

Barratt Ministries Challenge

Issue No. 23

The Light of the World

Sermon on the Mount Series, Matthew 5:14

by Maurice Barratt

“Ye are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hid. Neither do men light a candle, and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick, and it giveth light unto all that are in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven” (Matthew 5:14-16).

“Ye are the light of the world” said Jesus, just as he said “Ye are the salt of the earth”. It isn’t to do with what we should be, or with what we do, but what we are. “A city set on a hill cannot be hid” - it is going to be seen; its light, whatever it is, is going to shine. However, the same warning applies to light as does to salt: there can be salt without savour, and there can be “light” which is actually darkness. “If the light that is in thee be darkness, how great is that darkness!” (Matthew 5:23).

“He that saith he is in the light, and hateth his brother, is in darkness even until now” (1 John 2:9). What is this light that Jesus talks about? He gives us the answer himself in John’s gospel: “I am the light of the world; he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life” (John 8:12). The light is Jesus himself, His nature, His character. That is why it is called “the light of life”. This light is life. “In him was life: and the life was the light of men” (John 1:4). “As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world” (John 9:5). But Jesus is no longer on earth. The world snuffed out that light. The darkness hated the light. However, now we as Christians have that same nature and character of Christ, the new nature. That is why we are now the light of the world, the only true light the world has. Our light is also “the life of Jesus ... manifest in our mortal flesh” (2 Corinthians 4:11), shining out to the world.

But we are not automatically light just because we are Christians. How much light we have depends on how much of the character of Christ - the beatitudes - has been worked into our lives. It’s nothing to do with forgiveness or grace; it’s to do with holiness.

The World

In the last issue we saw that the earth and the world are quite different things in the Bible. The earth is the physical creation; the world is a spiritual system, hostile to God, ruled by the devil. Scripture is consistent throughout in this. The word for the world is kosmos in Greek, and it always means the spiritual anti-God system. Kosmos literally means an ordered system, an arrangement. It is the wisdom, the ideology, the mindset of the world. The distinction is made between the earth and the world in the Old Testament “The pillars of the earth are the Lord’s, and he hath set the world upon

them" (1 Samuel 2:8). "The heavens are thine, the earth also is thine; as for the world and the fullness thereof, thou hast founded them" (Psalm 89:11). "He hath made the earth by his power, he hath established the world by his wisdom" (Jeremiah 10:12). Wisdom and the world are linked. There is always a mind, a wisdom, behind a system. In the New Testament, the world is clearly referred to as being under the devil's control. He is "the prince of this world" (John 12:31). When Satan tempted Jesus, he showed Him "all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time. And the devil said unto him, All this power will I give thee, and the glory of them: for that is delivered unto me; and to whomsoever I will I give it" (Luke 4:5-6). The devil was not offering Jesus the physical creation; that was not his to give. He was offering Him the power and glory of the world order, the rulership of the system.

Occult Wisdom

The word "occult" means concealed, eclipsed, masked. The devil's "occult wisdom" is a superimposed wisdom, masking, eclipsing, concealing the true wisdom of God. The devil is a deceiver. He "is transformed into an angel of light" (2 Corinthians 11:13). Note what that says - not that he is able to transform himself into an angel of light, but spends most of his time with his horns and his cloven hooves and his pitchfork - no, it says he is transformed into an angel of light. He's like that all the time. He is a deceiver by nature. He manifests light! But that light, that life, that wisdom, is actually darkness. It looks like light, but it is the opposite to God's light. This is why Jesus says in Matthew 6:23, "If the light in you is darkness, how great is that darkness!" If you are living by worldly wisdom, according to the pattern of the world, and yet you believe you are a Christian and that you have the mind of Christ, then your light, your wisdom, is actually darkness.

Further scriptures highlight this distinction. In John 8:23 Jesus said to the Jews, "Ye are from beneath, I am from above: ye are of this world; I am not of this world". Jesus' light, His wisdom, was not of this world; it was not the wisdom of the world's system. Paul refers to these two wisdoms and contrasts them: "We speak wisdom among them that are perfect: yet not the wisdom of this world, nor of the princes of this world, that come to nought ... but we speak the wisdom of God ... which none of the princes of this world knew" (1 Corinthians 2:6-8).

John talks of two "spirits": "They are of the world; therefore speak they of the world, and the world heareth them. We are of God: he that knoweth God heareth us; he that is not of God heareth not us. Hereby know we the spirit of truth, and the spirit of error" (1 John 4:5-6). These two spirits are the two wisdoms. One is truth and life, the other is lies, and spiritual death. Both are "light" of a kind, but one of those lights is really darkness.

Salt In Society?

The earth needs salt; but the world needs light. The world is in darkness. Salt has no effect on darkness! This is an important truth, because it tells us that we cannot be "salt in society". What is "society"? It is the order of this world, civilisation and culture - part of the spiritual system. Society is not to do with the earth, the physical creation. So salt is no good for it. Society needs light, not salt. Perhaps you think I am splitting hairs. Not at all! Salt and light act in very different ways. Salt

influences and infiltrates, it flavours and seasons, it preserves. It works alongside and inside the thing it is preserving, flavouring and influencing. Light does not do this. Light and darkness are opposites. They cannot co-exist. Light confronts darkness and repels it.

God's ways and the world's ways cannot mix. God's system and the world's system cannot mix. The spirit of God and the spirit of the world cannot mix. If they confront each other, there is always a battle. One wins, and the other loses. There cannot be a compromise, or an influencing of one by the other. Light cannot "influence" darkness; darkness cannot "flavour" light. If you switch a light on in darkness, all the darkness goes and is replaced by light.

So we can't season or influence the world, or pull it a little bit towards God, or make it "more Christian". The world (remember, the world is the spiritual system ruled by the devil) is anti-Christian by nature. You can no more make a dog a little more human than make the world a little more Christian. The world is already what it is, what it always has been, and what it always will be. It cannot change. It is moving towards its unavoidable conclusion, the full-blown kingdom of antichrist. Once we see this, we can understand why we are told in scripture in such strong terms not to have anything to do with the world.

John, who talks so much of love, warns us to "love not the world" (1 John 2:15). Paul says, "Be not conformed to this world" (Romans 12:2). Jesus said of his disciples, "I have given them thy word; and the world hated them, because they are not of the world, even as I am not of the world." (John 17:14). But we are not to leave the world: we are to be in it, not to "influence" it, but to confront the darkness with pure light. "I pray not that thou shouldst take them out of the world, but that thou shouldst keep them from the evil one" (John 17:15). There lies the only danger - that we become corrupted by the darkness we are supposed to confront, that we become "conformed to this world". Thus James urges the Christian to "keep himself unspotted from the world" (James 1:27).

Let It Shine

"Let your light so shine before men that they see your good works". When your light shines, men see not light, but good works. The character of Christ within us yields good works - a new and different lifestyle, the works which are simply the outward manifestation of the Sermon on the Mount way of thinking, the outward manifestation of an inward attitude. When you turn the other cheek, walk the extra mile, love your enemy, refuse to lay up treasures on earth, these are all works; men see them and they "glorify your Father which is in heaven". They give God the credit. They realise that this is something different from the spirit of the world, the thinking of the world, different from the way they think. In an earlier issue I told the story of how impressed the insurance man was when he learned that I don't have any insurance. It made an impact on him. He saw that my faith resulted in a different way of living, which came from a different way of thinking.

Living Differently

If we are not living differently to the world, it's always because we are not thinking differently. If our thinking isn't different from the world, we've become conformed to the world. We've become one

of them. We are partaking in the spirit of the world, and our light has become darkness. The challenge being light in the world is that we must confront the world. Confrontation is not nice. It is uncompromising, unyielding, stubborn, implacable. It attracts persecution and hatred. But then, Jesus told us we should expect no less!

Experiences From Life

by Joanna Barratt

Affected or affecting?

"I hate people who sing on a Monday morning!" I whirled round in startled surprise to see Ann, the managing director's secretary, standing outside her door with bloodshot eyes, absolutely livid with rage as she yelled at me down the corridor. It was a glorious morning and I'd had a wonderful weekend at the church. The two messages on Sunday had been from the Sermon on the Mount and had both challenged and fired me up to continue the fight to be more like Jesus. I used to enjoy my three mile ride to work each morning on my bicycle. As my feet pedalled away songs and choruses easily sprang to mind and I would sing in total abandonment as the noisy rush-hour traffic passed me by. I enjoyed being a Christian, I enjoyed being carefree and single, and I also enjoyed working at the advertising agency surrounded by so many eccentric people. I parked up my bicycle around the back and walked in still singing my song not realising that it could cause any offence to somebody else.

I couldn't help laughing when I saw her in such a rage and thought to myself, "So this is what partying and living it up does for you!" I could see Ann was really suffering with an awful hangover, but she couldn't dampen my spirits. "Good morning Ann. I've had a wonderful weekend and feel so refreshed and relaxed and ready to start this brand new week. I do hope you feel better soon, and I'm sorry if my singing annoyed you." Her door slammed with a really loud bang as I continued to my own office, and as I peered in through the open doors I could see people slouched over their desks suffering the Monday morning blues. They craved their lives of debauchery and tried with all their might to convince me that I was missing out on something, but the more I witnessed the rewards of their wild living, the more convinced I was that they had nothing to offer me.

The Newsreader

I descended the stairs to my office in the cellar which I shared with two other departments. As the firm was operating from a large detached house, space was at a premium and only the directors themselves could boast of having their own offices. As I walked to my typewriter I could see Hilary slumped over her desk with her head in her hands reading the newspaper. It was actually Hilary's job to read newspapers and magazines all day, as she was employed to cut out and collect articles which referred to or advertised any of our clients, and then post them each evening to those particular

clients who had been written about. Her posture told me that she too was depressed. I opened up the conversation with a "Good morning Hilary, how are you?" She slowly spun her chair round to face me, and as she did so her expression was very doleful. She embarked yet again on another tale of woe about her relationship between herself and her husband. She was the mother of two teenage children and the wife of a very clever scientist who worked for Ferranti. His job often involved him going to other countries to speak with very important people and his salary reflected his rank. Hilary didn't need to work for her living; she came every day because she was bored and needed something to do with her life.

Witnessing Opportunities

When she first shared her marital problems with me I was full of understanding and sympathy. Apparently her husband didn't spend much time at home, and when he wasn't working he preferred to be at the pub rather than in her company. It didn't take many conversations with Hilary to realise why her husband needed this escape and I felt more and more sorry for her as she constantly revealed that she was the victim of her own character. I'm sure she had no idea of all the problems her lack of self-control were causing, and she spoke quite openly of times when she would rant, rave and scream at her children and husband, and would even resort to throwing things and slamming glass doors which shattered into a thousand pieces. On the rare occasions when she was willing to listen rather than talk I would seize the opportunity to share my faith, telling her that God could change her life and circumstances completely. She seemed desperate and looking for answers, and on several occasions agreed to come with me to the Sunday evening meeting at the church. Our Friday conversations always convinced me that she was ready for change and would definitely be at the church on Sunday, yet every time we made these arrangements she turned up on Monday morning with a bagful of excuses as to why she didn't come.

An End To Sympathy

Week after week I would listen to her stories, trying to understand and sympathise with her, but today something seemed to snap inside me. I'd had a wonderful weekend at the church and really felt close to God, and I was loathe to be robbed of this by yet another bout of evil speaking against her husband. As soon as she began her excuses I cut her short by saying, "It's all right Hilary, you don't have to explain anything. People do what they want to do. I've told you how you can solve your problem, but you obviously want to nurse your grievance. Please don't tell me any more about your husband, because I don't want to hear." Her eyes bulged with fury as she began to rant and rave, telling me that I didn't know what I was talking about, I was too young to have experienced any of her problems. But ... she was there at the church the very next Sunday evening. I was absolutely amazed, because on this particular occasion I hadn't invited her, and it was a great revelation to see what a slap instead of sympathy could achieve. I really hadn't intended to use shock tactics on her, I had simply come to the realisation that she wasn't listening to my counsel and was, in fact, forcing me to listen to gossip.

An Amazing Experience

I could see that she was enjoying the service and had enthusiastically joined in with the singing. She listened with rapt attention to the sermon and when the minister made the appeal for anyone who wanted to receive the Holy Ghost to go into the back room she was one of the first to respond. Unfortunately, because I wasn't sitting next to her, I wasn't able to explain that this wasn't for non-Christians, but I thought to myself that her spiritual state would be manifested quite easily, and one of the counsellors would lead her to Christ. At the close of the service I went round to the back room to collect her and couldn't believe what I witnessed. She came out of the room babbling away in the most fluent, clear, glorious language and I could see that she found it very difficult to communicate with me in English. Her face was full of confusion as she caught me by the shoulders and began to shake me with bewildered exuberance and said so accusingly, "You didn't tell me it would be like this, you didn't tell me it would be anything like this!" I don't know who was more shocked, her or me. In all my years as a Christian I've never experienced such a dramatic baptism in the Holy Spirit as Hilary's and during the time that I continued to work at the advertising agency I saw vast changes in her life as we prayed and went through Bible studies together. Her children and husband began to come to the church and I know that they all had an encounter with Christ, which brought life changing opportunities. I learned a very important lesson with Hilary. You don't give people what they need, when you give them what they want. No ... people need to be challenged and convicted to make a move, and it's only uncompromising Christians, prepared to speak the truth in love, who can shed this sort of light on a situation. People are looking for answers, not sympathy!