

## 262 The Light of the World

Jesus in His own life and ministry was usually in the public eye, constantly watched, weighed up and scrutinised. His many onlookers saw Him with their own eyes, be it close to or from afar - His appearance, His clothing and His manner. They saw how He treated people, notably the needy, the sick, the ignored and the downtrodden. They saw how He held His composure when confronted by the religious “big-wigs” who were so used to having everything their own way.

Mingled with their seeing was their hearing – time and time again in the Gospel accounts we read how the teachings of this Man aroused amazement, astonishment, wonder – “for He taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes” (eg., Matthew 7.28-29). When the Pharisees “sent officers to take Him” (John 7.32), we read how the officers returned without Him with the simple words, “Never man spake like this man” (7.46).

From all this seeing and hearing, everyone was left to make up their own minds about Jesus. Multitudes were convinced that He was truly the long-promised Messiah, and joyfully believed in Him because of all that they saw of Him and heard from Him. Others of course took a different view, for although they saw and heard the same things regarding Jesus, they realised He was a direct threat to “the System” and had to be got rid of. So His enemies accused Him of casting out “devils through Beelzebub the chief of the devils” (Luke 11.15), or of repeatedly breaking “the law”, notably over the keeping of the Sabbath (egs., Mark 3.1-6 / John 9, especially verses 16, 22, 28-34 and 35-38 / John 11.46-54).

But whatever He did in His Gospel ministry Jesus always shone as a light – in His case He was and is THE Light - and it is good for us to remember that we and every other person on the planet are also shining as lights. We can't help this, it just happens! What each of us really is, in terms of our character, deeds and words, shines forth as a light, which is seen by those around us and inevitably makes a difference to them, be it in great or small ways, and for better or worse. We see examples of this inevitable light-shining throughout Scripture (eg., Adam, Enoch, Noah, Nimrod, Jacob, Moses, Samuel, Saul, Ahab, Elijah, Jeremiah, Daniel; Mary, Joseph, John the Baptist, Herod, Peter, Stephen, Saul of Tarsus then Paul, Barnabas and Philip), and also around us today. The light shone by some people is wholesome and helpful, and by others, rather the opposite.

The light which is to shine forth from Jesus' own disciples is to be “in a league of its own”, for Jesus tells us plainly in the Sermon on the Mount – “Ye are the light of the world” (Matthew 5.14a). What this is to mean for us in practice we gather from Jesus' words in John 9.5, “As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world”. But Jesus is no longer “in the world”! - we are. Hence Jesus has told us that, as His disciples, we shine in the world today with the very light that He Himself shone forth throughout His Gospel ministry when He was physically present in the world.

We notice that this is not an instruction as to something we are to do, or a promise of future blessing from the Lord: no, it is a statement of fact – we are the light of the

world! This extraordinary fact only becomes a fact and remains a fact because we are “with Jesus”, believing, abiding, obeying, as closely as His first disciples learned to do (eg., Acts 4.13 end). It is as we stay close to Him day by day that the light shining forth from our own lives will be a Christ-filled light rather than an us-filled light, for of course we, as mere “us”, are a million miles from being the light of the world if left to ourselves.

At this time of Old Year and New Year it is appropriate to take spiritual stock of ourselves. As far as we can tell and without becoming self-obsessed, is the light emanating from our lives a Christ-pointing, Christ-glorifying, Christ-obeying light? To put it another way, are others likely to be blessed, helped, encouraged, and drawn towards Christ by how we are living our own lives? The answers to such questions will probably be, “Sometimes”, in which case, we know what needs to be done!

By God’s grace and by the Holy Spirit may we have become truer Christ-lights in twelve months’ time than we are now, and meanwhile a hearty rendering of Psalm 98 serves well as we enter 2018.

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