

Let The Lower Lights Be Burning

June 19, 2007

Many years ago, as night was approaching on Lake Erie, the pilot of a ship encountered a heavy storm. Feeling deeply about his responsibility for the lives of his passengers and crew, he headed for Cleveland, the nearest harbor. Finally he saw the beacon in the tower of the lighthouse, but as he approached he could not see any lower lights on the shore to guide him into the channel. He attempted to enter the harbor, but missed it, and his ship was wrecked upon the protruding rocks. Many lives were lost because of the neglect of the watchman whose duty it was to light the lower lamps (Hymns Illustrated by Harry Githens, 1958, The Standard Publishing Co., Cincinnati, Ohio).

Philip Paul Bliss, a singer and hymn writer, after hearing this story first told by D. L. Moody, was inspired to write the song, "Let The Lower Lights Be Burning", which has now been sung by many for well over a hundred years. In the song he compares the beacon light to the Lord and the lower lights to Christians. This writer would like to use this story and the lyrics of Mr. Bliss' song to make a few comments.

What A Sermon!

In Matthew chapter 5, in the first recorded sermon preached, and perhaps from one of the most recognized pulpits known - 'On the Mount' - Jesus expressed the importance of one letting his light "so shine" before men (verse 16). In essence he describes the person who "glorifies the Father in heaven" as one who sees the follower of Christ living a life which reflects the beauty of holiness by casting a constant ray of the character and attributes of the Lord in his life. Instead of the light being under a bushel where it serves no purpose, it instead is emitted so all can see it, not for self glorification like the Pharisees (Matthew 23:5-7) but to redound to the glory of God.

A Lesson Learned From Peter

About 3-1/2 years after Peter initially heard the wonderful sermon of Jesus he finds himself in a compromising situation. Hours before the crucifixion of Christ, while making preparation for the Passover Peter quickly and defensively avows his loyalty when Jesus told him he would deny Him. Just moments before the crowing of the cock, Peter began fulfilling the prediction of the Lord. When Jesus was apprehended and led before the High Priest, Peter soon began disassociating himself from Jesus by following Him afar off (Luke 22:54). Just like the Lord earlier predicted

that when the Shepherd of the flock is smitten the sheep will scatter (Matthew 26:31); and scatter, Peter did. He removed himself from the Lord by more than mere distance. One step led to another until his light was no longer shining as a disciple of the Lord. It became apparent by his conduct and words (Matthew 26:74) that Peter disavowed his fellowship with Jesus. He definitely began sitting with, and conforming to, the crowd around him. It became obvious that the only light he was associated with was that which came from the fireside of Satan (Luke 22:55).
Your Example: Good For Something or Good For Nothing?

A zealous follower of Christ will unashamedly walk hand in hand with the Lord and daily manifest the character of Jesus in his life regardless of the consequences; it'll be a life full of "good works" (Acts 9:36, 39; Titus 2:7); it'll be a life where his speech is "always with grace, seasoned with salt" (Colossians 4:6); it'll be a life of honesty and trustworthiness (Acts 6:3; Romans 12:17); it'll be a life of purity (1 Timothy 4:12; 5:22) and holiness (Romans 6:19, 22; Hebrews 12:14); it'll be a life that makes a difference to others and where Jesus is magnified through him (Philippians 1:20). The follower of Jesus will let his light so shine before men that by his beautiful upright and righteous life the Lord is glorified. His life cannot go unnoticed any more than a "city that is set on a hill cannot be hid" (Matthew 5:14-16).

On the other hand, a person whose light has gone out is much like that which the Lord said about the salt that has lost its savor - "it is good for nothing" (Matthew 5:13). This aptly describes the watchman whose duty it was to light the lower lamps in order to help direct the ship to safe harbor; but because of neglect the lives of many perished. He, like the one who has lost his influence for good, is good for nothing. By one's inconsistent and irreverent sinful conduct the worthy name of God can be blasphemed through him (Romans 2:24).

As Christians, our lives, our influences, our examples should have an impact for good upon those around us who live in darkness; our joy of serving the Lord should be seen by those who are unhappy; the peace we manifest should be obviously observed by those who are daily miserable and have no peace; our Christianity should exemplify everything that is true and right in a world that is errant and wrong; and our life is to be so attractive, so beautiful, so lovely - in word, in character, in behavior - that others cannot but see the reflection of the Master within His servant. Jesus is that Beacon whose light never dims or diminishes; and for His follower diligence, preparedness, and watchfulness are of paramount importance if one is to wield a godly influence and exhibit a Christ-centered life. With this kind of life one can be watchmen guiding others to safe harbor who otherwise are unable to navigate themselves in a world of

darkness and, whom having no sense of direction at sea, are lost. May each of us have the resolve and determination to always "Let the Lower Lights Be Burning" for there is "some poor fainting, struggling seaman" whom we may rescue, whom we may save!

Brightly beams our Father's mercy
From the Lighthouse evermore;
But to us He gives the keeping
Of the lights along the shore.

Dark the night of sin has settled,
Loud the angry billows roar;
Eager eyes are watching, longing,
For the lights along the shore.

Trim your feeble lamp, my brother;
Some poor seaman tempest tossed;
Trying now to make the harbor,
In the darkness may be lost.

Let the lower lights be burning!
Send a gleam across the wave!
Some poor fainting, struggling seaman,
You may rescue, you may save

Philip Paul Bliss

BJF Newsletter 031107 Volume 1 Number 4