

You are the light of the world.

Richard Dawson, 30 June 2013

Matthew 5¹⁴⁻¹⁶ / Deuteronomy 6⁴⁻⁸

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. All are aspects of the light of Christ.

(Light candle – light made up of massless photons – very little light – very little power. And yet if you were stuck in a pitch black cave with now light whatsoever this simple candle would allow you to see. One small light –salvation in the dark. But even more impressive is what light can do in large amounts.) In July 2010, Paul Crowther, professor of astrophysics from the University of Sheffield's Department of Physics and Astronomy, announced that he and his research team had discovered a star they described as the brightest star ever found in the universe. Not even a welder's helmet would help you face the light from this giant. The mass of the star is roughly 265 times that of our sun. But that's nothing. The brightness of this star is some 10 million times greater than the light coming from our sun! Think about that: The star, currently named R136a1, is not twice as bright as our sun, which would be overwhelming in itself if it were the sun that our earth orbited. It is

not just 10 times brighter, which is a light so bright we can hardly imagine it. It is not a hundred times brighter or a thousand times brighter than our sun. It is not a million times brighter! This newly identified star is ten million times brighter than our sun! How can anything be that bright? It is estimated that at its birth the star held 320 solar masses and has lost 50 solar masses over the past million years. That means that the star is burning so hot and so furiously that the wind it creates is blowing material away from itself as a fantastic rate. At this rate the star's light causes the gas around it to fluoresce literally for light years around it thus exposing what that space is holding and not just exposing but changing that space such is the power of this light.

Believe it or not we have something even more powerful within us! You see we have the God who created this amazing star within us. We are light! We are light by virtue of the work of Christ within us. This work both transforms us and gives us light with which to see. It helps us move forward. Light doesn't just help us see what is there but it gives us the ability to move forward – to make a way.

Being a Christian is not a static thing. God didn't give us faith to become little china Christians sitting neatly on a shelf. God made us Christians for a purpose – to complete something – to continue the work of Christ. Our destiny is to be creative as the Father is creative and we will never know true fulfillment until we begin to walk in this calling.

Admittedly there are seasons for things. We learn to swim so that when we are in the water we can negotiate this environment and

be comfortable and safe there but we are not always in the water and so we don't always have to swim. However we learn to walk so that we can move and it is an unhealthy person who gives up moving or who moves very little. Faith is more like walking – it provides a fundamental skill which we are meant to exercise not just everyday but in all circumstances so that we can move here and in eternity – in this life **and** the next!

We are light because we have Christ's light within us

¹²Again Jesus spoke to them, saying, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life." (John 8)

And since we have that light we are meant to use it! Jesus makes this abundantly clear in John 12 when he says:

³⁵Jesus said to them, "The light is with you for a little longer. Walk while you have the light, so that the darkness may not overtake you. If you walk in the darkness, you do not know where you are going. ³⁶While you have the light, believe in the light, so that you may become children of light." (John 12)

The question is how does this work **in me**? What does it mean that the light of Jesus is in me?

The dynamic I believe the NT presents is threefold beginning with belief, moving then to understanding and finally producing action. All three represent the working of Christ's life within us and all three contribute to the light we shed in the world.

So what is belief and how does it work? Jesus says this about belief:

¹²But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God, ¹³who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God. (John 1)

When we believe we receive power to be God's children and these are very particular children, very special children for we are children of the light:

⁴But you, beloved, are not in darkness, for that day to surprise you like a thief; ⁵for you are all children of light and children of the day; we are not of the night or of darkness. ⁶So then let us not fall asleep as others do, but let us keep awake and be sober; ⁷for those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who are drunk get drunk at night. ⁸But since we belong to the day, let us be sober

Belief opens up to us a world of daytime, of light. More particularly it enables us to discern light from darkness and to avoid the darkness. As we hear the voice of God saying 'This is the way, walk in it!' so we are able to walk in the light. What kind of creatures are we as Christians? We are **believing creatures**; we are those whose most basic expression of existence is to believe in the One who created us. We were made for this existence friends – we were made to believe and to live, above all else, in the light of that belief. This is the nature of every great revival and of every great life lived under God – it has been lived **by belief**. What was God's great

affirmation of the father of our faith Abraham? It was this, ‘He **believed God** and it was credited to him as righteousness. ‘Why was David able to slay Goliath? Because he **believed that God** was truly for him and since this was the case **what could stand against him!!!** Why was Daniel able to survive the Lion’s Den? Because he **believed God** was able in life or in death to save him above all earthly and heavenly power! **Who are we Christians? We are they who believe our God and stake everything on that belief –that’s who we are. Believing is our first task, our primary duty a bit like getting dressed before we go out. That comes before stepping outside the door – its basic –. We believe!**

Early in his career, many had hoped A. N. Wilson, a brilliant philosopher, would become the next C. S. Lewis. But as a young man, he began to wonder how much of the Easter story he accepted. By his thirties, he had lost all religious belief and publicly repudiated his Christian faith, becoming an atheist. He soon embraced the role of a harsh, cynical critic of Christianity and any faith in God at all. At one point he even wrote a book claiming Jesus was a failed messianic prophet (2004's *Jesus*). But on the Saturday before Easter in 2009, he wrote a shocking piece for London's prestigious newspaper, *The Daily Mail*, in which he shared his experience of participating in a Palm Sunday service. He writes:

“When I took part in the procession last Sunday and heard the Gospel being chanted, I assented to it with complete simplicity. My own return to faith has surprised no one more than myself. Why did I return to it? Partially, perhaps it is no more than the

confidence I have gained with age. Rather than being cowed by them, I relish the notion that, by asserting a belief in the risen Christ, I am defying all the liberal clever-clogs on the block. ...

But there is more to it than that. My belief has come about in large measure because of the lives and examples of people I have known—not the famous, not saints, but friends and relations who have lived, and faced death, in the light of the Resurrection story, or in the quiet acceptance that they have a future after they die. ...

Sadly, [the secularists] have all but accepted that only stupid people actually believe in Christianity, and that the few intelligent people left in the churches are there only for the music or believe it all in some symbolic or contorted way which, when examined, turns out not to be belief after all. As a matter of fact, I am sure the opposite is the case and that materialist atheism is not merely an arid creed, but totally irrational.”

Belief is assent to something, commitment to it and most importantly, understanding of it. The mind gets a lot of bad press in the Church these days and with some good reason. Intellectuals have largely been responsible for the most damaging forms of unbelief there are and they continue to rain down scorn on those who believe but are not capable of arguing on the same footing as those with quicker minds. Much of this criticism amounts to intellectual bullying in opinion but what is not my opinion is how important the mind is to our becoming Christ-like and therefore to our ability to be lights in this dark world.

I'm going to examine this more closely next week but before I get there I want to make one final comment about the light that comes

from belief and why belief comes first in this hierarchy of light. I've said that we are light by virtue of a threefold dynamic – Believing, understanding and doing. Throughout the Gospel belief takes first place and it is still the most important step in relating to God and yet many of us have a huge problem with believing not because we don't believe or because we don't want to believe but because – at least this is what I suspect – we don't believe **purely**! In other words we know we have doubts and we know we don't understand fully what it is we need to believe or, indeed, are believing!

So we ask ourselves, how can I say I am a believer when I have such doubts or, when I don't really understand what I am meant to believe? Frankly this is not bad news friends.

You see I believe firstly that many, if not most people hit this wall at some stage – if not at the beginning of their Christian journey then certainly later on. **Faith, you see, is not based on the strength of human conviction but on a relationship with the Lord of the universe and that relationship is held together by the sacrifice of Jesus on the Cross – not by anything we've done or can do.** If at some stage our conviction wavers then all that proves is that we are human – not that we have believed wrongly. Let me liken this to two examples closer to home.

I'm sure that at some stage in our upbringing we were convinced that our parents were wrong about some things. And we may have even expressed our point of view on occasion – even forcefully. Now no matter who turned out to be right in such event, one thing is clear, generally our lack of belief in our parents did not stop them being parents who loved us and wanted the best for us and it

certainly didn't stop us being their children. The doubt may be there but mature belief can handle doubt and it is not undermined by it.

Again, in marriage, how many of us come to a point where we either doubt the love of our spouse or we doubt our own love. Most marriages come to this point sooner or later and at this point it is clear that belief in the love of the other has wavered – it is no longer there with conviction. Despite that marriages don't fail at this point. If anything this is the point where marriages actually grow and become stronger because couples realize they must work to make love flourish – it doesn't just keep happening by itself.

Doubt is like the darkness. It may be everywhere but one small spark of belief will chase it away and all we have to fear is the fear itself.

Belief is important not because it constitutes our relationship with God but because it opens the door of our heart to the light of God and that light, friends, is all we need to cope with the darkness of doubt. Where God is, there is light!