

The Lord provides us with all kinds of pictures to carry around in our minds and hearts that we might remember his teachings. This morning we're going to talk about "light" and how this is a word of transformation for our walk with God and with one another.

OPENING PRAYER

MATTHEW 6:22-23: "The eye is the lamp of the body; so then if your eye is clear, your whole body will be full of light. ²³ But if your eye is bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light that is in you is darkness, how great is the darkness!"

We're in the nasty, nutty season of political mayhem. Two-months before the votes are cast, and we are thrilled. Not. The political malaise is palpable; it's making us sick socially and culturally as a people. But there is a solution in Christ. However, it's a challenge: It's a challenge for the church to make a difference in the world.

Which is to say, the world doesn't care about the church when it's only a mirror of itself; it knows what darkness is. Thank you very much. Consider a story that came out of Aretha Franklin's funeral, how the preacher—Bishop Ellis—had to apologize to a singer, 35 years his junior, because he "touched" her. Some called it groping. Others called it assault. And I'm angry. I'm angry at that preacher for not being able to keep his paws off the girl. I cringe to think about how many people shrugged their shoulders and said, "I'm not surprised. Christians are no different than anyone else; they're nothing but a bunch of hypocrites," or worse.

This kind of behavior is what Jesus spoke against when he said, **Matthew 6:22-23, "The eye is the lamp of the body; so then if your eye is clear, your whole body will be full of light. ²³ But if your eye is bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light that is in you is darkness, how great is the darkness!"**

One of the big challenges of Bible study is understanding the cultural context of what is written. As a case in point, the Greeks believed that we absorb spiritual

light into our bodies through meditation. If we meditate on that which is sacred, we will be purified. If we meditate on that which is carnal, we will defile our souls.

On the other hand, Jews and Eastern philosophers believed that spiritual light begins from within a person's heart. The Jews believed, for example, that when Noah was born, his parents saw that his eyes were filled with light and **"the whole house glowed like the sun" (Enoch 106:2).**

Their belief probably came from Old Testament prophets like Daniel, who wrote that the Lord's eyes are like **"flaming torches" (Daniel 10:6)**, and Zechariah who wrote that God's eyes are like **"seven lamps" (Zechariah 4:10).**

So the Greeks believed that we catch the light, that it comes from outside of ourselves and it transforms us. And the Jews thought that light comes from within us, from that spark of divinity which lingers in us because God is our creator.

So do we catch light or shine light from within? I think Jesus was good with both. He was talking to Jews who had been influenced by the Greeks. He wanted them to think about how they catch light from God's himself, and then about how they then reflect that light back out into the world to reveal the Lord's truth, God's love, God's wisdom, God's plan for eternity.

Let's think about catching God's light for a moment. What we "look" at or meditate on shapes our souls. If I spend my time jonesing over material things, worrying about things I have no control over, obsessing over other people's business, or any number of other things, then this is what will shine light or cast darkness on my soul. It will shape what I become in my heart. You know the expression, "You are what you eat"? Well, how about, You are what you meditate on?

If our souls are to produce light, we must meditate on godly things like God's Word, God's instruction. Personally, when I'm feeling unhappy or discouraged or a little depressed, I present myself to the Lord that he might again instill in me his light. I do it like this. I set aside a period of time—it might be 5-minutes or an hour, depending on how deep my sense of frustration seems to be. I find a place to sit down and relax, and then I take a piece of paper and a pencil and I begin to review what's presently going on in my life. I think about my work and things I need to do there. I think about my home and bills and projects which are in

disarray. And I think about relationships which are in some state of disrepair. Perhaps there's a person I need to apologize to. Perhaps there's a credit card bill that's hanging over my head which I need to get paid off. Maybe I've procrastinated on a project at work which I need to get busy on.

After I've made my list of things which I know are casting a shadow over my heart, I pray through that list, remembering God's promises and commands, such as, "I will never you nor forsake you," and "Cast all your worries on him for he cares for you," and "Come to me, all ye who are weak and heavy laden, and I will give you rest." And then I ball up that piece of paper with my list and throw it away, knowing that the Lord will answer my prayers and guide me in his light.

When we come face-to-face with our own mortality, we see that there is only darkness within our hearts. But when we meditate on Christ's Cross and Resurrection, we are changed, filled with light from above. Jesus is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world, and he sets us free! This Word is light from above, a light which shines down onto that path in the valley of the shadow of death which we walk every day of our lives. But because of this light, this path we follow brings us into the presence of the Most High God, that place that is filled to overflowing with love, and joy, and peace.

About Bishop Ellis who touched the singer at Aretha Franklin's funeral: He had the chance to shine a little light into that place, in that place that was filled with people who were broken, to encourage people with words, God's words, the light of his savior Jesus. But no, he chose not to shine light. But he cast a shadow on the Cross of his Lord Jesus. May God have mercy on his soul.

St. Paul wrote, 2nd Corinthians 4:6, "God, who said, 'Let light shine out of darkness,' has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ."

Brothers and sisters in Christ, we have been blessed with everything we need to carry forth in this ministry the Lord has entrusted to us. We are filled with light because the Lord has filled up our hearts with his own light.

Right after the Beatitudes, Jesus said, **Matthew 5:14,16, "You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden....¹⁶ (So) let your light so shine**

before others that they may see your good works and glorify your Father who is in heaven.”

Friends in Christ, this week let us fill up our hearts with the light of Christ by meditating on his Word, spending time in prayer and Christian fellowship, and performing acts of service.

This week, despite the political ugliness all around, let us shine some light in our own homes and among our neighbors and coworkers, being ever mindful that what we say with our lips and what we do with our hands makes a difference.

And this week let us share this Good News with another person who really needs to hear it, in the name of Jesus. Amen.