

ESF, Lord's day service message

3/5/2017

You Are Salt and You are Light

Matthew 5:13-16

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.

Everyone has influence. Whether it's over your kids, or your co-workers, your family or your friends, you have influence. The question is, what kind of influence do you have on others around you.

In this text, Jesus says that believers have the power of influence as the salt and the light. Salt is hidden yet has a powerful influence. Light on the other hand, is visible and has a revealing influence.

Your influence as salt

1. Salt gives taste

The main function of salt is making food tasty. God uses Christians to make people's lives tasty. Just as salt adds zest and fires up the taste buds, believers can make life more "tasty" for others. What is the taste of life? It is joy. The joy God gives us has nothing to do with material possessions or with circumstance. It is joy from the hope and trust in God. It is joy from God himself. It is joy in our hearts. "*You have filled my heart with great joy*" (Psalm 4:7). "*In him (God) our hearts rejoice,*

for we trust in his holy name” (Psalm 33:21). “May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him” (Romans 15:13).

So regardless of life's conditions or circumstances, believers can have joy that comes from God. People without God also try to gain joy. But they only gain temporary pleasure without joy of the heart. Temporary pleasure brings emptiness of heart or depression. Through believers God brings joy to the joyless world. If you are a believer, God has given joy in your heart already. Rejoice with the joy of God in all circumstances (Philippians 4:4). Then God will turn the joyless world around you into a joyful world.

2. Salt is a preservative

Salt is a preservative that holds back decay. People in ancient time didn't have refrigerators so they put salt on their meat to keep it from rotting. God has put His children into a rotting and corrupt world in order to preserve it. How? God enables believers to be a preservative in this corrupt world through the cleansing power of Jesus' blood, and through His holy presence. Believers can have an antiseptic impact on this corrupt society.

Followers of Jesus are to preserve the world from the rot of sin. As the presence of sodium in salt can inhibit the growth of bacteria that would spoil meats, Jesus' blood and the holy presence of God in believers' lives can prevent this world from the corruptive works of the devil.

A small amount of salt has power to preserve a large amount of water or food. The average percentage of salt in the ocean's water is 3.5 %. This small amount of salt preserves 96.5 % of the water in the ocean as well as all the contaminants from the earth that drain into the ocean.

We, believers may be small in number amongst the larger crowd of unbelievers. But when we carry the blood of Christ in our hearts and

God's holy presence, we can prevent the world we are living in from corruption.

When God was planning to destroy the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah, Moses prayed for the people in those cities. And God promised that He would not destroy the cities if He could find 10 righteous people there. Compared to the number of people in the two cities, 10 people was a very small number. God can use you to preserve your entire family. God can use you to preserve an entire company. God can use us to preserve the entire city of Chicago. God can use a small number of believers scattered around the world to preserve billions of people in this world.

Don't get discouraged for belonging to the small number of believers because God is using you like the preservative power of salt. Trust in the power of Jesus' blood. Trust in the power of God's holy presence in the small number of believers.

3. Salt symbolizes God's covenant with men

In ancient times salt was often costly and a valuable part of one's diet. And it could be used as a covenant sign between God and men and among men.

In the Old Testament, God instructed his people to use salt as a sign of the unbreakable covenant. Leviticus 2:13- *Season all your grain offerings with salt. Do not leave the salt of the covenant of your God out of your grain offerings; add salt to all your offerings.*

Numbers 18:19- *Whatever is set aside from the holy offerings the Israelites present to the LORD I give to you and your sons and daughters as your regular share. It is an everlasting covenant of salt before the LORD for both you and your offspring.*

In Arabic, the word for salt is the same word as the word for treaty. Similarly, in Persian, the word “traitor” means “*someone who is faithless to salt.*” Not that many years ago this was all proved in the modern state of Jordan. Informants for the King uncovered an assassination plot, and they discovered and reported to the King the name of the man who was supposed to kill him.

In response, the King devised an ingenious plan. Rather than sending his soldiers out to arrest the man, foiling the plot with guns and weapons, he invited the traitor to the royal palace for dinner! Since it is impossible to refuse a royal invitation, the man was obligated to enter the territory of his mark.

The King made certain that the meal was heavily salted. At that point things changed, because once they had eaten salt together there was a bond between them. The assassin became a brother, and he couldn't kill the King! They had eaten salt together!

Such a picture resonates with what Jesus is saying here. When He says "You are the salt of the earth!" He means that believers represent God's covenant to the world which does not know God. With the power of Jesus' redemption, believers can bring spiritual interest to the people who have no relationship with God. They can bring a right spiritual connection between God and the people who are spiritually ignorant. Be a salt of God's covenant. Reach out to those who do not know God with Jesus' gospel.

Your influence as light

The New Testament presents Christ as the personification of light: “*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). The Bible makes it clear that all who catch and reflect the light of Christ are themselves called “light.”

Ephesians 5:7 says, *“For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light.”*

Jesus says, *“let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.”* How can you let your light shine before men?

We can shine as light by letting others see our good deeds as God’s Children. Good deeds are not what we think or talk about or plan. Good deeds are what we actually do. What are these good deeds that can shine as light?

The function of light is to dispel darkness. Darkness is expressed in many different ways. There is darkness where there is bitterness and hatred. There is darkness where there is suffering. There is darkness where there is no hope. So to be a light, our deeds must be the deeds of love, comfort, and hope. We cannot manufacture such deeds of light. We just shine with the light of Christ in us. We are illuminators of the light of Christ.

1. Shine with deeds of love

God fills our hearts with the spirit of unconditional love and forgiveness through the cross of Jesus, so that we can love our enemies and forgive them unconditionally. With the love of God we can overcome the darkness of hatred and bitterness. Martin Luther King Jr. said, *“Darkness cannot drive out darkness: only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate: only love can do that.”*

When we forgive and love the one who hurt us, we do not become losers. We become winners. Because we overcome the darkness caused by bitterness and hatred. The hallmark of Jesus’ disciples is not miracles. It is love. Jesus said, *“If you love one another, all men will know that you are my disciples”* (John 13:35).

When we spend time together closely as the family of Christ, we can see many faults and weaknesses of each other. Often we may deeply hurt each other. But we can forgive each other because we have Christ's unconditional forgiveness. We can still love each other with the love of God. When unbelievers see such forgiveness and love among us, they can see the difference between Christians and others. They can see God and Christ through the love in us. That is how we can shine upon them as children of light. Is there anyone among us who has hurt you? Forgive the person today. Love the person with the love of Christ. Let the light shine through your deed of love.

2. Shine with deeds of comfort

God is the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those also in trouble (2 Corinthians 1:3-4). Think about the pearl of an oyster. A hurtful particle comes into the shell and the oyster grieves about it. It covers the hurtful substances with precious substances that comes from its own body. It does this until the substance changes into a pearl. God uses suffering to shape a beautiful character in believers. The beautiful character shines in the suffering world. We can shine as overcomers of suffering. We can shine by comforting those who are in the darkness of suffering. Do you know some people who are suffering and need comfort? With God's comfort in you, reach out to them. Comfort them with God's comfort.

3. Shine with deeds of hope

God of Christ is the God of hope. Psalm 65:5 says, "*God is the hope of all the ends of the earth and of the farthest seas.*" Our Lord Jesus is the Lord of hope. In Jesus name the nations will put their hope (Matthew 12:21).

There is a story about how the caverns north of Yellowstone National Park were discovered. As the story goes, one of the original explorers was walking along the top of that mountain and fell through a hole, and he dropped down several hundred feet into this cavern and was stuck in almost total darkness for over a week, no food, no water. He cried out every day, "Help me!" hoping that somebody would hear his voice and figure out that he was down there.

Sure enough a guy came along and heard this faint sound and looked around and found the hole. They dug him out and that's how they found this giant cavern. They asked him, "How did you hold on to hope day after day after day in the dark without giving up?" He said, "There was one little pinhole ray of light that was coming through and I just kept focused on that ray of light."

Many around us today are like that man down in the cave. They are in darkness looking for a way out. They need light that gives them hope for a life.

Whenever we put our trust in the Lord of hope, He gives us hope. With hope of God we can shine on those who are hopeless. Put your trust in the Lord's hope. Encourage hopeless people with hope in God. And God will let the light of hope shine upon them.