

Are You the Light of the World?

Cheryl Roth
June 6, 2017



(14) “You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden.(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. (16) In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.” – Matt. 5:14-16

Why did I cross out the last sentence in this Bible verse? Sometimes when we read a passage in the Bible, we can miss the first part of the meaning because we get focused on the last part we read. I

want to focus most on the first sentence, and then examine how the next sentences support the meaning of the first.

If you’re a parent, you probably remember this feeling when your child was born: “You are the light of my life, nothing I’ve done until now is as valuable as you!”. When Jesus told his disciples, “You are the light of the world,” I think he was expressing God’s heart toward his children – humankind. Can you imagine when God first created Adam and Eve in the Garden, that they were the pinnacle of creation?

Innate Value or Value Based on Performance?

Too often, we connect our value to our activities, our performance and our accomplishments. Having a nice home, a good car and money makes us feel powerful and secure. Getting a college degree takes a lot of hard work and commitment, so we’re proud of that. None of this is wrong unless we use it as a measure of value – our own or anyone else’s.

Does the President of the United States have more value than a beggar on the street, or a refugee from a war torn country? I’m not getting political here, we’re talking basic human value. Consider the words of the Founding Fathers of the United States of America:

“We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the Pursuit of Happiness.” – Declaration of Independence, USA

Their understanding of human value was not at the level yet to use the word “people” instead of “men”, but we’ll forgive them for that. Historically, this proclamation was a big step forward in remembering who we truly are.

A Subtle Shift in Meaning Makes a Big Difference

Jesus proclaimed “You are the light of the world.” Then he went on to explain how that can’t be hidden. It’s only natural for a light to shine and for others to see it, and enjoy it for what it is.

Like anything else in the world, a light can be misused in many ways. But that’s not the point here. Even if something is misused or abused, that doesn’t change it’s original value.

I think Jesus was trying to teach people about their original value as God’s children. If we get stuck on the last sentence of the verse, it would be very easy to misunderstand the whole thing. Many people have done good deeds for very selfish reasons. “Good deeds” are not the evidence of your value, they are the result.

Freedom Comes from Knowing Who You Are

I believe Jesus was trying to empower people, so they could be free from limited and negative thoughts about themselves. Chapter 5 of the book of Matthew is the *Sermon on the Mount*. Verses 3 to 11 start with “How blessed are...”. At that time, people who were suffering, sorrowful, meek or persecuted probably didn’t consider themselves “blessed”. Jesus was trying to break their concepts.

How many times have you not done something because of negative self-talk or fear? For various reasons, we have all grown up with some degree of “can’t”, “shouldn’t”, or “I’m not good enough”. Sometimes we

plod through life with with all sorts of unfulfilled hopes and dreams because we just don't believe in ourselves. If we could really identify with being "the light of the world", we might accomplish those hopes and dreams, and be a lot happier as well!



Finding God's Heart Within

In the rest of the 5th chapter of Matthew Jesus talks a lot about motivation. People were confused because their leaders, who were supposed to be Godly men, were doing things for the wrong reasons. Selfishness, pride, arrogance, power and money can hide behind a righteous facade. I believe Jesus was trying to cut through the layers of confusion to uncover people's original heart and mind.

Is it possible that you are the light of the world because you are God's child? Because God actually created you in (His/Her) image? Which means that your original heart is an expression of God's heart?

Let's take a look at what other faith traditions tell us about finding God within:

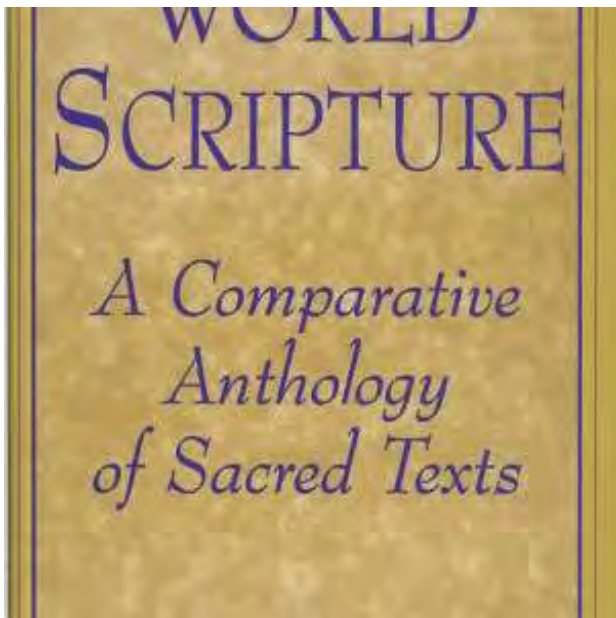
"Let a man always consider himself as if the Holy One dwells within him." – Judaism. Talmud, Taanit 11b

"I have breathed into Man of my spirit." – Islam. Qur'an 15:29

"The rich build temples to Shiva, what shall I, a poor man do? O my Lord, my legs are the pillars; my torso, the shrine; and my head, the golden pinnacle! Things standing shall fall, but the moving ever shall stay!" – Hinduism. Basavanna, Vacana 820

"Every being has the Buddha nature. This is the self." Buddhism. Mahaparinirvana Sutra 214

"The deity is immanent in man and man is inherent in the deity; there is neither the divine nor the human; there is no difference in essence at all between them." – Shinto, Genchi Kato



So, it seems that all religions tell us that human beings are divine, that God dwells in us. Jesus commanded the people to let their light shine before others, and to do good deeds so that God could be made manifest in this world. Unlike human parents, God is invisible and beyond time and space. Could it be that God is "all-knowing" because God is everywhere all the time, having the same experience that all humanity is having?

Perhaps we underestimate ourselves. We can search high and low in this world trying to figure out what's right or wrong, and trying to find happiness. We can do a thousand good deeds and still end up depressed if we don't feel loved. But once we experience the love of God that dwells within each and every one of us, we are filled with joy and empowered to be who we really are.

"God is love, and whoever abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him." – 1 John 4:16

"No other power is greater than your God-centered love. You have a weapon as powerful as an atomic bomb. No other power can compete with the power of love." – Sun Myung Moon