

October Excurses: Love & Light

¹³ “You are the salt of the earth, but if salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything except to be thrown out and trampled under people's feet. ¹⁴ “You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. ¹⁵ Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. ¹⁶ In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven. (Matt. 5:13-16 ESV)

The Light Of The World

October 23rd, 2016

Matthew 5:13-16

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Introduction:

Good morning church! I mentioned last Sunday that we would be taking a two-week-long break from our Revelation series and we would use that break to discuss some key themes that have presented themselves in these first two chapters of Revelation. Last Sunday we spoke about Christian love. The Christian life is not about striving to earn God's love. The Christian life is about responding with gratitude and overflowing with the love that God has freely given to us through His Son Jesus Christ. The moment that we lose sight of that and start believing that we can do enough in our own strength to please God is the moment that we have ceased to abide in His love.

Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me. ⁵I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing. As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Abide in my love. (John 15:4-5,9 ESV)

Amen! Let's be a people who abide in the love of God.

This morning I want to turn your attention to another recurrent theme in Revelation. All of the letters to the churches in Revelation 2 and 3 have the same basic structure and they all end with a promise. Those promises are designated for a specific group of people: Those who conquer. We've noted that the Christian conquers by standing firm in his faith. The Christian conquers by not compromising. He conquers by persevering. We see that in Revelation 2:25-26.

Only **hold fast** what you have until I come. ²⁶The one who conquers and **who keeps my works until the end**, to him I will give

authority over the nations, (Rev. 2:25 ESV)

Hold fast! The world is going to try to change you. It will mock you, persecute you and indoctrinate you in order to bring you to the place of compromise. But Jesus has called you to stand fast! And as you do that – as you refuse to compromise – you will shine the light of Christ into a dark world.

Do you remember the analogy that is used in Revelation to represent the churches? In Revelation 2:1 we read,

“To the angel of the church in Ephesus write: ‘The words of him who holds the seven stars in his right hand, who walks among the seven golden lampstands.’ (Revelation 2:1 ESV)

In the verse directly before this he explained,

“the seven lampstands are the seven churches.” (Revelation 1:20b ESV)

Jesus is walking amongst the churches and he is inspecting us. He is tending to the lampstands. Are they shining brightly? Has the fire gone out? Are there issues within the church that will cause the flame to die unless they are dealt with? As we consider these letters to the churches in Revelation it is critical that we understand this theme of light. I want to look with you this morning at Matthew 5:13-16. Please turn there with me in your Bibles. I want to help you to see that Jesus’ message is consistent. We are the light of the world! And Jesus, as our great high priest, is attending to his church. He is confronting things that keep us from shining brightly, and he is encouraging that which will set us apart from the world around us.

Christian, when you repented of your sin and put your trust in Jesus Christ, you became a citizen of the Kingdom of Heaven, and yet, when you look around, you see that you are still living in a kingdom that is marred by sin. You sense that you are an alien, and if you live the way that God has called you to live, the world will sense that too. Our text this morning explains how we are to live in this strange and foreign land.

Hear now the Word of the Lord. Matthew 5, beginning at verse 13.

¹³“You are the salt of the earth, but if salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything except to be thrown out and trampled under people’s feet.

¹⁴“You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. ¹⁵Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. ¹⁶In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.

This is the Word of the Lord, thanks be to God.

How does the Christian conquer? They conquer by not compromising. They conquer by shining their light into an increasingly dark world. They conquer by being different. They conquer by being near. This morning I want to spend some time considering this command, particularly what it looks like for us to be different and near, and then I want to look at some obvious implications that arise from the text.

Called To Be Different And Near

Isn't it amazing when you hear an analogy that is so easy to understand? Some of us have the gift of over-complication. Sometimes people use an analogy to try and help me to understand something and I find myself in need of an analogy to explain their analogy. But not so with Jesus. He points to two things that are so common and so universal that anyone from any culture can understand his meaning. Salt and light. He uses these images of salt and light to help us understand how Christians are to live in the world. He teaches us first of all that:

1. Christians Are Called To Be Different

Salt would be pretty useless if it just assumed the flavour of whatever food it was sprinkled on. What would be the purpose of sprinkling meat flavoured salt on your meat, or corn flavoured salt on your corn? Salt is useful because it is distinct. In the same way, light is inherently different from darkness. That is bound up in the very essence of light. What is darkness? It is the absence of light.

Jesus points to these two examples and he says to us, "You are the salt of the earth. You are the light of the world." He's telling us that, as Christians, we are by nature different.

The context of this passage illustrates wonderfully what this different living should look like. Our text this morning is found near the beginning of the Sermon on the Mount. The rest of the sermon explains how the Christian should live differently in the world. It was in this Sermon that Jesus strengthened the moral law. He teaches us not to hold grudges and not to look at women with lust in our heart. He teaches us to love our enemies and to give to the needy. He teaches us not to store up treasures here on earth and not to make a display of ourselves when we are fasting. Essentially, he preaches a whole sermon on how we are to do the opposite of what the natural man would be inclined to do. It is a sermon on how the Christian is to be different.

For your homework today, I want to challenge you to go home and to read the Sermon on the Mount in its entirety. Listen as Jesus walks through each and every facet of your life and explains how you ought to be living so as to be the salt of the earth and the light of the world. The more we are conformed to the image of Christ, the

less we will look like the world around us. And as we look less and less like the world, we will experience more and more resistance. But blessed are you when the world persecutes you. They're persecuting you because you are shining brightly the gospel of Jesus Christ. We shine by being different.

2. Christians Are Called To Be Near

Another obvious trait of salt and light is that their usefulness is best appreciated as they change their surroundings by their very presence. Salt locked up in the cupboard doesn't save mom's soup. But when the salt is in the soup it makes all the difference. In the same way,

"A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. ¹⁵ Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house." (Matthew 5:14b-15 ESV)

Interestingly, salt was predominantly used in Jesus' day as a preservative. It was rubbed into meat so that the meat would not spoil as quickly. Again, salt locked away does not preserve anything. But when it is rubbed in, it slows the death and decay of that which it is present in.

We simply cannot lock ourselves away from the world. I wonder if we haven't put our faith in a secret cabinet only to be unlocked on Sundays and at Bible studies? The world teaches us in no subtle way that religion is a taboo conversation item. And some of us are so polite that we buy that hook, line and sinker.

I want to be careful this morning as we consider being near. I don't want you to hear this as an encouragement for you to continue going to the club with your friends. That's not nearness. That's nonsense. Jesus ate with tax collectors but he didn't go with them to the brothel. We need to be both near *and* different. Each of us will need to assess where we need to be corrected.

For some of us, we have the near bit down. We work with 25 unbelievers, play in a town hockey league and have a family full of folks who don't care to know Jesus. We are near the world all the time! But maybe we need God to transform us so that we can be different. We need to stop laughing at inappropriate jokes at work and we need to stop getting drunk in the change room. You see, you can throw us much salt in mom's soup as you like, but if it's not salty – if it's not distinct and different – than the soup would be better off without it. We need to be different.

For others of us, we have the different bit down. We carry Greek Bibles with us to the grocery store just in case we feel the need to do a word study, and we are known at Tim Horton's as "the lady who is always trying to

convert her cashier.” No one would deny that we are different! And yet, we’re finding ourselves increasingly out of touch with the world. We are passionate about evangelism, but we don’t have more than three relationships with unbelievers. Our light is shining, but it feels like it’s shining on its own behind a veil.

Some Obvious And Practical Implications

My hope for us this morning is that each of us will be pushed and corrected by the Holy Spirit. I’d like to spend the remainder of our time looking at some obvious and practical implications from this text. The first implication I see in the text is this:

1. This World Is Dying

Do you hear that? We are salt in a decaying world. We are light in darkness. The world around us is heading full steam in the direction of death and ruin. They don’t know this. They aren’t able to see this, because spiritual things are spiritually discerned. They don’t have the Holy Spirit. They are lost. They are travelling down a dangerous road that leads to an eternal damnation and they have no idea.

There is a way that seems right to a man,
but its end is the way to death. (Proverbs 14:12 ESV)

Romans 1 paints the picture of a world that is diving further and further into its sin and rebellion. It tells of a people who have heard God’s decrees at one time or another but who have rejected them to go their own way.

²⁸ And since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them up to a debased mind to do what ought not to be done. ²⁹ They were filled with all manner of unrighteousness, evil, covetousness, malice. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, maliciousness. They are gossips, ³⁰ slanderers, haters of God, insolent, haughty, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, ³¹ foolish, faithless, heartless, ruthless. ³² Though they know God’s righteous decree that those who practice such things deserve to die, they not only do them but give approval to those who practice them. (Romans 1:28-32 ESV)

Paul speaks here of a culture that not only practices evil, but celebrates it.

We saw last week that we need to be fuelled by love. Do you want a very practical illustration of that love? God is worthy of the praise of every man, woman, boy and girl in this city. He fashioned them after His own likeness. He gives them food to eat and causes the sun to shine on them. And they mock Him. He is kind and compassionate and patient, but they in turn spit in the face of God. If you really love God, and if that love really fuels you, than it should break your heart when you see this world worshipping anything or anyone other than the God who made them. You should be ready and willing to give your life to the cause of seeing God receive the

praise that He deserves. “May the people praise You!” “All creatures of our God and King, lift up your voice and with us sing, ‘O praise Him! Hallelujah!’” Does your love for God fuel your mission?

If we are to be fuelled by a love for our neighbour, than shouldn't this reality bring us to tears? Countless people that we see and speak with every day will spend an eternity in hell unless they turn and put their trust in Jesus. Are you okay with that? Do you understand now why Jesus is so determined to make sure that these lampstands are shining their light? When we compromise, God receives less glory. When we compromise, people don't hear the gospel, and people go to hell.

With that sobering reality in mind, I see some very clear implications that follow.

2. Be Different

Why is it that we feel this insatiable need to apologize for being different? How many churches are singing Beyonce songs, preaching ten-minute sermons and taking communion in separate, private services because they don't want to be seen as different? Church, let's embrace the fact that what we do here is weird! We hold a thirty minute sing along that both grandma and little Timmy take part in, we sit and listen to a forty minute sermon, and we call bread and juice the body and blood of Christ – and then we consume them! That is jarringly strange to the outside world! We can apologize for that, and we can rethink the model of what these gatherings look like. Or, we can remember that salt and light are by nature different and we can accept that our corporate gatherings will, as a result, look very strange. Now, that doesn't mean that we are weird for the sake of being weird. It means that when we come together we will do what we see prescribed for us in the Bible. We will prioritize the word, we will sing, we will pray and we will observe the sacraments of baptism and communion. We will embrace God's model and we will expect it to appear strange to the world.

What does it look like for you to embrace your Christian distinctiveness? We dealt with some of it last week when we considered how loving God with our heart, soul and mind included speaking about Him, and living lives of obedience. Both of those behaviours and responses are a part of what it means to shine. I suspect that one of the greatest obstacles we will face as we try to truly live as salt and light in this world will be the idol of approval. Some of us just care too much of what the world thinks of us. We know that if we start talking about Jesus, and if we stop laughing at those dirty jokes, and if we tried reading our Bible at lunchtime than we might lose our influence in our workplace. Some people might judge us, think less of us, or resist us. But do you remember what Jesus said to those who love the approval of men?

²⁶“Woe to you, when all people speak well of you, for so their fathers did to the false prophets.” (Luke 6:26 ESV)

Do you know why people spoke well of the false prophets? It was because the false prophets always told the people what they wanted to hear. If you high five folks on their way to hell they will absolutely think highly of you. If you encourage them and enable them in their sin, you will be a rock star in the eyes of the world. And if you care more about people thinking highly of you than you do about people spending an eternity in hell than woe to you! Shine the light of Jesus Christ in the dark context that you are in. Who is better positioned to reach your unsaved family with the gospel than you are? Who is better positioned to reach your co-workers? Your neighbours? Be salt! Be light! For the glory of God and for the good of the world, be different! God’s plan to reach the lost folks around you just might begin with you looking more like a follower of Jesus and less like the world.

The other obvious implication is that we must be near.

3. Be Near

We, as a church, must intentionally find ways to reach out into this city that God has placed us in. Without patting ourselves on the back, there are a lot of folks working really hard to help us engage with our community. Every Monday a team meets in our kitchen to prepare meals for people who are in need. We have volunteers serving at the Orillia Pregnancy Resource Center, Living for Jesus and the Lighthouse. We have volunteers serving at the food bank and at the Downtown Dispensary methadone clinic. On Tuesday nights we run a free rehabilitation program to help people who are lost in addiction. We have a \$20,000 line in our budget called Common Good that we distribute to other not-for-profit agencies in our community. Now I’m not saying that we do this perfectly, but there is much to celebrate in terms of our church’s commitment to let its presence be felt in the community.

So that’s what we’re doing as a corporate people, but I want you to consider this question: What am I doing as a follower of Jesus to be near? We want the salt of the gospel to be rubbed into a decaying world and we want the light of the gospel to shine in the darkness but we must be present if we are to be persuasive.

My dad is an amazing man. One of the things that he modelled so well for me was this reality of being in the world but not of the world. He realized that he didn’t have many avenues to build relationships with unbelievers so he joined the local basketball league. Now, you don’t know my dad, but to help you picture him, he’s about 5’6” on his tiptoes. He would be a star in the basketball league for hobbits. But he’s a giant in my mind because

he joined this league so as to be a light in a dark place. And sure enough, when tragedy strikes the men in that league and they need someone to talk to, my dad is often the guy who gets the call. He also started to coach the local high school basketball team and has established strong relationships with countless young people and with the school.

What are you doing to be near? If you can count the relationships you have with unbelievers on one hand, I want to challenge you this morning to do something about that. Join the mom's group at the library, or register your kids in the local soccer league, or volunteer at Living for Jesus. Every Tuesday I go to the Lighthouse for lunch. I hang out with the nice folks who are there, hear their stories, and then before the meal is served I get to share the gospel for five minutes and to pray for the folks who are there. Can you believe that? I get to share the gospel with a room full of people who don't know Jesus every Tuesday! And that's not a role that's only available to pastors! Any one of you can go right now to the Lighthouse or to Living for Jesus and can volunteer to help.

Sometimes we overcomplicate our evangelism efforts. We think that the only way to do evangelism is to run door to door with gospel tracts or to put on a multi-thousand dollar concert with lights and fog machines. Those things aren't wrong, but your evangelism might look like going to the library every Tuesday and telling a mom who's there with her kids why you love going to church on Sundays. Take that light that Jesus Christ has set ablaze in your heart and shine it in the dark places of this city. Be near, for the glory of God and the good of the world.

4. Expect Resistance

Finally, as we conclude this morning I want to draw your attention to one last implication. This one might not be as obvious to the naked eye. As we are different and as we are near we should expect resistance. Look at the context of this morning's passage. When you are studying your Bible, try to make a habit of looking at the story and the verses that are surrounding your passage. Jesus here has just begun his Sermon on the Mount. But before he gives the command to be salt and light he gives "The Beatitudes." Look with me at verses 3-12.

³ "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

⁴ "Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.

⁵ "Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.

⁶ "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.

⁷ "Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy.

⁸ "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.

⁹ "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.

¹⁰ "Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

¹¹ "Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. ¹² Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

Do you hear what Jesus is saying? He is telling us that this will not be an easy road. As we shine our light, we will experience the push back of the darkness of the world. Blessed are the poor in spirit. We will lose relationships with friends and family. Blessed are those who mourn. People will look down at us. Blessed are the meek. They will call us self-righteous. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness. As we extend grace to those that the world has deemed unworthy of grace we will be called naïve. Blessed are the merciful. The sin all around us will bring us to our knees in despair. Blessed are the pure in heart. We will be hurt, and we will turn the other cheek. Blessed are the peacemakers. We will be harassed. Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake. People that we love will mock us and will gossip about us. Blessed are you when others revile you, and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil about you falsely on my account.

And then Jesus tells us to be the salt of the earth and the light of the world. Don't hide. Don't compromise. Jesus walks amongst the churches and he inspects the light of their witness. What does he see in you? Do you love the praises of men or do you love the Saviour of the world? When you are staring in the face of persecution do you stand firm in your faith or do you surrender to compromise? Christian, the world is dying all around you. They can applaud you on their way to hell or they can despise you as you seek to save their lives. Those are your options. The Christian life is a rescue mission for those who don't want to be rescued. But God is in the business of transforming hearts and minds. We are here because God had mercy on us. Humanly speaking, we are here because someone loved us enough to tell us the truth about our sin before it was too late.

The Christian life is hard. The Christian life, at times, can be devastating. But in the midst of our hardships, the God of the universe will lift up our heads and He will give us strength. He will cause our light to shine. Listen to these beautiful promises from your Saviour Jesus Christ. Speaking of those who persevere he says,

theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

they shall be comforted.

they shall inherit the earth.

they shall be satisfied.

they shall receive mercy.

they shall see God.

they shall be called sons of God.

for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

So with promises in hand, and hearts full of love, let's shine the light of the gospel into this world. Like a city on a hill, let's pierce the darkness with the good news of Jesus Christ. Let's be different. Let's be near. For the glory of God and the good of all people. This is the life of obedience. This is the word of the Lord. Let's pray.