

LIVING WATER

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A CITY ON A HILL

by Kirk Wright

Matthew 5:14

14 "You are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden.

These words that Jesus spoke while delivering his famed sermon on the mount were recorded by the inspired writer Matthew. This verse and the ones preceding it outlined the personality a Christian should have. To be poor in spirit, to be mournful, to be meek, to hunger and thirst for righteousness, to be merciful, to have a pure heart, to be peacemakers, these qualities would lead to their persecutions. Christians are not to hide these qualities out of fear but have faith in the promise of God that the kingdom of heaven would be theirs.

Sepphoris, the largest city in Galilee, rose four hundred feet above the valley below it and could easily be seen from Jesus' hometown of Nazareth. The lights of the city could not be hidden at night. It would not be uncommon for Jesus in his teachings to refer to a city like this.

John Winthrop was a member of a religious reform movement known as the Puritans that arose within the Church of England in the late 16th century. Unable to reach the reform they desired for the Church of England, he and about 800 other Puritans

boarded the ship *Arabella* and left England headed for Massachusetts Bay Colony. They arrived in the year 1630.

The Puritans envisioned an idealized community in which all citizens would focus their lives on the word of God. John Winthrop knew that their community would be under intense scrutiny by those who they were trying to reform. As they were about to reach their destination, he delivered an inspiring sermon.

The sermon consisted of what would be expected of each member of the community whether they be rich or poor. He made it clear that the only way to avoid God's wrath was for each to do his or her part. The following is an excerpt from his sermon.

"Now the only way to avoid this shipwreck, and to provide for our posterity, is to follow the counsel of Micah, to do justly, to love mercy, to walk humbly with our God. For this end, we must be knit together, in this work, as one man. We must entertain each other in brotherly affection. We must be willing to abridge ourselves of our superfluities, for the supply of others' necessities. We must uphold a familiar commerce together in all meekness, gentleness, patience and liberality. We must delight in each other; make others' conditions our own; rejoice together, mourn together, labor and suffer together, always having before our eyes our commission and community in the work, as members of the same

body. So shall we keep the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace. The Lord will be our God, and delight to dwell among us, as His own people, and will command a blessing upon us in all our ways, so that we shall see much more of His wisdom, power, goodness and truth, than formerly we have been acquainted with. We shall find that the God of Israel is among us, when ten of us shall be able to resist a thousand of our enemies; when He shall make us a praise and glory that men shall say of succeeding plantations, "may the Lord make it like that of New England." For we must consider that we shall be as a city upon a hill. The eyes of all people are upon us. So that if we shall deal falsely with our God in this work we have undertaken, and so cause Him to withdraw His present help from us, we shall be made a story and a by-word through the world. We shall open the mouths of enemies to speak evil of the ways of God, and all professors for God's sake. We shall shame the faces of many of God's worthy servants, and cause their prayers to be turned into curses upon us till we be consumed out of the good land whither we are going.

And to shut this discourse with that exhortation of Moses, that faithful servant of the Lord, in his last farewell to Israel, Deut. 30. "Beloved, there is now set before us life and death, good and evil," in that we are commanded this day to love the Lord our God, and to love one another, to walk in his ways and to keep his Commandments and his ordinance and his laws, and the articles of our Covenant with Him, that we may live and be multiplied, and that the Lord our God may bless us in the land whither we go to possess it. But if our hearts shall turn away, so that we will not obey, but shall be seduced, and worship other Gods, our pleasure and profits, and serve them; it is propounded unto us this day, we shall surely perish out of the good land whither we pass over this vast sea to possess it.

Therefore let us choose life, that we and our seed may live, by obeying His voice and cleaving to Him, for He is our life and our prosperity."

John and his fellow Puritans settled in Boston. For the remaining nineteen years of his life John lived in the New England wilderness and was elected governor twelve times. With their spiritual goals in mind the community thrived for some time. The rich, the poor and the in between each tried to do what was expected of them. They were hard working and committed to their community. "The Puritan Work Ethic" became the phrase used to describe those who worked hard.

As any community goes, differing views on how things should be handled both spiritual and secular matters began to emerge. Those in power tried to force those who disagreed with them to fall in line.

The word of God teaches us that man has free will and he can either accept God's word or deny it. The bible teaches us how to discipline those that deny it, but it cannot be forced upon them.

I think we would all like to be a part of a community like the one that the Puritans set out to create but, in this world, the enemies of the cross of Christ will not allow it.

Consider Philippians 3:17-21

17 Brethren, join in following my example, and note those who so walk, as you have us for a pattern. 18 For many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ: 19 whose end is destruction, whose god is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame—who set their mind on earthly things. 20 For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, 21 who will transform

our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body, according to the working by which He is able even to subdue all things to Himself.

Let us live our lives with the qualities mentioned earlier. Let us be poor in spirit, let us be mournful, let us be meek, let us hunger and thirst for righteousness, let us be merciful, let us have a pure heart, let us be peacemakers, let us lead lives that bring about persecution. Let us not hide these qualities out of fear but have faith in the promise of God that the kingdom of heaven would be ours.

Let our lights be a beacon to those that are lost leading them to the kingdom of heaven.

