a dark world and it's getting darker. That's why Jesus came—to bring light to people in darkness. The Bible says, “The people living in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of the shadow of death a light has dawned.” (Matthew 4:16)

One of the tragedies of living in an increasingly darker world is that many Christians are gradually becoming used to the darkness. Have you ever walked into a dark movie theater after coming in from daylight? You can't see anything, but your eyes gradually adjust until you can see better. Sadly, too many Christians are growing accustomed to the darkness rather than being alarmed by it. The great preacher/writer Vance Havner wrote about this problem in 1964. If his words were true then, how much truer are they 45 years later? “We are living in the dark. Men love darkness rather than light because their deeds are evil. The depths of present-day human depravity are too vile for any word in our language to describe. We are seeing not ordinary moral corruption, but evil double-distilled and compounded in weird, uncanny, and demonic combinations and concoctions of iniquity never heard of a generation ago. We not only live in the dark, we get used to it. There is a slow, subtle, sinister brainwashing process going on and by it we are gradually being desensitized to evil. There was a time when sin shocked us. But as the brainwashing progresses, what once amazed us only amuses us.”

Our world is getting darker, but I'm not pessimistic. It just means that there is a greater need for

light! We are the children of light in a dark world, and there has never been a greater need for our message of love and hope. Did you hear about the shoe salesman who was sent to a foreign country for his company? After a few months he contacted his home office and said, "Bring me home. These people over here don't even wear shoes!" The company sent another man to that country. After a few days he contacted his home office and said, "Send me all the shoes you've got, I've never seen so many prospects!" That's how I feel about the future of the church. I'm not discouraged by the report that fewer people are declaring their interest in religion. That just means there's a greater opportunity for churches like ours who offer a living relationship instead of a dead religion.

## **2. JESUS RADIATES LIGHT SO I CAN REFLECT HIS LIGHT TO OTHERS**

When Jesus said, "A city on a hill cannot be hidden," I've stood where Jesus was when He spoke these words and you can still look to the northwest and see the white limestone buildings of a nearby city that sits on the crown of the next hill—you can't hide that city as the white building reflects the light of the sun.

Then Jesus said the light of a lamp is wasted when it is placed under a bowl. When He said this, homes were illuminated by clay lamps filled with olive oil. Each lamp contained a cloth wick soaked in the oil which burned. Fire was valuable, but it wasn't easy to ignite a fire. They didn't have matches or lighters, obviously. They had to either get fire from another source or strike pieces of flint together. At night, a family might take a lamp and place it on the floor and put a clay pot over it. A little air would feed the flame from around the uneven base of the bowl. This way the lamp wouldn't burn out, but neither would it burn brightly and keep the family awake—sort of a first century nightlight. Jesus pointed out that a lamp under a bowl is worthless. Instead, when light was needed, the lamp was placed on a high ledge on the wall so it illuminated the entire house.

The good news for us is that we don't have to ignite our own light either—we just have to keep it lit, and refrain from hiding it. In other words, we don't have to generate our own light; Jesus is the source of light. 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)

So which one is it? Is He the light of the world, or are we the light of the world? Yes. Here's a simple way to understand it. Jesus is like the sun, and we're like the moon. We say the moon shines, but it really doesn't. It's just a dead rock orbiting the earth. Sometimes the moon doesn't shine brightly, because the world gets between it and the sun. But at times, when the angle is right, the moon is full and it shines so brightly you can see your own shadow. It only reflects the light from the sun. The sun radiates, and the moon reflects. Like the moon, we only *reflect* the light of Jesus, and our job is to stay oriented to Him, so the world doesn't get in our way of reflecting His light. Jesus radiates love, joy, peace, patience, gentleness, goodness, meekness, faithfulness and self-control. I can't produce that kind of light, but my job is to simply reflect His nature to others.

## **3. I LIGHT MY WORLD BY ACTS OF KINDNESS THAT PUT THE SPOTLIGHT ON GOD**

In verse 16, Jesus explained *how* we light our world. He said, "Let your light shine before men that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven." Some people say be kind for kindness sake, or to be good for goodness sake, but Jesus said we should be kind for the sake of glorifying God. It's easy to say, "I love God" but the Bible says if you say that and hate your brother, then you are a liar. It's also easy to say, "I love people, but unless you prove it by performing acts of kindness to them, then you're just adding to the darkness. The Bible says in 1 John 2:9-10, "Anyone who claims to be in the light but hates his brother is still in the darkness. Whoever loves his brother lives in the light."

We light our world as we perform acts of kindness to others. But notice Jesus didn't say we should perform random acts of kindness, or acts of kindness that bring attention to ourselves. He clearly said we are lighting our world when our acts of kindness place the spotlight directly on God. In order to do this, we must let people know that we are showing kindness to them because God has first shown kindness to us when we didn't deserve it.

I want to give you a specific way you can show kindness to others. Our church is already helping people who are struggling financially during this recession. Every week our church offers financial aid to people for food, clothing, utilities, and other needs. We give money to members and non-members, but we don't blow our horn about this, because we tell the people who are helped that we are doing this in Jesus' name, and we want God to be praised, not a church.

But times are tougher than ever, and some people in our church and community have lost their jobs. It's time for the entire church to step forward and help them. In the early church, all the members shared their resources and they shared meals in each others homes on a regular basis. Today we're launching a new initiative to help individuals and families who are without work. I'm asking those of us who have jobs to open our homes to share a meal on a regular basis with a family who may be going through a tough time. There is a form in our worship folder for you to fill out. If God has blessed you, will you offer the gift of hospitality to someone who may need some help right now? On the other hand, if you are without a job right now, will you please be kind enough to fill out the bottom portion of the form? We aren't talking about a long-term arrangement, because most people only need some temporary help. If you'll complete your form, you can drop it at the welcome center, place it in one of the boxes in the lobby, and even come and hand it to me personally. All of this information will be kept confidential, and we'll match up some people who need some help with those who are offering to share the gift of hospitality. My prayer is that we'll have so many of you who offer the gift of hospitality that we'll have to go out into the community and find unemployed people to help. This is just one way to light your world, but it is one way. As the old proverb says, "It's better to light a candle than to curse the darkness."

Will you light your world? Don't worry about lighting the whole planet; just allow your light to shine forth in your world. Your world may be your family, your workplace, your classroom, or your neighborhood. Back in the 1980s one of my favorite Christian groups was NewSong. They recorded a song entitled, "Light Your World" and it was the memory of that song that gave this message its title. The words are powerful:

Two doors down one rocking chair is rocking;  
She sits there all alone, her husband dead and gone.  
The best years of her life they spent together;  
He was always strong, but now she's on her own.  
And the telephone never rings  
No one laughs, no one sings  
It's quiet there;  
does anybody care?

A knocking at her door breaks the silence;  
She looks out to see a little boy from down the street.  
She cracks the door, surprised that he came over;  
Flowers in his hand, like a little gentleman.  
He said, "I picked these just for you;  
I hope you like the color blue.  
Could I stay awhile?  
I love to see you smile."

Light your world;  
Let the love of God shine through  
In the little things you do,  
Light your world.  
And though your light may be  
Reaching only two or three;  
Light your world!

## CONCLUSION

One of the songs I learned and as a child was "This little light of mine, I'm gonna let it shine!" Kids still sing that song. The second verse says, "Put it under a bushel, NO! I'm gonna let it shine!" I don't know why, but kids always shout when they say, "NO!" Jesus said as the light of the world, we shouldn't hide our light under a bushel or a pot. When I was a teenager, I had a life-changing experience that taught me a powerful lesson about not hiding my light. I grew up in a little town in South Alabama and went to church from the time I was born. I became a Christian when I was a child, and for the first six or seven years of my Christian life I was as dedicated as possible for a child.

But when I got into the ninth grade I discovered sports and girls, and those two attractions turned my attention away from God. I attended church and participated in the activities, because my parents made me, but I complained about it. I played on our high school varsity football team as a freshman, and when I heard the upperclassmen cussing, I thought it was cool. So, I wanted to cuss, too. I was so serious about it that I went to the high school library found an unabridged dictionary and looked up profanity. I filled out index cards and wrote down those ugly words until I could string them together in a full sentence of obscene cussing. When I would miss a pass or a tackle, I'd let my full vocabulary fly and the other guys would say, "Man, Dykes, you sure can cuss!" I thought it was cool. I developed two vocabularies, because at home and church,

I could turn it off like a faucet. I was a hypocrite, which means "two faced." I started hanging out with those guys and when they handed me a beer or moonshine I'd join them to be cool. I was saved, and I knew it. I was just running from God and dishonoring Him through my two-faced lifestyle.

Halfway through my freshman year, a family from up north moved across the street from us and that's when I first met Donnie. He was a couple of years older than me and had his own car—a Plymouth Road Runner. He was also an athlete, so we became friends. I rode to school with him, and on Friday and Saturday nights, we'd drive down to Florida, which was only about two minutes from our city limits. We'd pull up into the parking lot of a beer joint and wait for somebody over the age of 21 to go in and buy us something to drink. Then we'd cruise around town drinking beer, listening to the Young Rascals singing "Good Loving" on his eight-track tape player. I thought I was the coolest guy in town. Donnie's family never attend church, and we never talked about spiritual matters when we were hanging out.

Donnie played on our basketball team and one night we were riding back on the school bus after we had won a game, which meant we could cut up and sing, because when we lost the coach made us sit there and quietly ponder all the mistakes we'd made. I was in the back of the bus with some of the guys singing, "Gimme a Ticket for an Airplane" and somehow the topic of conversation switched around to church. I didn't bring it up and I didn't want to talk about it. But right there in front of my friends, Donnie looked at me and said, "Hey, Dykes, you go to church every Sunday right?" I couldn't deny that, because he could see my family getting in the car and going each week. Then he said, "Man, why do you go? What do you get out of it?" I was embarrassed so I brushed off his question by saying, "oh, I just go because my dad makes me. Besides I can sit in church and hold hands with my girlfriend." I didn't realize at the time, but I was hiding my light, putting it under a bowl. Then the conversation steered away from church and I remember breathing a mental sigh when we got on another topic.

A few weeks later, I was in Panama City, Florida with my family visiting my grandparents for the weekend. On that Friday night, Donnie headed out to do what we usually did, but since I was gone, he did it alone. Later some of my friends told me Donnie had been drinking and pulled up to the local hang-out. Some guys from a neighboring town, our biggest rivals, ridiculed Donnie's Road Runner. Apparently they made a bet that he couldn't go around Harrison's curve doing 80 mph. Harrison's curve is a turn of almost 90 degrees just north of my hometown on U.S. Highway 331. Donnie took them up on the bet. But he lost the bet and he lost his life, because he wrapped that Plymouth Road Runner around a big tree on the outside edge of that curve.

On Saturday morning, my grandmother's phone rang and I could hear my mom talking to someone. I had helped my granddad work in the yard that morning, so I was in the bathtub when my mom knocked on the door. Through the door I heard her say something I'll never forget. She said, "David, last night Donnie was killed in a car wreck. Isn't that awful?"

I was stunned, and immediately two separate thoughts flashed through my mind. At that time I didn't know the details of what had happened, but I realized if I hadn't been in Panama City, there was a good chance that I would have been in the car with Donnie. But that thought soon evaporated and was replaced with a second thought that still lingers with me 41 years later. I

suddenly remembered that night on the bus when Donnie had looked at me and said, "Dykes, you go to church, what do you get out of it?" I realized it was Donnie's way of asking if there really WAS a reason I went to church. He was looking for some light in his darkness. And I took my light and hid it. Only God knows whether Donnie went to heaven or not, but I doubt it, because in the few months I knew him, he never once gave any indication to me he even believed in God.

You may be thinking that an experience like that can mess up a teenager. After a few weeks of wandering around in a daze, God broke through my shame and grief and I heard Him say, "David, you can no longer live two lives. Either get all the way in or get all the way out." I don't even know if that's spiritually possible, but I humbly said, "God I'm sorry. I've brought shame to You, so please forgive me." Since that time, my theme has been "Put it under a bushel? NO! I'm gonna' let it shine!"

Jesus said, "You ARE the light of the world." So, here's the challenge: Light your world! Let the love of God shine through in the little things you do. And though your light may be reaching only two or three: Light your world!

## OUTLINE

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"The people living in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of the shadow of death a light has dawned." *Matthew 4:16*

### 2. JESUS RADIATES LIGHT SO I CAN REFLECT HIS LIGHT TO OTHERS

"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*

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"Anyone who claims to be in the light but hates his brother is still in the darkness. Whoever loves his brother lives in the light." *1 John 2:9-10*





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To put it in Texas terms, “You’re mighty welcome to use any and all of my ingredients; just make your own chili!”

For the Joy...  
Pastor David Dykes