

“Throwing Light or Throwing Shade?”

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¹³ “You are the salt of the earth; but if salt has lost its taste, how can its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything, but is thrown out and trampled under foot. ¹⁴“You are the light of the world. A city built on a hill cannot be hid. ¹⁵No one after lighting a lamp puts it under the bushel basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all in the house. ¹⁶In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven.
(Matthew 5:13-16)

As RuPaul once posted on Twitter, “Throwing shade takes some creativity.” Those who practice the art say there is a subtlety and a nuance to it... that well-thrown shade is more like a surgeon’s scalpel than a blunt force weapon.

These are things that I did not know last week. but fortunately, in addition to two youngish Boomers in our family, we also have two savvy and well-traveled “Zoomers.” And my Gen-Z daughters helped me understand a bit more about what it means to “throw shade.” And the good news is that, this morning, I want to share these discoveries with you.

In case you didn’t know, to throw shade is to criticize or disrespect someone, to cut them down or slam them in some way. Taking it to the next level, the kids would say that shade can be “lowkey” (which means the edge of the disrespect is dulled or softened a bit) or it can be “highkey” (which is not dulled or softened at all). Someone who throws “highkey” shade does not want anyone to miss the insult.

For example, imagine someone tuning in to the livestream of this service on Facebook, and even as I speak they are typing in the comment section, “Thank you, Boomer, for this cutting-edge tutorial on contemporary cultural literacy.” That would be some beautifully crafted lowkey shade!

Enough on that. The main point is that, when we throw shade, we are working purposefully and intentionally to cast the target of our criticism in a less favorable light. That is, after all, the basic definition of shade – “darkness or obscurity caused by a blockage or interception of light.”¹ When we throw shade, we impair the natural flow of light, causing darkness to fall on someone else.

This brings us to the teaching of Christ in the Sermon on the Mount. He draws our attention to the lights we use in our homes. Yes, most lamps have shades, but the intent of those shades is to direct the light to the places where it is most needed and most useful. No one, Jesus says, lights a lamp and then hides it completely under a basket. That just leaves the house in darkness. Instead, we put the lamp in a prominent place and let its warm glow shine throughout the house. “In the same way,” Christ tells us, “let your light shine before others.” In other words, throw light, not shade.

That is the concept I want us to explore this morning. The language Christ uses seems simple enough: “*You are the light of the world... let your light shine before others.*” But what is that light, how do we have it, and how do we share it?

¹ <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/shade>



To answer those questions, we need to begin at the beginning, “*when God created the heavens and the earth, the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep... and God said ‘Let there be light,’ and there was light.*”² Light comes before everything else; it is the first good thing God brings into the world. And from the moment of that first creative utterance, God and light have been inextricably linked. In scripture, God is not only seen as the giver of light; God **is light**. And the same is true of Christ -- the One who would enlighten everyone, who would be “*the light of all people,*”³ and who would say to his disciples, “*I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life.*”⁴

And, as children of God and followers of Christ, we are repeatedly instructed to “walk in the light of the Lord,”⁵ and to behave “as children of light.”⁶ In our world, light is associated with God and with good things. Life depends upon light. Clear sight depends upon light. Light is warmth, wisdom, honesty, purity. Light guides the way and helps us find our path.

Darkness, by contrast, is associated with the opposite of all of these things. To be in darkness is to be lost, confused, without wisdom, understanding, or direction.⁷ A world shrouded in darkness is a world without goodness, without order, without God.

Therefore, when we “walk in the light,” when we behave as “children of light,” when we “let our light shine before others,” we are choosing to reflect the very best aspects of what it means to be fully alive, to be fully human, and to be, as best we can, the true people of God.

In this regard, note that the word “reflect” is vital. As human beings, we are not able to generate light ourselves. The best we can hope for is to reflect the light. This is one of those places where knowing a little Hebrew comes in handy. In Hebrew there are basically two words for bringing something new into being. The first, *bara* (בָּרָא) means “to create.” The second, *asah* (עָשָׂה), means “to make” or “to do.” Those concepts may sound the same, but in Hebrew they could not be more different, because in holy scripture anyone can make something or do something, but only God can **create** something. Only God can “*bara*.” And that is made plain right from the very beginning, with the first three momentous words of the Hebrew Bible: “*Beresheet bara Elohim*” – “In the beginning, God **created**.”

So, when it comes to the light of heaven, we do not and cannot create the light. We can only hope to reflect it... direct it... let bounce off of us and shine through us on the way to those places where it is most needed. God is the sun; we are the moon. Without God’s light to shine upon us, we are in cold, desolate darkness. But when we seek the light of God, and walk intentionally in the light of God, we can reflect and share God’s light in beautiful ways.

This is our choice, in every minute of every day. We can choose to throw light, or we can choose to throw shade. And when it comes to choosing the latter, we do more than miss an opportunity. A number of times and in a number of ways scripture warns us against being a stumbling block for other people. “*Let us not... judge one another anymore,*” Paul writes in his letter to the Romans. “*Instead, let us judge this: that no person should put a stumbling*

² Genesis 1:1-3.

³ John 1:4-9.

⁴ John 8:12.

⁵ Isaiah 2:5; 1 John 1:7.

⁶ Ephesians 5:8.

⁷ <https://bible.org/article/subjects-kingdom-and-their-influence-world-matthew-513-16>

block or an occasion to fall in another's way."⁸ In this teaching, Paul was building directly on the teaching of Jesus himself, who said

"Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven... Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me. [But] if any of you put a stumbling block before one of these little ones who believe in me, it would be better for you if a great millstone were fastened around your neck and you were drowned in the depth of the sea. Woe to the world because of stumbling blocks! Occasions for stumbling are bound to come, but woe to the one by whom the stumbling block comes!"⁹

It seems to me that throwing shade on someone is a lot like throwing a stumbling block into their path. If we intentionally block the light, or try to cast someone in a negative light, isn't that the same as standing between God and that person, blocking that person's ability to see God and experience the love and grace of God?

If it sounds like I am throwing shade on the concept of throwing shade, then you are hearing me perfectly. The choice for us as people of God, in every situation, is to ask ourselves, "If I say this, am I throwing light, or throwing shade? If I do this, am I throwing light, or throwing shade?" If we think of the Sermon on the Mount as Christ's master class in what it means to seek God and follow God, and that is what it is, then we ought to pay close attention to the first three commands that Jesus gives us in that discourse... the three imperatives that come first stand above all the others: "Rejoice," "Be Glad," and "Shine your Light."¹⁰

But here is the thing: if we are really going to reflect God's light in our living, if we are really going to let that little light shine before others, then the first step is to believe that amazing thing that Jesus says to us before we are instructed to shine: "***You are the light of the world.***"

Note that Jesus does not say, "Someday you might be the light of the world." Jesus does not say, "On a good day you are the light of the world," or "Remember that time in 8th grade when you were the light of the world." No, Christ says to us, without exception, without qualification or caveat, "You are the light of the world." Period.

And let me ask you: do you believe that? Can you accept that as truth, and claim that truth for yourself? God is light, and Christ is the true light, but the gift of God, and the promise of God, is that a little part of that light is part of you and lives in you. There is nothing you can do, no mistake you can make or law you can break that can extinguish the light that lives in you. And that little flicker, small though it may be, is bright enough to illuminate every corner of your life. If we can accept this, that you and I really are vessels for the light of the world, then our power to reflect the light of God instantly multiplies exponentially. When that happens, we will be throwing light all over the place!

So, embrace the truth of who you are. "You are the light of the world. So Rejoice... Be Glad... and Shine! ***Amen.***

⁸ Romans 14:13-23.

⁹ Matthew 18:3-7.

¹⁰ D. Mark Davis, Left Behind and Loving It, "The Heart of the Law and the Light of the World," <https://leftbehindandlovingit.blogspot.com/2014/02/the-heart-of-law-and-light-of-world.html>.