

**Sermon Study Guide Based on
Mat Morgan's Message of December 28, 2008
"Stewards of His Light"**

[Jesus, who is the light of the world, is telling us today as Christians to share his light with others.]

[Topics: Light of the World, Darkness, Sharing the love of God, Being Witnesses, Salvation]

Excerpt: Mat Morgan works as a treasurer for our denomination. In an effort to do his job well, he goes to many seminars, read books on accounting and investing and study the IRS rules, etc. He also attends the local chapter of the Christian Leadership Alliance. And every quarter they get together and talk about the biggest issue or problem for us and try to find ways to make all of our donations go further to preach the Gospel.

In these meetings, the focus is always on money. And the more Mat learns about good stewardship of money, the more he learns that it's not really about the money. He's not saying that we as Christians should stop giving offerings. How we spend our money is indicative of what's in our hearts.

In the broader context God doesn't need our money. God doesn't need our money to preach the Gospel. He doesn't need us to preach the Gospel. But he has invited us along, out of his love for us, to share salvation with other people because he wants us to.

Christian stewardship is about what we do with our whole life. It's what we do with our life after we say yes to our Savior and recognize that He died for our sins. Christian stewardship is having the Father, Son and Holy Spirit live in and through us. It's about how we yield ourselves to God's will for our life. It's our whole life, not just our wallet.

Being a good steward for God is about organizing our life so that everything we do points others to the Father. We should follow the example of Jesus who didn't take credit for the things he did, but rather pointed people back to the Father. Being a good steward for God is about being a light to the world like Jesus is the light of the world.

So today, let's consider our role as stewards of his light from the text in the gospel of Matthew. Although the gospel doesn't come out and say that it was written by Mathew, one of the many reasons why scholars believe that this gospel was written by him is that the author writes about money more than the other three gospels. Matthew was a tax collector, a kind of an IRS agent of his day. The Gospel was written between 50 and 60 AD about 20-30 years after Christ's death.

In chapter one of Matthew, he writes about the genealogy of Jesus. In chapter two, he covers Jesus' birth, the visit of the Magi, the family's escape to Egypt and their return to Nazareth. In chapter three, he writes about how John the Baptist prepares the way for Jesus and how John baptized Jesus.

Then in chapter 4, Matthew covers the temptation of Jesus by Satan as well as his ministry beginnings in Galilee, including the recruiting of four disciples. Jesus also begins to heal many people and they start to realize that there is something special about Jesus. And so they started following him in large groups of people. And now this brings us to chapter 5.

"Now when he saw the crowds, he went up on a mountainside and sat down. His disciples came to him, 2) and he began to teach them saying..."

The rabbis were held in very high esteem in that culture and many tried to follow them and to be like them. There was a saying at this time, "May you be covered by the dust of your rabbi." It was common for a rabbi to sit down before teaching his disciples.

In the following verses, Jesus begins to list what are called the Beatitudes. Its Latin meaning is blessed or happy. **3) "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. 4) Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted. 5) Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.**

6) Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled. 7) Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy. 8) Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God. 9) Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God.

10) Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. 11) Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. 12) Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you."

Jesus is talking not just about good deeds that we should do. It's much deeper than that. He's talking about character traits. He's talking about strongly held internal beliefs that motivate people. These types of traits come from within only as a result of walking with Christ.

13) "You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled by men." If we don't have these strong convictions, we're not very effective. We're like salt that has lost its savor.

14) "You are the light of the world. A city 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 men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven."

So Jesus, who elsewhere in the gospels is called "**the light of the world**", is telling his disciples and us as Christians today, that we are also lights. He doesn't say we will be lights, he says we are lights.

We are to be lights of good character exhibiting the traits mentioned earlier in this chapter. The ability to show these character traits comes only from Christ living in us – we can't do it on our own. If we don't reveal our Father through our lives we are of little use as a light to the

world. Phrases about light were familiar to the Jews at the time. They called Jerusalem a "Light of the Gentiles" and a famous rabbi was once called a "lamp of Israel." One thing the Jews were certain of was – that the light came from above to illuminate us.

But, just like the disciples sitting at Jesus' feet in that day, we are also asked to share this light with others through our life's example. We do so, so that people will praise and glorify the Father in heaven and not us.

What kind of light might the disciples have had in their minds during this sermon when Jesus talked about the lamp in **verse 15**? What kind of lamp would they think about when Jesus said, "**Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl**"?

Most lamps used at that time were small simple clay lamps. The larger center hole was where you put in the olive oil or other type of burnable fuel such as bees wax or animal fat. Often times, it was covered by a lid so the oil wasn't contaminated. The smaller hole at the one end is where the wick was laid down and then lit. The oil was pulled down onto the wick as the flame burned.

Since they lived in one-room houses, they put the lamp on a tall pedestal of some kind in the center of the room to illuminate light to the whole area. These lamps were very simple and functional, although they weren't like a 100-watt bulb that we might use today. They often burned day and night because of the difficulty in lighting them. So, they often put something around them at night, perhaps a bowl, so they could go to sleep.

Let's now consider some of the characteristics of a lamp and see what we can learn about being a light for our Father. First of all, the purpose for the lamp was to produce light at the direction of its owner. The lamp was nothing by itself. It is just a vessel made or purchased by the owner and is used at his will to shed light.

Likewise, we are purchased by our owner with a price – the blood of Jesus. We are set in place and our wick is trimmed by our owner – God in heaven. We exist to shed light on behalf of our Father in heaven just as Jesus shed light for the Father. Our fuel as a Christian lamp comes from above. We can only shine brightly if we are full of the love that comes from God. If we are full of his love from above, we burn brightly and are rejuvenated and refueled daily through contact with our owner and creator through prayer and study. We can't burn brightly by ourselves.

After his resurrection, Jesus is giving his disciples instructions as to what to do in his absence. **Matthew 28: 18-20, "Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 19) Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20) and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."**

Jesus has sent the disciples and us on a mission to make disciples. He promised to refuel us and to be with us. He doesn't send us on a mission as a dry lamp. Jesus has shown us in the Gospels how we can daily be refueled through prayer and study.

Another characteristic about lamps is that they do their best work in the darkness. How many of you have noticed a lamp lit up on a bright sunny day? It's only in the darkness that they become effective.

Remember what Jesus said in **Matt. 5:14**? "**You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. 15) Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl.**"

As Christians, we must venture out into the darkness. We must mingle with those who need the light. Reaching out to others, as Christians, takes us into some uncomfortable places. Jesus' example would have been a little different if he had not spoken to sinners, the Samaritan women, for example or confronted the religious leaders of his day.

Some of Paul's best letters were written from a dark prison (Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, Philemon). But look how these letters instruct and encourage us even today. Before prison, Paul went through many difficult times such as being ship wrecked and beaten. James was killed by a sword, probably beheaded, as recorded in Acts. Although it is not clear from the Biblical accounts how the other apostles died, Christian tradition indicates John was boiled and others lived and died in difficult circumstances. The disciples shined their light in dark and difficult places.

It's easy to stay comfortable within the walls of our church building. But our light needs to shine both inside and outside those walls. We need to share the love of God outside these walls. Where are some of the places that God may wish us to shed light into?

Do we shine the light of God in our work place? Do we allow God's love to flow through us or do we hold back? It's God's job to tap people on the shoulder and bring them to him. But we have a tremendous opportunity to participate in that. One person may plant the seed of God; another may reap. But we don't have to worry about how it all turns out. We just have to worry about letting our light shine.

What about the teens who are skateboarders or have tattoos and piercings? Does that seem like a dark place to go? We may consider them to be unreachable with the light. But that's not true. We need to step out there. Mat has personally seen kids at camp, who would scare us if we met them on the street at night, become transformed and changed because of camp and who now have a love for Jesus.

Now what about the homeless? Many of us go to the Cold Weather Shelter, which is a wonderful example of reaching out to others. That may seem a dark place or an unreachable place. Sometimes we don't see any progress. But nevertheless, we are shedding the light of God there and providing hope. We're named New Hope Christian Fellowship, so it's our job to shine God's light and offer hope wherever it's needed.

Mat, told us that this message today is for himself as well. Too many times, he's held back and not stepped out to do things when he knew he should. He's not followed through on the nudge that God was giving him at the time. All of us need to respond to God's urging and step out on faith, so Jesus can use us in a more powerful way to share his Gospel.

What if someone came here to worship and they didn't smell that great? How would we treat them? We would shed God's light on them or ignore them? That could happen, and it probably will. Let's hope that we respond with the love of Christ and shed that light on them.

Mat was talking with Glen McCutchan not too long ago. As most of us know, Glen is going a difficult time in his life fighting cancer. He said that he was lifted up one day by receiving an encouraging note from one of our members, Sarah Connelly. Sarah is going through her own difficulties. She lives in a dark place, because she can't see and has other health issues. We need to be lights of encouragement to people both inside and outside of our church walls.

Another characteristic of lamps is that they provide more light in groups. Have you ever driven across North Dakota or Wyoming in the middle of the night? You see a farmhouse light here and a farmhouse light there. But the countryside is pretty dim.

Now when you drive into Los Angeles or Las Vegas at night and the sky is alive because of all the collective lights shining together. Likewise, Christians can shine more light out to others as groups. And for those who don't like to belong to a church, they don't shine as brightly as they could, because together we can accomplish more than by ourselves.

Our denomination, the Worldwide Church of God is able to reach out into Bangladesh, to Central and South America, to the Philippines, and all parts of Africa and Eastern Europe and other places by pooling funds and talents. We couldn't do that on our own.

We can create electronic media on the internet like our president, Dr. Tkach's "Speaking of Life, or written media like the Odyssey magazine, through our combined resources. New Hope, as a congregation of believers, is able to reach out to help preach the Gospel in such places as El Salvador and Bangladesh.

Another characteristic of lamps is that they can cause other lamps to ignite when in close proximity. It's our personal relationships that are important. (Teens, I know what you are thinking right now. This isn't about sitting close in the movie theater with that special someone.)

If we get close to people outside the walls of the church, they should be able to see Christ in us, which in turn ignites them into a relationship with Jesus. This happens over and over again. This is traditionally how Christianity spreads. Pray and ask God to help you be involved as a tool in bringing someone to Christ.

As an example, Mat's prayer last year was that he could be involved in helping others see Christ. God answered his prayer through Vocation Bible School and Acquire the Fire event, which focuses on youths and teens. You know, most people make their commitment to Jesus before the age of 15. So we can have a tremendous influence on our children and grandchildren and their friends.

Another characteristic of lamps is that covered lamps have very little use, that a covered lamp doesn't allow the light to shine forth. At this point in the sermon, Mat introduced some amazingly talented young people who have volunteered to perform a skit about some candles who didn't want to come out and shine. This is skit that was adapted from a story by Max Lucado "Some Candles Who weren't Too Bright."

A few nights an electrical storm caused a blackout in their neighborhood. When the lights went out, Mat felt his way through the darkness into the storage closet where they keep the

candles for nights like this. Through the glow of a lit match he looked up on the shelf where the candles were stored. There they were, already positioned in their stands, melted to various degrees by previous missions. Mat took his match and lit four of them.

How they illuminated the storage room! What had been a veil of blackness suddenly radiated with soft, golden light! He could see everything in the room. Talking out loud, Mat told the candles where he was going to put them – one at the kitchen table so they could eat, one at his desk so he could read, one to his wife Pam so she can cross-stitch. And to the largest candle, he said he would place it in the living room to light up the whole area.

At this point, Candle #1 said, "Now, hold it right there." Mat thought it was his wife, standing behind him teasing him for talking to the candles.

But Candle #1 spoke again. "Hold it, I said!" Then Mat asked, "Who said that?"

Candle # 1 replied, "I did." Not believing what he heard, Mat asked, "Who are you? What are you?"

Candle # 1: "I'm a candle. There's no one here but you, me and the rest of the candles."

Mat: "I don't believe it! You have a tiny little wax face! Not just a wax face that someone carved, but a moving, functioning, flesh-like-face full of expression and life.

Candle # 1: "Don't take me out of here!" Mat: "What?" Candle # 1: "I said, don't take me out of this closet."

Mat: "What do you mean I can't take you out of this closet? I have to take you out. You're a candle. Your job is to give light. It's dark out there. People are stubbing their toes and walking into walls. You have to come out and light up the place!"

Candle # 1: "But you can't take me out. I'm not ready. I need more preparation."

Mat: "I don't believe my ears. More preparation?"

Candle # 1: "Yeah, I've decided I need to research this job of light-giving so I won't go out and make a bunch of mistakes. You'd be surprised how distorted the glow of an untrained candle can be. So I'm doing some studying. I just finished a book on wind resistance. I'm in the middle of a great series of tapes on wick build-up and conservation. I'm reading the new best seller on flame display. Have you heard of it?"

Mat: "No." Candle # 1: "You might like it. It's called Waxing Eloquently".

Mat: "What am I doing? I'm in here conversing with a candle while my wife and children are out there in the darkness! All right then, you're not the only candle on the shelf. I'll blow you out and take the others!"

All candles said in unison, "We're not going either!"

Mat: "It's a conspiracy! You are candles and your job is to light dark places!"

Candle # 2: "Well, You may think we have to go, but I'm busy." Mat: "Busy?"

Candle # 2: "Yes, I'm meditating." Mat: "What? A candle that meditates?"

Candle # 2: "Yes. I'm meditating on the importance of light. It's really enlightening."

Mat: (Trying to reason with them) "Listen, I appreciate what you guys are doing. I'm all for meditation time. And everyone needs to study and research; but for goodness' sake, you guys have been here for weeks! Haven't you had enough time to get your wicks on straight?"

Candle # 3: "I'm waiting to get my life together. I'm not stable enough. I lose my temper easily. I guess you could say that I'm a hothead."

Candle # 4: "I'd like to help, but lighting the darkness is not my gift." Mat: "Not your gift? What do you mean?"

Candle # 4: "Well, I'm a singer. I sing to other candles to encourage them to burn more brightly." Then Candle # 4 begins to sing, "This Little Light of Mine..." And then all the candles begin singing with candle # 4.

Mat: "Come on, you guys. There's plenty of time for this later. We've got a crisis on our hands." But the candles keep singing – even louder.

Mat: "Four perfectly healthy candles singing to each other about light but are refusing to come out of the closet. I can't take it anymore. I am going to blow you all out." All the candles keep singing until blown out.

Pam: "Where are the candles?" Mat: "They won't work. Where did you buy those candles anyway?"

Pam: "Oh, they're church candles. Remember the church that closed down the street. I bought them there."

Mat: "Oh now, I understood."

This skit is humorous, but it illustrates an important point. Lamps, candles or Christians, are of limited use, if they never face the darkness outside of a closet or the walls of a church building. One thing we need to remember is that an unused lamp eventually becomes a shard.

If any of you have ever been to Jerusalem where they continuous excavate to look for information about the past, you know that shards of these unused lamps are commonly found. These pieces are from unused lamps that eventually got broken and then were discarded. Let's not be this kind of lamp.

Let's burn brightly this coming year, not just to those in this room or to other Christians. Let's look for ways to share God's love and life with those who need him the most. There are exciting times ahead for all of us when as we step out of our comfort zone and go into dark

places and shine the light of Jesus Christ to others. In this way we can glorify our Father in Heaven and point others to Him.

Key Scripture: Matthew 5:14-16, "You are the light of the world. A city 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 men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven."

General Group Question: What did Jesus mean when he said, "You are the light of the world"?

Additional questions for the entire group or in groups of two or three of the same gender (15-20 minutes). If appropriate, please pray for each other's needs afterwards.

1. Are we lights now for the Kingdom or will we become lights sometime in the future. Briefly explain.
2. Are the Beatitudes that Jesus preached about just good deeds a Christian is to do, or was he talking about spiritual character traits? What's the difference?
3. What does the great commission that Jesus gave to all of his disciples have to do with being lights to the world?
4. What is the significance of the statement that lamps do their best work in the dark – to us as Christians?
5. What is the significance of the statement that lamps can provide more light in groups – to us as Christians?
6. What aspect of the skit about the four candles impacted you the most?
7. How can you be a light to the people God has placed in your life?