

Sermon by Dr. Jeremiah
November 20, 2005

“My Life as a Witness”
Matthew 5:14-16

The power of our influence on other people: A mother took her young son shopping. After a day in the stores, a clerk handed the little boy a lollipop. “What do you say?” the mother said to the boy. He replied, “I’ll put it on my credit card!” I read this week that even the most introverted person will influence at least 10,000 people in his or her lifetime. In our series this fall we’ve seen from the Bible that God’s great desire for each of us is that we glorify Him and enjoy Him, now and forever. The only way we can begin to do that is to receive God’s Son into our lives as our personal Savior and Lord. Building on that critical, saving relationship, we glorify and enjoy God as we worship Him, live in the power of the Holy Spirit, as we live generous lives, and as we’re connected with other Christians in His church. Today, we look at God’s desire for our lives when it comes to our influence on other people, especially those in the world.

What’s important at the outset is that we see our world the way Jesus sees it. We need the biblical understanding of our world in order to influence it the way Jesus wants us to. That’s our first point. Realize that the biblical view is not political or economic or scientific or technological. It’s spiritual. So on the day Jesus preached His Sermon on the Mount, it is said that as He “looked out on the crowd, Jesus saw the corruption and the disintegration of life at every point, its breakup, its destruction. He saw a world wrapped in gloom, sitting in darkness, groping amid mists and fogs.” The people in that crowd may have all looked just fine, nicely dressed, smiles on their faces. But that wasn’t what Jesus saw. He saw into the heart, He saw the spiritual condition of those people, and it was a picture of corruption and darkness. What Jesus sees is confirmed more than 30 times in the New Testament, where the world is viewed as the men, women, boys and girls who in sin are alienated from God, hostile to Jesus Christ, and under the domination of Satan and his allies. The biblical view is not only that the world is spiritually lost in corruption and darkness; its getting worse and worse as time goes on. Paul warned in II Timothy 3:13, “Evil men and impostors will proceed from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived.” The world cannot do anything but get worse, because it has no natural goodness to build on, it has no positive spiritual or moral life that it can grow in. Year after year the system of evil accumulates a deeper darkness. I know the objection can be raised at this point: Hasn’t there been tremendous advances and improvements in science, medicine, education and technology in the past 150 years? The answer is, yes, absolutely. But, with all these incredible advances, the world has not improved. The world’s knowledge has greatly increased, but the world’s morals have progressively degenerated. The world’s accomplishments have been spectacular, but peace of mind, or any sense of purpose and meaning in life has all but disappeared. There is no hope for anything better, no hope at all in this world. Instead of improving the moral and spiritual quality of human life, mankind’s discoveries and accomplishments have simply provided ways for him to express and promote his depravity faster and more destructively. Ethically, morally, spiritually, the world is not getting better, its getting worse and worse and worse. That increasing darkness is characterized by more and more division, disappointment, despair, destruction and death. My friends, do you see it? Do you see the world as Jesus sees it? If you don’t, anything I say from this point forward is meaningless and useless to you, a waste of your time. Do you see your world the way Jesus does?

It’s in this dark world Jesus says that we, His followers have a distinctive role and responsibility. I have to say, He does something very unusual here. In John 8:12 Jesus said, “I am the light of the world.” John 1:4 gives us an explanation of that light: “In Jesus was life, and that life was the light of men.” As opposed to the discouragement, despair and destruction of human existence in the darkness, the light that is Jesus Christ is life, a life of peace and love and hope and joy. A life of salvation and freedom from the darkness, a life of glory. Knowing

the time is coming when He will no longer be physically present in the world, Jesus takes this title He claims for Himself, and He gives it to us: "You are the light of the world." In the Greek language, He states this in a very forceful, emphatic way. He's saying, "You are the light of the world." He's not making a request or giving an order, He's stating a fact. If you're a believer in Jesus Christ, the light that was His as He walked the earth is now your light. It doesn't originate with you. You reflect His light the way the moon reflects the light of the sun. The "you" is emphatic in another way. Jesus is also saying, "You are the only light of the world." There is no other light for the world lost in darkness. The light He's given you is the only light there is.

In verse 16 Jesus tells us how we're to shine the light: "Let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven." Is it by what you say that people will praise God? No. It's by the things we do that people can see, it's by our good deeds that we shine the light. It's not enough to simply avoid sinful, evil pursuits. Shining the light is not a negative, it's a positive. The word for "good" Jesus uses emphasizes not the quality of goodness. He's not concerned about meeting a standard of excellence. The goodness He's looking for is the goodness that is beauty, that's attractive to other people. Those are the deeds that people in the darkness will notice. Some will notice and praise God. Many won't, but that's not our problem.

Our problem, or question is will we shine the light or won't we? How we answer that question is largely determined by how we think of ourselves as believers in Jesus Christ in relationship with the world. A very popular response of Christians to our world lost in darkness is the "fortress" mentality. The church is seen as a safe, secure place, immune from the realities and dangers of our world. In the fortress, we don't engage the world. If we did, they may change us or corrupt us. We can't have that! If people from the world want to be a part of us, they have to conform to our expectations: look like us, dress like us, talk like us. The fortress mentality is rampant in the American church. The fortress mentality is not biblical, not faithful to God. And as it is not biblical and God-honoring, the fortress mentality leads only to decline and death, for the individual believer, and for any church. I contrast this view of our relationship with the world with Jesus' view. In Matthew 16:18 He says, "I will build my church, and the gates of hell will not overcome it." When He says, "The gates of hell will not overcome it," Jesus is talking about His church on the offensive, attacking the strongest part of the kingdom of darkness, the gates of hell. The church Christ is building is moving forward against the powers of evil, wickedness and darkness. God did not give the gospel of His Son to be the secret, hidden treasure of a few, but to enlighten every person. I received an email recently from a parent who's very aware of these two ways of looking at and engaging the world. She wrote, "I know for myself, especially as a parent, my tendency is to insulate myself and my family from the dirt in the world, and sort of cocoon around us in an effort to "protect" them from the world." But "as hard as I tried to 'insulate' and 'protect' my family, the world got in anyway." She went on to write that this reality has "exposed me to so many people that I would never gotten to know otherwise, and I have seen how much the world needs us and needs to see Christ's love and compassion and the hope that we have through our relationship with Him. I understand so much better what it means to be salt and light in the world. It isn't about walking around being perfect so others will see how 'good and perfect' we are and want to be like us. It's about being Christ's love to the world and being like Christ who said He came into the world to save the lost. He did not separate Himself from the world, but instead He reached out to the world and offered love and hope to the lost." Here's a person who's very aware of her individual, daily opportunities to shine the light of Jesus Christ to her world. We all have opportunities like that. We also are blessed with opportunities as a church to do good deeds that shine the light. We're doing that through providing clothing to needy children of Panther Lake Elementary School, and through giving food for the Thanksgiving Baskets the Deacons will be putting together later today. Before the service I was told that the amount of clothing you've donated is "overwhelming," and that Panther Lake will be overwhelmed by your generosity and love. I was told separately that the amount of food you've donated for the Thanksgiving Baskets is "overwhelming" too. Thank you, and praise God! Next Sunday you'll hear about ministering the love of Jesus to inmates in the Kent Jail in the month of December. I'm confident that other

opportunities for us to let our light shine so that the world may see our good deeds and praise our Father in heaven. As we step up to those opportunities we know our Lord will be pleased, He'll be glorified, because we'll be doing what He saved us and called us to be; light, His light, the light of the world!