

You are the light of the world 2

Richard Dawson 7 July 2013

Matt 5:14-16

Romans 12:1-3

¹⁴**“You are the light of the world.** A city built on a hill cannot be hid. ¹⁵No one after lighting a lamp puts it under the bushel basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all in the house. ¹⁶In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven.

What I believe/ what I know/ what I do.

Belief leads to understanding leads to action. Each of these describes a biblical step in the way God’s light shines through us

Last week we began to see the power of light in our lives. Like a single candle in the darkest cavern light has the ability to completely push back the darkness and yet this massless thing called light has enough power in a huge sun to blast away mountains of material by virtue of its radiative power alone. Light is so powerful and yet so hard to grasp in its nature.

Jesus, however, insists that you and I are light. Indeed, He says **‘You are the light of the world!’** How can that be? How can we flawed creatures be light for this dark world? It can be only

because Jesus, the true light, lives within us and is able to work through us. The question is, how does this work?

Last week we said that it begins at belief. As we open to door of our hearts to belief so we open ourselves to the light of Jesus and Jesus must be welcomed in if He is to bring light to our darkness. **This fundamental movement is basic to a Christian life. Belief opens the door to God...**

⁹because if you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. ¹⁰For one believes with the heart and so is justified, and one confesses with the mouth and so is saved. (Roms 10)

And again...

²⁹Jesus answered them, "This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent." (John 6)

Belief stands at the heart of our ability to shine for God because belief opens the door of our heart to all that God would do within us. And please remember, as I said last week, let's not get hung up over doubt. I know that in James it speaks of the one who doubts as being double minded and unreliable but I believe what James is speaking about here is not the doubts that plague every believer in regard to our role in God's plan but the doubt of that refuses to believe or to take God at His Word.

Most good drivers drive using doubt as a basis for safety. They drive with a constant doubt about the behaviour of other drivers on the road. This doubt allows them not to take for granted what another driver will do and so it helps them to drive defensively.

This is an entirely different doubt to the doubt that undermines a driver with no confidence and who drives dangerously because of it. This kind of doubt actually causes accidents. It is a chronic doubt which gives all those who travel with that person cause for celebration when they stop and can get out of the car. [Story of friend hitchhiking and into a Mark II Zephyr which was driven by such a driver.)

We who believe will always have to deal with doubt and frankly doubt can be a good thing at times. Those who do not doubt regularly are usually doomed to confidently drive off a cliff someday!

Belief opens the door to the light of God but **understanding** allows us to feed on it and to grow. God offers us more than simply guidance with His light. Rather he offers us to transform us and that transformation comes by way of our minds, our understanding.

The Word of God makes its way into us by virtue of our mind's ability to grasp it. Paul will say in Romans 7

So then, with my mind I am a slave to the law of God, but with my flesh I am a slave to the law of sin. (Roms 7)

And then later in Romans 12 he will further and say...

²Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God—what is good and acceptable and perfect (Roms 12)

How are we transformed? By the renewing of our **minds!** And anything which can help the mind to cope with the Word of God is helpful. Intellectuals have been responsible for some of the worst heresies in history and yet the education of the mind is still one of the most important hedges against heresy. One cannot believe oneself out of heresy. Belief opens doors but it doesn't analyse them – it doesn't point out where they are faithful and where they are not.

The very start of the Christian Church was characterised by a huge heresy called Arianism. Arius, the sponser of this heresy taught that Jesus was a created being and not part of the divine Godhead. He was therefore inferior to God and, indeed, not divine. This, of course, had tremendous implications for the very heart of Christianity which was the event of the Cross on which Christ died for the sin of the world. A created being could not atone, could not save and could not offer to us the Holy Spirit as Jesus did and yet at the time this teaching became incredibly

popular so much so that those who spoke out against such as the amazing Bishop of Alexandria St Athanasius. He spent his life defending the doctrine of the Trinity and was, indeed, exiled for it 5 times covering 17 years in all. He died in 373 at the ripe old age of 77 having created one of the most enduring theological and episcopal heritages in history. Had he not fought for a proper **understanding** of Christ there would likely have been much future for the Church because hope is founded on Christ precisely because He is God. And it is God's love and grace that comes to us in Christ because He is a part of the godhead – the three in One. Athanasius understood what was at stake. He understood something of the nature of God and that understanding was what gave him hope during the long years of exile. Understanding is vital and we need to fight for it. It does not come easily to us. We will need to apply ourselves consistently and habitually to gain understanding. The great proverb in Proverbs 25 illustrates just how noble a thing understanding is...

**It is the glory of God to conceal things,
but the glory of kings is to search things out. (Prov
25)**

It is a kingly thing to search out understanding – is a Royal thing and it we, the Royal Priesthood who should be engaging in precisely such an activity.

Understanding enables us to process the Word and to let the Word change our minds which changes us but an even stronger force for change comes in the form of action. The Word of God is to be believed and it is to be thought but more than anything else it is to be acted upon or acted out.

Jesus didn't say think about me He said 'Follow me!' Paul didn't say we observe the race he said we **run the race!** Peter didn't just say be faithful he said "**add to your faith** goodness; and to goodness, knowledge; ⁶and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness; ⁷and to godliness, brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness, love." In other words, act it out – **make an action** out of what you believe.

The one chance light has to get out of the church walls comes when we put what God has put within us into action. When we act on the Word our light shines. When we don't, we hide it under a bushel. And this marks the difference in most of the giants of the Bible.

Abraham was prepared to offer his son in obedience to God – to act on his belief. For all his ambivalence Jacob was prepared to act on what his mother said and pretend to be Esau and take the first born's birthright from his brother. Joseph believed in the wisdom God has given him and prophesied to Pharaoh about the plagues thus paving the way for thousands, perhaps millions to be saved and for Israel to enter Egypt and become a

nation there. David didn't just curse Goliath along with the rest of Israel's scared army, he acted on his belief that God was stronger than any enemy and he fought him. Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego didn't just believe God, they confessed God before an angry King who threw them into a fire so hot that the guards who carried them there were killed – and they lived in the midst of the fire. Jesus... didn't just love us, he came in the flesh and got close to us and accepted death at our hands in order to love us.

Action brings light! Faith without action isn't just dead... it's dark!

A philosopher, a scientist, and a simple man—none of whom could swim—were trapped in a cove with sheer cliff faces. They split up, but the tide kept coming in. Rescuers lowered a rope with a safety harness. The philosopher said, "Ah, this looks like a rope, but I might be mistaken—it could be wishful thinking or an illusion." So he didn't attach himself, and he was drowned. The scientist said, "Ah, this is an 11 mm polyester rope with a breaking strain of 2800 kg. It conforms to the MR 10-81 standard," and then proceeded to give an exhaustive, and entirely correct, analysis of the rope's physical and chemical properties. But he didn't attach himself, and he was drowned. The simple man said, "Ah, I'm not sure if it's a rope or a python tail, but it's my only chance, so I'm grabbing it and holding on with my whole life." He was saved.

God is calling us to act on what we know Don't just stare at the rope God has given you, grab it with everything you've got and go! Move! Get in action. This dark world is looking for your light! **You are the light of the world!**