

Salt and Light

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Date: 29 May 2022

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[0 : 01] So, as Christians, we are God's people living in God's world on God's mission for God's glory.

But there are perhaps three broadly different approaches that Christians take to mission. One is to simply mirror the culture around them.

And at least in its beginnings, it's got a noble motivation. And that is, well, if these people say that, well, I'm just like them, they're just like me, they can think maybe I can be a Christian too.

But the difficulty with that is that our culture is so secular. And the things that our culture offers are such mimics of Christianity that what would be the point of them becoming Christians?

I mean, if they can have unlimited, unconditional acceptance and love without having Jesus, without having church, then why bother with him at all?

[1 : 10] And second of all, if someone does decide to become a Christian, their conversion will not be to the Christianity of the Bible, but just to a spiritualized version of what they already have.

A secular life with church thrown in. They'll have no call or no impulse to live as Jesus has called them to because, well, the person who led them to faith doesn't either.

And this version of Jesus is just a kind of a spiritual version of you do you. The second approach to missional living is really no missional approach at all, which is just to sit sort of cross-armed in church, hoping that someone might take a notion to come to church.

However, in our passage today, Jesus doesn't say, you're the salt of the church. You're the light of the church. He says, you're the salt of the earth, the light of the world.

And the third approach is what I think Jesus is calling us to here, which is nothing less than full participation in God's world, living lives that are distinct and that are holy, lives that point others to him.

[2 : 24] You are the light of the world, Jesus says. So don't hide your light away. You are salt. So don't let your saltiness be hidden away.

Let it be tasted by all around you. Let that life, that flavor, that vibrancy come out. And the motivation for this is not so that we can feel good that we've done our Christian duty of evangelism, but it's that God is glorified.

That's the great end to which Jesus is pointing us to here, is he calls us to live out our lives as light, as salt. It's that God would be glorified.

Isn't that what we are here for as Christians? To glorify God and enjoy him forever. As Christians, we are God's people, living in God's world, on God's mission for God's glory.

So when we live our lives as Christians, each relationship we have, each role we hold, whether we are an employee or a manager, whether we're a parent or a sibling or a neighbor, these relationships are not there for an end in and of itself.

[3 : 44] It is there so that we can bring glory to God. Church history, whilst full of times where the church has not lived as salt and light, there are many occasions to draw from in which the church has been salt and light in their context.

During the Roman Empire in the first century, if a baby was born with a disability, the baby would be killed. But who was there rescuing the newborn babies with disabilities?

Who was there standing up for the rights of all children, whether they had a disability or not? The church. Tertullian, a Christian who lived about 100 years after the resurrection of Jesus, said this, Even the pagans remark, see how these Christians love one another.

And that's the kind of salt and light that Jesus is talking about here and that we're going to get into. That kind of salt and light that makes passersby look on and say, there's something different going on here.

That's how I ended up coming to faith was through the witness of someone else and saying, wow, this person's life is just so markedly different to anything I've ever seen before.

[5 : 01] So what does this look like in 21st century Scotland? Well, we're going to look at this passage here with two headings. You are and God is.

I like to keep it nice and simple so I don't get confused. So you are. So there's a show that Maddy and I have been watching for a wee while now called Parenthood and it covers the life of an entire family.

You have parents, grandparents, kids, grandkids, aunties, uncles, the whole nine yards. And one set of parents decide to adopt a child. And the boy that they adopt, Victor, understandably has quite a hard time getting his head around the fact that his adoptive parents love him.

That they're there for him. That no matter what, they're going to be present in his life. And in fact, it takes a long time of his adoptive parents showing up, being there, being present, loving them, caring for them before the boy actually takes to heart that he is their son.

But regardless of how he felt through that entire time, he was their son. Now as Christians, we might read what Jesus has to say here about us with a dose of skepticism.

[6 : 19] You might think, really? Me? We might kind of take our Scottishness, which doesn't like to make much of ourself, and be like, nah, not me. But what Jesus says here is true.

It's not sentimentalism. He's not just being nice. He's not saying just kind things. It's true. He's not special, but because he is at work in us.

Not because we have any inherent light in and of ourself, but because his light shines through us.

And so I just want us to note, first off, how Jesus words this.

Verse 13, you are salt of the earth. Verse 14, you are the light of the world. Now, Jesus isn't saying here, you should be the light of the world, or you should be salt of the earth.

Or even you could be the light of the world or the salt of the earth. If you just did these things, then you could possibly be the light of the world. Then you could possibly be the salt of the earth. He doesn't say that.

[7 : 27] He says, you are the light of the world. You are the salt of the earth. Jesus isn't commanding us here to be salt of the earth, to be light of the world.

He says you are. And that is what we are as Christians indwelt by the Holy Spirit. Lights shining brightly in God's world. We are salt set apart to bring the light and the love of Jesus to the world around us.

We are. Not we could be. Not we should be. We are the light of the world. And so just as you are salt of the earth and light of the world, Jesus is calling you and me to live in reality of that.

Friends, we might feel inadequate. Indeed we are. We might have our mess. Indeed we do. But if you love Jesus this morning, he says you are the light of the world.

You are the salt of the earth. No matter how you feel. No matter how much mess you've got. No matter how much we instinctively want to turn Jesus' words here into commands.

[8 : 42] They're not here. Here he is saying you are the salt of the earth. You are the light of the world. But what is Jesus meaning here when he says this?

So we'll take it first in verse 13. You are salt of the earth. What does he mean here? Well, I'm going to go primarily to what Jesus is saying here.

And then I think because biblically it warrants that we will go to perhaps more modern understanding of the usage of salt. But back in Jesus' day, there was no giant fridge freezers.

The food preservation was difficult. And so salt would be used in preserving food from going off.

And so that's one way in which Jesus is calling us salt of the earth here.

And to live in light of that. Paul writes in 1 Timothy 3 that the church is the pillar and foundation of the truth. Now, of course, that has implications for what we believe.

[9 : 42] For what we teach. But it's also got implications for how we live our lives. The church, because it's living its life in light of God's truth.

It will necessarily mean living differently to those around us. Guided by the principles of God's word. Rather than those who are not guided by God's word.

Remember, it was the Christians who protected disabled babies in the Roman Empire. It was Christians who showed that radical love for one another that made even passersby go, wow, let's see how they love one another.

Now, before we go any further, the sermon could go one of two ways right now. It could go down the toxic route of pious pride.

Which sort of says, well, we're the good people in here. We've got it all sorted out. And that they're the evil, wicked people out there. That's not where I'm going. Because I don't think scripture warrants that mentality.

[10 : 46] I think instead scripture calls us to something else. You see, the goal of preservation is for the good and health of something else.

The good and health of keeping something else. And so preservation is to do for the good of those around, not for the harm. And as soon as we turn the role of preserving, of being Saul, into a matter of pride and arrogance, we automatically turn what we do from being a force for good to being a force for evil.

Because we've made it all about us. As Christians, living as God's people, in God's world, on God's mission, for God's glory, means that we do not come to bring harm.

We come to bring good. And that comes at an individual, relational level, and at a societal level. And it takes its form in the words we speak.

Those great gospel truths of Jesus, pointing people to find life and meaning and hope and purpose in him. But also the good that we do.

[12 : 00] Helping our communities be places that thrive and flourish. Being that neighbor that people know that they can come to. And this has been the case all throughout the scriptures.

You see, back in Genesis 12, God calls a man called Abram. And one of the reasons for that is so that he and his descendants would be a blessing to the nations. So when that opportunity comes up to speak the message of Jesus, will we be the ones sharing the wonderful story that he has?

When your neighbor is going through a hard time where your colleague at work is hurting, is it going to be you? Is it going to be me, the Christian, that shows up?

That is there to care for and to support and to be present? So the preservation, but there's also, as I mentioned, a more modern usage, which I think scripture calls for, though this isn't exactly what Jesus is talking about here.

But that our lives would be marked by flavor. As Christians, living as God's people in God's world, on God's mission for God's glory, means that our life makes things taste good.

[13 : 22] That it brings a savor, that it brings a flavor and a joy to those around us. It's not bland. Being devout doesn't mean being doer. It means your life is vibrant, full of life.

It's appealing and winsome. It doesn't taste like this bogging medicine that you know is good for you, but it just makes you screw your face up every time you have it. It's like the most beautifully ripe strawberry.

So full of flavor. So good. Now you might not think you have much to offer as a Christian on mission.

You might think, I'm worried I wouldn't know what to say. I'm worried that I don't know enough. But if you have a life transformed by Jesus, there is a saltiness about you.

A flavor. And in the same way as after tanning a bag of crisps, you're thirsty because of all the salt. In the same way as our salt goes out, God is using you and me to help others realize their thirst for him.

[14 : 36] Do you realize that this morning? That God has given you his Holy Spirit. That your life might be marked by life and vibrancy.

And that in that, people might realize their thirst for him. And before going on to light the world, I just want to look at the second part of that verse.

If the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It's no longer good for anything except to be thrown out and trampled underfoot. Not suggesting that if you don't live up to your name, that somehow you're going to get thrown out and you're going to be good for nothing except thrown out and trampled underfoot.

But what Jesus says here and what he says about the light is that, well, what's the point of salt if it's lost its saltiness? What's the point of light if you're just going to hide it?

No, Jesus is calling us here to let our saltiness be made known to those around us. So second of all, you are the light of the world.

[15 : 50] At our house, there's a battle that goes on. I don't know if this is true in your house. I think there's perfectly sufficient natural light coming in through the window.

And Maddie is of the opinion that, no, we need to turn the big light on because it's not bright enough. But as much as it pains me to admit it, sometimes Maddie's right. You turn the light on and it actually makes a difference. You can see a lot better with the light turned on. And similarly, life without God, it's easy to think that we see perfectly. But it's not until God comes and turns on the light that we're helped to appreciate the bigger picture and we can see fully what he's doing in our world. So light, it gives the ability to see things that are hidden. And yeah, we don't know where things are or that things are there until the light is turned on and we can see.

[16 : 52] And it's important to note here, as with the soul, that our light is derivative. It comes from Jesus. Paul says in 2 Corinthians 4, For God who said, Let light shine out of darkness, has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

And of course, in John's Gospel, chapter 8, Jesus says, I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness. And so that's what it comes down to as Christians. We aren't purporting to be the light of the world because we think we're something special or because we think we're a cut above the rest, but because God has shone his light into our hearts in the person and work of Jesus. Jesus who for all eternity dwelt in unapproachable light. Jesus who is the radiance of the glory of God. He came to earth as a human being. His glory veiled in human flesh, as the carol puts it, veiled in flesh the Godhead see, hail the incarnate deity, pleased as man with man to dwell, Jesus our Emmanuel.

[18 : 08] He came as Savior, taking upon himself the guilt of sinners like you and me, rising victorious on the third day, who dwells now in unapproachable light once more.

It was him who went through the torture of the cross, the punishment for sin, that his light might be yours. So, we said his light gives sight. C.S. Lewis, who wrote the Chronicle Narnia, the Narnia Chronicles, in the right order, he said this famously, I believe in Christianity as I believe that the sun has risen, not only because I see it, but because by it I see everything else. And I just want to come back to this idea for a second then, you know, that we think in this world that without God we have perfect sight, that we have no need of him. And that might be you this morning. You might think, I have no need for God. And it's very easy to think we have perfect sight today because as a society we care so much about a lot of important things, about justice and injustice, about love and tolerance, about equality, about the environment.

[19 : 27] But I just want to push back slightly and gently and say that without God, none of these things actually matter.

If all we are are just a clump of cells that have come together, by chance, if there's no design, then justice is just made up. We've just created something and therefore it's surely got no value or no worth because it's got no root, no foundation, no base. We've just made it up. Equality is pointless because, well, if we're all a clump of cells, we're all worthless anyway. So, friends, we think we see perfectly without God, but what we fail to realize is that these things actually have their foundation and their fullness in Him because justice, right? God is just and holy and good and right. God is love in all its perfection and fullness. Equality? That was God's idea. He created you and me in His image so that we would be endowed with dignity and honor, whoever we are. And so that there is God's idea.

[20 : 54] And the second thing I just want to say briefly about light is that His light helps us point others to Him. In the same way as being salty leads to people discovering their thirst for Jesus, so our light helps point others to Him in all His goodness, in all His beauty, so that people can see who He is.

So the second point is God is. So the first point is you are salt of the earth, you are light of the world, and the result of that, God is. And we see that in verse 16, God is glorified. Jesus calls us to shine the light we have. Jesus calls us to be salt, not as an ending of itself, but so that God is glorified. And that's really important because we all need a motivation as human beings. We all need a reason to do what we're going to do. I wonder how many parents have the experience of asking

their children to do something, whether it's tidy their room, do the dishes, walk the dog, and after asking, and better asking, you eventually attach a motivation to it.

If you don't do this, then I'm taking away your Xbox, or you're not going to get to see your pal later, or something like that. But we need a motivation. We need a reason for being something bigger than ourself.

[22 : 23] Think of a spaceship. It doesn't launch by itself. It has a rocket booster on each side launching it up off the ground.

And once the spaceship reaches a certain altitude, these boosters, they fall off because they have served their purpose. The boosters don't exist for themselves, for their own purpose.

They exist so that they might propel forward the spaceship higher and higher. As Christians, as those living in God's world, and God's mission for God's glory, it means that that is our motivation, that we do everything, whether we eat or drink, whether we sleep, whether we work, whether we rest, we do all of it for God's glory.

And that is our great motivation. And that's what Jesus is saying here. He says, you are the salt of the earth, so let your saltiness be tasted. You are the light of the world.

Let your light shine so that. And that so that right there is so important. That is our motivation. That is what is going to propel us forward in doing what God calls us to.

[23 : 35] Namely, a passion for his glory. Not just within ourselves, but that those around us would glorify him.

Not just within the four walls of this church building, but out there. Out in the streets, there will be men, women, boys and girls, bringing glory and praise and worship to God.

Let your saltiness be tasted. Let your light shine so that men may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.

Jesus isn't after the self-interested Phariseeism of his day that just does good in order to be seen by others and praised by others. He is after the worship of his people that does good so that it's seen, not for their own end or benefit, but for God's glory and praise.

And I think it's an important question for all of us to ask ourselves that as we go about our life, as we seek to be salt and light in the place that God has put us, what is our motivation for doing good?

[24 : 46] That others may think well of us, that we may be liked? Or is it for God's glory? Friends, God calls us not to live for our own glory, but for his.

His glory is the greatest motivation in all that we do. His glory is the reason that we are to shine our lights in the world. As we live in God's world, as God's people on God's mission, let it be all for God's glory.

You are salt of the earth, but if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It's no longer good for anything except to be thrown out and trampled underfoot.

You are the light of the world. So let your light shine before others that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.

Let's pray. Father God, thank you so much for the wonderful story of Jesus. That though he was in heaven in unapproachable light and glory, he came to earth in flesh.

[26 : 05] He came to earth to live that perfect life that we so often fail to live up to. That he came to die a death in our place on the cross, taking the punishment for our sin, rising again so that we might have his light in us.

Lord, in our friendships, in our relationships, in our workplace, wherever we are, help us to shine the light of Jesus.

Help us to be salty. Not just for our own end, but so that others around us may see our good deeds and bring glory to you, our Father, in heaven.

Amen. Amen.