

Salt and Light 2-8-04

Matthew 5:13-16 (NIV) ¹³"You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled by men. ¹⁴"You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. ¹⁵Neither 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. ¹⁶In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.

Have you ever heard the expression, "People like that are the salt of the earth!?" We're losing a lot of those old Biblical expressions as our culture becomes increasingly secular. It meant that a person had integrity and was willing to stand up for what they believe. Jesus was addressing His disciples, but the "you" applies to every follower of Christ.

Salt had three special qualities in Jesus' day. It was associated with purity. I have picked the salt off the encrusted rocks on the shore of the Dead Sea. The white clarity of pure salt is beautiful. In the previous passage Jesus called the pure in heart blessed and promised that they would see God. The follower of Christ is pure. It isn't that they are perfect, but that God has taken their heart of stone and given them a heart of flesh, a new heart sensitive to God's leading. (Philippians 3:12)

Although it sounds like an instantaneous process, it reminds me of wastewater treatment. Since the Apostle Paul counted his old life as garbage, it may be a fair analogy for us to consider. (Philippians 3:8) The wastewater enters a treatment plant where it is irradiated. That kills the living things that shouldn't be in there, at least the larger ones. When we come to Christ we have some pretty serious garbage in our thoughts and desires, and like forgotten leftovers in your refrigerator - they're alive! (Romans 7:17) That initial work is like the Holy Spirit just killing off some old deceptive desires so you are willing to consider what God's plan might be for you.

Then we get filtered. There is a lot of junk in our life that just doesn't need to be there. We are filled with so much needless stuff. That is like coming to the cross and leaving our old nature there. (Colossians 3:3) Now we look pretty clean, but there are still some microscopic living things that have made the journey, so many little things that can poison the water, so chlorine is added. That is like the Holy Spirit filling our heart and mind so that those little things are killed when they come in contact with it. (1 John 1:7) But we still aren't pure H2O. We are getting closer, but we won't be pure until we evaporate. I don't have to explain that analogy. The trumpet will sound and the dead in Christ will rise first...(1 Thessalonians 4:16,17)

What a difference purity makes in a life! When God looks at your heart, does He see the pure white crystalline beauty of salt, or is it more like pepper, black and gray? There is only one way to have a pure heart, and that is to have God take your sin and give you the righteousness of Christ. (2 Corinthians 5:21) Have you made that exchange? Have you met Him at the filter of the cross? He made it possible by taking your punishment in your place that you might be made right with God. It's only then

Commented [notes1]: ¹²Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already been made perfect, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. Philippians 3:12 (NIV)

Commented [notes2]: ⁸Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ, Philippians 3:8 (KJV)

Commented [notes4]: ³For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. Colossians 3:3 (NIV)

Commented [notes5]: ⁷But 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. 1 John 1:7 (NIV)

Commented [notes6]: ¹⁶For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. ¹⁷After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever. 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17 (NIV)

Commented [notes7]: ²¹God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. 2 Corinthians 5:21 (NIV)

that you can follow Christ. We would all be going our own way, polluted and unusable, without His work in our hearts.

One common pollutant is religiosity. Religiosity has plagued men since Cain and Abel. Religiosity is performing religious ritual without a salt like purified heart. Cain could offer a sacrifice of his best work, but God could see his polluted heart. Esau could cry over the loss of the blessing, but God could see his heart. Lot's wife could flee from the judgment on the wicked, but God could see her heart. You can do all the right things, but without the right heart they are worse than meaningless; they are hypocrisy.

Saul sacrificed to God and prayed for His help, but it was in direct disobedience to the instructions of the prophet Samuel. Absalom heard the cry of his people and sacrificed to God, but God could see his heart was for self-promotion.

Why is it easier to be religious than to have a changed heart, a purified heart? It is because our old nature refuses to give up the throne of our heart. We want others to think our heart is pure while we insist on doing things our way. We ignore God's loving call for a relationship that we know would end in us surrendering our heart to Him. Love can be frightening because it can call us to a place beyond our own plans for our life. The purity of heart that salt represented can only be found in the new heart that lets Christ rule and reign over it. It is where true freedom is really found.

Salt was also used as a preservative. The ancient world did not have refrigeration, so meat and fish were preserved with salt. One of the ancients said that salt gave a new soul to meat so that it would not decay. In that sense, Jesus was saying that we keep the world from decaying into rotteness. It is the genuine Christian influence that brings morality and standards. Secular society is trying desperately to shake that heritage, the preserving influence of salt, not realizing they do so at their own demise. The freedom they seek is the freedom to destroy morality that in turn destroys the very society in which they live.

It is true that some laws are made out of the same religiosity that we mentioned earlier. We lose nothing when those laws of personal opinion are removed, but when we mess with God's laws, the standards He sets for decency, then we are endangering our very society. God's laws are given out of love for man to guide us into what is safe and wholesome. Religiosity demands you do things the way one particular group prefers it, because that is what they think is right. Sometimes it is hard for man to tell the two apart, but not for God. Remember, He looks right into the heart. (1 Samuel 16:7) Is it salt? Is it keeping from decay or influencing decay? (Proverbs 14:34)

This pollutant of religiosity is so subtle that it often sneaks in before we realize it. We say things because we are supposed to. We act in a certain way because that is the respected thing, instead of letting the real life of Christ flow. The antidote for religiosity is a moment-by-moment relationship with Christ. (Galatians 2:20)

I am very concerned that after people in our community see The Passion of the Christ that Christians will respond with religiosity. I can just see the scenario. Someone from an empty faith comes up to a Christian and says, "The movie really touched me. It has

Commented [notes8]: ⁷But the LORD said to Samuel, "Do not consider his appearance or his height, for I have rejected him. The LORD does not look at the things man looks at. Man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart." 1 Samuel 16:7 (NIV)

Commented [notes9]: ³⁴Righteousness exalteth a nation: but sin is a reproach to any people. Proverbs 14:34 (KJV)

Commented [notes10]: ²⁰I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. Galatians 2:20 (NIV)

made me think." The religious person says something off the top of their head that is totally unintelligible to that person that is seeking. They might say something like, "Did you receive Christ as your Savior?" The person has no idea what they mean. A debate follows that leaves the person thinking they made a mistake to discuss it. That is not salt. That is religiosity that tends toward decay as much as decadence does. (2 Corinthians 3:6) We don't realize that religiosity drives people away from God as fast as temptations do, and sometimes with a more lasting result.

Commented [notes11]: ⁶He has made us competent as ministers of a new covenant—not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life. 2 Corinthians 3:6 (NIV)

I can't give you the words that we should say. I just read a point-by-point instruction on how to talk to people after they see the movie. They gave the example of Philip and the Ethiopian eunuch. If that is the example we must follow then we'll all be running alongside the cars as they leave the lot. Philip was following the leading of the Spirit when he ran alongside that chariot, not a how to manual. It was the Spirit's timing, direction and words. It was the life of Christ in Philip that met that man right where he was. (Acts 8:26-40)

Every person and situation is unique. That is why we need to be dependent on the life of Christ within us. He's the only One that has the answer that the person needs to hear. It may be just to listen and draw them out. It may be to challenge them to examine how the claims of Christ compare to their beliefs. It may be to ask them right then and there if they want to receive the forgiveness He offers them. How can you know? What would drive them away? What would draw them close?

I know the answer. You or I would drive them away, but the Spirit will draw them closer to Christ. That is always true! We have to realize we don't have all the answers, but the Spirit does. Don't just act or speak like you think you are supposed to, follow His lead. (Romans 8:13,14) Be authentic. Ask God to direct your words. The people Jesus was talking to were His followers, not the religious leaders. They were the ones to whom He said, "You are the salt of the earth." When you respond to others by following Jesus' lead, you too, are the salt of the earth.

Commented [notes12]: ¹³For if you live according to the sinful nature, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live, ¹⁴because those who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. Romans 8:13-14 (NIV)

The third and most common use of salt is for seasoning. It adds flavor. Meals did not have the variety and seasonings we have today. Pepper was worth its weight in gold, but salt was an absolute essential. It was not only essential for flavor but health as well. Do you think of Christian influence like that? Is it the flavor in your relationships and in your society? If you are thinking, "You got to be kidding, it is more like the party pooper who puts a damper on all the fun", then you are thinking of religion and not the life of Jesus. Do you think people in Jesus' day said, "Oh no! Here comes Jesus. Things are really going to get boring now." That's not what we read in the gospels. He was the life of the party. People were crowding around waiting for Him to speak. His words brought life, not because he gave them pat answers, but because He spoke the words of God by the Spirit of God from a life that lived in tune with God. They clung to His words, and they either hated them or loved them, because they either hated or loved His Father from Whom the words came. (John 15:21-23)

If we are followers of Jesus, we will be the flavoring in this world. (Mark 9:50) We will have the words that will spice things up, the words from the Spirit. That was what made the early church such an influence in the world. By the time Emperor Constantine

Commented [notes14]: ⁵⁰"Salt is good, but if it loses its saltiness, how can you make it salty again? Have salt in yourselves, and be at peace with each other." Mark 9:50 (NIV)

made it the official religion, it became perfunctory obedience instead of real life. After Constantine, another "Emperor called Julian, who wished to put the clock back and to bring back the old gods. His complaint, as Ibsen puts it, was:

"Have you looked at these Christians closely? Hollow-eyed,
pale-cheeked, flat-breasted all; they brood their lives away,
unspurred by ambition: the sun shines for them, but they do not
see it: the earth offers them its fullness, but they desire it not;
all their desire is to renounce and to suffer that they may come to die."

As Julian saw it, Christianity took the vividness out of life."
—Barclay's Daily Study Bible (NT)

Remember that when someone claims to be a Christian but doesn't have the life and joy of Jesus, they are a testimony of what Christians should not be. They are discouraging seekers from having a life in Christ. I think many of the New Age seekers have had a taste of religion in their youth and thought that was Jesus. God help us. No wonder they looked elsewhere. We need to rediscover the relationship with the Spirit that the early church had, an intimate relationship that directs us daily and is the joy of our life. Barclay writes, "In a worried world, the Christian should be the only man who remains serene. In a depressed world, the Christian should be the only man who remains full of the joy of life. There should be a sheer sparkle about the Christian, but too often he dresses like a mourner at a funeral, and talks like a specter at a feast. Wherever he is, if he is to be the salt of the earth, the Christian must be the diffuser of joy."

—Barclay's Daily Study Bible (NT)

Jesus follows this great compliment of calling them the salt of the earth with a stern warning. It is difficult to understand, as salt cannot lose its saltiness. Sodium Chloride is always Sodium Chloride. I think we will understand it better when we get to the equivalent in the analogy of light under a bushel. The point is that we'd better keep adding flavor to our world or we are no longer of value. Worse than that, we need to be thrown out.

"You are the light of the world." Here's another great compliment. Jesus said He was the light of the world (John 8:12). In other words, He's saying that they have the affect on the world that He does. Where there is light, the darkness flees. They must have looked at one another and shrugged, "us?" Light of the world? We might look at one another and wonder the same. Don't forget, Christ is in you, and when you will let Him express His life through yours, you have become light to the world. (2 Corinthians 13:5)

The flame on the altar of ancient Israel was lit by the Lord. It is His fire, not our own, and it was never to go out. (Leviticus 6:13) If the flame is of your own doing, it is merely religion. Old Testament students wonder why God slew the sons of Aaron when they offered strange fire. (Numbers 26:61) Not only was it disobedience, but also symbolically it was saying that our ways are as good as God's. It was saying religion is good as relationship. It said, "Who needs God when we are so gifted? We have our own light, so who needs God's?" Our fire must be lit by God, and we must be sure it remains burning. (Zechariah 4:6)

Commented [notes15]: ¹²When 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."
John 8:12 (NIV)

Commented [notes16]: ⁵Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves. Know ye not your own selves, how that Jesus Christ is in you, except ye be reprobates?
2 Corinthians 13:5 (KJV)

Commented [notes17]: ¹³The fire must be kept burning on the altar continuously; it must not go out.
Leviticus 6:13 (NIV)

Commented [notes18]: ⁶¹And Nadab and Abihu died, when they offered strange fire before the LORD.
Numbers 26:61 (KJV)

Commented [notes19]: ⁶So he said to me, "This is the word of the LORD to Zerubbabel: 'Not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit,' says the LORD Almighty.
Zechariah 4:6 (NIV)

In the Jewish home a small earthen lamp was used for light. There were only small window openings in homes, so lamps were essential to illuminate the space. Since matches were not yet invented, it was difficult to relight the wick if it went out. For this reason lamps were left burning. When the person left the house the light was not needed. The lamp was covered with an earthen bushel bowl for safety. Light is desperately needed in our world. It is meant to be seen. Don't cover it up. There is no such thing as a closet Christian. Their very countenance will betray them.

You are not just to shine when you are in church. No! Jesus said you are the light of the world. In every contact the Christian has, he should be salt and light. We should bring flavor and clarity. Our presence should repel darkness. As employees we should be the most honest and productive of people. As business owners we should establish a Christian atmosphere and bring out the very best in our employees. In parties and social functions we should bring a wholesome and joyful quality that fascinates people with heaven's perspective. You are the light of the world.

Light was set up where it could be seen, where it would give the most light. Monasticism is not Biblical Christianity. We should be right out there, up front, expressing a godly opinion in a humble and loving way. We should be setting the tone and the mood wherever we go. Shine! As the popular Christian band sings, "Shine, make 'em wonder what you've got, make 'em wish that they were not on the outside lookin' bored." Real Christianity, in sync with the Holy Spirit should be exciting and challenging.

A light can be a guide. It can mark the way of an estuary or a runway. It can show others the way to go. You may have to stand up for a godly perspective in the midst of others who are going along with the status quo, but when you do, others will join you. They were just looking for someone to have the boldness to lead the way.

A light can be a warning. Lighthouses declare that there are dangerous rocks in front of a ship. Our lives should warn others of the destructiveness of sin. Just by living in step with the Spirit, (Galatians 5:25) others will be warned and guided to safety.

God didn't make you a light to hide you away and keep you all for Himself. He wants to work through you to bring His light into the darkness of the world around you. He is light. (1 John 1:5) When you shine, you are expressing His nature and bringing His presence into your world. Jesus said that the shining that people observe is good deeds. (Matthew 5:16) The Holy Spirit prompts us to act and we do. He moves us to say a kind word, care for the needy, or love the unlovable, and the world reacts with awe and wonder and thinks about God.

This week the Spirit of God put this question into my heart. What do I want to see happen in those of us that worship at Wayside? I realized that the LORD was trying to say something to me and through me to you. I want to see all of us that worship here be salt and light to this city. I want us to bring the flavor of Christ into every arena we are involved in. I want each one of us to have such a vital daily relationship with Christ that His life overflows into every place we connect with the world. Our purpose is to know Christ and make Him known. Yes, that is what I want. But not to make Him

Commented [notes20]: ²⁵Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit. Galatians 5: 25 (NIV)

Commented [notes21]: ⁵This is the message we have heard from him and declare to you: God is light; in him there is no darkness at all. 1 John 1:5 (NIV)

known as religion, but in a way that is totally consistent with the dynamic, joyful, loving sense we see in Scripture. May God help us not to represent Him as a religion, but as a person, the loving Lord of all, who desires a relationship with those we meet.

Is that your desire too? We need to live it before we can give it. He won't overflow from us until we let Him fill us to the rim. Light of the world? Us? We may think like His disciples that that is an impossible notion, yet we can see what God did with them. Why can't He do that through us? If we get our eyes off of our selves and onto Christ within us, we can see that anything is possible.

I'm continuing each day to pray for you those things that the Apostle Paul prayed for the congregations he ministered to. I won't be satisfied until Christ is formed in us and I hope you won't be either. (Galatians 4:19)

Is God calling you to join this church? It doesn't have a thing to do with your standing with God, it merely is an indication of where you believe God is calling you to be a part of the local body of Christ. If you have sensed the LORD calling you to commit to being a part of this fellowship, I invite you to come forward while we are singing and an elder will give you the material you need to consider it more fully. Next Sunday we will welcome new members. Or if God is calling you to commit to deeper walk in Him, to live in a more vital union with Him, maybe you feel led to declare that this morning, so we can keep you accountable to that commitment. Or perhaps you have never accepted the work of Christ on the cross for your sins. You are still the boss of your life, but His Spirit has drawn you to a place where you know you need Him. Come forward and let us know about it this morning, and we will pray with you.

Commented [notes22]: ¹⁹My dear children, for whom I am again in the pains of childbirth until Christ is formed in you,
Galatians 4:19 (NIV)