
One Candle

by: Ronald L. Dart

Now, it was odd when I began to think about it and realized that Jesus never spoke to the church. I hadn't thought about it, but He didn't at any time. To Him the church was a future thing. Remember what He said? "I will build My church." It's future for Him. And the church would be built out of individual bricks one at a time. So, while Jesus spoke to crowds, the people He was really talking to be the individuals in that crowd who would eventually form the foundation, the building blocks, the things upon which you and I have built, and later generations that we call the church. He was talking to individuals who would understand, who would hear, and who would respond. Something not everyone did. Even when He drew his disciples away, and taught them privately, they were still not a church. They were each a unique individual. Each was a collection of talents, experiences, knowledge, problems, headaches, aggravations, prejudices, strengths and weaknesses. Every one of them was different. Every one of them was unique. Every one of them though brought something to the table that Jesus felt they needed to have, and He chose to work with them. He worked with them together, He worked with them separately, just as He works with all of us, together and personally.

Light and Salt

This year, at this Feast, I feel led to talk, not to the church, but to you personally, because after all, you are the light of the world. You are the salt of the earth.

And these two comparisons: salt of the earth, and light of the world, come from that old standby, the Sermon on the Mount. Every young preacher gets this advice from the guys who send him out to do his first sermon. You can't go wrong to preach on the Sermon on the Mount. So, it becomes familiar to all of us by default. I think these two comparisons, the salt of the earth, and light of the world, seem to say two different things about us. One, we are like salt scattered, not concentrated, all in one place. Two, each of us is like a candle in a very dark place.

The Lights Went Out

Now, one night I was working in my study, everything was all lit up bright. You know, lights on, and I had all my books out, and there were no thunderstorms around, there was nothing going on, it was a cloudy night and it was in the dark of the moon.

And as I worked with no clap of thunder, and no warning, all the lights went out. And you know what, you ask, why now? Why here? Why, in this place, all of a sudden everything was dark?

Now, the sharp contrast between bright light and all of a sudden, no light, is really startling, and disorienting at first. I waited a moment and it's pitch black.

Then I carefully got out of my chair, I felt my way to the door. I was able to put my hand on the door and reach down and find the knob where it was supposed to be. Open the door, stepped out and the garage is utterly black. Couldn't see my hand in front of my face, so I took one step forward, and put my hand on Allie's car. I felt my way along toward the hood of the car, and then I calculated carefully the angle and the distance to where I knew the door should be. I took two steps across, found the door, worked my way down to the door handle, and opened it up. Inside - pitch dark. I started up the steps, there are about five or six steps from the garage level up into our kitchen level. There was no light coming from the neighbor's porch light as often it is at night. There was just darkness. So, I got to the top of the stairs carefully, got the angle right, took one or two steps across to the counter top, in the kitchen, and then felt my way down to the bottom drawer, opened the bottom drawer, and got out a candle and a match. Scratched the match, lit the candle, and you know what this is like, I have a feeling all of you have been through it.

One Little Candle

There is that one little candle that makes all the difference in the world at a time like that. It's a difference between stubbing your toe on things or not.

Light one little candle, and your whole world changes in that moment, from pitch dark to light. And the dark cannot defeat the light of that candle, can it? It can't quench it. Doesn't make a difference how much darkness there is, that one little flame of light sends it away, and it changes.

Each of Us is like a Candle

But what did Jesus mean by the analogy that each of us is like a candle? How should we take it? What should we do with it? Well, the analogy, as I said arises from the Sermon on the Mount, chapter five of Matthew, and here's the way it goes. Jesus says several things leading up to this statement about being the light of the world.

Blessed are the Poor in Spirit

Jesus said in verse three of Matthew 5, "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the Kingdom of heaven".

Poor in spirit is referring to an attitude of mind. Solomon said that "the rich answer roughly, but the poor use entreaties" (Proverbs 18:23).

It's a question of the way, you respond to people, this is what He was talking about here. It describes an honest humility in a person, and it's reflected in how we treat people.

Now there's an odd angle about this Kingdom of Heaven idea, because we all look forward to the Kingdom of Heaven, Christ returns, establishes his Kingdom on Earth, and the Kingdom of God.

But there's a funny thing, if you work your way through the Kingdom parables, and any of you can do that if you have a concordance. Just read them all, and when you get through with them you get the distinct feeling that there's a very large concept of here and now, in those Kingdom parables. I think what Jesus is trying to tell us is that you represent the Kingdom of Heaven here and now. When you are like that little candle, you have suddenly brought a small piece of the Kingdom of Heaven, into perhaps another person's life. This is all about how we treat people.

Blessed are the Meek

Let's try another Beatitude in verse five, "Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth".

I always look at words carefully, because sometimes the translators don't get it right, sometimes the dictionaries can clarify, and how we look at it basically, what the word means is 'mild' and 'gentle'. I understand those two principles quite well. It relates closely, doesn't it, to be poor in spirit. The person who is humble, who is meek, who is mild, and I love that word 'gentle' in the way we treat people, has everything to do with it. You know a mild person is a person who is easy to be with, who is a comfortable person. I daresay you could sit there for a moment and you could probably tick off a list of people who fit that description. Are you one of them?

You could also find another list of people who are, what I shall call them, prickly? Oh you do know people who are prickly! There is that distinction. I think that's important.

Blessed are the Merciful

Now, let's try another one, Matthew 5:7, "Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy."

Now this is a cautionary one for your file of warnings. In your judgment of other people, you are often pronouncing your own sentence. Whatever it is you think should happen to that person, you may wind up having it happen to you. So, there's an incentive for you, if you ever needed one, to be merciful. But, once again, it's how you treat people. A merciful person is easy to be with. They are comfortable. They are a comfort. You like to be with them.

Blessed are the Peacemakers

Here's another one, "Blessed are the peacemakers, they shall be called the children of God."

Now, this is not so much a matter of trying to help two friends who are at odds to reconcile. That's the way people tend to want to think about this, but they use that merely as an excuse to meddle in another person's business. That's not what this is about. It takes two to reconcile, and you may be one of the two. If you can make peace with people with whom you are at odds, you're a peacemaker. That's what it means.

The place to start making peace is between yourself and those where that peace does not exist. It has to do with your attitude. How you conduct yourself toward other people, how you treat people and whether or not you're just a comfortable person to be with, and to be around.

Blessed are They who Are Persecuted for Righteousness' Sake

Jesus comes down to Matthew 5:10, "Blessed are they who are persecuted for righteousness' sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you, when men will revile you, and persecute you, and say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. Rejoice, and be exceedingly glad: for great is your reward in heaven: because you have suddenly found solidarity with the prophets."

With every man of God in all of history who has suffered this way, because of his obedience to God, you have joined a large, mighty, wonderful band of people. Good people whom you would enjoy. You would love to be with. They would be comfortable with you. They would be a light to their surroundings, and the people who hated them, are the ones to stay away from. Then He says this, and what He doesn't exactly say in this place, is that your endurance will have an effect on other people.

An Old Friend

We have a friend, an old friend, I haven't seen in years, but I know he's there in a nursing home. Actually, he's at home now, he was in a nursing home in Gladewater. He's diabetic, and up there suffering, and putting up with the miseries of a nursing home. Another friend who visited him on a very regular basis, said that he went there because this guy lit up his life. He was a source of encouragement, and of strength. He thought, "What in the world do I have to complain about? I go to see this guy to cheer him up and he ends up cheering me up, from a bed in a nursing home."

You Have an Effect on People

Whatever it is that you're doing, wherever you are that you're doing it, you have an effect on other people. I don't think the fellow in the nursing home realized the extent to which he was changing the lives of people who came, and interacted with him, but he was.

You know, you don't win points in a heavenly lottery because someone treats you badly. The points are won in terms of your endurance, and your effect on other people, in making that endurance. Your effect, in strengthening other Christians who may have to suffer the same thing. You're effect in giving encouragement to people who say, "If he can do it, I can do it." That makes a great deal of difference, and whenever you endure adversity, whenever you stand up against it, and overcome it, you have an effect on others beyond anything you can possibly know.

You Are the Salt Of The Earth

Now, having led up to this, Jesus, in the Sermon on the Mount, goes on to say, "You are the salt of the earth, but if the salt has lost its savor wherewith shall it be salted? It is thenceforth good for nothing, but to be cast out and trodden under the foot of man."

Here is a warning right there for all of us, it was tossed out, in a way as an encouragement, that we are the salt of the earth, but also there's a risk that we might become good for nothing. Oh, God forbid that we should let that happen. How does it come about? Well, I suppose it comes about by our failure to live up to the Beatitudes. Our failure to live up to the things that Christ says throughout his ministry as you page your way through those red-letter versions of the Bible. You know, not the question of: "What would Jesus do?" But, "What did Jesus say that we must do?" The failure to live by that, and the savor is gone.

"You are the light of the world, a city that is set on a hill cannot be hid, men don't light a candle and put it under a basket, they put it on a candle stick, so it can give light to the whole house. Let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works and glorify your Father who is in heaven".

This seems to be the task, the responsibility of every one of us no matter what we may think of ourselves, or of our place in God's Kingdom. This is it - let your light shine before men.

Read the Book

A little self-examination, in the light of the words of Jesus, is always a good thing for those of us who claim to be His disciples. It is time to read the book, and not think about how it describes someone else as being bad, but to look at how it describes you in your life, and what you do.

In a way, what this sermon is about is a different approach to evangelism, of all things. Now I know a lot of you feel inadequate when it comes to explaining the Bible, because you have told me that, again and again. Some complain that they can't remember scriptures. They say, "I read it, I understand it, and I forget it." These are understandable human limitations, and we all struggle with them in one way or another. All of us are different, but all of us are the salt of the earth. All of us are the light of the world.

Nevertheless, some are scented candles, short, blocky. You may not notice them at first, but they can change the atmosphere in a room. That's simple. Others are long, tapered candles, they hold their light up a little higher to help to keep you from stubbing your toe on something in the dark.

Adopt a Widow

Now, light and salt are just metaphors. How does it actually work?

Another of my friends always made it a point to visit a nursing home in her area. She would locate a couple of elderly ladies in the nursing home and she would adopt them. She would visit them on a regular schedule. She would buy them little things they needed or wanted. If they needed a hairbrush, she would bring them one. If they needed lipstick, she'd bring them one. She would come, and she would sit and read the Bible to them, or read other books, whatever it is that they needed. However, she could warm their day, warm their life, make them feel loved, that's what she did, and she would do this regularly, and she paid a price for this.

Think about it for a moment, you're visiting these old ladies and they get to be almost like moms to you, and you spend all this time with them, and then they die. And it hurts. She would have to endure the pain of loss because of the kind of person she was, and still is, to this day. So, what did she do when she lost one? She would go and adopt another one and carry on. She was for these little old ladies, a candle in a dark place and she changed the atmosphere in the room when she came in.

Now, I ask you this, how much is it worth to make someone feel better by just seeing you walk in the door? What's it worth? Now you know people like this. Are you one of them? Or, are you a prickly person? Are you a kind person? A gentle person that people feel good when you're around?

Cards, Letters and Phone Calls

Now, there's also the question, of how do people feel when they get a card from you? Does that mean something to them? A letter? A phone call? And my question is, is this really evangelism?

Evangelism is a compound word from the Greek and it means literally 'good message'. The word 'angel' is from the same root as 'messenger'. So, these words go back and forth.

So, my friend, who visits a nursing home, is like an angel when she walks in the door. It isn't necessarily her words, it is her presence, her kindness, her caring, her love, and how much these things mean to people. Listen carefully to me now, she does not really bring the Gospel, she is the gospel. She is the good message because of who she is, what she is and, as much as anything else, how she treats people.

Be the Gospel

Hebrews 13, at the end of the chapter, this is where the book of Hebrews begins to become personal. You kind of get the feeling up until this point it is a theological treatise, and you forget the fact that this is a letter to real people, in real time, from a real person.

The writer of Hebrews says in chapter thirteen verse one, "Let brotherly love continue. Don't forget to be hospitable because thereby some have entertained angels unaware. Remember those who are in prison as if you were in prison with them, and them which suffer adversity as being yourselves also in the body."

I don't know if you know anybody who's in prison or not, but you know those guys, and ladies, who are out there in a prison, for some stupid thing they've done in their life, a crime that they committed, in rare cases maybe a crime they didn't commit.

Do you have any idea how much a letter means to them? A personal letter telling about circumstances, and people they know, and just taking the time to answer their letters, it means a lot to them. If you don't know, you don't have occasion, you probably may never get it, but if you ever do, you will begin to realize by the letters you get back, how important it is that they receive a letter from you. And of course, some people who are in nursing homes feel like they're in jail.

And your presence there, your visits, your time with them is a kind of evangelism. Now, naturally, the words of the gospel will come into play at some point, but the words of the gospel are the easy part. The hard part is being the gospel.

One of the great things to know about evangelism is that it depends heavily on being in the right place at the right time. It happens sometimes too in the strangest way, ways that you wouldn't necessarily see.

In Acts 16:6 Luke is writing an account of all of Paul's journeys through Asia Minor, and when Paul and Silas had gone through Phrygia and the region of Galatia, they were forbidden by the Holy Spirit to preach the word in Asia. A vision appeared to Paul in the night. There was a man of Macedonia who stood there, pleading with him saying, "Come over into Macedonia and help us". Thus, began an entirely new phase of Paul's ministry.

Sleeper Cells

From the Cold War, we've got a new idea that's entered our vocabulary. It's the concept of a 'sleeper cell'. These are people deliberately planted in a certain area, sometimes they were given a code word, that if they got over the phone, or through the mail, they would know they were activated, and they were supposed to do 'X'. We were told that Soviets had 'sleeper cells' in this country by their hundreds, perhaps thousands, who had instructions on what to do in the event we got into war with the Soviet Union.

Well Paul, when he got to Macedonia, encountered an entirely different kind of sleeper cell. In Acts 16:10, "After he had seen the vision of that man we endeavored to go into Macedonia, assuredly gathering that the Lord had called us to preach the gospel to them. Therefore, loosing from Troas, we came with a straight course to Samothracia, and the next day to Neapolis; And from there to Philippi, which is the chief city of that part of Macedonia, and a colony: and we were in that town abiding certain days. And on the Sabbath, we went out of the city by a river side, where we thought prayer would be made; and we sat down and spoke unto the women which resorted there".

And who was there? Jewish men? Rabbis? No. A group of women who met there.

"And a certain woman named Lydia, a seller of purple, of the city of Thyatira."

Lydia was a business woman. Purple is a particular type of dye, a very valuable dye, and she was a merchant from Thyatira. What's she doing in Philippi? She was a 'sleeper cell', and she didn't know it. She had no idea why she was there, she just was there.

"Whose heart this woman the Lord opened that she attended to the things that were spoken by Paul, and when she was baptized, and her household, she besought us saying, "If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come into my house and live there, and she constrained us.""

For all we know, this woman was brought from Thyatira to be the first building block of the church at Philippi. And it was a precious church that rose up around those women. It was a church that, when Paul was in Corinth, they helped him time after time. It was a poor church, they did not have much in resources, but whatever Paul needed they broke their backs to provide for him. It was led by this woman.

Why is the Feast of Tabernacles Important?

Why do we come to the Feast? Why is it important for us to be here? Well, we come so we can encourage one another. So, we can help one another. So, we can teach one another. And we have tried, right from the very beginning of the Christian Educational Ministries' Feast of Tabernacles, to make these learning opportunities, growing opportunities for training, teaching and developing.

We used to have a banner we put on the wall up here - "That the man of God may be proficient and equipped to every good work".

We're going to need to have our 'wicks trimmed' for our lamps. We're going to need to have our savor as salt renewed, so that we can do what we're here for. As one person 'sleeper cells' waiting for the call, waiting for the message, the open door and the chance to make a difference. That's who we are, and why we're here.

Communication Was Not Easy

For Paul, and the Philippians, communication was not easy. Take a letter, he had to write it, no word processors, you know, you had to scribble it out, and then somebody had to take off on foot from wherever Paul was, to deliver that letter to Philippi, a long time out there. Sometimes it was verbal, sometimes it was written. For us it's a lot easier, and thus it's taken for granted, like so much. And we must not miss what God has laid before us.

The scripture that has become very important to me is Malachi 3:16, "Then they that fear the Lord spoke often to one another, and the Lord listened".

You and I are sitting here talking to each other, and God listens to what it is that we say. We fire e-mails back and forth. Every one of those goes through God's Internet server, He knows about them, when we write them.

"The LORD heard it, and a book of remembrance was written before him for them that feared the LORD and thought upon his name. And they shall be mine, says the LORD of hosts, in the day when I make up my jewels; and I will spare them as a man spares his own son that serves him. Then you shall return, and judge between the righteous and the wicked, between him that serves God, and him that does not" (Malachi 3:16-18).

You know this is not a job that you can afford to leave to anyone else, this job of staying in touch, this job of communication. Because what Malachi says here is, "All that fear God will be in contact with each other on a continual basis." Why? We need each other. We need

encouragement. We need a pat on the back. We need somebody to say, "I know exactly how you feel because I have been there."

It is Your Job to Keep in Touch with the Saints

So, I have no idea why God has put you where you are, but it's for a reason. It's not a job you should leave to someone else. No church, no organization, not CEM, not anybody else can take care of keeping you in touch with other saints. You have to do it yourself. No one else can do the task that is given to you as a 'sleeper cell' in the Kingdom of God.

And it's important that you keep your candle where you can find it when the lights go out and you keep your matches dry.

The late Ronald L. Dart was a Christian evangelist whose teachings still inspire thousands of people around the world. His legacy spans decades. For more information about the teachings of Ronald L. Dart, visit RLDEA.com where you will find booklets, articles, sermons, Bible studies, and books by Mr. Dart.

Discussion Questions

1. Do you find it interesting that Jesus didn't try to start a church when He was here on earth?
2. Isn't it amazing how bright one little candle is?
3. What are your thoughts about being the Kingdom of Heaven now?
4. Are you meek, mild and gentle?
5. Do you feel that you are merciful?
6. How hard is it to be a peacemaker?
7. Have you or someone you know ever been persecuted for righteousness sake? If so, what happened?
8. What is the significant difference between these two questions Mr. Dart asked - it isn't about "What would Jesus do?" but "What did Jesus say that we must do?"
9. How do you let your light shine before others?
10. Does your life show the Gospel to others?