

Matthew 5:13-16 (NKJV)

13 "You are the salt of the earth; but if the salt loses its flavor, how shall it be seasoned? It is then good for nothing but to be thrown out and trampled underfoot by men.

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

15 Nor do they light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a lampstand, and it gives light to all *who are in the house*.

16 Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven.

We have been speaking about salt and light. We talked about that what Jesus is describing here is **influence**, a Christian's influence on the world. We talked about **tasting** like Christ. We also talked about **reflecting the light** of Christ.

Today we are going to investigate this salt and light a little further.

13 "You are the salt of the earth

14 You are the light of the world.

If you are a believer, Christ is saying this as much **to you** as his **disciples** 2000 years ago. He is describing the essence of a Christian's influence. We are in this world to **be this thing**. We talked a few weeks ago about this being **part of our purpose**. Our existence on this planet is filled with purpose and here Jesus makes clear at least what **some of it** is. We are representing Christ in a dark world.

Now, when we read this we are prone to ask, ok, if that is what scripture says I am, what **evidence** do I see of this in my life? And that is always a good question. Truth, by itself, does not save us. Truth coupled with faith saves us. So we need to look for those **signs of life** that scripture gives us. And here are a couple more. If we ARE salt, we will be **salty**. If we ARE light, we will **light things up**.

And immediately we begin to consider how we can be **better** at these things. We ask, if that is my purpose, how can I **do it better**? What obstacles are there in my life that can **be removed**? How can I best fulfill that which Christ says I am **here for**?

Is that not what you think as you read this?

If my influence is to be salt, I want to be pure salt.

If my influence is to be light, I want to be bright light.

And that is good. That is supernaturally natural. It is spiritually congruent. I want to best be **what I am**. If Christ defines His followers as salt and light, we do well to want to aspire to **being that** in purity.

We talked a little last week about how no one installs their lights under their floorboards. And why is that? It is ridiculous. It is absurd. It displays someone who is dumber than a hoe handle. It shows someone who knows nothing about anything.

That is the picture Christ wants us to get here. Nothing could be more absurd to go through all the trouble of **lighting an oil lamp** whose only purpose is to grant light to a room, and then put **a box** over it. It is quite likely that when Jesus said this, the people listening would have laughed. It would be a funny thing to consider. No one is that silly. For us it would be like putting batteries in flash light and then painting the bulb black. It is silly. It goes counter to the things purpose.

And that is the point Christ wants us to get. He did not put a bunch of Christians on this earth for them to **hide what they are**. He did not put people here to influence the earth for them to act like they are **something else**. That makes no sense.

So we should want to **best be what we are** because to not be that is a silly, foolish idea.

But then, on top of it being foolish to **deny** our influence, Christ also makes the point that it makes **that vehicle of influence** useless.

Remember how Christ told us that this left over salt sack has **no good purpose** at all if it is not salty? The point He was making is that it either **fulfills its purpose** or there is **nothing good to do with it**. It is more than just foolish. It has no use.

This is not true of everything that has a purpose. For instance the purpose to **grow oats** is to **harvest oats**. But even if the oats were not to come to head, the stalks themselves could be used for straw. And even if they cannot be used for straw, they will at least replenish nutrients in the soil.

But salt that is not salty does not have an alternative positive purpose. Nor would light that does not light.

Think about this.

Who has less of a place in this earth than the person who **proclaims himself to be a follower of Christ** but **will not walk by faith**? Who is more **cast out** than this man?

By proclaiming himself a Christian he has **separated himself** from the fellowship of this world. He declares an alliance that will not allow himself to **openly receive** the world's fellowship. He robs himself of the **pleasures of this world** to some degree. His rules keep him from it. He has **restrictions** in this life as to what he is free to enjoy. His conscience has some proper training. He has **rules** that he feels he must live by because he is a Christian. So he is not **at home** in this world. He does not have the ability to walk in this world like those who are part of it.

But at the same time he is not free to **enjoy** his Christian walk. He does not have the kind of faith that **abandons one's self to Christ's work in his life**. The person has enough belief to understand that salvation is necessary to avoid hell, but **not enough belief** to **trust** God's love in every situation in life. His conscience cannot allow himself to devote himself to **live like the world** and at the same time his heart cannot **fully enjoy** living like a Christian. His life is full of yes, but's. It is full of instances that proved to him that this God is not to be **fully trusted**. This God **will not** provide everything that is needed. This God will **never grant true happiness**, so it must be found elsewhere. The counsel of fellow believers appealing to the sweet fruits of the Holy Spirit will be **ineffective** in this person's life because at the core of his heart, he really does not trust this God.

He has just enough religion to make him miserable.

What is more useless than a Christian who only has a **profession** of faith but no **acts** of faith? Who is more miserable than the person who fears God enough to want to **avoid His punishment** but will not trust Him enough to ever **enjoy His fellowship** or **live for His rewards**? Who has less of a place in this world than that person? Who is more cast out than him?

No, we certainly do not want to be that person. We want to be **the happy people of a happy God**. We want to **trust God** enough to **enjoy God**.

It may be good at this point just to stop and ask ourselves this question.

Do I believe in my heart of hearts that there is no greater way to acquire my happiness than complete trusting surrender to the person and words of Christ?

Why do we stray? Why do we disobey? Why do we rebel? I know of no one who does that because they hope for **misery**. No, in some sane or insane way, everyone seeks their own happiness. The greatest determinant of what path we will choose at any given time is **who or what we believe is the greatest source of our happiness**. If we believe that it is God, guess what? We happily choose God and we believe we are the most blessed people on the face of the earth. If we don't think God is our greatest source of ultimate happiness, we choose alternatives and we are destined to be less than happy, less than peaceful, less than content. Repeat the question.

Now, we were talking about why Christians want to be salty and brightly lit. And it is because we do not want to be absurd, and we don't want to be useless.

Ok so then we watch our lives.

From what I can see, there are **two ways we withhold light**.

We can withhold light by **what we choose to say or not say in conversations in the world**.

And we can withhold light by **failing to live as we are called to live**.

And in reverse, those are also the two ways that we **shine the light**.

First we watch carefully, looking for times and places where we feel some inclination to express something that displays something about our saved-ness. When we have an opportunity to state some reason for what we believe. We should always be ready to give an explanation for the hope that is in us. Sometimes we may have an inclination to say **why we can or cannot do something**. It may be an explanation of **something we believe**. It might be an expression of our love for our Savior. It might be an appeal to this person to consider their own future. It could be lots of things. The question we apply to this is, **did I withhold saying or doing that thing because I was afraid of losing something?** Did I withhold saying that thing because it would **keep me from gaining something?** Why did I respond as I did? Sometimes the answer could be that we did what we thought **was best** in that situation. But we really do need to answer those questions. Did I deny Christ? Did I hide light? Was I guilty of being useless and absurd in the world? If we can see this

action as being as silly as putting a painting our flashlight screen black, we will reconsider. We will repent and commit to being more light-like.

So we must watch the content of our conversations with the world. But maybe even a more difficult task of not hindering this light is **how we live**. We have two very clear scriptures here, but if time allowed there would be many more

Phil 2:12-18

¹² Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; ¹³ for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for *His* good pleasure.

¹⁴ Do all things without complaining and disputing, ¹⁵ that you may become blameless and harmless, children of God without fault in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world, ¹⁶ holding fast the word of life, so that I may rejoice in the day of Christ that I have not run in vain or labored in vain.

¹⁷ Yes, and if I am being poured out *as a drink offering* on the sacrifice and service of your faith, I am glad and rejoice with you all. ¹⁸ For the same reason you also be glad and rejoice with me.

Notice what verse 15 says. **children of God without fault in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world**

This is clearly talking about the Christian's influence in the world. It is talking about the qualities that cause us to shine as lights. It is interesting to me that in this text it is not talking as much about **our message** as our **lifestyle** that shines like light.

It starts with a pure motivation. It is an internal thing in our heart of hearts. It is the kind of thing that only a Christian would ever do.

We start with

work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; ¹³ for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for *His* good pleasure.

This is the picture of the Christian doing the serious business of wrestling with who we are. We are **working out** something which implies **great effort** and **great concern**. I suspect we all know what this is about. It is the business of allowing **God's word** to shine its light on all **we think and do**. And we strive to have the gospel applied to **every bit of us**, bringing our lives more and

more into the conformity of God's will. And we are doing that privately, in all seriousness, with all effort. And **we do it** knowing that **God is doing it too**. God is **fixing** us. He is making us **think right** and **do right** until He is well pleased with **our efforts** and **His success**. This is no **external** thing, even though it will show external results. It is a deeply personal thing. And us shining as a lights **starts** in this process, much like in Jesus's sermon it started with the beatitudes process.

Then it says

Do all things without complaining and disputing

Wow. What would happen if tomorrow we began regarding all complaining as sin? Would we get anything done other than confessing our sins? We might need to do more study on exactly what complaining is and isn't, but I suspect it stems from us thinking we have some kind of **right** for our **circumstance** to be **better than it is**. We think that deserve better than this. That is certainly how the **Israelites** complained in the wilderness.

Try applying this this week. How many times a day do complaining words come out of my mouth? How do you think the world interprets that when we also say that we have a God who coordinates all the circumstances?

So do we want our light to shine? Paul tells us to remove complaining and disputing from our attitudes. Do you think that might gain some traction for the gospel in the world? Evidently Paul thinks so.

He then says

that you may become blameless and harmless

How can the world blame this person of being **in the wrong** if they will not **complain**, if they will not **push back** when it is not right to do so? The world may get angry with them, but no onlooker can find the blame for this hatred in anything wrong that the Christian has done. They are without fault, just like Jesus said. What Paul is talking about is taking away the world's ability to blame their hatred on us rationally. They will still do it. But it will be without reason. It will be counter to reason.

among whom you shine as lights in the world,

Why do we shine? Because we take what Jesus said very seriously, very internally. And the truths that we believe exhibit **strange things** in our lives. We do not need the same **rewards** that the world expects. We live like we have a sovereign God in charge of everything that happens to us. We don't need to complain. We don't need to dispute. Realistically we believe the core

truth that everything that is happening to us would not be happening if a loving God had not **chosen it to accomplish** what He wants. While we may not, in one sense, **want** the situation. Deep down we know that we **would** want it if we could see the whole plan. Because our Lord **loves us** and this is part of His course for us that was charted out by that love.

What shines is a **different kind of believing** that results in a **different kind of living**. It is a living that a non believer cannot have a reference point for, they cannot relate, because they do not have our reality to base it on. And Paul's text goes on to say

¹⁶ holding fast the word of life,

I am not sure if this is something separate, or if everything before it was defining what **holding fast the word of life** really is. Believing doctrines as facts on paper does not produce the kind of life he was describing. Any human could memorize doctrinal statements and get them correct on a test. But only a Christian **holds those truths fast**, like a person holds on to a life preserver in rough waters. Only Christians really have their reactions to life's situations **changed** by holding fast the truth. And only those kinds of changes shine light in a dark world.

And let's look at what Peter had to tell us.

1 Peter 2:9-12

⁹ But you *are* a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; ¹⁰ who once *were* not a people but *are* now the people of God, who had not obtained mercy but now have obtained mercy.¹¹ Beloved, I beg *you* as sojourners and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul, ¹² having your conduct honorable among the Gentiles, that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may, by *your* good works which they observe, glorify God in the day of visitation.

We see that Peter, too, is talking about the Christian's influence in the world. He is talking about **your conduct among the Gentiles**, which in this circumstance means the world. It is the same message.

Here we are again, a people who are not just trying to **act** differently. Our whole mindset is coming from a different set of assumptions. Worldlings live as if this world is all they have. They **must** choose that way because that is what they believe. What else could they think?

Look at the difference a Christian has. We think this world is a short stop on a long journey. The fleshly lusts all say otherwise. They want us to fixate on the here and now. They want us to make **here and now** all there is. If we bypass a **here and now** pleasure, we are missing out. We are being **short changed**. So we are to **abstain from them** because that view is wholly wrong. It is flawed. It won't make us happy. Our destination and everything congruent with our destination, will make us happy. As a result we live in such a way that **does not do evil**. We don't make the here and now **sell outs**.

Notice that both in Jesus's sermon and this one, **good works** are mentioned. And what is so **good** about those **works** is that they only come from **believing unworldly things**. They are God inspired things. They are works that are produced by people working out their salvation with fear and trembling. They are good works that are inspired by **future world expectations**. They are works that only come when Christians actually bank their lives on what God promises.

This produces a whole different human than a human just trying to be better. Comparing them is like comparing apples and oranges. These people **don't complain**, not because they are **not** realistic. It is because they are **wholly** realistic. And the reality they believe in **supersedes** the views of the natural man. This faith produces something that smells of heaven. It cannot be helped when we really believe what God says.

This Christian is just a **weird animal** in this world. And it stands out. You could say it **shines**. Because it is so **different** in its very **core of being**. And one day those worldlings who chose to just watch on will be forced to say that, yes, they **did** see that light. They **did** see those good works. They **did** know that there was something different about them. But they chose to do nothing about it. And that will glorify God.

It is important to note that point.

Our shining as light and tasting of salt is valuable no matter if it does not draw anyone. God's glory is not received by the light's **effect**. God's glory is received by its **existence**. God's glory is not received only by people's being drawn by it. God's glory is also received when people are repelled by it. The glory is that **God was represented** by it.

Oh sure, we want it to draw people. We want them to come to our Savior. We want them to have the joy we have. But no matter what, when we represent Christ well, Christ is glorified.

We might want to think about one more thing.

Think about Jesus's illustration. The lamp being lit was an **oil** lamp.

There are two parts to an oil lamp. **The oil and the wick.**

Now in the New Testament oil in a lamp often represents the **Holy Spirit**.

You and I cannot live the Christian life, we cannot be light, apart from **the Holy Spirit**. We must walk in the spirit. It would be crazy to think that you only need to fill a lamp one time. It takes continual re-fillings. It is like hungering and thirsting for rightness. We must keep going back. It is not an **event** as much as it is **a process**. We are told to pray for the Holy Spirit and it will not be denied us. We walk in the Holy Spirit. It is a constant appeal to God for us to be filled with His Spirit. We remove the obstacles to His fellowship by **confession** and **repentance** and He fills us. It would be a shame to create the expectation that we can **be light** apart from the presence of God Himself in our lives. Naturally that is the primary **MUST** for us to be light in this world.

The other element of the lamp is the wick. That would be us. As the oil is drawn into the wick and the flame ignites, we are the channel for the source of that fire, the oil. But in oil lamps, every now and then the lamps start to smoke and it clouds the light. Then **the wick needs trimmed**. Parts need carved off the top of the wick so the light again can burn most brightly. That would represent again the process of us confessing our sins and having that fellowship with God fully restored.

I hope we have seen this morning that we have a **part to play** in being light and salt to this world. There is effort required. There are **things we can do** that are congruent with our life in Christ. And there are **things we can do** that are counter to what we say we believe. We cannot **make** ourselves salt or light. But there are things we can do **to mask** what we are. And there are things we can do to **remove those obstacles** and shine as lights in the world.

I think it would be a good idea to revisit these texts and consider, how can I better fulfill my purpose in this world.

Phil 2:12-18

1 Peter 2:9-12