

## **Briefing Document: Matthew Lesson 51 ("Turn On Your Light Please")**

**January 4, 2026**

### **Executive Summary**

This document synthesizes the key themes from Lesson 51 of "The Sermon on the Mount," titled "Turn On Your Light Please," delivered on January 4, 2026. The central argument, based on *Matthew 5:14-16*, is the Christian's non-negotiable responsibility to be a visible "light" in a world presupposed to be in "decay and darkness." This light is not an action to be initiated but an intrinsic quality of the believer, empowered by the Holy Spirit, that must be allowed to shine. It manifests through "good works" that are winsome and attractive, serving the ultimate purpose of glorifying God. The primary obstacles preventing believers from shining are identified as fear of persecution and the exaltation of self—concerns for personal reputation and popularity—which cause them to hide their light. The sermon is a direct call to action, urging believers to overcome these fears, actively share their personal testimony, and make a covenant to live as "salt and light" in the face of growing opposition.

### **Sermon Overview and Context**

The sermon is presented as the 51st lesson in an ongoing series on the Gospel of Matthew, focusing specifically on the first of five major discourses. This particular lesson concludes a subsection covering *Matthew 5:14-16* and addresses the believer's fundamental responsibility to the lost world.

- **Primary Scripture:** *"You are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do they light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father who is in heaven."* (Matthew 5:14-16, NKJV)

- **Intended Audience:** While the Beatitudes were delivered to the wider crowd, this teaching is specifically directed at Jesus's disciples.

- **Central Theme:** The necessity for those with "kingdom character" to be a visible and influential light in a dark world, moving beyond the failed, works-based religious system of the time.

### **Core Theological Argument: The Mandate to Be a Light**

#### **Presupposition of a Dark World**

The sermon begins with the foundational premise that the world is in a state of decay and darkness. It is within this context that Jesus calls his followers to serve two critical functions:

- **Salt:** To retard the moral and spiritual decay of the world.
- **Light:** To illuminate the spiritual darkness.

### The Nature of Christian Light

The light that a Christian is called to display is not something that needs to be created or switched on. Rather, it is an intrinsic quality that already exists within a true believer.

- **Inherent Quality:** The Holy Spirit within a believer is the source of this light. The command is not to "start shining" but to "let your light so shine," implying that the only thing required is to remove any obstruction.
- **Manifestation Through Works:** The light becomes visible to others through "good works." The sermon emphasizes that these are not just good deeds in themselves, but they possess a beauty and attractiveness meant to draw people to God. The Greek word *kalos*<sup>1</sup> is used to describe this quality as something beautiful and winsome.

### Obstacles to Shining: Hiding the Light

Jesus's analogy of putting a lamp under a "bushel basket" is used to describe the conscious decision of a believer to hide their Christianity from the world. The sermon identifies two primary motivations for this.

### The Role of Fear

Fear is presented as a major reason believers hesitate to be a visible light.

- **Fear of Persecution:** The sermon explicitly states that the "biggest problem" is the fear of persecution, which can make believers hesitant.
- **Fear of Rejection:** Christians may hide their faith because they are uncomfortable, fear they will not be accepted, worry about offending others, or do not want to "make any waves."

### The Conflict of Glory

A central conflict exists between glorifying God and glorifying oneself. When a believer prioritizes their own status, they diminish their capacity to be a light for God.

- **Self-Concern vs. God's Glory:** As a person's concern for their own reputation, popularity, or prestige rises, their concern for God's glory naturally decreases.
- **The Decision:** The sermon posits that every believer must eventually decide whether their primary concern is God and His glory or themselves and their reputation.

### The Ultimate Purpose: Glorifying God

The overarching reason for a Christian to be salt and light is to bring glory to God. This is presented as the supreme purpose of human existence.

- **Biblical Mandate:** The final five words of *Matthew 5:16*, "...glorify your Father in heaven," are highlighted as the ultimate goal. This is reinforced by *Psalms 115:1*: "*Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but to Your name give glory, because of your mercy, because of your truth.*"
- **Chief End of Man:** The sermon references the Westminster Catechism, which defines the purpose of mankind as the glorification of God.
- **The Nature of God:** Jesus's language emphasizes two aspects of God's nature: His tenderness and intimacy ("Father") and His majesty and sovereignty ("in heaven").

### Practical Application and Call to Action

The sermon concludes with a strong appeal for believers to actively live out their calling as salt and light, presenting specific applications and historical models.

### The Power of Testimony

- Every saved person possesses a unique and powerful testimony.
- Withholding this testimony from someone who needs to hear it is described as retarding their ability to come to the Lord.

### The "Wheat Field" Analogy

An analogy is used to illustrate the urgency of the mission: a five-year-old boy gets lost in a vast, tall wheat field and perishes overnight in the cold. Believers are called to "join hands" and systematically search the field for lost souls so they do not meet a similar fate.

### Historical Examples of "Shining"

Several historical figures are cited as examples of people whose lives radiated the glory of God.

- **Dr. Robert Murray McShane:** A 19th-century teacher whose face was said to be so "lit up with a hallowed expression" that people would fall to their knees and accept Christ upon seeing him.
- **Fenelon:** A man from several centuries prior whose communion with God was so evident that his face "glowed." He spent a night snowed in with the Christian skeptic Lord Peterborough, who later wrote, "If I spend another night with that man I'll be a Christian in spite of myself."

- **Helen Ewing:** A young woman who died at age 20, of whom it was said that wherever she walked, she "dropped Christ behind her" like a bouquet of flowers.

#### New Year's Covenant and Future Persecution

The sermon serves as a New Year's challenge for the congregation in 2026.

- **The Challenge:** Believers are asked to make a covenant in their hearts to be salt and light to a dark world.
- **A Call to Stand Firm:** The message warns that proclaiming allegiance to Jesus Christ will become more difficult and that persecution will increase, citing *Hebrews 12:4* ("*You have not yet resisted to bloodshed...*") and the examples of Christians currently facing death for their faith in Iran and China.
- **Final Plea:** The sermon concludes with a prayer that believers will not cause Jesus "any more tears over the lost" because of their unfaithfulness, but will instead influence the world by living differently.

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#### Greek Terminology

Word	Phonetic Pronunciation	Definition from Source
<i><b>kalos</b></i> <sup>1</sup>	kah-LOSS	"Things that are beautiful." It signifies the attractiveness and winsome beauty that manifests through a believer's good works, stemming from being a child of God.

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<sup>1</sup> A reference to the Greek word *kalos*, used to describe the beautiful quality of the "good works" mentioned in *Matthew 5:16*.