

Carrying the Torch

Matthew 5:14-16

INTRODUCTION

- A. The Italian word for “influence” is “influenza.”
 - 1. The word “influenza” was introduced into English in the mid-1700’s, apparently coming from the Italian phrase which attributed the origin of the flu to an *influenza di freddo* (influence of the cold).
 - 2. Influenza is a highly contagious virus. It’s rare to find the flu affecting just one person in the family—generally if one person comes down with the flu, everyone in the family is going to get the flu.
 - a. We are, by our very nature, highly contagious people. We learn from others & others learn from us.
 - b. The comedian Sam Levenson, for example, once recalled that his over—protective mother went with him on his very first day of school and insisted on talking to the teacher before leaving him.
 - 1) Levenson said that, among other things, his mother told the teacher that if he misbehaved she should punish the boy next to him.
 - 2) When the teacher asked why, Levenson’s mother said, “My little boy learns by example.”
- B. Jesus speaks about the example he wants his believers to exert on the world.
 - 1. READ TEXT.
 - 2. The Olympics begin in China at the end of next week, and tonight, we begin a short series about how the Christian life can be compared to the Olympic Games.
 - a. Right now, the Olympic torch is making its way through China in anticipation of the Olympic Games.
 - b. The Olympic flame goes back to the ancient Greek Olympics and commemorated the Prometheus’ stealing fire from the gods and giving it to mortals.
 - c. However, the idea of a torch relay has no precedent in antiquity.
 - 1) The first torch relay was for the 1936 Summer Games in Berlin.
 - 2) Hitler wanted to show off Germany—put the spotlight on the country, if you will—and show that the Greeks were the forerunners to his Aryan race.
 - 3) Since that time, the torch has been carried throughout the host country to showcase that country to the world.
 - 3. In our text, Jesus calls upon his believers to showcase his country. Tonight, we will examine the torch & see how we are to be to showcase Jesus’ country.

THE TORCH’S CHARACTER: LIGHT, v 14

- A. Our character as a torch is light.
 - 1. On the one hand, that is a great compliment, for the Father & Son are both referred to as “light” in Scripture.
 - a. “Jesus spoke to them, saying, ‘I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life’ (Jn 8:12).
 - b. “This is the message we have heard from him and proclaim to you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all” (1 Jn 1:5).
 - c. The Father & the Son are not physically in this world. And, Jesus says, “You are the light, as my Father & I are light”
 - 2. Of course, it’s not just a compliment to be called light as the Father & the Son are light, but there is a great responsibility given to us: to live as the Father & the Son.

- B. There are two important implications in being the light of the world.
1. We must live morally pure lives.
 - a. Light often stands for holiness/purity & darkness stands for sinfulness.
 - 1) “This is the message we have heard from him and proclaim to you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all. If we say we have fellowship with him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth” (1 Jn 1:5-6).
 - 2) “At one time you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light (for the fruit of light is found in all that is good and right and true)” (Eph 5:8-9).
 - b. Do we walk as children of light?
 - 1) Do we seek to avoid sin, or are we not that concerned about a little sin here and there?
 - 2) Does the way we treat those we encounter display what is good and right and true?
 2. Our light is reflective light.
 - a. In a very real sense, you & I are like the moon. As we know, the moon has no light of its own, but it reflects the light of the sun.
 - b. You & I have no light of our own.
 - 1) I do not need to illustrate how far you & I are from perfection—we each know our own sinfulness all too well.
 - 2) Were it not for the light of the Father & Son, you and I could never be the light of the world. Notice again what Paul writes: “At one time you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord” (Eph 5:8).
- C. You & I have a decision to make: are we going to be the light of the world?
1. We don’t have to be.
 - a. Notice carefully what Jesus says at verse 16: “Let your light shine before others.”
 - b. There are many Christians in this world who do not allow their light to shine. There are so many Christians who live so close to the world that’s it’s difficult, if not impossible, to tell any difference between them & the world.
 2. P. P. Bliss was in a service where a preacher told of a captain’s trying to bring his boat to the Cleveland harbor one dark and stormy night.
 - a. The waves rolled like mountains and not a Star was to be seen in the clouded sky,
 - b. The captain peered through the darkness for the sight of a signal light by means of which to guide his vessel to safety.
 - 1) When he finally spotted a single light from the light—house, he turned to the pilot and asked: “Are you sure this is Cleveland harbor?”
 - 2) “Quite sure, sir,” the pilot replied.
 - a) “Then where are the lower lights?” the captain continued.
 - b) “Gone out, sir,” the other man answered.
 - c) “Can you make the harbor?” the captain asked anxiously.
 - d) “We must, or perish, sir,” the pilot replied.
 - c. But despite his strong heart and brave hand, in the darkness he missed the channel.
 - 1) With a resounding crash the boat piled up on the rocks and then settled slowly to a watery grave.
 - 2) The preacher concluded his message with this admonition: “Brethren, the Master will take care of the great light-house; let us keep the lower lights burning.”
 - d. That was all Bliss needed to pen that famous hymn: “Let the Lower Lights Be Burning.”
 - e. SING HYMN.

THE TORCH’S CORNER: THE WORLD, v 14

- A. Jesus says, “You are the light of the world.” There’s our corner, our place to shine: the world.

- B. God has placed us in this world so that we can shine in it.
 - 1. Through the years of Christian history, there have been many who have sought to remove themselves from the world.
 - a. In the earliest days of Christianity, there were many who went to live in caves so that they would not be corrupted by the world.
 - b. In our own day, there are the Amish and the Mennonites who have separated themselves from the world.
 - 2. Jesus never desired that his believers segregate themselves from the world.
 - a. Jesus says here that we are the light of the world. How can we be the light of the world if we refuse to be around the world?
 - b. As Jesus prays for the disciples, he says, “I do not ask that you take them out of the world, but that you keep them from the evil one” (Jn 17:15).
 - c. Concerning the man living with his step-mother, Paul writes to the Corinthians, “I wrote to you in my letter not to associate with sexually immoral people—not at all meaning the sexually immoral of the world, or the greedy and swindlers, or idolaters, since then you would need to go out of the world” (1 Cor 5:9-10).
 - d. God never intended us to segregate ourselves from the lost in this world!
- C. We are to shine in this world:
 - 1. Paul and Barnabas said in the synagogue at Antioch in Pisidia, “The Lord has commanded us, saying, ‘I have made you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring salvation to the ends of the earth’” (Acts 13:47).
 - 2. “Do all things without grumbling or questioning, that you may be blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world” (Phil 2:14-15).
- D. Are we allowing our lights to shine in the midst of this crooked generation?

THE TORCH’S CLEARNESS, vv 14-15

- A. “A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, put on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house.”
- B. It is absolutely impossible to hide a city set on a hill.
 - 1. I believe the most spectacular sight I’ve ever seen in my life was New York City at night from an airplane.
 - a. I was on my way to Albania, and we took off from JFK late at night.
 - b. As far as you could see out the window were bright, bright lights.
 - 2. There was absolutely no way to hide those lights—they were far too bright.
- C. No one lights a lamp in a house and hides it. You light the lamp in order to give light—in order that it might be clear.
- D. If we are to be the light of the world, our light must be clear.
 - 1. There is absolutely no way to be the light of the world if we hide.
 - a. If the electricity goes out in a storm, you light a candle, and put it under a bowl, what good is that going to do?
 - b. Likewise, if we are following Jesus but afraid for anyone to know it, what good is that going to do?
 - 2. Are we holding forth our light before others?

THE TORCH’S CAREER, v 16

- A. “In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory

to your Father who is in heaven.”

1. Here is the career, the purpose, of our torch: to let our light shine before others so that they can glorify God.
 2. This indicates that we are to do good works in front of others.
 - a. In the Sermon on the Mount, from which we are reading, Jesus condemns doing good works in front of others.
 - 1) “When you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your giving may be in secret” (Mt 6:3-4).
 - 2) “When you fast, anoint our head and wash your face, that your fasting may not be seen by others but by your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you” (Mt 6:17-18).
 - b. What gives?
 - 1) On the one hand, Jesus says, “Do good in front of others so that they can see your good works” & then he says in the very same sermon, “Don’t do your good deeds in front of others.”
 - 2) I pray that you can see right through that contradiction I developed & that you already know the difference.
 - a) When Jesus speaks of giving to the needy and fasting, he is condemning the selfish desire to be seen by others: E.g., “When you give to the needy, sound no trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may be praised by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward” (Mt 6:2).
 - b) Here, Jesus encourages us to do our good works in front of others, not so that we can receive the credit, but so that God can be glorified.
 - c) It all comes down to our motivation: Are we seeking the glory, or are we seeking to point others to God?
- B. How do our good works cause others to glorify God?
1. Light reveals the dangers in our path:
 - a. “The light is among you for a little while longer. Walk while you have the light, lest darkness overtake you” (Jn 12:35).
 - b. When I was a junior in high school, Dad took the family to Mammoth Cave.
 - 1) I’m sure that many of you have been to Mammoth Cave or similar caves & had the same experience: Our tour guide got us into a deep part of the cave, turned out all the lights, and encouraged us to put our hands in front of our faces.
 - 2) You could see absolutely nothing. It was the only time I’ve ever experienced utter darkness. I couldn’t see a single thing.
 - 3) Guess what he did before we started walking again? He turned on the lights. Why? Because we needed to know where we were going—we needed to see the dangers in our paths.
 - c. As we live before the world, we are able to show the dangers that lie in their paths.
 2. Light can also guide you out of darkness.
 - a. “I have come into the world as light, so that whoever believes in me may not remain in darkness” (Jn 12:46).
 - b. As we allow our lights to shine in this world, we are able to guide others to the truth and out of the darkness.
 - 1) “Wives, be subject to your own husbands, so that even if some do not obey the word, they may be won without a word by the conduct of their wives—when they see your respectful and pure conduct” (1 Pt 3:1-2).
 - 2) Does our conduct draw others to Jesus?
 3. Are you a light to this dark and dying world? Do you need to light your flame tonight?