



Matt 5:13-16

If I were to say to you these words; the Lady Maud: what would they mean to you?

LADY MAUD VIDEO

Yes, the Lady Maud was a boat and during the 1960s it used to take people on boat trips around Felixstowe Bay and Harwich Harbour. A favourite was the one shown - out to the Cork Lightship.

CORK

The Cork was anchored offshore to indicate to shipping that there was a sand bar called the Cork Bank which was too shallow for ships. The Cork was visible from the shore and people knew which way the tide was running according to the way the ship was pointing.

Modern navigation lights and GPS mean that the lightship is no longer needed and it's now part of Felixstowe history.

LIGHTHOUSE CHURCHES

Lighthouses have been a common image in Christian thought for centuries. Just a short trawl of internet sites gave me a whole clutch of Lighthouse Churches in various parts of the world. But what's even more remarkable is that Lighthouses aren't mentioned in the Bible!

PHAROS OF ALEXANDRIA

They had been invented and one of the Seven Wonders of the World was the Pharos at Alexandria. It was a huge lighthouse where fires burned at night to guide ships to the harbour entrance - and of course to impress arrivals to Alexandria of its wealth and importance.

Lighthouses are an example of how we use light to protect mariners from the dangers that the coastline brings at night when it is impossible to find the shoreline or spot dangers unless someone marks them. Actually the same is true when we look for somewhere onshore. Lights have been used down the centuries as beacons to warn and as markers to show people the way, or where something is - very useful at night.

So why use the picture in a Christian context? Because Jesus said this of Himself.

VERSES

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

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

So we see Jesus bringing light to people, illuminating their way, guiding on their journey to eternal life.

Who's guiding you through life this morning?

VERSE

But our reading this morning gave us another important point about being light.

"You are like light for the whole world.

Jesus is the Light of the world - but the ones that bring light now are his disciples - us! It's his light that should be shining from us. Let's read on 14 *"You are like light for the whole world. A city built on a hill cannot be hid. 15 No one lights a lamp and puts it under a bowl; instead it is put on the lamp stand, where it gives light for everyone in the house. 16 In the same way your light must shine before people, so that they will see the good things you do and praise your Father in heaven.*

THAT LIGHT SHOULD BE OBVIOUS..

A city on a Hill is conspicuous. It's true - you can't miss a town on top of a hill - it's visible for miles! When people look at us they should see Jesus! His light should shine out of us. From our witness they should be able to see and understand a real faith, a living faith, a vibrant faith, a powerful faith and as

Jesus says, they will praise our Father in heaven!

.. UNLESS WE CONCEAL IT

But so often they don't see that in God's people. Why? 15 *No one lights a lamp and puts it under a bowl; instead it is put on the lamp stand, where it gives light for everyone in the house. Jesus gives us an example.* When you light a lamp, you don't hide it, you put it in a place where it will give light to everything. The whole idea of lights is to be seen, so why on earth would anyone want to conceal a light? During the War we had blackouts. Why? So the occupants could have light in their homes but the enemy would be deceived into thinking the town they were looking for was somewhere else.

The sad thing is that many believers conceal their lights and if that happens, something is wrong. In what ways do we conceal the light?

- By consciously not saying anything to anyone - being a secret believer that's so secret no-one would ever guess. Usually fear causes us to conceal our faith. In some places in the world Christians have to do that to save their lives. Actually, as we look at the scripture, we see that what should shine from us is what we do not what we say. It is the lifestyle that so often fascinates people who aren't Christians. Actions speak louder as it were. In the first 3 centuries the church was illegal and evangelism was largely banned in many places. There were no church buildings. . So why did it grow so amazingly fast. Because of how Christians lived and died. They fascinated people with an attitude to life and a lifestyle others hankered after. That's what our light shining should do.
- By concealing it by preferring to have a lifestyle that does not honour Jesus.
- By concealing it because of our own sin.

Do we want others to know about Jesus? There are lots of plans, strategies, evangelism training courses that we can go on to let people know about Jesus, but there is nothing that speaks more powerfully than a changed life, a prayerful life, a positive life, a life that reflects the power and presence of God. How does it start - by making a decision, that as I reflect on what Jesus had done for me I pray in the words of that old spiritual "This little light of mine, I'm going to let it shine - let it shine, let it shine, let it shine.

PAINTING

I want you to have a look at this painting. It was given to us last year by one of the women from Worship Academy who came to share with us last year. As you can see it's not a masterpiece or perhaps not even designed to take a prominent place in the church building. The lady in question enjoys painting and sometimes the Lord gives her a prophetic message which is not in writing, but as a picture. Look back in the OT and you'll find examples of how God commanded prophets not to speak words, but use visual aids to get His message across. I know that there are quite a few people in the church who have artistic skills, skills in poetry and musical skills. Praise God that you have them. That which is visual can be just as powerful if not more powerful than words. Don't be afraid to share what God has given you if it for the fellowship.

But, back to this painting. It had been intended to display this picture earlier and explain why it was given to us. But the opportunity never arose. Now it has arisen. I don't know her name, but the lady who painted it felt that God wanted to give us as a church this picture of a lighthouse in the midst of a stormy sea as a prophetic word. We are the light of the world and we are that lighthouse in the midst of our community. God has called us to Walton. As we look at our community we see it is one of the most troubled in Felixstowe and certainly in Suffolk. We see lots of pressures on family life, on employment, on social and financial need. And on top of that there is a generation rising that seems to have little hope or ambition. That's not my assessment but that of the local authority and the health service.

And in those storms, we have words of life and of hope. God has called us to be that lighthouse in this community. God is calling us to be lighthouses in our streets. People need to have the life and hope that can only come through Jesus Christ. Let me try and unpack that by using the picture of the lighthouse.

LIGHTHOUSES SHOW THE WAY Lighthouses are there to mark the shoreline so that people can navigate. When Jesus talks about being the light of the world he talks about never walking in darkness. He lights the way. As God's people, as He lights the way for us, we light it for others.

LIGHTHOUSES WARN OF DANGER The Cork existed not just to mark the way but to warn of danger. Lighthouses have always marked danger. We're not just called by our lives to show the right way, but to warn others of the wrong way.

LIGHTHOUSES BRING WELCOME Lighthouses are there to show the way home. For mariners, the home

lights were always a welcome sign to see in the darkness. Because people who we are a light to see us, we attract them to where God wants them to be - as His people, part of the Body of Christ. Never be afraid to advertise church. We are supposed to. What we've got to do is make it that warm and welcoming place that makes people feel they have arrived home when they become part of it.

"You are like light for the whole world. We are already a light. We no longer conceal it but show it. How can we do that. Here's a few suggestions and there are a few more on the sheet. Because we are alight only because Jesus is alight, people who use this analogy often point to the fact that prayer underpins what it means to be a light for the whole world. The most important thing about lighthouses is that they need to be built to exacting standards so they can handle all the storms, stresses and strains. In Christ we have foundations but we need to have the right building if we are to be a lighthouse in our families, in our work, amongst our friends and in our neighbourhoods.

And where does that start?

- STARTS WITH THE DESIRE TO BE LIGHT! We are the light but we must want to be that light to the world and not to conceal it. And what does that mean? *In the same way your light must shine before people, so that they will see the good things you do and praise your Father in heaven.* It's by realising that what makes the biggest impact on people is our lifestyle - how we live, what we say, how we treat others. If we've got something amazing, then people will want to be amazed too and find out what makes us different.

- WE BUILD IN PRAYER How do we start? By praying for the people around us. There are people God calls to reach total strangers. That's good. It's a noble calling. All of us have friends, neighbours, family who don't know Christ. They are not strangers. If our light can't illuminate them it probably won't illuminate anyone else. If you want to see people come to Jesus, then start praying that the light of Christ in you might start to illuminate them.

It all starts with prayer. Pray regularly for others. Become a lighthouse of prayer. Pray for your neighbours - 11 houses across 10 either side. There are other formulas you can use Most importantly - pray. Do it as a church or church group. The Worship Group[has committed itself to be a light to the people in Maidstone Road and they are exploring how they might do that. Other groups - why not try something similar.

- WE CARE Being a light is about the good works. What do we mean by that. By caring for the people we come across. It may just be listening to them and empathising with their problems, it may be just friendliness, it may be by meeting needs they have. It may be by just inviting a lonely neighbour over. In many ways this is actually just being a good neighbour, but we live in a society that has lost the sense of community that existed many years ago and we need to be reminded of something that to many of us will be obvious.

- WE FIND WE SHARE Worried about speaking to people about Jesus? Don't. People who are prayed for and cared for are incredibly open to hear about Jesus. And why not. They've been prayed for, they've been cared about - you've got their attention - just let the Holy Spirit do His work. The opportunities to share will come to you. They will be natural, not contrived and won't give you a moment's worry. You've allowed God to use you to be a lighthouse, a light to the world. Let the Spirit do His work!

*Preached by Mark Reid
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