

Fil-Am Community Church

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25 March 2012

Key Verse: Matthew 5:14-16

“GIVING YOUR TESTIMONY”

A Peanuts cartoon showed Peppermint Patty talking to Charlie Brown in which she said, “Guess what, Chuck? The first day of school, and I got sent to the principal’s office. It was your fault, Chuck.” Charlie Brown responds, “My fault? How could it be my fault? Why do you say everything is my fault?” To which she declares, “You’re my friend, aren’t you, Chuck? You should have been a better influence on me.”

While Peppermint Patty was trying to pass the buck, she was also speaking some truth. We should be a good influence on those around us.

People are watching us. I heard of a minister who was making a wooden trellis to support a climbing vine. As he was pounding away, he noticed that a little boy was watching him. The youngster didn’t say a word, so the preacher kept on working, thinking the lad would leave. But he didn’t. Pleased at the thought that his work was being admired, the pastor finally said, “Are you trying to pick up some pointers on gardening?” “No,” he replied. “I’m just waiting to hear what a preacher says when he hits his thumb with a hammer.”

We are always influencing someone, either positively or negatively. People are watching you! What do they see? What they observe has an influence on them. And it should. Jesus has commanded us to be influencers of men. And we can influence them only if we reflect his nature and character. Just like light.

We're on the last part of our 4-part series on "Giving Like Jesus". We've looked at three parables of Jesus and saw how they relate to our giving with respect to our time, our treasure, and our talents. This morning, we're going to look at "Giving our Testimony."

Please open your Bibles with me in Matthew 5: 14-16. Let us read together: *"You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven."*

Notice that when Jesus said we are the light of the world, he was not stating that as a suggestion. He was stating a fact. Jesus says, "YOU are the light of the world." No 'ifs, ands, or buts about it.' Jesus doesn't say you are like the light. He says YOU are the light. This is a major part of our calling. It's our purpose as his disciples. It's who we are and why we live in this world. Once

we accept Jesus into our lives, we are automatically tasked with functioning as the light of the world.

Light is a very common metaphor in the Bible. Along with darkness, light is often used to contrast knowledge and ignorance. Here, it almost certainly stands for the world's opportunity to perceive the truth about Jesus. The world is "in the dark" about God, but Christians "turn on the lights". Light allows people to see. Christians allow the world to understand how much God loves them and what Jesus has done to restore their relationship with him.

Being the light of the world, we actually carry out the same purpose that Jesus had in coming to earth. The gospel of John says that when Jesus was born,

John 1:9 The true light that gives light to every man was coming into the world. Jesus himself said,

John 8:12 "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life."

John 12:46 I have come into the world as a light, so that no one who believes in me should stay in darkness.

John 12:36 Put your trust in the light while you have it, so that you may become sons of light."

Jesus came to earth to show men that God loved them and to demonstrate what he was prepared to do to have a relationship with them. In a dark, dark world, that revelation was like a piercing bright light.

2 Corinthians 4:6 For God... made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ.

But now, Jesus is gone. He has left the earth and he has left us to fill the role of bringing light to the world, of bringing the world knowledge of God's love and forgiveness. While he was yet in the world, Jesus gave a testimony of his life. And such was his testimony that in Luke 2:52, it says, "*And Jesus grew in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men.*" Jesus wants us to give a testimony also of our lives. A testimony that would bless others and in turn give praise to God. That's what Jesus means when he says, *Matthew 5:14 "You are the light of the world.*

Light, however, can become ineffective. How? By being hidden. Light is meant to be seen and to allow people to see. Hiding it defeats the purpose of light. Again, in verse 15, Jesus says,

[15] Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house.

The purpose of lighting a lamp was so everyone could see. If you put it under something, then the purpose was defeated. And you would be crazy to do that.

In what way Christians hide their light? In the face of persecution. When persecuted, a Christian might be tempted to hide his identity. But Jesus says if people don't know about our relationship with Jesus, then it defeats the purpose of our "layover" here on earth. That's the way it is with our witness in the world. If we are going to be effective in the role that Jesus gave us as his followers, then we need to be visible.

Some Christians also hide their light because they are ashamed. They are ashamed because they don't have a good testimony. Maybe they have a secret sin or a blatant sin. They know in their hearts that what they're doing doesn't please God and so they don't want others to discover they're Christians. If you're guilty about this, well and good. That means the Holy Spirit is working in your life. That's a start. The next step is to confess this sin to God, ask for forgiveness, and then you can be restored to God. Then, let your shine before men. Remember, God doesn't take anything against you. He loves you and wants to use you despite who you are, despite of what you've been.

Others are hiding their light under the bowl of apathy. They don't seem to care that a lost world is going to Hell around them. What a tragic shape for a Christian to find themselves in! We need to have the heart the Rich Man in Hell had regarding the souls of his five brothers, Luke 16. We ought to be

consumed with the idea that people are dying without Jesus everyday! They are perishing and we hold in our hands that antidote! If we really cared, we would tell them about Him!

A Hindu trader in India once asked a missionary, "What do you put on your face to make it shine?" With surprise the man of God answered, "I don't put anything on it!" His questioner began to lose patience and said emphatically, "Yes, you do! All of you who believe in Jesus seem to have it. I've seen it in the towns of Agra and Surat, and even in the city of Bombay." Suddenly the Christian understood, and his face glowed even more as he said, "Now I know what you mean, and I will tell you the secret. It's not something we put on from the outside but something that comes from within. It's the reflection of the light of God in our hearts."

[16] In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.

We must allow ourselves to be visible to the world around us. Notice the emphasis here in verse 16 is allowing the world to see our good deeds. Not only should we be good, but we should let the world see our goodness. My goodness, the world should see our goodness.

The hope, the goal, is that people will give praise to God. This is an important point to catch. The goal is not that people will say, "What great people those Christians are. Look at all the wonderful things they do to help

people. Look at how honorable their lives are.” Rather, the goal is that people will say, “What a great God they have.”

You know, the only way that will happen is that if we make it clear that the reason why we are living moral lives and doing good deeds is because we are following Jesus. If we don't give God the credit, then we are not being a light to the world. I think this means that in every good thing we do for our fellow man, it is important that we give God the credit. If we do good, but fail to point people to Jesus, then we haven't done what light is supposed to do. Being “light” means that people are able to SEE that God is the source, and purpose and cause of our goodness.

The apostle Peter repeats the same idea in his letter.

1 Peter 2:11-12 Dear friends, I urge you, as aliens and strangers in the world, to abstain from sinful desires, which war against your soul.

[12] Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us.

Once again, the emphasis is on people giving God glory because they can clearly see our goodness. That is why our purity is so important. I know it's hard to be pure in this impure world. Everywhere we go, there are things that distract us and tempt us. Evil is just a touch away or a click way. In your homes, for example, we must be careful of what we see and hear on the TV, on the internet.

If anyone asks you to show the history of your surfing on the net, would you do that willingly or would you be ashamed? The point is, the things that enter our eyes and ears get lodged in our minds and are translated into actions. As the saying goes, “Garbage in, garbage out.”

OK, so we know what Jesus says we should be: a visible presence in the world that attracts people to God because they see and experience our goodness.

But just how do we go about that? How do we function as the light of the world? How can we make sure that the people of the world get to see the good things that God has produced in our lives?

In the rest of the time we have, I’d like to look at some of the things we’ve tried. And then I’d like to suggest what we need to do, what I think Jesus had in mind when he told us through this metaphor that we should be a visible example to the world of the goodness that God can produce in a human being.

What We’ve Tried

As we consider the issue of our visibility in the world, first, let’s look at a couple of things that we’ve tried.

Isolation

The first is isolation. It probably first started as an attempt to preserve our own goodness, to keep ourselves, as James 1:27 says, from being “polluted by the world”. But in an effort to do things differently than the world, we created organizations that would allow us to spend our time with believers instead of unbelievers. Besides various church activities, we created Christian businessmen’s directories so we could do business with other Christians. We built Christian schools for our kids or schooled them at home. Soon many other organizations started popping up:

Christian radio stations, Christian publishers, Christian counselors, Christian musicians, Christian newspapers, Christian artists, Christian television and Christian movies. The more immoral the world around us has become, the more alternative Christian organizations have multiplied.

I’m not saying that there’s anything wrong with these things. They all have their advantages. They all have their place. My point is, they also all tend to isolate believers from the culture at large. Though Jesus decided NOT to pull us out of the world, sometimes we have pulled ourselves out.

While there is nothing wrong with these Christian alternatives in and of themselves, the more occupied we are with other believers, the less involved we are with unbelievers; the more isolated we become from the people of the world, the more we need to work at building new connections with the folks

that God intends to see us. Isolation makes us invisible; it hides the light that we are meant to shine.

But isn't this isolation necessary in order to keep the church morally pure? Listen to what Paul said to the Corinthians:

1 Corinthians 5:9-11 I have written you in my letter not to associate with sexually immoral people" [10] not at all meaning the people of this world who are immoral... In that case you would have to leave this world. [11] But now I am writing you that you must not associate with anyone who calls himself a brother but is immoral.

The way we keep the church pure is by dealing with sin in the church, not by isolating ourselves from sinners in the world. If our lights are going to be seen by the world, then we must be involved in the world, not isolated from it.

Proclamation

A second thing that we have tried is proclamation. Usually from our isolated position, we try to spread the good news about Jesus with persuasive words. Stop to think for a minute about how most non-Christians might hear the message of the Bible today.

It's true that some people wander into churches and hear the gospel, but most do not. Some of the most prominent tools are TV evangelists and preachers, or big evangelistic crusades like Billy Graham's. Then there are gospel tracts or books, people who go door-to-door, and street preachers.

Once again, there is nothing wrong with these tools of communication. Each of them has helped people meet and trust Jesus. But you know what else? Each of them tends to be impersonal and non-relational. Each of them relies heavily on words instead of example. But listen to what Paul says about his ministry among the Corinthians:

1 Corinthians 2:4 My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit's power.

It isn't that Paul didn't speak to them. He certainly explained the gospel. But he also lived out the power of the gospel in his own life, right in front of them, right where they could SEE it. Again, I'm not saying that there is anything wrong with crusades or tracts or street preaching. In fact, I'm going to encourage you to take one or two or three of this tract and share it, give it

to people around you. What I'm saying is that it is not enough. If we are going to be the lights of the world that God intends us to be, then we need to be seen and not just heard. To be visible, we need to get up close and personal.

I think that whenever these tools we've mentioned incorporate personal contact between an unbeliever and a believer, then they tend to have a greater impact. Let's continue to use whatever tool will help someone discover Jesus.

What We Need to Do

But I also think that there are other, more visible, more effective ways for us to shine the light of truth on the world. Here are some things we can do to become more visible:

Make Contact

Get out and rub shoulders with the people of the world. Many of you work in environments everyday with unbelievers. Some of you, perhaps, belong to the Boy Scouts or PTA or a community sports team. What a great opportunity to get to know people and allow them to see the light of Jesus in you through your goodness. When Jesus left us here, that's exactly what he intended. Listen to the words of his final prayer for his followers:

John 17:11, 15, 18 I will remain in the world no longer, but they are still in the world, and I am coming to you. ...

[15] My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one. ... [18] As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world.

We are to remain “unpolluted by the world” but the place we belong is “in the world”, right in the middle of it, involved everyday with people who need to see the light of Jesus in us.

Build Relationships

I think it’s clear that the normal avenue for the truth of the gospel is through relationship. It doesn’t need to be a long-standing relationship, but it must be relational. We must care for unbelievers as people, not as potential converts. Our love should be demonstrated in our willingness to serve. Here’s the way Paul described his own ministry among unbelievers in the Greek city of Thessalonica:

1 Thessalonians 1:5 You know how we lived among you for your sake. ...[2:7] We were gentle among you, like a mother caring for her little children.

[8] We loved you so much that we were delighted to share with you not only the gospel of God but our lives as well, because you had become so dear to us.

Notice that the message was communicated in both words and works. Paul and his partners let these people see them live life.

They demonstrated on a day-to-day basis what life in Jesus looked like. The Thessalonians could see the goodness that Jesus produced in his followers and so they longed to experience that kind of life too.

[9] Surely you remember, brothers, our toil and hardship; we worked night and day in order not to be a burden to anyone while we preached the gospel.

Be Available

When you live that kind of goodness out in front of others, it will cause some to desire the same kind of life we have. The third thing we need to do is be ready for the day when someone, drawn by our goodness, asks us where we got it. We need to be ready to tell them where they can get it, too.

1 Peter 3:15 Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have.

I read the story of this guy, named Chip, who worked with a waiter named Kevin. Kevin was about as immoral and godless a person as you can imagine. Kevin knew that Chip was a Christian and occasionally he'd tease him about being such a goody-goody.

He didn't seem to have any interest at all in spiritual things. But Kevin was married and had a little girl. And one day he and his wife decided that in order to give their little girl a proper upbringing, they ought to do something for her spiritual education. They were looking for a church. How would they find one? Well, Kevin, naturally approached Chip. He asked if he could recommend a place where they could go. When he wanted to find a

Christian, he knew where to find one, because Chip was not afraid to be a visible light in a dark place.

Point to Jesus

The final point is that we need to point people to Jesus. It isn't enough to let people see our goodness. We need to let them know that it is Jesus that makes us good and produces that goodness in us.

Philippians 2:14-16 Do everything without complaining or arguing, [15] so that you may become blameless and pure, children of God without fault in a crooked and depraved generation, in which you shine like stars in the universe [16] as you hold out the word of life.

I want you to notice the last phrase. "You shine, AS you hold out the word of life." It's really important that we follow up our good behavior and our good deeds by pointing people to Jesus. If we don't then we are shining our light on emptiness instead of shining it on the world's only hope.

You are the light of the world. As you live out this goodness visibly in front of the people of the world, your life will point them to Jesus where they too can find life that is real life.

That is the task that Jesus has left you on the planet to accomplish. We can still worship him when we get to heaven. We can still serve him when we get to heaven. We can still fellowship with each other when we get to heaven.

But one thing we cannot do in heaven is help other people discover how they can get there too.

Woodrow Wilson told the story of being in a barbershop one time. “I was sitting in a barber chair when I became aware that a powerful personality had entered the room. A man had come quietly in upon the same errand as myself to have his hair cut and sat in the chair next to me. Every word the man uttered, though it was not in the least didactic, showed a personal interest in the man who was serving him. And before I got through with what was being done to me I was aware I had attended an evangelistic service, because Mr. D. L. Moody was in that chair. I purposely lingered in the room after he had left and noted the singular affect that his visit had brought upon the barber shop. They talked in undertones. They did not know his name, but they knew something had elevated their thoughts, and I felt that I left that place as I should have left a place of worship.”

That is the kind of God desires us all to be! If you were to be very honest today, would you have to confess that your light wasn't as bright as it should be? Maybe your heart is like those old kerosene lamps we used as a child. They would get soot on the inside of the glass the light just couldn't shine through like it was supposed to. But, when we cleaned up the inside, the light came through again.

Has God spoken to you about your own testimony? Are you a light for Jesus? Could you be doing better? Are you even saved? Do you have people on your

heart that you want to bring to the Lord in prayer tonight? Whatever the need, respond to Him and let Him have His perfect way in your life!

What are you going to do with your light? Here's what I intend to do with mine:

This little light of mine, I'm gonna let it shine

This little light of mine, I'm gonna let it shine

This little light of mine, I'm gonna let it shine

Let it shine, Let it shine, Let it shine.

Let Us pray.....