

Well, good morning! Good morning! How are we? Good. Good. It's so good to be with all of you this morning. I also want to say good morning to those of you joining us in our online community. We're so glad you're worshiping with us and studying God's Word with us, wherever and whenever you might be.

And if I haven't had the pleasure of meeting you yet, my name is Doug. I'm one of the pastors here and I'd love to meet you, hear a little bit of your story, and get to know you. So please don't hesitate to come up and introduce yourself after the service.

You know, I've been thinking a lot this week about where we actually live out most of our faith, because the truth is, most of the Christian life doesn't happen in this room. We gather together here for an hour or so on Sunday morning, and this time is incredibly important, but then we leave this place and go back into our normal, everyday lives. We go home to our families, tomorrow morning many of us will go back to work, some will go back to school, we'll interact with our neighbors, we'll run errands, we'll go to the grocery store, some of us will go on vacation, and we'll have a hundred different interactions with people throughout the week. And really, those ordinary places are where the vast majority of our lives with Jesus are actually lived.

I think most of us really do want to represent Jesus well in those places. We want the way we treat our family to reflect Jesus. The way we interact with people at the store or at work, we want to reflect Jesus well. We want the way we respond when somebody frustrates us or when things don't go our way, when we're tired or impatient, to look different because we follow Jesus. And I really think most of us who follow Jesus genuinely want that. We want people to encounter something of Jesus in us.

But here's where I struggle with that, because to be honest with you, there are a lot of times when my life doesn't look like Jesus. I'm working through something right now that has been eating at me for a few months. There was a situation in the coaching area of my life where I was treated unfairly, and over the last few months I've watched that hurt begin to take root in me as resentment and anger. And something happened again recently that just dug the knife a little deeper and I thought, I don't want to. I don't want to. And I start to justify saying, what they did was wrong. How they treated me was wrong. How it has affected my children, my family, it's wrong. I don't want to forgive, I don't want to let go.

It's embarrassing. The hypocrisy of having been forgiven so much. And it's not just that. There are plenty of times when my life doesn't look much like Jesus at all. Times when I'm impatient, selfish, times when someone's abrasive to me and everything inside of me wants to give that same attitude right back to them.

And it's so easy in those moments to feel like I just need to try harder at this Christian thing, "come on Doug, you're a pastor! you're a professional Christian, be more patient, be kinder, serve more, forgive, share my faith more." I feel like I gotta do more good things. I gotta be a better Christian.

But here's the thing, the more I do that, before long, following Jesus begins to feel like this exhausting process of trying to manufacture a version of myself that looks more spiritual than I actually feel.

But Jesus says something super interesting in our text this morning that carries so much weight. If you have your bible with you this morning, turn with me to Matthew chapter 5. I'll be reading out of the ESV and I'll pick it up in verse 14. I really want you to see this with me cause I think He says something incredibly important in the order of what He says.

¹⁴ "You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden.

¹⁵ Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. ¹⁶ In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven."

Do you see where Jesus begins? He looks at His disciples and He says, "you are the light of the world." He doesn't say "you need to become the light of the world" or "if you work hard enough, if you become more patient, kinder, if you become spiritual enough, eventually you might shine." No, "you are the light of the world." Before Jesus ever tells them what they're supposed to do, He tells them who they are. Before there is activity there is identity.

But when Jesus calls us the light of the world, He isn't only telling us what is true of us in Him. He's also naming the calling He's given us together. Being the light is an identity we receive and a calling we faithfully live out.

But that leaves me wondering, if I'm the light of the world, why does shining sometimes feel like something I have to work so hard to produce? What is this light? Where does it come from? And how does it actually become visible in the ordinary places where God has put me?

And then, along with that, in John 8, Jesus makes another statement that probably sounds just as familiar as the Matthew 5, He says, "I am the light of the world." So, Jesus says He's the light of the world and that we're the light of the world. I think for us to really understand what it means to let our light shine like a city on a hill, we need to unpack this.

So let's start with the source of the light. In John 8:12, Jesus says, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life." So Jesus is saying He doesn't just have the light,

or point us toward the light, He says, "I am the light." And this is how John describes Jesus earlier in John, back in chapter 1 where he says of Jesus, "In Him was life, and the life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it."

So back in Matthew when Jesus is talking to His followers and says, "you are the light of the world," He isn't saying that somehow we have become the source of this light ourselves. No, Jesus is the source.

I think Paul helps us understand how these two truths fit together in Ephesians 5:8. Listen carefully here to the language Paul uses. He says, "At one time you were in darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light (for the fruit of light is found in all that is good and right and true." He says, "you are light...in the Lord)."

Again, Paul is not saying we gotta clean ourselves up, behave better and we'll shine. No, he says there's been a change in who we are. Are you getting this? Are you seeing it? We were darkness, but now we are light. And the reason that is true is because we are in the Lord. We are united with Christ. We belong to Jesus, the One who is Himself the Light of the World, and because we are united with Him, His life is now at work within us.

So, this should change the way we hear Jesus when He says, "Let your light shine." If I'm the source of the light, then the pressure is on me. I've got to produce it. I've got to manufacture kindness when someone is unkind to me, and somehow work hard enough to make myself look like Jesus. But, friends, that's just not sustainable. Eventually, I get tired, frustrated, discouraged, or I just get really good at pretending.

But the Christian life isn't about producing spiritual life on our own. It

begins with the life of Christ already present within us and the Spirit increasingly transforming who we are. That's a very different way of thinking about spiritual growth. Instead of asking, "how can I work harder to shine brighter" the question becomes "How does the light of Christ actually become more visible through me?"

There's this image from the Old Testament that has been stuck in my mind all week as I've been thinking about this. In Exodus 34, Moses has been up on Mt. Sinai in the presence of God, and after spending this time with the Lord, Moses comes back down the mountain to the people. And when Aaron and the people see Moses they see that the skin of his face is shining, so much so that they were afraid to come up to him. The glory of God is being reflected from the face of Moses. It's wild. But here's the detail I just love in the text, in verse 29 we read, "Moses did not know that the skin of his face shone because he had been talking with God."

Oh my gosh, this is so good. Moses didn't know he was shining. He wasn't up on the mountain thinking, "okay Moses, when you get back down there, you better shine. These people need to see some radiance! Come on Moses, try harder!" Guys, Moses wasn't trying to manufacture anything. Moses had been in the presence of God, and when he came down the mountain, the evidence of having been in God's presence was visible to the people around him. Friends, presence precedes radiance.

Now, I want to be careful here because Moses' experience was pretty unique. And so I'm not saying that if you spend enough time praying this week your face is gonna start glowing! But, if that happens, please come find me and let me know cause we got some stuff to talk about!

But, Paul actually picks up this imagery in his letter to the Corinthians. In 2 Corinthians 3 he connects the imagery of Moses to the transforming work

God is doing in us. He says that as we behold the glory of the Lord, we "are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another." In other words, as we look to Christ, as we live in communion with Christ, the Holy Spirit is actually transforming us to become more like Christ.

Are you seeing the difference? The answer isn't to stare at ourselves and constantly ask, "am I shining enough? Am I doing enough? Am I being a good enough Christian? Moses was looking toward God! I think a lot of us need to stop obsessing over our own radiance and start paying more attention to His presence. Don't manufacture radiance; pursue presence.

Because presence precedes radiance. As we draw near to the One who is the light and behold Him, His Spirit transforms us. Increasingly, the life of Jesus within us begins to become visible through us.

And this is exactly where Jesus goes next in Matthew 5. He says, "in the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works." Again, we gotta look at the order. The good works don't make you the light; they make the light visible. We can say it this way: the works are the fruit, not the root.

They grow out of this new life that we have in Jesus.

Now, that doesn't mean obedience is passive or effortless. Jesus still tells us, "Let your light shine." Grace doesn't eliminate effort; it changes the source, purpose, and character of our effort...are you with me here? We aren't working to earn an identity or to persuade God to love us. We're living from the identity and love we have already received in Christ, through the strength His Spirit supplies.

And we have to guard this carefully, because performance Christianity can quietly sneak into a church. We can begin measuring spiritual

maturity by how much someone does, how disciplined they appear, or how busy they are with Christian activity. And before long, we aren't obeying because we know we are loved; we're obeying to prove that we're worthy of love—to God, to other people, or even to ourselves. There is no room for that in the gospel. Spiritual disciplines and good works are wonderful servants, but they are terrible saviors. We don't obey for acceptance; in Christ, we obey from acceptance.

But that doesn't make obedience optional, passive, or easy. Sometimes letting the light shine requires costly, deliberate obedience.

Sometimes we forgive while our emotions are still resisting it. Sometimes we serve when it would be easier to protect our own comfort. Sometimes we confess, resist sin, practice generosity, or do the right thing when it costs us something. The light comes from Christ, but we are still called to faithfully walk in it.

This is what Paul emphasizes in Ephesians 2. He says that we were dead in our sin, but God, because of His great mercy, made us alive with Christ. We are saved by grace through faith, "not a result of works, so that no one may boast." But then Paul immediately says, "For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them."

Are you seeing the order? Good works matter tremendously, but they have to be in the right place. We aren't saved by good works; we are saved by grace for good works. We don't obey so that God will save us, love us, accept us, or make us light. We obey because, in Christ, He already has. The works are the fruit of God's grace, not the reason we receive it.

And here's what I love about this: most of the good works probably aren't gonna feel spectacular. Most of us aren't going to leave here today and do something that changes the world by Tuesday. We're going back to those ordinary places we talked about earlier. We're going home. We're going to work. We're going back to school. We're going on vacation. We're going to interact with neighbors and coworkers and family members and strangers, and those are the places where the light of Christ becomes visible.

Maybe at home it looks like being the first one to apologize instead of needing to win the argument. Maybe it's in how you treat your brother or sister or talk to your parents. Maybe at work it's doing the right thing and not cutting corners when that would be easier. Maybe it's showing patience to somebody who doesn't deserve your patience, or extending forgiveness when everything inside of you wants to hold onto that hurt.

Maybe it's noticing the person everybody else overlooks, or being generous, being hospitable or being present when someone's hurting. These things may seem small, but what if they're not small at all? What if God has actually placed us where we are because that's exactly where He intends His light to shine?

And there's something else here I don't want us to miss. When Jesus says, "you are the light of the world," the word "you" is plural. He's talking to His disciples together. That's why the picture isn't just a little individual candle somewhere; He says, "A city set on a hill cannot be hidden." Jesus isn't only saying that I'm the light. He's saying that we are the light. Together as the people of God, the way we love one another, forgive one another, serve one another, care for hurting people, welcome people in, and faithfully live in our community becomes a visible testimony to the world around us.

God has placed us right where He wants His light to shine. He has placed you in your home, your workplace, your school, your neighborhood, your community, and wherever you might find yourself this week. Faithfulness doesn't require creating some extraordinary spiritual moment. Stay close to Jesus and faithfully live out the calling He has given you right where you are.

And ultimately, Jesus tells us where all of this is headed. He 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." That's the goal. The goal isn't that people look at us and think, "wow, what an incredible Christian." The goal is that they look at the Foothills family and think, "what an incredible church." I mean, I hope they do, lol. But, no – the light is meant to point beyond us to the One who is the source of the light, so that people see something different in us and ultimately give glory to our Father.

And I think that's what everyday faithfulness looks like. It's probably not gonna be spectacular most of the time. It's going to be a thousand ordinary moments of consistent faithfulness in the places God has already put us. And that means I have some work to do with the resentment I mentioned earlier. I need to bring it honestly into the presence of Jesus. I need to confess what has been taking root in me. I need to remember how much I have been forgiven and trust the Spirit to transform what I cannot transform on my own. And then I need to obey. When the opportunity to forgive comes, I want to walk faithfully in that direction—even if my emotions haven't completely caught up yet. That obedience won't earn God's grace; it will be the fruit of the grace I have already received.

Friends, don't manufacture radiance; pursue daily presence. Presence precedes radiance. Stay close to Jesus. And when I say, "Stay close to Jesus," I don't want that to just sound like some vague spiritual thing that you leave here going, "Okay...but how?" We actually want to help you

with that. We have a quiet time guide that can help you learn how to spend daily time with Jesus in His Word, and we have a prayer guide that can help you develop a life of prayer. And if you've never really known how to do those things, please grab those resources. They're not another Christian checklist. They're simply tools to help you spend time in the presence of Jesus.

And we need each other in this too. That's why we have Bible studies where we can dig into God's Word and grow as disciples, and community groups where we can actually know one another, encourage one another, pray for one another, and walk through life together. Remember, Jesus didn't just say you individually are the light; He called us the light. We were never meant to follow Jesus alone.

Would you stand with me as I pray.