

Scriptures and Doctrine :: THE LAMP AND THE BUSHEL

THE LAMP AND THE BUSHEL - posted by pastorfrin, on: 2008/5/30 8:48

THE LAMP AND THE BUSHEL

Alexander Maclaren

‘Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on an hill cannot be hid. 15. Neither do men light a candle, and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick; and it giveth light unto all that are in the house. 16. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.’—MATT. v. 14-16.

The conception of the office of Christ’s disciples contained in these words is a still bolder one than that expressed by the preceding metaphor, which we considered in the last sermon. ‘Ye are the salt of the earth’ implied superior moral purity and power to arrest corruption. ‘Ye are the light of the world’ implies superior spiritual illumination, and power to scatter ignorance.

That is not all the meaning of the words, but that is certainly in them. So then, our Lord here gives His solemn judgment that the world, without Him and those who have learned from Him, is in a state of darkness; and that His followers have that to impart which will bring certitude and clearness of knowledge, together with purity and joy and all the other blessed things which are ‘the fruit of the light.’

That high claim is illustrated by a very homely metaphor. In every humble house from which His peasant-followers came, there would be a lamp—some earthen saucer with a little oil in it, in which a wick floated, a rude stand to put it upon, a meal-chest or a flour-bin, and a humble pallet on which to lie. These simple pieces of furniture are taken to point this solemn lesson. ‘When you light your lamp you put it on the stand, do you not? You light it in order that it may give light; you do not put it under the meal-measure or the bed. So I have kindled you that you may shine, and put you where you are that you may give light.’

And the same thought, with a slightly different turn in the application, lies in that other metaphor, which is enclosed in the middle of this parable about the light: ‘a city that is set on an hill cannot be hid.’ Where they stood on the mountain, no doubt they could see some village perched upon a ridge for safety, with its white walls gleaming in the strong Syrian sunlight; a landmark for many a mile round. So says Christ: ‘The City which I found, the true Jerusalem, like its prototype in the Psalm, is to be conspicuous for situation, that it may be the joy of the whole earth.’

I take all this somewhat long text now because all the parts of it hold so closely together, and converge upon the one solemn exhortation with which it closes, and which I desire to lay upon your hearts and consciences, ‘Let your light so shine before men.’ I make no pretensions to anything like an artificial arrangement of my remarks, but simply follow the words in the order in which they lie before us.

I. First, just a word about the great conception of a Christian man’s office which is set forth in that metaphor, ‘Ye are the light of the world.’

That expression is wide, ‘generic,’ as they say. Then in the unfolding of this little parable our Lord goes on to explain what kind of a light it is to which He would compare His people—the light of a lamp kindled. Now that is the first point that I wish to deal with. Christian men individually, and the Christian Church as a whole, shine by derived light. There is but One who is light in Himself. He who said, ‘I am the light of the world, he that followeth Me shall not walk in darkness,’ was comparing Himself to the sunshine, whereas when He said to us, ‘Ye are the light of the world; men do not light a lamp and put it under a bushel,’ He was comparing us to the kindled light of the lamp, which had a beginning and will have an end.

Before, and independent of, His historical manifestation in the flesh, the Eternal Word of God, who from the beginning was the Life, was also the light of men; and all the light of reason and of conscience, all which guides and illumines, comes from that one source, the Everlasting Word, by whom all things came to be and consist. ‘He was the true light which lighteth every man that cometh into the world.’ And further, the historic Christ, the Incarnate Word, is the source for men

of all true revelation of God and themselves, and of the relations between them; the Incarnate Ideal of humanity, the Perfect Pattern of conduct, who alone sheds beams of certainty on the darkness of life, who has left a long trail of light as He has passed into the dim regions beyond the grave. In both these senses He is the light, and we gather our radiance from Him.

We shall be 'light' if we are 'in the Lord.' It is by union with Jesus Christ that we partake of His illumination. A sunbeam has no more power to shine if it be severed from the sun than a man has to give light in this dark world if he be parted from Jesus Christ. Cut the current and the electric light dies; slacken the engine and the electric arc becomes dim, quicken it and it burns bright. So the condition of my being light is my keeping unbroken my communication with Jesus Christ; and every variation in the extent to which I receive into my heart the influx of His power and of His love is correctly measured and represented by the greater or the lesser brilliancy of the light with which I reflect His radiance. Ye were some time darkness, but now are ye light in the Lord. 'Keep near to Him, and a firm hold of His hand, and then you will be light.'

And now I need not dwell for more than a moment or two upon what I have already said is included in this conception of the Christian man as being light. There are two sides to it: one is that all Christian people who have learned to know Jesus Christ and have been truly taught of Him, do possess a certitude and clearness of knowledge which make them the lights of the world. We advance no claims to any illumination as to other than moral or religious truth. We leave all the other fields uncontested. We bow humbly with confessed ignorance and with unfeigned gratitude and admiration before those who have laboured in them, as before our teachers, but if we are true to our Master, and true to the position in which He has placed us, we shall not be ashamed to say that we believe ourselves to know the truth, in so far as men can ever know it, about the all-important subject of God and man, and the bond between them.

To-day there is need, I think, that Christian men and women should not be reasoned or sophisticated or cowed out of their confidence that they have the light because they do know God. It is proclaimed as the ultimate word of modern thought that we stand in the presence of a power which certainly is, but of which we can know nothing except that it is altogether different from ourselves, and that it ever tempts us to believe that we can know it, and ever repels us into despair. Our answer is Yes! we could have told you that long ago, though not altogether in your sense; you have got hold of half a truth, and here is the whole of it:—'No man hath seen God at any time, nor can see Him!' (a Gospel of despair, verified by the last words of modern thinkers), 'the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, He hath declared Him.'

Christian men and women, 'Ye are the light of the world.' Darkness in yourselves, ignorant about many things, ungifted with lofty talent, you have possession of the deepest truth; do not be ashamed to stand up and say, even in the presence of Mars Hill, with all its Stoics and Epicureans:—'Whom ye ignorantly worship—alas! not whom ye ignorantly speak of, Him declare we unto you.'

And then there is the other side, which I only name, moral purity. Light is the emblem of purity as well as the emblem of knowledge, and if we are Christians we have within us, by virtue of our possession of an indwelling Christ, a power which teaches and enables us to practise a morality high above the theories and doings of the world. But upon this there is the less need to dwell, as it was involved in our consideration of the previous figure of the salt.

Continued:

Re: THE LAMP AND THE BUSHEL - posted by pastorfrin, on: 2008/5/30 20:06

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Alexander Maclaren

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II. And now the next point that I would make is this, following the words before us—the certainty that if we are light we shall shine.

The nature and property of light is to radiate. It cannot choose but shine; and in like manner the little village perched upon a hill there, glittering and twinkling in the sunlight, cannot choose but be seen. So, says Christ, 'If you have Christian

character in you, if you have Me in you, such is the nature of the Christian life that it will certainly manifest itself.Â' Let us dwell upon that for a moment or two. Take two thoughts: All earnest Christian conviction will demand expression; and all deep experience of the purifying power of Christ upon character will show itself in conduct.

All earnest conviction will demand expression. Everything that a man believes has a tendency to convert its believer into its apostle. That is not so in regard to common every-day truths, nor in regard even to truths of science, but it is so in regard to all moral truth. For example, if a man gets a vivid and intense conviction of the evils of intemperance and the blessings of abstinence, look what a fiery vehemence of propagandism is at once set to work. And so all round the horizon of moral truth which is intended to affect conduct; it is of such a sort that a man cannot get it into brain and heart without causing him before long to say—'This thing has mastered me, and turned me into its slave; and I must speak according to my convictions.'

That experience works most mightily in regard to Christian truth, as the highest. What shall we say, then, of the condition of Christian men and women if they have not such an instinctive need of utterance? Do you ever feel this in your heart:—'Thy word shut up in my bones was like a fire. I was weary of forbearing, and I could not stay'? Professing Christians, do you know anything of the longing to speak your deepest convictions, the feeling that the fire within you is burning through all envelopings, and will be out? What shall we say of the men that have it not? God forbid I should say there is no fire, but I do say that if the fountain never rises into the sunlight above the dead level of the pool, there can be very little pressure at the main; that if a man has not the longing to speak his religious convictions, those convictions must be very hesitating and very feeble; that if you never felt 'I must say to somebody I have found the Messiah,' you have not found Him in any very deep sense, and that if the light that is in you can be buried under a bushel, it is not much of a light after all, and needs a great deal of feeding and trimming before it can be what it ought to be.

On the other hand, all deep experience of the purifying power of Christ upon character will show itself in conduct. It is all very well for people to profess that they have received the forgiveness of sins and the inner sanctification of God's Spirit. If you have, let us see it, and let us see it in the commonest, pettiest affairs of daily life. The communication between the inmost experience and the outermost conduct is such as that if there be any real revolution deep down, it will manifest itself in the daily life. I make all allowance for the loss of power in transmission, for the loss of power in friction. I am glad to believe that you and I, and all our imperfect brethren, are a great deal better in heart than we ever manage to show ourselves to be in life. Thank God for the consolation that may come out of that thought—but notwithstanding I press on you my point that, making all such allowance, and setting up no impossible standard of absolute identity between duty and conduct in this present life, yet, on the whole, if we are Christian people with any deep central experience of the cleansing power and influence of Christ and His grace, we shall show it in life and in conduct. Or, to put it into the graphic and plain image of my text, If we are light we shall shine.

Continued:

Re: THE LAMP AND THE BUSHEL - posted by pastorfrin, on: 2008/5/31 8:04

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'Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on an hill cannot be hid. 15. Neither do men light a candle, and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick; and it giveth light unto all that are in the house. 16. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.'—MATT. v. 14-16.

III. Again, and very briefly, this obligation of giving light is still further enforced by the thought that that was Christ's very purpose in all that He has done with us and for us.

The homely figure here implies that He has not kindled the lamp to put it under the bushel, but that His purpose in lighting it was that it might give light. God has made us partakers of His grace, and has given to us to be light in the Lord, for there is among other purposes, that we should impart that light to others. No creature is so small that it has not the right to expect that its happiness and welfare shall be regarded by God as an end in His dealings with it; but no creature is so great that it has the right to expect that its happiness or well-being shall be regarded by God and itself as God's only end in His dealings with it.

He gives us His grace, His pardon, His love, the quickening of His Spirit by our union with Jesus Christ; He gives us our knowledge of Him, and our likeness to Him—what for? 'For my own salvation, for my happiness and well-being,' you say. Certainly, blessed be His name for His love and goodness!

But is that all His purpose? Paul did not think so when he said, 'God who commanded the light to shine out of darkness hath shined into our hearts that we might give to others the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.' And Christ did not think so when He said, 'Men do not light a candle and put it under a bushel, but that it may give light to all that are in the house.' 'Heaven doth with us as we with torches do: not light them for themselves.' The purpose of God is that we may shine. The lamp is kindled not to illumine itself, but that it may 'give light to all that are in the house.'

Consider again, that whilst all these things are true, there is yet a solemn possibility that men—even good men—may stifle and smother and shroud their light. You can do, and I am afraid a very large number of you do do, this; by two ways. You can bury the light of a holy character under a whole mountain of inconsistencies. If one were to be fanciful, one might say that the bushel or meal-chest meant material well-being, and the bed, indolence and love of ease. I wonder how many of us Christian men and women have buried their light under the flour-bin and the bed, so interpreted? How many of us have drowned our consecration and devotion in foul waters of worldly lusts, and have let the love of earth's goods, of wealth and pleasure and creature love, come like a poisonous atmosphere round the lamp of our Christian character, making it burn dim and blue?

And we can bury the light of the Word under cowardly and sheepish and indifferent silence. I wonder how many of us have done that? Like blue-ribbon men that button their great-coats over their blue ribbons when they go into company where they are afraid to show them, there are many Christian people that are devout Christians at the Communion Table, but would be ashamed to say they were so in the miscellaneous company of a railway carriage or a table d'hôte. There are professing Christians who have gone through life in their relationships to their fathers, sisters, wives, children, friends, kindred, their servants and dependants, and have never spoken a loving word for their Master. That is a sinful hiding of your light under the bushel and the bed.

Continued:

Re: - posted by Logic, on: 2008/5/31 10:53

Quote:

-----pastorfrin wrote:
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III. Again, and very briefly, this obligation of giving light is still further enforced by the thought that that was Christ's very purpose in all that He has done with us and for us.

Jesus tells us this right after He said in a few verses before it in **Matthew 5:10** Blessed are they which are persecuted for their righteousness' sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

11: Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake.

Here, we see the Church reflecting Christ as the Moon reflects the Sun.

This light that Jesus is talking about is our attitude and our reactions to this world when it comes against us in persecution.

The correct responses are to contrast those of what the world might expect from such persecutions.

When the world sees this contrast of ours' to theirs, the world will then notice our good works.

These good works are not what they would expect as a response to what they have done to us.

These good works are how we conduct ourselves in employment and of business, or in that which any one is occupied. It also could be an act, or a deed, or the fruit of righteousness. In other words, a different way of life, a Christ centered view on life, and Godly motives for everything that we do and think. The idea of good works is emphasized in us for the world to see Christ in us.

Re: THE LAMP AND THE BUSHEL - posted by pastorfrin, on: 2008/5/31 17:42

Hi Brother Jeff,

It is these works that the world needs to see in us and in pt. IV Brother Maclaren makes the point very clear.

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IV. And so the last word, into which all this converges, is the plain duty: If you are light, shine!

‘Let your light so shine before men,’ says the text, ‘that they may see your good works and glorify your Father which is in Heaven.’ In the next chapter our Lord says: ‘Take heed that ye do not your alms before men to be seen of them. Thou shalt not be as the hypocrites are; for they love to pray standing in the synagogues that they may be seen of men. What is the difference between the two sets of men and the two kinds of conduct? The motive makes the difference for one thing, and for another thing, ‘Let your light so shine’ does not mean ‘take precautions that your goodness may come out into public,’ but it means ‘Shine!’ You find the light, and the world will find the eyes, no fear of that! You do not need to seek ‘to be seen of men,’ but you do need to shine that men may see.

The lighthouse keeper takes no pains that the ships tossing away out at sea may behold the beam that shines from his lamp; all that he does is to feed it and tend it. And that is all that you and I have to do—tend the light, and do not, like cowards, cover it up. Modestly, but yet bravely, carry out your Christianity, and men will see it. Do not be as a dark lantern, burning with the slides down and illuminating nothing and nobody. Live your Christianity, and it will be beheld.

And remember, candles are not lit to be looked at. Candles are lit that something else may be seen by them. Men may see God through your words, through your conduct, who never would have beheld Him otherwise, because His beams are too bright for their dim eyes.

And it is an awful thing to think that the world always—always—takes its conception of Christianity from the Church, and neither from the Bible nor from Christ;

and that it is you and your like, you inconsistent Christians, you people that say your sins are forgiven and yet are doing the old sins day by day which you say are pardoned, you low-toned, unpraying, worldly Christian men, who have no elevation of character and no self-restraint of life and no purity of conduct above the men in your own profession and in your own circumstances all round you—it is you that are hindering the coming of Christ’s Kingdom, it is you that are the standing disgraces of the Church, and the weaknesses and diseases of Christendom. I speak strongly, not half as strongly as the facts of the case would warrant; but I lay it upon all your consciences as professing Christian people to see to it that no longer your frivolities, or doubtful commercial practices, or low, unspiritual tone of life, your self-indulgence in household arrangements, and a dozen other things that I might name—that no longer do they mar the clearness of your testimony for your Master, and disturb with envious streaks of darkness the light that shines from His followers.

How effectual such a witness may be none who have not seen its power can suppose. Example does tell. A holy life curbs evil, ashamed to show itself in that pure presence. A good man or woman reveals the ugliness of evil by showing the beauty of holiness. More converts would be made by a Christ-like Church than by many sermons. Oh! if you professing Christians knew your power and would use it, if you would come closer to Christ, and catch more of the light from His face, you might walk among men like very angels, and at your bright presence darkness would flee away, ignorance would grow wise, impurity be abashed, and sorrow comforted.

Be not content, I pray you, till your own hearts are fully illumined by Christ, having no part dark—and then live as remembering that you have been made light that you may shine. ‘Arise, shine, for thy light is come, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee.’

Alexander Maclaren

Re: - posted by Logic, on: 2008/5/31 21:57

Quote:

-----pastorfrin wrote:

Hi Brother Jeff,

If you said "hi" to me, I'm not Jeff. 8-)

Re: - posted by pastorfrin, on: 2008/6/1 8:51

OK, Hi Brother Logic

Sorry about that. 8-)