

The Brown Street Beacon

*“...Shine out among them like beacon lights,
holding out to them the Word of Life” (Phil 2:15-16)*



Volume 3

October 16, 2016

Number. 35

Go Kill a Bear

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No doubt, most readers have already heard the following story: A very large man and a very small man were talking. Admiring the size of the larger man, the smaller one said, “Man, if I were as big as you, I wouldn’t be afraid of anything. I’d go out in the forest and find the biggest bear and tear him limb from limb.”

The large man replied with a smile, “There are a lot of small bears in the forest, too, you know. Why don’t you go tackle one of them?”

The story has a point that is badly needed right now among the people of God. Many Christians stand on the sidelines and tell what they would do if they were as strong as others. Some like to tell what they would do if they were elders of the church. Others would surely do a better job if they were the song leaders. Some would sure like to get into that pulpit and “tell it like it is!”

Some preachers boast of what they would do if they were preaching for the big church on the hill instead of the little one in the valley. Other preachers insist on telling us just what they would do if they ever got into one of those new fields of the world! But there is work in the kingdom for everyone. There are a lot of us little fellows who need to quit coveting the strength of others and who need to go out and tear some little bears apart!

An additional thought needs to be injected right here. How can one ever qualify himself to fight big bears if he hasn’t first tackled the little ones? In other words, as Christians, how can we ever expect to succeed in great battles for truth and righteousness if we haven’t learned to do the smaller things that seem somewhat insignificant? Most of us could start on the road to success by just bravely facing up to the tasks that already are altogether suited to our “size,” spiritually.

The lesson herein also applied to churches. Some congregations may be doing almost nothing except “keeping house for the Lord” because they think they are not big enough for greater things. They may look upon the large congregations with envy, and they may be satisfying their consciences by reflecting upon what they would do if they were big like some other congregations.

But the big church can’t do any more than the little church, proportionately. The church is people, and a few people can each do as much as each one in the larger groups.

Together, the few can do just as much as the many in proportion to their numbers. Perhaps the church where you worship needs to simply go out and find some small bears to engage in battle for truth and holiness. Try it. You'll like it!

Evil is everywhere. It is all around us. It's in the workplace and in the school houses. It's in the neighborhoods and in the media. It's even in the church buildings and in the home. It is, indeed, a very clear and present danger.

But ours is not the first generation to be shrouded in darkness. Noah was a "preacher of righteousness" (2 Peter 2:5) in a day when "the wickedness of man was great on the earth" (Genesis 6:5). Gideon and Eli were honorable judges during a time when "every man did what was right in his own eyes" (Judges 17:6). Josiah, the eight-year-old king, "walked in the ways of his father David" while his father Amon "multiplied guilt" (2 Chronicles 33:23). These and other heroes of faith did not use their unfavorable surroundings as an excuse for bad behavior. Rather, the very presence of evil became an opportunity for them to show what was good.

Jesus addressed this very principle in the Sermon on the Mount. With the Beatitudes (Matthew 5:1-12), He described what the kingdom citizen must look like on the inside: "poor in spirit" and "pure in heart." In the next section (Matthew 5:13-16), He pictured what we must look like to everyone else: "the salt of the earth" and "the light of the world." How fitting that Jesus used two common items, two things that everyone has in their house. And they describe something that everyone has in their life—influence.

What can Christians do concerning the evil that is all around us? Shelter in place? Keep to ourselves? Remain shut in and shut out? Not hardly. In fact, Jesus' admonitions suggest that we spread out.

Be distinct. Salt has a peculiar taste. It is immediately recognizable. Food at the restaurant (notice I didn't say at my house) is usually judged as having too much or not enough salt. When Jesus said that we are the "salt of the earth" (Matthew 5:13), one of the things that metaphor recommends is that we have a distinguishing flavor all of our own.

Now, this is not about being different just for the sake of being different. This has nothing to do with weird hairdos and eccentric clothing that draw more attention to the person than the cause they represent. This is about being different for the sake of being right. That is, after all, how we make a difference. When evil abounds, good is easily detected. But what good is salt that is not salty? When you can't tell the difference between the flavor and what needs flavoring, we have lost our effectiveness. "Low salt" is fine if you're on a diet, but when it comes to a world that is starving and thirsting for righteousness, get out of the shaker and into the soup. Leave a taste in someone's mouth that causes them to say, "we could use a little more of that." Christians, of all people, ought to be worth their salt.

Be seen. Lights are meant for shining. They are to be beaming from a lampstand, not hidden under a bushel. You can't be "the light of the world" (Matthew 5:14) when you stay in your house all the time. You have to shine like a city set on a hill.

Darkness is not a power that opposes light. It is merely the absence of it. And it doesn't take much light to cancel it out. One candle can brighten a whole room. One flashlight can

illuminate an entire tent. What do you think one Christian can do? When you shine in your dark corner of the world, you enable others to see. You give them enough light to finally find the way out, the way to Him who gives life and light. But if you are not where you can be seen, the rest of the world remains turned off, too.

You have a little light. Let it shine. All around the neighborhood. All the time. Let it shine. If you hide it under a bushel or let the devil blow it out, you extinguish your purpose and responsibility as well. You shut your own eyes to the “blessed gospel light.”

Be good. “You” are the salt of the earth. “You” are the light of the world. These are individual responsibilities. You can’t depend on others to do them for you. Just as salt has a distinct taste, you have a peculiar circle of influence. Just as light spreads and extends, you have a unique area where only you can shine. Don’t wait for other people to overcome evil with good. Be good yourself.

That’s what the world should taste. That’s what they should see. “Your good works” (Matthew 5:16). They’ve already seen plenty of bad ones. All they have to do is look around to observe those. Let them see good in you.