

# MAKING A DIFFERENCE

CMBC February 15, 2015

Matthew 5:13 – 16; John 3:16 - 21

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- The news these days is filled with the horror stories of armies and terrorists carrying out horrific acts of murder and destruction.
- It is an attempt at forcing other people to change their beliefs. It has happened in our own country.
- It happened just yesterday again in Copenhagen.
- There is a ceasefire that was declared to begin today between Ukraine and Russia, but the gunfire was brutal right up to the last moment, and in one city there is still fighting going on.

There is another threat that is just as real and has devastating consequences. It affects our nation and the nations that have for centuries called themselves Christian. It is the moving away from faith in God, moving away from the values and morality that shaped our nations.

## 1. THE MOVE AWAY FROM FAITH IN GOD

- a. The truth has become discrimination
  - i. A week and a half ago our Canadian Supreme Court declared it was discrimination to not allow doctors to assist people to commit suicide, people who were terminally ill or psychologically overwhelmed.
  - ii. Earlier our courts have said it is discrimination to refer to marriage as only between a man and a women.
    1. Cristina Odone is the former deputy editor for The New Statesman a left of center news magazine in Britain. She had been invited to speak at a conference on marriage last summer, to be held at the Law Society in London. The conference was a chance for supporters of traditional marriage to contribute to the debate ... The title, "One Man. One Woman. Making the Case for Marriage for the Good of Society,"

In her article she wrote: A few days before the conference, the sponsors of the event [rang me and said that] the Law Society had refused to let us meet on their premises. The theme was "contrary to our diversity policy," the society explained in an email to the organizers, "espousing as it does an ethos which is opposed to same-sex marriage." In other words, the Law Society regarded support for heterosexual union ... as discriminatory.

Hurriedly, another venue was found in the heart of London, a publicly owned modern building situated across the street from Westminster Abbey ... But with only 24 hours to go before the conference, managers at that venue told Christian Concern that the subject it planned to discuss was "inappropriate." The booking was cancelled.

2. To hold the truth that marriage is between a man and a women is discrimination.

- iii. Lawyers all across our country voted to ban graduates from Trinity Western Law School from practicing law in their province, because the Trinity Western students are required to sign a commitment to moral chastity.
    - 1. Would the lawyers rather have the disgustingly sexual abuse that has been exposed in in recent weeks in some of our other universities?
    - 2. Fortunately the Nova Scotia Supreme Court ruled that it was illegal for the lawyers to ban Trinity Western Students. But that is the law and not the heart.
    - 3. The Bank of Montreal declared that they would not work with any company that used Trinity Western lawyers.
  - iv. We could go on to speak of other alarming attempts to silence our beliefs. You can speak it in the church but not in public.
- b. Who is to blame?
- i. It is easy to blame our courts, our politicians, our universities, our newspapers, the movie industry for the undermining of our Christian beliefs and values.
  - ii. I think maybe we need to look at the church, and the failure of the church to influence our society.
  - iii. But first let me say that the Bible warns that faith in God and obedience to his commandments will always be challenged.
    - 1. There has never been a time that the truths of God haven't been under attack.
    - 2. Eugene Peterson - Eighteen hundred years or so of Hebrew history, capped by a full exposition in Jesus Christ, tell us that God's revelation of himself is rejected far more often than it is accepted, is dismissed by far more people than embrace it, and has been either attacked or ignored by every major culture or civilization in which it has given its witness: magnificent Egypt, fierce Assyria, beautiful Babylon, artistic Greece, political Rome, Enlightenment France, Nazi Germany, Renaissance Italy, Marxist Russia, Maoist China, and pursuit-of-happiness America. The community of God's people has survived in all of these cultures and civilizations but always as a minority, always marginal to the mainstream, never statistically significant.
    - 3. A slipping away from faithfulness to God's truths has always been a danger for even the faithful.
      - a. We see that over and over again in the OT story of the people of Israel.
      - b. We see this in the story of the church
    - 4. We will never be done this battle until Christ finally comes again to put rule, and Satan's work and power is finally brought to an end.  
So the reality of these challenges to the truth will always be before us
  - iv. But let me come back to the failure of the church

1. Through much of the churches history it has failed to be the influence on the world that is possible through the power of the Holy Spirit.
  - a. We have slowly compromised
  - b. Or we have relied on governments to make the rules
  - c. We have not focused on developing a deep relationship with God
  
2. People without God can hardly be expected to live differently
  - a. We experience that even in our own lives. When we try to live the Christian life on our own, we fail.
  - b. We can pass laws and make rules, but in the end that will fail.
  - c. **2 Corinthians 10:3** For though we live in the world, we do not wage war as the world does. [4] The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world.
  - d. The weapons of the world are those that try to force people to change by passing laws, or by torturing or killing those who do not agree. It is only by the power of the Holy Spirit changing hearts that we can follow God's moral laws.
  - e. Paul goes on to say, On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. [5] We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ.

## 2. GOD BROUGHT LIGHT INTO DARKNESS

- a. There are wonderful passages in the Bible about God bringing light into the world. Here are some of them.

**John 1:1 – 7** In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. [2] He was with God in the beginning. [3] Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. [4] In him was life, and that life was the light of men. [5] The light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not understood \* it. [6] There came a man who was sent from God; his name was John. [7] He came as a witness to testify concerning that light, so that through him all men might believe. [8] He himself was not the light; he came only as a witness to the light. [9] The true light that gives light to every man was coming into the world. \*

**John 3:16 - 21** "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, \* that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. [17] For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. [18] Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God's one and only Son. \* [19] This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but men loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil. [20] Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that his deeds will be exposed. [21] But whoever lives by the truth comes into the light, so that it may be seen plainly that what he has done has been done through God." \*

**John 8:12** When Jesus spoke again to the people, he said, "I am the light of the

world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.”

**1 John 1:5** This is the message we have heard from him and declare to you: God is light; in him there is no darkness at all. [6] If we claim to have fellowship with him yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live by the truth. [7] But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all \* sin.

- b. Understanding the need for light
  - i. The warring and fighting and terrorism that we see in the news is because of darkness. Somehow in the darkness man is desperate to somehow make a better world.
  - ii. Even the drive for tolerance of every immoral passion is a frantic hope to find some kind of meaning to life. It is a desperate act in the darkness.
- c. What the light means to a dark world
  - i. Jesus said that men are afraid of the darkness.
  - ii. It shows the hopelessness of trying on our own and the need to submit to God
  - iii. But it shows the hope that there is in Christ, the love of God for people desperate to find meaning and purpose for life.

**Here is what Jesus said.**

### **3. YOU ARE THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD**

**Matthew 5:14 [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.

- a. Living as people of light
  - i. An early Christian document written somewhere between 120-200 AD and believed to have been written by a man named Athenagoras. In one important section the author describes how Christians are alike—and different from others:

The difference between Christians and the rest of mankind is not a matter of nationality, or language, or customs. Christians do not live in separate cities of their own, speak any special dialect, not practice any eccentric way of life. ... They pass their lives in whatever township—Greek or foreign—each man's lot has determined; and conform to ordinary local usage in their clothing, diet, and other habits. Nevertheless, the organization of their community does exhibit some features that are remarkable, and even surprising. For instance, though they are residents at home in their own countries, their behavior there is more like transients. ... Though destiny has placed them here in the flesh, they do not live after the flesh; their days are passed on earth, but their citizenship is above in the heavens. They obey the prescribed laws, but in their own private lives they transcend the laws. They show love to all men—and all men persecute them. They are misunderstood, and condemned; yet by suffering

death they are quickened into life. They are poor, yet making many rich; lacking all things, yet having all things in abundance. ... They repay [curses] with blessings, and abuse with courtesy. For the good they do, they suffer stripes as evildoers.

- ii. Michael Ramsden, a co-worker with Ravi Zacharias, shared the following true story about a minister from Iran. As the minister was driving with his wife, they stopped in a small Iranian village to purchase some water. Before entering, the minister noticed a man holding a machine gun and leaning against the wall outside the store. The minister's wife looked at the man's face and the gun, then put a Bible in her husband's hand and said, "Give that man this Bible." Her husband looked at the man—his menacing beard and his machine gun—and replied, "I don't think so." But she persisted: "I'm serious. Give it to him. Please, give him the Bible."

Trying to avoid the issue, the husband said, "Okay, I'll pray about it." He went into the shop, purchased the water, climbed back into the car, and started to drive away. His wife looked at him and said, "I guess you didn't give him the Bible, did you?" Looking straight ahead, he replied, "No, I prayed about it and it wasn't the right thing to do." She quietly said, "You should have given him the Bible," and then she bowed her head and started praying. At that point, he turned around and told his wife, "Fine! If you want me to die, I will."

When the minister returned to the store, the man with the machine gun was still standing against the wall. The minister approached him and placed the Bible in his hand. When the man opened it and saw it was a Bible, he started to cry. "I don't live here," he said. "I had to walk for three days in order to get to this village. But three days ago an angel appeared to me and told me to walk to this village and wait until someone had given me the Book of Life. Thank you for giving me this book."

The minister became a courageous witness for Christ. Eventually, along with many other co-workers in the Iranian church, he was martyred for his faith.

- b. During the 1970s and '80s, Chattanooga, Tennessee, was a decaying city.
  - Divorce was rampant.
  - Half of all births were to unwed mothers.
  - Single women were the sole providers in 30 percent of homes, with many living in poverty.

In August of 1997, a group of businessmen, civic leaders, and church leaders formed a nonprofit organization called First Things First.

Brad Rymer was a local businessman at the time, and one of the founders of First Things First. "The information we received about the state of marriage and families in our community really shocked me," he says. "After hearing a certain amount of it, I went home and prayed, 'Lord use me to help you save marriages.'"

First Things First's goal was to decrease divorce, help marriages, and reduce teen

pregnancies. They provided numerous seminars and classes on strengthening the family. Some of the seminar titles were: "How to Avoid Marrying a Jerk," "Discovering the Love of Your Life All Over Again," and "Boot Camp for New Dads." Families and churches could also borrow books and videos from a newly founded resource center.

The results have been excellent. As of 2006—less than 10 years since the program began—the divorce rate has gone down by 25 percent. Cases of children having children have gone down by 26 percent. Fathers spend more time with their children and are more aware of the crucial role they play. With God's help, First Things First has transformed Chattanooga and restored numerous families.

- c. Brightly shining the light
  - i. Being a light in the world is not easy.
    - 1. It costs.
    - 2. A candle always is burning up the wick. It is a sacrifice.
    - 3. But we know that the fuel for the fire has no end to it.
  - ii. The news blares out to us the desperate need for the light
    - 1. People are killing each other to find what only the Light can bring
    - 2. Marriages and homes are being destroyed hoping to find what only the Light can bring
    - 3. They think that drugs or alcohol can bring them peace but it only brings more slavery and evil
  - iii. Jesus said you can make a difference that will bring glorious light to the world around you
    - 1. We complain about the news, the lawyers, the movie stars, the law makers
    - 2. But wait! You are the light that bring what these fail to bring.
    - 3. You can live as children of light
    - 4. You can let them see what living in the light means
    - 5. You can make the sacrifice to
  - iv. Know that this will always be a battle. Don't hide it. Let it shine brightly. Not forcing people, but living it.
    - 1. Jesus said, "A city on a hill cannot be hidden."
    - 2. A church is that city. It is a powerful light.
    - 3. People think that the church is a dark scary place. Let's let them know that this is a wonderful place to be a place of light, a place of hope, a place of salvation
    - 4. Let's be that light.
  - v. Make a difference in the world around us.