

City on a Hill

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We're considering what it means to be a church that renews cities socially, spiritually, and culturally with the gospel of Jesus. Today we're talking a broad look at city renewal. In the weeks to come, we'll global cities. And there are a lot of global issues we can't do much about. We hear about one every week: coup in Myanmar, stranded Afghans, suffering Haitians. But we can do something about the people right here, in our city: crushed by cancel culture, struggling w covid. In this text, Jesus says *we* are the light of the world, a city on a hill. How can we be the light? Let's look at *derived light*, *public light*, *provocative light*.

Derived Light

"*You are the light of the world.*" Who's Jesus talking about? Who is the light? Teaching from a hilltop, *crowds* gathered around Jesus. Are the crowds the light? Sunday morning attenders? Just because you're in the crowd doesn't mean you're the light. It's a great place to be exposed to the light, to feel the warmth of the light, but it doesn't make you light. Verse 1 points out that the *disciples* emerged from the crowds and came to Jesus. Are the disciples the light? But didn't one of the disciple go dark, betray the Son of Man with a kiss? *Who is the light?* Notice what Jesus says immediately prior: *Blessed are the meek, the merciful, the righteous, the peacemakers, the persecuted.* These people, **Beatitude** people, are the salt and light of the earth. The word beatitude means to flourish under God's favor. People who emit: justice, meekness, mercy, peacemaking. This is Jesus' vision, the church, a people of beatitudinal light. Now, that's a lot of sunbeams to juggle, but if we leave one out, we won't truly shine. Say you focus on *the righteous*. You may stand for justice, but do so proudly if you're not *meek*. Or say you focus on *meekness*, but if you don't hunger and thirst for *righteousness*, you won't stand for anything. We may be willing to be *persecuted* for our beliefs, but without *mercy* we'll despise our ideological opponents. See the beams of the beatitudes hang together to produce clear, society-enhancing light. So how does this light flood through us? When Jesus says *you* are the light of the world, he uses a plural pronoun, as he does when he says, *you* are the salt of the earth. 2 things. The light of the world isn't just beatitudinal; it's **communal**, not just individual collective. It takes a community—the church—to embody the full spectrum of this society-enhancing light. The light is visible

when a city group works together. A merciful person will tend keep the marginalized and needy in front of the group. The poor in spirit will model humble repentance. The peacemaker makes sure relationships are reconciled in Christ. When the group is showing up in one another's lives, the beatitudinal light is turned up, but when you're non-committal, the light flickers. The light of the world is communal. Second, where do we get this light? *Jesus says, I am the light of the world* (Jn 8:13). Exclusive and divine. Our light is a **derivative** light, a light derived from the Lamp of the eternal city: *the city has no need of sun or moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and its lamp is the Lamb* (Re 21:23). The glory of Christ is so pure and so powerful it will illuminate the new creation for all eternity. That light is transported from the future to the present. How? We are born in darkness, *for at one time you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light* (Eph 5:8). How do we become the light? By being "in the Lord," not in ourselves. When we put our faith in Christ, his eternal glory can shine through us, a derivative light. But we have to choose it, "Walk as children of the light." Take a step, put one foot in front of the other, towards Christ. It's our childlike attraction to the light, and a commitment to stay there, that the glory of Christ floods through us. If you hold up a magnifying glass to the sun it projects the light, but it is not the light. The sun is the light; the glass derives its beam from the sun. If the glass isn't held up to the sun, there is no light. How do we become the light of the world? By holding ourselves up to the light of the world. When each of us walk in the light, it intensifies the humility, mercy, righteousness, beatitudinal glory, making us an irrefutable city on a hill. The light of the world.

Public Light

What is Jesus trying to get across when he compares the light to a city on a hill, a lamp in a room. Neither can be hidden. You don't cover them up. You put them out there. The light is public not private. When ancient people were travelling they didn't have well-lit highways to guide them from place to place, so a city on a hill served as a public beacon to guide them in their travels. Now, not all cities were set on a hill, and not all faiths are public, but Christianity is a public light. Despite that, some say my faith is private faith; I keep it to myself. But Jesus says not Christian faith. A Christian walks in the light and *shines* the light. Their very nature is to shine outwardly. The light we are is a light we display. Why is that? Christian faith is public faith because Christ was *publicly* shamed on the cross, *publicly*

raised from the dead, *publicly* proclaimed among the nations, *publicly* ascended into heaven, and will return *publicly* in the sight of all humanity. When we no longer walk in darkness but become light *in the Lord*, we are baptized in public, declaring Jesus not a private savior but a public Lord. Jesus leaves no room for private faith; it's a faith that shines. [The lamp is not covered but is placed on a stand—why?—to give light to all in the house](#) (15). What might this look like? Jesus uses the lamp analogy repeatedly throughout the Gospels. When you look closely at each use, you see various applications of the light. In [Mark](#), the light is not put under a basket but used to expose and redeem darkness. ***Spiritual renewal***. God's people should be sharing words of evangelistic light in everyday darkness. My son is a gamer and has a network of online friends. When one of them shared he was struggling with how dark the world is, he responded by saying That's why we need God. He set up a call with his friend and shared who God is and how he brings hope. In [Luke](#) 11, the light enters the eye making the whole body a beaming lamp. ***Moral renewal***. God's people should embody moral excellence. What you watch, do, say, think—light. One person in our City Group often talks about his desire to be godly. As he strives for godliness, he inspires the rest of us to turn up our moral light. In [Matthew](#) 5, the light is among other things public: justice, mercy, peace shining into the world. ***Social and cultural renewal***. The people in our city group who bring meals to their Afghan neighbors and give them emotional support inspire us toward social and cultural renewal. The city on a hill is a city of light, its public faith renewing cities socially, spiritually, and culturally with the gospel of Jesus.

Provocative Light

Finally, Jesus says [let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven](#) (5:16). The light provokes a response because it produces real moral, ethical, social, and spiritual change. The entire western civilization is testimony to this. Christians have led the way in scientific breakthroughs (Edward Jenner first vaccine; Francis Collins human genome); civil rights (MLK), and so on. These works are the result of a public faith in public Redeemer. They provoke a response. Light shines, faith works, the gospel renews. *And* this also happens in everyday ways. In raising our children to tell the truth, in spouses humbly serving one another as Christ

served them, in choosing to make peace not war with those who oppose us, in being salt and light online and in the neighborhood, in telling coworkers about the light of the world. Our earthly behavior should demand a heavenly explanation. When people compliment your social, spiritual, cultural renewal don't take the credit; point to the light. I really admire your *work ethic*. Oh, that's because I have a God who works on my behalf day and night. Your commitment to *justice* is inspiring; thanks, it's nothing compared to justice of Christ. You are so *compassionate*; I appreciate it. How could I judge when God has shown so much mercy toward me? Good works that cause others to glorify our Father in heaven. A missionary and his companions got up early to walk a distance in India. As they traveled east, the people traveling west saw a faint light on their faces. When asked where the light came from, they pointed east to the rising sun. They did not draw attention to themselves, a light derived; they pointed to the rising sun. This is a vision of the church, says Leslie Newbigin, "a minority going the opposite way of the majority with the first glow of the light of a new day upon their faces." *Will you be the light? Walk in the light?* Let's renew cities as a faithful glowing minority, a people of derivative, communal, public, and provocative light pointing others to our Father who is in heaven.