

**Isaiah 58:1-12**

58:1 Shout out, do not hold back! Lift up your voice like a trumpet! Announce to my people their rebellion, to the house of Jacob their sins

58:2 Yet day after day they seek me and delight to know my ways, as if they were a nation that practiced righteousness and did not forsake the ordinance of their God; they ask of me righteous judgments, they delight to draw near to God.

58:3 "Why do we fast, but you do not see? Why humble ourselves, but you do not notice?" Look, you serve your own interest on your fast day, and oppress all your workers.

58:4 Look, you fast only to quarrel and to fight and to strike with a wicked fist. Such fasting as you do today will not make your voice heard on high.

58:5 Is such the fast that I choose, a day to humble oneself? Is it to bow down the head like a bulrush, and to lie in sackcloth and ashes? Will you call this a fast, a day acceptable to the LORD?

58:6 Is not this the fast that I choose: to loose the bonds of injustice, to undo the thongs of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free, and to break every yoke?

58:7 Is it not to share your bread with the hungry, and bring the homeless poor into your house; when you see the naked, to cover them, and not to hide yourself from your own kin?

58:8 Then your light shall break forth like the dawn, and your healing shall spring up quickly; your vindicator shall go before you, the glory of the LORD shall be your rear guard.

58:9a Then you shall call, and the LORD will answer; you shall cry for help, and he will say, Here I am.

58:9b If you remove the yoke from among you, the pointing of the finger, the speaking of evil,

58:10 if you offer your food to the hungry and satisfy the needs of the afflicted, then your light shall rise in the darkness and your gloom be like the noonday.

58:11 The LORD will guide you continually, and satisfy your needs in parched places, and make your bones strong; and you shall be like a watered garden, like a spring of water, whose waters never fail.

58:12 Your ancient ruins shall be rebuilt; you shall raise up the foundations of many generations; you shall be called the repairer of the breach, the restorer of streets to live in.

*Jesus now speaks of the Law and the Prophets, telling us that he is the one who fulfills it. We are to follow him and be salt and light for the world.*

**Matthew 5:13-20**

5:13 "You are the salt of the earth; but if salt has lost its taste, how can its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything, but is thrown out and trampled under foot.

5:14 "You are the light of the world. A city built on a hill cannot be hid.

5:15 No one after lighting a lamp puts it under the bushel basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all in the house.

5:16 In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven.

5:17 "Do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets; I have come not to abolish but to fulfill.

5:18 For truly I tell you, until heaven and earth pass away, not one letter, not one stroke of a letter, will pass

from the law until all is accomplished.

5:19 Therefore, whoever breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches others to do the same, will be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever does them and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven.

5:20 For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven."

### **Proclamation of the Word**

I wish Jesus had just stopped right here. I love these words of Jesus:

*let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven.*

I love this verse so much, that I put it on a t-shirt my Sr. year in College. I was the intern for Student Volunteer Services (SVS) at my college, Presbyterian College. And this was the t-shirt for our coordinators.

SVS is a collection of student-led groups making a difference by serving in the community. At that time, we had thirty-three active groups: some tutored in the local schools, others were big brothers or big sisters at Thornwell home for children. Some like my husband, Chuck, taught Thornwell kids to swim. We had a Habitat for Humanity chapter. We hosted Special Olympics or spent time building relationships with Sr. Adults at the local Presbyterian Community in Clinton.

Today students work with the local humane society or get folks registered for bone marrow donation. Just a couple of weeks ago over 15 percent of the student body participated in the Day of Service in honor of MLK day.

Service is part of the Presbyterian ethos.

In fact, our college motto is "While I live, I serve."

Service is a core value of our Scouting program.

As Presbyterian type Christians, we believe that we serve as a grateful response to God's love, mercy, and care which we experience and know.

(PSA- Fort Hill Church supports Presbyterian College, and on March 22, we will host the College choir for a concert. Our own member Hannah Sawyer is in the choir.)

After leaving Clemson Campus Ministry and while in Seminary, I served with the Open Door Community, a ministry of hospitality with people who are homeless.

But after many years of serving our homeless neighbors in downtown Atlanta, I got to a point of frustration. I got tired of handing out band-aids.

Not that I minded getting downtown by 6:00am to serve breakfast across from Grady Hospital, or making tuna sandwiches for 250 at lunch, or handing out Tylenol and band-aids at the door.

I was just sick of finding out that the system was broken, and that the system did not work for the poor or the dispossessed.

I met homeless veterans who were struggling with mental health needs and substance abuse.

I met a man who broke his leg on an hourly wage construction job, then lost his home, and then was homeless because of the hospital bill.

I realized that charity, that love, means a hot meal after a cold night, or a warm shower after living on the streets.

Those are necessary. But they were not enough.

I hungered for a just society where the system could be a part of the solution for my friends living on the street.

And that is when I discovered this passage from Isaiah 58.

Yes, I thought, we are all better when those who need assistance can get the care they need.

Light dawns, healing and restoration begin.

All seems right in the world again.

God's name be praised.

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Jesus said, "I am the Light of the World."

And today he is instructing his disciples and us, that we are light, too.

But that light is not to point people to us, but to God.

Listen again:

*let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven.*

You may have heard a certain Clemson coach say, "Let the light inside you shine brighter than the light on you."

As disciples, we are called to acts of love and service, to infect the world with good, like salt brings out the flavor of food.

**And that good is not just to follow God's law, but to live God's love.**

In fact, the word for good here, *kalo* in Greek, does not just mean to do good as in the right thing, but to do good that is beautiful, attractive, and captivating. God is glorified when we are good, righteousness. (Barclay, 144)<sup>i</sup>

Strong's Greek Dictionary defines it this way<sup>ii</sup>:

*attractively good; good that inspires (motivates) others to embrace what is lovely (beautiful, praiseworthy)*

But Jesus is speaking not just to an individual.

He is speaking to us, a group of disciples, to a plural you, to Y'all.

We collectively are light and salt.

And together we are to be a city on a hill shining to help others find their way.

A shining city on a hill is an image deep within our nation's ethos, too.

That image has infected our country since it was preached by John Winthrop in 1630 before the Pilgrims disembarked from the ship.

Ronald Reagan used the image to speak of his vision in his farewell address as President. ("Uh oh, preacher," you may be thinking. "You are talking politics.")

But we cannot read this passage and not acknowledge how it has infected our society or nation.

As head of the Church and Lord of all, Jesus is always political, but never partisan.

He taught about the kingdom of God, of God's governance as a Sovereign God,  
and we are under God's rule.

We are citizens first of this realm when we profess faith in Christ.

God deserves our ultimate allegiance and loyalty.

The prophet Isaiah speaks to the nation Israel.

He addresses the community of faith, God's covenant people.

Isaiah describes light breaking forth like dawn, healing, repair and restoration.

And that happens when we do the things God requires of us.

When we not only worship God with our lips but love our neighbors.

When the hungry are fed, the oppressed are freed, the homeless poor given shelter. When we stop the pointing of fingers and the speaking of evil, then light shall return, God says.

Jesus is speaking to his most committed ones, his disciples, and to us.

He describes a faith that is not easy or simple.

He challenges us to be fully committed to God's vision of the world.

Jesus never said, "I am the light of the Church."

He said, "I am the light of the world."

And how we live in that world reflects on Jesus.

I spoke to a Jewish law professor a couple of months ago about the Alabama Supreme Court case about the 10 Commandments on display at the Courthouse.

"First, he said, you as a Christian don't have to follow the 10 Commandments.

Why would you not place Jesus' Sermon on the Mount up in public places?"

He had a point.

Jesus does speak about the Law and the Prophets here today.

He tells us that he is the fulfillment, the embodiment, of the Law and Prophets.

Jesus knows the Hebrew Scriptures, the Old Testament.

His teachings grow out of them.

But following the rules and regulations are not an end in and of itself.

For all law, according to Jesus is to help us love God and love our neighbors as we love ourselves.

Jesus usually critiques the religious people who have satisfied the jot and tittle of the law, but do not love God and others.

Think about the Ten Commandments, for instance.

They are about reverence for God and respect for your neighbors.

**Reverence and respect.**

These are the principles of the law.

But some Jews got so distracted by the rules that they developed layer upon layer of interpretations, examples, and what ifs.

For example, not working on the Sabbath came to mean one could not write.

A person could write in erasable ink, like sand or fruit juice, but not permanent ink.

One could write one letter, but not two.

The Scribes were the folks responsible for passing the law down, first orally and then in writing.

But they lost sight of the principle of keeping Sabbath holy- a day to honor God and rest.

So why does Jesus say this when he usually critiques religious leaders:

*For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven."*

I am confused by his praise of the scribes and Pharisees.

In fact, some have claimed that Matthew, being Jewish, put these words in his mouth, but Jesus seems to be saying, that we as disciples know Jesus so we know better about what is truly righteous.

**That we are responsible for following the essence of the law- to show reverence for God with right worship and that we are to show respect for neighbors with right actions.**

We cannot have one without the other.

There is no right worship, without right actions.

William Barclay wrote, "**That reverence and that respect Jesus came to fulfill. He came to show men and women in actual life what reverence for God and respect for one another look like. Justice, said the Greeks, consists in giving to God and to others that which they are due.**"

Barclay continues, "**That consisted not in sacrifice, but mercy; not in legalism, but in love; not in prohibitions which demanded that we should not do things, but in the instruction to mould their lives in the positive commandment to love.**"<sup>iii</sup>

Scouting promotes faithfulness in religious duties and respects the convictions of others in matters of custom and religion. (Scout Law)

Christian communities throughout the ages have tried to live by love.

Some like the Benedictines developed a Rule of Faith or practices that helped engender in them reverence for God and respect for neighbors.

Fort Hill developed our own Rule of Faith.

We call them Faith Practices.

You can see them printed on the front of your bulletin.

They are not an end in themselves, but ways we can develop as Jesus' disciples.

They are means to revere God and to respect others.

And the only end, the goal and purpose, is LOVE.

A while back someone asked the preacher and writer Eugene Peterson what he would say if he were writing what he knew would be his very last sermon.

He replied, "**I think I would want to talk about things that are immediate and ordinary. In the kind of world we live in, the primary way that I can get people to be aware of God is to say, 'Who are you going to have breakfast with tomorrow, and how are you going to treat that person?'"**

Peterson had a down to earth way of thinking of faith and discipleship.

His words, "Who are you going to have breakfast with tomorrow, and how are you going to treat that person?"

reminds us all that it starts with the people right in front of us: our family, our co-workers, the cashier at the store, but it also includes the invisible folks down the street who are hungry, or need medical care, who lack jobs and shelter.

Our private and public lives matter according to Scripture.

Whether we are on county council, own a business, or work at the hospital,

Whether we are in the classroom or volunteer at the Clemson Free Medical clinic,

Disciples of Jesus Christ seek first the Kingdom of God.

God promises if we love God with reverence and show respect for neighbors in need, light will dawn, our communities will be rebuilt, restored, healing will happen.

Wholeness and shalom will be everywhere present.

That is true righteousness, the good works, that God desires.

And when that light shines, may all see it and give praise and glory to our Father in heaven.

Otherwise our worship here today is meaningless.

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<sup>i</sup> William Barclay, *The Gospel of Matthew*, Volume one (Louisville: Westminster John Knox) 1956, revised 2001, 144.

<sup>ii</sup> Strong's Greek Concordance, word study helps at <https://biblehub.com/greek/2570.htm>

<sup>iii</sup> Barclay, 146.