

## **Salt and Light**

Call to Worship: Isaiah 12:2-6

1st Scripture: John 4:1-42

2nd Scripture: Matthew 5:1-16

Hymn #634- *We Praise Thee, O God*

Hymn (Supp)- *Be Thou My Vision*

Hymn Insert- *O Church Arise*

### **Introduction**

Having worked through the list of beatitudes, which deal with the general heart and disposition of those who are truly part of Christ's kingdom, this morning we move on to consider the responsibility which belongs to these same individuals, as they continue to live out their "life in the kingdom," on this side of the grave. And the last of the beatitudes, which addressed the way, in which, the world would respond to those described as "blessed" (in the first nine verses), is a bridge, which carries us into this next portion of our Lord's sermon.

The natural question for a redeemed child of God, who has been born again, into the glory of a new and eternal Kingdom, as a servant of their New King (Jesus), is, "How am I now to view the world? What is my responsibility in this world, and to this world (if anything), as a citizen of Christ's kingdom? Do I hide away in some monastery and pursue holiness, out of the way of the temptations and defilement of the unsaved world? If not, where do I go from here, having been brought out of the kingdom of darkness and into the Kingdom of light? How can one remain *in* the world, while not being *of* the world (at the same time), in keeping with the teachings of Scripture and the call to holiness that is given to all who are part of the Kingdom of God?"

Our text for this morning leads us to address these kinds of questions, with the helpful use of two great analogies.

### **I. You are the Salt of the Earth** (vs. 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" (vs. 13).

Again, clearly our Lord is directly addressing His disciples here, when He states, "*You are the salt of the earth.*" And again, in verse 14, when He states, "*You are the light of the world.*"

As we have seen already, in verse 2, He is directing these teachings primarily toward His disciples, and then secondarily toward the multitudes, who are watching along. And of course, we know that it would be inconsistent with Scripture for unbelievers to be called “salt” and “light” in any respect, as well.

But, as we seek to unpack this first illustration, we note first that both illustrations assume that something is seriously wrong with the earth/world, which represents not the material world, but the world, as it is represented by mankind, who inhabits it. And the “seriously wrong” assumption is this: In some way, the world is suffering mortal/terminal decay, which requires an antiseptic and preservative antidote. And, in some way, the world is in utter darkness, requiring light to expose something critical that needs to be seen. And the true Christian is to serve as both the preservative antidote and the necessary illumination, which is to aid the world in overcoming its terrible plight.

Looking then at the first illustration, what does our Lord mean by stating that His disciples; that the citizens of His Kingdom (the “blessed” of the beatitudes) are the “salt” of the earth? Well, when we consider the purpose of salt, particularly in this first century context, it will help lead us to answer this question. To this end, there were at least two major purposes for salt in the first century.

1) Obviously, salt is meant to season food. It brings out and emphasizes flavoring, so as to make (especially tasteless) food enjoyable to the tastebuds.

2) Most importantly, especially in the first century, salt was used as a preservative. Remember, they didn’t have electricity and refrigerators like we do (in the present). And so, in order to keep their meat from spoiling and from becoming rancid, they had to cover it with salt. And they had to rub salt into the meat, so as to keep any germs from spoiling it.

To these ends then, the Christian is to be the salt of the earth, by seeking to live and act in such a way, that would, bring flavor to its natural dullness/tastelessness, while serving to reverse the *moral* decaying process that has been naturally in effect since the fall of mankind.

Getting back then to the seriously wrong “assumption,” which this implies, we highlight two facts that are brought to the foreground here: First, because of the fall of mankind, the world is constantly regressing and moving further and further into moral collapse, which will ultimately

end in final judgment. What happened during the time of the flood, and what happened at the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, picture this so well. And what happened at the rise and fall of every great nation, only further confirms this reality. The world is in a constant state of decay!

Now, you might say, but haven't there been times of prosperity? Haven't there been times where the decay has been stayed to some extent, at least for a time? Yes, and that is the point of this text. It has always been the people of God, who have been used, like salt, to serve as a preservative element within a context of corruption and defilement. You might state it this way: In keeping with the grace of God, God has often planted His people throughout the world, in part, to persevere that which would otherwise come into judgment sooner. God uses the redeemed to bring about preservation. And of course, the redeemed themselves are ultimately purified in Christ, but by virtue of their union with Christ, they begin to live in the ways described by the beatitudes, which helps serve to preserve the people around them.

Consider this: How many times have we read in Scripture that even the unregenerate were blessed for the sake of God's people? Wasn't Laban blessed on account of Jacob? How about Potiphar and the jailor and Pharaoh? Did not God bless them on account of Joseph? And consider further, when Abraham had pled with God on behalf of Sodom and Gomorrah. What did Abraham say, over and over again? "But what if there are a hundred righteous men? Or fifty? Or twenty? Or even ten? Would You still destroy the nation, if such a number of righteous men lived among them? And recall God's answer. Even if there are ten righteous men among them, I will spare the entire cities for their sake. But sadly, there was very little salt left in Sodom and Gomorrah. Indeed, only Lot and his two daughters trekked out alive. And the irony is that Lot's wife, who should have been salt to the people of those wicked cities, was turned into a pile of salt, because her heart was in keeping with Sodom and Gomorrah and not with her own husband's heart.

And so, Christians (the people of God), by living faithfully before God; by living in accordance with the supernatural qualities listed in the beatitudes, serve to help preserve a decaying nation and world. [Note: They also promote morality by their godly behavior/laws]

But furthermore, as we have seen, salt also provides taste to that which is generally tasteless. By living for Christ and His glory; by living joyfully in relationship with God through

Christ, the people of God exhibit flavor to a flavorless world. We know that all of the temporary joys and lusts of this world do not last. They are short-lived lies. People are caught in the trap of seeking the next best thing to fulfill them, but they are always, constantly let down. They attempt to fill their God-shaped void with material things that break down, lose their value and rot, and they seek after lusts which never fulfill, and they come back empty. The world has left them with the taste of sugar packed bubblegum, which promises such lovely flavor for a few moments and then becomes utterly tasteless, and is in need of replacement after a short time, as it rots out their teeth! Their TV shows grow dull. Their drunkenness ends in a hangover. Their high comes back down low. Their vacations end. Every quick fix joy leaves them hungering for the next, tomorrow's problems still remain, and the grave quickly inches toward them.

Ahh, but the Christian, enjoying abundant life in Christ; not abundant life in the increase of this world's possessions (for, they often lack them), but abundant life in enjoying a relationship with the living God, and constantly looking forward to eternal glory with Christ, exhibits flavor to a tasteless world, which cannot find true and lasting fulfillment and satisfaction. And as they live this life in Christ; rejoicing even in sufferings (having the big picture in mind), the well spring of life, given in Christ and applied by the Holy Spirit, springs up out of them, inviting others to come, and taste, and see, that the Lord is indeed good! And so, like salt, they provide seasoning and taste to an empty and tasteless world.

But brethren, notice that our Lord adds some sobering words to this statement, regarding His people being the salt of the earth: "But...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."

You see, if the salt loses its preservative and savory benefits, then it no longer has a functional use. You can't use it somewhere else. You can't use it for fuel or for making clothing or for some other benefit. It was purchased for these purposes, and when it loses its flavor, it becomes useless. It is simply thrown out or tossed to the ground, like sand, only to be trampled underfoot.

Now, this analogy can be hard to appreciate, at a time when salt, generally doesn't lose its flavor. But, back in the first century, that most certainly could have happened, and did happen at times. You see, their primary source of salt was taken from places like the Dead Sea. It was not

pure, and was generally mixed with other elements that could ruin it over time. And so, our Lord's analogy here, would have hit the mark, for those to whom He was speaking.

And His point is this. We've been redeemed unto a critical purpose, in the service of our King, in His glorious Kingdom. And while we remain here on earth, we have the unique privilege of serving as agents and vehicles of preservation and flavoring until the Lord returns. Our redemption is not solely for the purpose of bringing us to heaven. That is certainly a glorious benefit, to which we constantly look, but we have a significant, *present* purpose as well in God's plan of redemption. God has ordained to use us as instruments of preservation, influence and change, for those who yet remain in darkness. And so, when we fail to be useful to that end; when we continue to look, think, act and live like the world, we are no longer fit to serve the purpose for which God has redeemed us. We are like that salt, which has lost its flavoring, having been corrupted by the other elements. No longer being useful to God then, like the tasteless salt (from the standpoint of God), we are fit to be cast aside or trampled underfoot, like the soil of the earth.

Now, having said that, let us turn to the second analogy which the Lord gives, which provides us with an illustration that adds another critical dimension to the purpose, for which, Christ's people remain in the world.

## **II. You are the Light of the World** (vs. 14-16)

We have just seen that we are called to act as preservatives, and we are to provide Gospel flavor to the world, especially by our godly living (in keeping with the beatitudes), but here, we find a second illustration which also serves to help define our responsibility to the dark, dying world, within which, we continue to live. [Read vs. 14-16 again]

The people of God, living in the Kingdom of Christ, are to serve as light bearers to the world. Now, again, this illustration would have really hit home to those whom our Lord was speaking, because remember, they didn't have electricity. When it was dark, it was dark! And so, you really depended upon oil lamps to see, and to get around in the evenings. You didn't have light posts outside in the street. You didn't have residual lighting from other houses and stores, providing additional light beyond the scope of their own context. And you certainly

didn't have light switches in every room, that you could just flick on and off at will. No, you had to use oil lamps, and you had to set them up in high places, so as to provide the most light for the entire room that you were utilizing. Now, we have all had the experience of getting up at night to use the restroom, and not wanting to disturb others, we try to feel our way to the bathroom. And especially if you have young children, that can be a very dangerous journey. You can stub your toes or find yourself trampling on such deadly objects as legos...etc. And so, you learn to appreciate the light when it is on, because it helps you see where you are going. We even have the convenience of having a little light go on in our refrigerators when we open them, and when that light burns out, it can become challenging trying to find an item you are searching for. And so, the light is important (all around) to help us see where we are, to help us get to where we need to go, and to help us function when the sun goes down. [Ill: You want to feel your heart drop...Turn off headlights on a car, when going down a dark road—don't really do this!]

And so, the Lord borrows this illustration then, to make a critical point about the responsibility that Christians have in the world. First, he highlights, a city that is on a hill, and how it cannot be hidden. Walking along at night, again, in a very dark place without electricity, you could easily look for an elevated city to help direct you in your journey. Because, within that city, where oil lamps would be lit at night, being raised up, you would be able to see the collective light provided by those lamps, particularly from a lower elevation. And so, that could be a very helpful “compass” for someone traveling at night.

And then, furthermore, it would be silly and foolish for an individual to light a fueled lamp, only to put it under a basket. Why? Because the basket would cover its light, not allowing the lamp to serve the very purpose that it was designed to fulfill. It's a ridiculous notion! Who would do such a thing? No, you would take the lamp and set it on a lamp stand, so that it could be elevated high enough to emit light all throughout the room and house. You want to get as much benefit from that lamp as possible. That's obvious.

Now, Jesus uses an illustration that speaks in such obvious ways, because he wants His audience to understand that, in the same way, from the standpoint of God, He has a very specific and important purpose for His redeemed people. And it would be absolutely foolish and unthinkable for a Christian to live in a contrary way to His purpose. A Christian has been

regenerated and recreated to provide light to others. That's a given! To shield and hide and privatize that light, for any reason, is absurd, when considered from the standpoint of the Kingdom of God. And that is why our Lord then turns the illustration toward His disciples and adds, "Let *your* light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven."

And so, here we find then, that a true Christian, by virtue of his conversion and union with Christ; by virtue of the fact that he is now, presently, part of a new Kingdom (a kingdom of the heart, in the present), is designed to serve as a light; a bright light to the rest of the world! By our good works; by the ways in which we contrast the naturally selfish deeds of the flesh; by living in accordance with the beatitudes that we have gone over, and by accompanying all of this with the proclamation of the Gospel of Christ (which has brought us into this Kingdom), we are called to serve as lights!

And what purpose does this light then serve? Well, it is at least threefold: First, it exposes the fallen condition of the world. It reveals and explains the present darkness and death, which permeates the world because of the fall of man. It reveals the reality of the fall which has brought every human being into the blind and condemned state that naturally controls everyone. And it unveils the reality of our God, as the Eternal Creator and righteous Judge, who reigns over this lost world, and who will bring everyone and every act into everlasting judgment. And then, secondly, it exposes Christ as "the Way, the Truth and the Life"; as the only hope for fallen sinners, presently bound to a fallen world. It declares Christ as the only Savior for sinners, to the world! And then finally, in all of this; in presenting the new creation, which God has done in us; in revealing the reality of God's work, in bringing us into His kingdom and in transforming us, such that we live differently than the rest of the world, with a rock solid, sacrificial sense of hope in Christ, in keeping with the lifestyle presented by the beatitudes, we bring glory to our God and Father! Others see the light and are led to bring glory to the God who has made us what we now are, and they now, likewise, come to the source of our light, the Lord Jesus Christ! We present the light of the moon, in our words and actions and lives. And all of this is a borrowed light, as it were, a reflective light, which draws its light from the power of the sun, the source of all true light...the Lord Jesus Christ. And so, our aim is to let our light so shine; not to hide it; not to

ferret it away like a monk in a monastery, but to let it pour forth, so that others in darkness will see, and bring glory to our God and Father. Will this lead to persecution in some cases? Yes, we've already seen that. But, it will also lead to salvation in other cases, and above all, it will serve to represent the glory of God, in the face of Jesus Christ! [Note: Contrast with the Pharisees, who self-righteously sought to draw the attention of the people to *themselves*]

And so, the Christian; the true child of God has been purchased for a purpose, which begins in this life, where the presence of darkness and the evidence of a tragic fall, still greatly exist. And by our godly living, we are to serve as salt; unto the preservation of the world, and unto leaving the savory aroma of Christ, wherever we go. And we are to provide light, so as to expose all that the darkness hides...all unto the glory of God! [Note: John's letters to the seven churches of Asia Minor, and the threat of losing their "lampstand," should they not maintain, or return to, their proper function]

### **III. Concluding Thoughts**

Brethren, it all boils down to this critical reminder, which we ought to keep at the forefront of our minds. We have to lay a lot of thoughts and plans on the back burner in this life, but this is not one of them. This needs to be front and center, at all times. You can't put this on low or on simmer, leaving it to rest for a time, while you tend to alleged "more important" matters. This is a "Seek first the Kingdom of God" principle, which we will later come to, at the end of Chapter 6.

Brethren, we were created and re-created in Christ, for a purpose that goes far beyond our own desires. And its a wonderful purpose. But, we have to begin by recognizing that we are not our own. We belong to God and Christ. And we can't be consumed with the trappings of this world, and fulfill that purpose at the same time. You can't have one foot in the world, and one foot in Christ's kingdom. Redemption is an all or nothing reality. You are either of the world or you are crucified to the world. There is no in between. The cross doesn't serve as a halfway point. It's an all out death to one's life, so as to live a new life in Christ. This needs to be a conscious reality for us.

And as we consider this reality, we must consider the fact that we do have a responsibility here and now, in this world, that is set before us. And it is a responsibility that requires great sacrifice and fervent commitment. It's a responsibility that lives out of a biblical world view, and which lays our entire lives on the altar, with the desire of impacting this world for Christ. And that impact comes from godly and holy living, in keeping with the beatitudes, and it comes from consciously seeking to spread the Gospel.

You see, the danger for us, is to settle down into the status quo, because that's what's comfortable, and because that's what the church at large is doing. But, we have to let the Scriptures govern our hearts and our mindset, such that, we are prepared to prayerfully make drastic, radical changes, when Christ calls us to do so, in accordance with His word and will. We have to periodically examine ourselves to this end, and we have to determine if we are really living life in the kingdom (if we are really "salt and light" to the world), or if we are simply "playing church" on Sunday mornings. We have to ask ourselves if, the "American church" looks like the true church, as defined by Christ. We have to ask ourselves if Grace Reformed Baptist Church looks like the true church, as defined by Christ. And we have to ask ourselves, if we ourselves, personally, are living in keeping with the mindset and mission of Christ's church, as defined by Christ, in Scripture.

And to this end, brethren, I ask, "Where is our evangelistic zeal?" Where is the evangelistic zeal that would bring about the type of persecution, described by our Lord, in the beatitudes? Where is our evangelistic zeal? Look at the utter demise of our country. Might any of this have to do with our failure to live as salt and light in the world? This is a frightening, but necessary question, that we must all ask with "Judgment Day" honesty and integrity!

To the unbeliever, you too were created for a purpose, and for the glory of God, but your sin has separated you from your God, and it is quickly carrying you to swift, final, total and eternal judgment. [The Gospel!!!]

Amen!!!

Benediction: Ephesians 3:14-21