

Series: The Sermon on the Mount

**Light Up the Dark**

Matthew 5:13-16

Sermon by Lead Pastor Paul Joslin

Waterstone Community Church, Littleton, Colorado

Sunday morning, September 21, 2025

A reading from Matthew chapter 5, verse 13 through 16: “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 underfoot. You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither 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. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven,” the word of the Lord. You may be seated.

Good morning. How is everyone doing? Good. If you had any confusion about who was booing the pie pastor this morning, that was me. I think I still have whipped cream in my nose from last year, when my wife threw a pie in my face but smooshed it up and it just like was all, yeah, I am still, I think that is why I am still congested, actually. It is not allergies, but it is the whipped cream, so thanks for that, Steffy. It is so good to be with you today. You may have noticed that as we went into the scripture reading there, a little bit of a different rhythm for our church is I am actually leading us towards standing during the scripture reading, and that is not something we have traditionally done at Waterstone, and I am not just doing that because I want a new tradition or a new rhythm for our church, but I actually think that when we stand for the reading of scripture, it does two things for us as a congregation and as a community and as a church. The first is that we are actually, and you know this, not just people who live out our faith with our heart or with our minds, but actually with our whole bodies. Jesus wants us to be whole followers of Jesus, and so our posture during worship matters. It is why we sing standing sometimes, or why when we pray, we might kneel, because the posture we take actually communicates our posture before the Lord, and so when we stand for the scripture reading, we are saying that this is the word of God. This book is not like another book. It is not just some ancient stories or ancient principles for wisdom. It is actually the living word of God, and we want to hold it in reverence and anticipate what we are going to hear from the Lord every time we open it, and so that is a new thing that we are going to be stepping into as we continue with the series on the Sermon on the Mount. If you have any questions about that, feel free to reach out. I would love to have some conversation about that, and then finally, I want to talk just a moment about giving at Waterstone. Just like standing to maybe read scripture or kneeling to pray, this is one of the ways that we live out our faith with our whole lives, and this posture matters. We live with open hands. We say what we have been given from God is not just ours, but we live with open hands, and we want to give back to God and to those in need, and so one of the ways you can do that is just through online giving at [waterstonechurch.org](http://waterstonechurch.org), and you can also follow that QR code, and that is a way that you can help us stay on mission to reach those around us and to share the good news of Jesus. Does that sound good? All right, let me pray for us, and then we are going to dive into the message this morning.

Heavenly Father, God, as we come before you, and as we continue our series on the Sermon on the Mount, this ancient sermon that two-thousand years ago, Jesus climbed onto the side of a hill, to a

mountaintop, and He began to preach, and He shared the good news of the kingdom of heaven and what it is like to live in relationship with God and relationship with one another. God, for some of us, the Sermon on the Mount might feel like something we have heard a thousand times, and for others of us, we maybe have never even heard what the Sermon on the Mount is. God, wherever we are coming from today, my prayer is that we as a community would hear this as if we were the original audience, that we would imagine what it is like to watch Jesus climb up a mountain, to turn, to sit, and to open his mouth and tell us this good news, and that we could experience your presence in that way today as we open your word, and it is in Christ's name that we pray, amen.

So, we are in our second week on the Sermon on the Mount, and last week, what we did was that we walked through a little bit of background on the Sermon on the Mount, what was going on in Jesus' world that led Him to this moment when He climbed up onto the side of the hill and began giving what I would say is the greatest sermon ever given, and we examined some of the historical context, the background. We looked at the Beatitudes, which are the opening for the Sermon on the Mount and how Jesus is calling to Him all of the people who feel like they are not religious enough, they are not bold enough, they do not have enough faith, the people who are ostracized and outcast and maybe feel like their life is falling apart, and Jesus looks at them and says, you know what, they are actually the ones who are first in the kingdom of heaven. They are the ones that I am welcoming in, the people that you would least expect, and then the follow-up to that moment is Jesus talking to that same group of people and those disciples. He gives this illustration about what it looks like to engage with the world, a world that Jesus makes an assumption about, a world that Jesus says is inherently broken on so many different levels, a world that, yes, it has beauty, and we can see it. With my family, we were just in the mountains yesterday, looking at the fall leaves, and there is so much beauty, it just takes your breath away, and yet at the same time, you look at the headlines in our world, the events of the last few weeks in our nation, and it does not take a master debater to convince you that the world is broken and that things are unraveling in different ways, and that we experience decay and darkness. That is the assumption that Jesus makes about the world we live in, that it is broken, and that that brokenness seeps into every area of our lives, and that when we look at the world, we see decay and darkness.

This past week, I was reminded of that idea in a pretty unexpected way. I was in the carpool pickup line at my daughter's elementary school. I was like, "Wow, the world is dark." That was not because of a parent or something sinister happening at the school. It was because of what was going on in my back seat with my daughter and the little boy we picked up from school. My daughter is six years old, and what you need to know about her is she has opinions. She knows what she believes about the world, and she has a lot of strong thoughts about what she believes around the world. As I was listening to her talk to this little boy who is about seven, she is in first grade, he is in second grade, and it got into that playground space, and you are probably familiar with it, where suddenly they just start to one-up each other in everything, right? So they are talking about, "I have this toy," and then the other one is like, "No, well, I have this toy, and this toy is even better than that toy," and it is like, "Oh, yeah, well, I am going to shift the conversation then, because you just won that argument, and so we are going to talk about who gets to watch more TV, and I get to watch this TV show," and then there is like, "Yeah, but I get to watch movies on Tuesday afternoon," and it is back and forth, back and forth, and it got to this place where it was comical watching

it play out and a little exhausting, because where it ended was they started arguing about whose bully was a bigger bully at school. So, one of them, like, that is how badly they felt the need to prove to the other person, like, “I am bigger and better than you. Even my bully is a bigger bully than the bully you have at school,” and I am just sitting there thinking, like, what? Like, can I turn the music up louder and just, like, drown this out? It was exhausting listening to it.

It made me think of this summer, when we had a very similar interaction, again, with my daughter. She has her opinions. She is talking to her cousin while we are visiting family. She starts talking to her cousin, saying, “Hey, you know what? I think my dad is stronger than your dad.” That is just what she led with. I am listening to this as I am getting lunch ready for them. He responds, of course, he has to respond, has to defend the honor of his household. “No, your dad is not stronger than my dad. My dad is stronger than your dad.” It is back and forth, back and forth, and they are trying to figure out all the different ways they could prove whose dad is stronger, like swimming in the lake or lifting a boat or all this stuff, and here is what you need to know. I am not a small guy, but Uncle Kevin, this cousin’s dad, he is about 6 feet 5 inches tall. He played college basketball, and he could probably bench press me if he wanted to, okay? So, I just turned to Camden, and I am like, “Hey, sweetheart. I actually think Uncle Kevin is probably stronger than Daddy,” and I kid you not, she looked at me with this look of absolute betrayal, like, “How dare you undercut my argument? I was winning,” and then turns to her cousin and says, “Yeah, he might be stronger than my dad, but he is not stronger than Jesus,” and it was just like, trump card, like, Jesus is stronger than your dad, like, I win. You can’t argue with that,” and it is just this, all laughter, all fun and games. There is nothing wrong with that. It is kids being kids, but it is those moments when you watch this play out on this silly scale of cousins at a lake house or two classmates arguing in the back of a truck on the way home from school, and what struck me is, man, it starts so young and so small, this belief that we have to prove ourselves to everyone else in the world, that we have to make everyone else know that we are enough, that we have what it takes, that the things that are important to us matter, that even our hardships, like school bullies, are bigger and worse than other people’s hardships. We want to feel seen. We want to feel known. We want to feel like we matter, and I think what happens is sometimes we never really grow past that six or seven-year old phase of arguing about whose daddy is stronger, and it just scales up into ways that impact our communities and our homes, our families, and you can even blow it up into a national scale. I think you could say that so much of the tension and the darkness and the decay that we see in the world originates from this spot of feeling like I am not enough, and I need to prove my worth to other people. How we end up going about trying to prove our worth to other people leads to all sorts of chaos and darkness and brokenness, and it seeps into every area of our lives.

That, I think, is what Jesus is beginning to confront in his Sermon on the Mount, when He talks about how his followers, his people, are supposed to be salt and light in the world. They are supposed to be a community of people who actually preserve life in a world of decay, and they are supposed to be a community of people that push back against the darkness that we see and feel in this world by being a light that shines in the darkness, and so Jesus gives us these two metaphors, and Kyle, I am going to be hopping around a little bit from what I had originally written. I feel like I need to switch something up, so I actually want to start with a passage in Matthew. If you could go to Matthew 5, if you are following along in your Bibles, it is Matthew chapter 5, verse 13, and this is what it says.

Jesus says, “You are the salt of the earth, but if 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 underfoot.” Now, I said at the beginning that Jesus has begun this section of the Sermon on the Mount with the assumption that the world is full of decay and darkness, and Jesus’ answer to that is his community of people, his followers, stepping into the decay and darkness by being salt and light, and so He begins by saying, “You are the salt of the earth.” Now, when you hear that statement, I am not imagining that if I come to you and I say, hey, you know the world is broken, you know the world is difficult, you know that the world is challenging, and I say, “I need you to be salt,” you’re not going to sit there and be like, “Oh, yeah, that is a great rallying cry. That gets me pumped up and inspired. I need to be more salty.” Like there’s no professional football coach that is coming to his players and saying, “You need to be saltier,” and inspiring them to win their game, right? It feels a little flat, but there are two things about salt that you need to know, and one you are probably pretty familiar with if you have heard this part of the Sermon on the Mount before. It is that in the ancient world salt was a preservative. In a world where they did not have refrigeration, they did not have a way to keep food preserved, salt was a thing that if you put enough salt on, let’s say, some meat, then it would keep the meat from rotting and decaying. It would preserve it and keep it in a space where it would continue to be able to be used and eaten and produce life, and so what Jesus is saying to his followers is that you are the salt of the earth. In a world of decay, you are the preservative that holds on to things that are good and beautiful, and you allow grace and mercy and justice to flow through you in a world that is bent against those things, that you preserve what is good in this world, but there is a second part of this illustration around salt that we may be a little less familiar with.

Actually, in the Old Testament, when they would talk about the covenant, God’s promises to the people of Israel and how they were supposed to live out their calling as the people of God, the covenant in several different places is called a covenant of salt. Again, that does not really mean a lot to us. If I come to you with a realtor and I say, “Hey, I want to buy your house, and this is a contract of salt to buy your home,” you’re going to think, “What does that mean? Like, that has no value for anything that I am doing right now in my world,” but in the ancient world, this idea of salt, again, taking with it this idea of a preservative, means that it is lasting, that it is forever, that it has this binding component to it, and so when God says that the covenant is a covenant of salt, what He is saying is my covenant with my people, it is this binding agreement that you will be the people who experience and embody my blessing to the world forever, that this calling to preserve life and beauty and goodness in a world of decay is your calling, and it will not end. This is what you are supposed to do forever. You are inheriting this calling.

In the ancient world, salt was really valuable. In fact, Roman soldiers were often paid in salt instead of money. That is how valuable it was. In fact, that is where we get the term, “salary.” It is from this idea of being paid in salt. That one is for free. You can take that home and tell that on your next trivia night or something, okay? It is this idea that salt is actually incredibly valuable, and so God is coming to his people, and Jesus is coming to them and saying, “You are my covenant people. You are meant to embody and extend the promises of God’s goodness into a world that is falling apart to decay,” but He adds this warning at the end of this section of scripture. He says, you are the salt of the earth. That is your identity. That is what you are supposed to do, but He gives this warning, “but if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be

made salty?” It loses its purpose. It loses its value. You can’t pay someone in salt that is not salty. It can’t do what it is meant to do, which is to preserve and extend life and to push back against decay.

So, what is Jesus saying here in this passage? What He is saying is that if we lose our saltiness as the people of God, what He is saying is that we are actually losing our distinctiveness. Technically, pure salt, salt in its purest form, never loses its saltiness or its flavor. It is not like other spices that if you just leave it around long enough, the flavor begins to decay. Salt actually keeps its flavor forever, but when it is mixed with other minerals, or when it is mixed with other components, then it begins to dilute the salt, and the salt is not actually good for what it is intended for, and it loses its distinctiveness. What Jesus is naming in this warning is that if the people of God, the people who are supposed to embody the kingdom of God and be a blessing to the world, if they begin to look like the world, if they begin to lose their distinctiveness, if they start blending in with the world and adopt the world’s methods of control or fear or pride or violence, they may look like they are religious, but they will no longer be preserving anything. Their witness fades. Their power to heal disappears. When they stop being salt, the world is left to decay.

This is not just a first century warning for us. I think this warning is so applicable today, because as we are going to look at in just a moment, I think there are so many different areas of life for the church, or followers of Jesus are tempted to become like the world and adopt the world’s ways and reject the ways of Jesus, and what Jesus is saying is when that happens is we actually are incapable of living out our identity as the salt of the earth. The question we have to ask ourselves is, I think sometimes what happens in the church is when we look at the world and we see the darkness and we see the decay and we see how everything is falling apart, it is so easy as the people inside the club, inside the followers of Jesus club, that we look outside of ourselves, and we say, “Man, they are screwing everything up. Look at how bad they are doing. Look at all the stuff that is going wrong and look at all of the ways that they are not following God. They are just making their own bed, and it is a bad one. They are just like living in it,” and I think what Jesus is saying here, that it actually calls us to hold up a mirror to ourselves and that as followers of Jesus, as believers in Jesus, that maybe when things are going bad in the world, we do not point the finger at them, but we look inward, and we question and we wonder, maybe we are losing our distinctiveness. Maybe we are not playing the role that Jesus has called us to as followers of Him.

So that is the first illustration or metaphor that Jesus uses for how the people of God are supposed to engage with the world, but He has two more that He uses, and He puts them back-to-back, because they have a similar meaning. He goes on in verses 14 and 15, and He says that you, followers of Jesus, you disciples of Jesus, “You are the light of the world, and a town built on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl.” This is Jesus using humor. You do not light a candle and then stick something over it, blocking out the light. “Instead, they put it on a stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house.” Now, you probably know this, but again, in the Old Testament, any time there’s imagery or illustration about light, it is a very clear representation of God’s presence. So, if you think about scripture, any time someone encounters a bright light, usually it is the way of saying that hey, they are coming face to face with God. They are seeing God and seeing his presence and experiencing his presence, but what also happens in the Old Testament is so often this imagery of light is tied to a place and a people. It said that God’s light, God’s presence in a dark world is tied to the temple, the place of worship. It is tied to a building, but Jesus changes the metaphor, doesn’t He?

He does not say the light will be found in your church building. He says the light is in you, that you as followers of Jesus reflect the light of God into a dark world, but you do not do that in a way where you are just like a little flashlight or a little candle just trying to shine light into the darkness. You do that as a community of people that together you make a bright light that can't be hidden, a light like a city that is built on a hill.

Now I want you to think about the light of Denver and light pollution. If you go away from Denver, even if you go on the other side of the mountains, and you have an entire mountain range between you and Denver, you can still see the light from the city, because the light just illuminates everything, and in the darkness, it cannot be hidden. That is what Jesus is saying here. Who could hide a city? It is Him using humor to say there is no way that if you are doing what you are supposed to do as the people of God, if you are being a light in the dark world, then nothing will ever cause your light to go out. Your light will be seen by everyone, and that is the calling that we have as followers of Jesus in a decaying and dark world, to preserve life, but also to shine light into the darkness, to help people see God's goodness, and so what Jesus is saying for us in a very practical sense as followers of Him and people who want to live out the Sermon on the Mount is this is what the kingdom of God looks like as we try to engage with the world. It is public, not private. It is visible, and it is not hidden. It is communal, and it is not individualistic.

I think we sometimes have this temptation to say, "Oh, you know what? My faith is just mine. It is just between me and God. It is just this private thing that I hold to and that is really important to me, but I do not know that it really affects my public life. I do not know that I want it to get into my workplace. I do not know that I want it to bleed into the PTA at school. I just want it to be between me and God and then on the weekends at church." We might have this idea that the kingdom is something that we can just hide, and it is like, well, it really causes a lot of trouble in my life if I live out the values of the kingdom, so I will just hide those things and live those out, and visibly I will just look like everyone else, or we can get to this place where we can think that our faith is just individualistic. It is just between me and God, and so, I will just experience God up in the mountains and the beauty of the aspen trees that are changing or in the ski slopes, and we can live in this place where we just withdraw and pull back into ourselves. Jesus is saying that the faith that we live out in a dark and decaying world, what the world desperately needs from us is that we live our faith in public, that we do not hide, and that we live in a community that when people look at us, they see something distinctive, something that tastes like something they can't find anywhere else in the world, and in a world of shadows and darkness, they see a light shining forth that they are drawn to, because it looks like something they cannot find in the world around them. That is the calling of believers.

Now, how well would we say that the church is living out that calling today, not just Waterstone, but the church at large in America? Let's just box it in there. How effectively are we living out that calling to be salt and light? I think one thing that has happened is that we, in many ways, and this is a generalized statement, but I think there is truth to it, is that in many ways the church has lost some of its saltiness. I think in many ways the church, its light is flickering a little bit, not because Jesus is not good, not because God is not on the move and doing important things in the world, and I absolutely believe He is. I think if we are honest with ourselves, there are places where it feels like the church is struggling. I think what has happened in many ways is that we have lost our distinctive flavor, because in many ways, the church and

followers of Jesus, we have sort of adopted the ways of the world, and we have forgotten the way of Jesus, and last week, when we started with the Beatitudes in the background for the Sermon on the Mount, and this teaching goes together, Jesus is tying all of the Beatitudes and the salt and light together. So what we did is we looked at these four different groups of people and the way that they believed the kingdom of God would come into the world, and we defined that as the different ways that people in our world try to accomplish reaching the good life, how to help people flourish, how to cause everyone to experience the way that life was always meant to be, and we looked at how the world adopts these ways and the church at times, but I think today what we need to do as a church is hold up a mirror to ourselves and not examine, okay, where does the world adopt these ways of living in the world, but where has the church rejected the way of Jesus? Where have we as followers of Jesus rejected his ways and begun to adopt the ways of the world?

So, if you remember, we looked through four different groups last week and their different ways of defining what it means to have the good life. So we have the Pharisees, and the Pharisees, they believed that the way the good life would happen in the world, the way that we would experience life the way that it was always meant to be, the way that we could look at everyone and say, everybody has what they need, and everybody is flourishing, and everybody is enjoying the beauty and goodness of life, that darkness has been pushed back, decay has been held at bay, life is coming in, the Pharisees said the way to do that is to follow all of the rules. You need to obey, obey, obey. Their answer to brokenness was really simple. "You need to be better. You need more morality. You need more religion," and they point their finger like this, because it is always you people who need to be better and to follow the rules more fully, and if you follow the rules the way you are supposed to, then God will bless you and bless us, and so it is up to you to do all of the right things.

Now here is the problem with these different groups that we're going to see. It is that they are sincere. They think that they have found the answer to darkness in the world, but actually what happens inadvertently in each of these groups is rather than pushing back the darkness with light, it is that they are contributing to the darkness, and if you have ever interacted with a moral or a religious purist, someone who is a legalist and says, "You just need to follow all of the rules better in order to get the good life you are looking for," those people are a little like, they are annoying, and deeper than that, it does not lead to flourishing. Any time people just give you a list of rules, there is no joy in that. It actually produces a lot of exclusivity. There are certain people who are following the rules and certain people who are not, and they are the in crowd, and they are not, and we can go down this path where it actually crushes people under the weight of expectation that you need to follow the rules better, and if you could just follow the rules better, then things would be fixed, and it actually just heaps shame onto people and gives other people a sense of spiritual pride. The Pharisees were not preserving life. They were preserving tradition. They were preserving the rules, and instead of drawing people to God, they pushed people away from God with their legalism and their superiority.

When I was in middle school, we did this really dumb game, and I hope none of you students do this game, but we would play this game with salt and ice, and what you would do is you would put some salt on your hand during the lunch table, and then you would put ice on top of the salt. Now, what happens when you put salt on ice on roads? It burns it away. It melts it, right? The same thing happens on your

skin. It causes a chemical reaction, and so we would just sit there in the lunchroom, bored out of our minds, thinking like, “Okay, who can hold their salt, chemical burn on their hand the longest?” Again, really, really dumb, right? Again, going back to the conversation in the back seat of my truck, it is like, “How do I prove to myself that I am enough, and I am better than you? I guess I will burn my hand with salt ice.” Like, that is what this was, and in so many ways, that is a picture of legalism, of following all of the rules, because actually life with Jesus is supposed to be something that is healing, that brings life and joy and fullness, and when you just keep a bunch of rules on it, people just get burned. They do not actually experience the whole life. It leaves scars. They do not experience life with God the way that He intended and wanted them to. They just turn following Jesus into a checklist of rules. The Pharisees, they are trying sincerely to figure out how do we bring the good life here? In fact, they are just contributing to the darkness.

The second group, the Sadducees, they were the ones who wanted to compromise with Rome, and so they thought, “We are not in power. Rome is in power. If we can just compromise, if we can get the right leaders in the right positions, if we can get people to follow the right things, if we can get the right people to have influence in the world, then that will bring the kingdom of God.” The problem with compromise is that what you actually end up doing is you sell out. You trade your integrity and faithfulness for influence, and when has that ever worked for anyone? When we try to say that if we could just get the right political movement to take root and to take off, then the world would change, and yet what happens is usually there is an opposite reaction. When a certain political party comes into power, everybody is like, “Nope, we do not like that. Let’s go the other way,” and then we get over there, and we are like, “Nope, that is actually really bad too. Let’s go the other way,” and we just swing back and forth. It does not produce any change. Jesus is calling us to something more, something different, something else. The Sadducees, what they did is they were the salt that got mixed with impurities, and they lost their distinctive flavor, because they gained the platform, but they lost their soul along the way, and it killed their witness. I think that that is taking place in the church today.

The third group, the zealots, their cry was to fight back, protest louder, dominate your enemies, destroy your enemies, and they believed that if they could just overthrow their enemy, Rome, by force, the kingdom of God would come, and this is taking root in our culture so deeply that if we could just eliminate those who disagree with us, if we could just eliminate those who say things that hurt us, and if we could just eliminate those who speak differently than us, and it does not work, because violence does not bring peace. It only brings more violence, and no amount of shaming or cancer culture or amount of online outrage will ever produce the righteousness of God or the world that we want to see. We cannot fight darkness with darkness. It only leads to more darkness.

I think sometimes what we have done is we have taken the light, and when you have a light, and you take a magnifying glass, and if you can just point out everybody else’s sin, and if you can just point out everybody else’s faults and everybody who has got it wrong, if we could just burn them away, then maybe we would have the life that we are looking for, and actually, it just leads to more hardship and violence and turmoil and chaos, and it only produces more darkness.

Then finally, you have the Essenes, and they were this crew that they just thought, if we could withdraw into a bubble, “If we could just eliminate the corruption by looking at how bad the world is,

how broken it is, how dark it is, and if we could just pull back into the safety of our community, and we could just be around people who look like us, think like us, everybody gets along, if we could just all be alike together and get rid of everyone who is different than us and withdraw into the wilderness and just wait for God to deal with all of it, then that is the way that people experience the good life,” but there is a group of people that preserved their purity, but they forfeited their witness, because what happens if you leave salt in a jar? Nothing. Nothing, and Jesus is calling us to a different way of engaging with the world, and these four groups, and you might even be able to find yourself in one of them, that these four groups have four different strategies for what it would look like to push back against the decay and darkness of the world, and all of them are sincere, all of them are passionate about their reasoning, and every single one of them is wrong. Each claim to bring salvation, each claim that they could fix the decay, each claim that they could make light come into the darkness of the world, but it only produced more darkness, more division, and more brokenness. Why? Because every one of them was trusting the human weapons or strategies for how to bring the kingdom, and Jesus is saying, “You are doing it wrong. There is an entirely different way. There is an entirely different path.”

Jesus did not come to just enact laws. He did not come to just bring a different political movement. He did not come to destroy his enemies. He came to die for them, and Jesus did not come from heaven to earth by withdrawing from the darkness of the world. He came as a light pushing back the darkness in the world, and He says, “If you want to follow me, then this is the way of the cross. This is what it is going to look like. Jesus is not giving us a checklist of morality. He is saying, “You have a new identity. You are the salt of the earth. You are the light in the darkness. You are a city on a hill.” These are not goals. This is not Jesus saying, “Hey, you need to be more salty. You need to be a better light.”

I think what happens sometimes is we hear these teachings, and really what we do with all of the Sermon on the Mount is we go the way of the Pharisees, and we try to turn this teaching of Jesus into something that is a checklist that we are supposed to do, and so we hear a teaching like this, and we start to feel a conviction in our heart, and we start to think, “Oh, you know what? I am actually not salty the way I should be. My candle is flickering. I am not sure it is going to stay lit much longer. I feel like I am struggling. I am not doing what God is calling me to do. I need to do better. I need to try harder. I need to strive more,” and that totally misses what Jesus says. He says, it is not that you need to try harder to be the light. He says, you are the light. He does not say you need to try harder to be saltier, and probably some of your spouses are like, “We got enough salt coming out of your mouth when we are going out.” Like, we do not need that, right? You are salty enough, so Jesus is saying that it is actually an identity about who the people of God are created and called to be, how we are supposed to engage with the world.

The Sermon on the Mount is not a ladder that we are supposed to climb to become better people. It is a map that we walk towards wholeness. It is not about how well we perform. It is about a promise that Jesus has said He is doing something in the world. It is not about being flawless. It is about being faithful. The idea here is that you are not perfect, and you do not need to try to be perfect so you can belong to the community or the kingdom of God. The idea is that you belong to the kingdom of God, and now you are called to be salt, and you are called to be light. You are already salt, and you are already light, so live like it. Act like it.

That is why Jesus closes this section, this is his introduction, and this is where He closes it. He says not only that you are the light of the world and the salt, but in verse 16, he says, “In the same way, let your light shine before others that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.” Let your light shine among the world of darkness so that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven. Now this is where we get it really twisted. It is because we think, and I think people outside of Christianity look at Christians, and they think that the whole purpose of Christianity is just to be a better person, to get everything in line, have the perfect family, the perfect career, the perfect looks, the perfect morality, and you just do everything right. Like it is, you do not cuss, you do not smoke, you do not watch R-rated movies, and as long as you do all of those things, then you are probably okay, and that is the whole like pinnacle of Christian living, and what happens inadvertently when we live out that belief is that we want people to look at us and say, “Oh, look at them, man. They are a good, good person. They are a good Christian.”

I used to play basketball a lot in high school, and I was one of the only guys on the team who did not swear a lot. Occasionally it would happen, I would get technical fouls and stuff, and I would have a competitive temper that would come out, but they would just look at me and say, “Paul, usually he is just pretty chill. “He is just a good dude.” I do not know that that was the purpose of following Jesus, just for people to look at me and say, “Yeah, he is a good dude. He just does things the right way.” What Jesus is saying here is not that people will see your good deeds and think that you are a good person. What is the purpose of the good deeds and shining light into the darkness? It is so that they would glorify your Father in heaven.

What we do is we inadvertently turn Christianity into this thing where it is just another way of proving ourselves. It goes back to the conversation in the back of my truck or with Camden and her cousins. It is that we are just trying to prove our worth, prove our value, prove that we are enough, prove that we are good enough, and the purpose of the Sermon on the Mount and the purpose of following Jesus is not proving that you are good. It is not about proving your greatness. It is about displaying God’s goodness. That is entirely different. It is that as we live as salt and light in a world that is experiencing decay and darkness. It is not so that people would point at you and say, “Wow, they are so good,” but so that they would look at God and say, “There is something different that they have in them. What would it look like for me to experience the goodness of God in my life too?” Because here is the real secret that no one talks about in the church. It is we are just as flawed, we are just as broken, we are just as empty, and we are just as lonely as the world outside. The difference is that we have Jesus and that it does not matter how broken you are when you know Jesus, because He is in the business of redeeming all things. It does not matter the darkness in your past, because Jesus is the light who will purify all darkness in the world. It is the only difference.

It is the only difference, and so as we close our time together today, I think the question we have to ask ourselves is what do we do in a world of darkness and decay? What does it practically look like to be the salt and the light? I want to boil it down to just one thing for you this week, because I think if you look at the Pharisees and the Sadducees and the Essenes and the Zealots, and you look at each of those groups following the rules, trying to compromise influence to get power, if you look at the people who are trying to angrily just type away and blast on their computers about who is an awful person in the world, if

you look at all the people who are withdrawing and trying to just pull in within themselves, one thing that you will not see in any of those groups is joy. You will not see joy. What you will see in their lives is striving. You will see anger. You will see division. Maybe with a group that retreats to the mountains, they might have a little more joy. That is tempting sometimes. A week up in the hills can do us all a little good, but you lose purpose. What happens is, we as believers, I think one of the strongest ways that we can follow Jesus and be salt and light in the world today is by experiencing the goodness of God, tasting and seeing that the Lord is good, tasting and seeing that the Lord is good, and that produces joy in our life, in a world of darkness and decay. We do not deny the darkness and the decay. That is a part of reality, but as Christians we are called to experience the joy of life in the kingdom of God, and what would it look like if we as a community this week experienced the joy of life with Jesus, if people looked at us, and they saw that joy in our lives, and they thought there is something different there, not because you are a good person, but because God is so good in a world of darkness and decay. Amen? Amen, and that is the call for us today. If you would please stand as we respond in worship, I want to pray over you.

Holy Father, as we come before you today, God, this call to be a salt and light in the world, it is not an easy one. There is darkness in the world, and we do not deny that. We have seen that in the headlines of the past two weeks. We have seen the division and the hatred and the heartache, and yet we, as the people of God, recognize the call to engage with that darkness, the place where people are experiencing decay in their life, where they feel like something is just not right, and that we are supposed to be a people that shines a light into that darkness, bringing warmth and hope, pushing back the shadows and the fear, and allowing people to experience joy. Salt not only preserves, but it makes food taste better, and God, may we be the salt of the earth that makes life taste better, and when people look at us, may they think, "Man, there is something there that I want to taste as well," and may it point them towards Jesus. It is in Christ's name that we pray these things, amen.

Going back to that moment with my daughter fighting about whose dad was stronger and then just laying down the trump card right that Jesus is stronger than everyone, that is the sermon in one line, because Jesus is stronger means that you do not have to be the strongest. It means that you do not have to prove yourself. It means that you do not have to try to prove yourself to the world that you are enough, because Jesus is enough. I think in many ways that is the key in the heart of joy, that when you look at the world, and you see that the world is dark and full of decay, you recognize Jesus and that He is enough, even in the darkness, and in a world full of darkness, joy stands out like a neon light. I mean, joy is a thing that is magnetic. It is rare. It is something that that we look at in this world of anxiety and exhaustion, and we feel like we long for, and so the challenge for you this week is that we the people of Waterstone would live with joy of the kingdom of God in our hearts and that we would not just experience that for ourselves, but that we would experience that so the world could know his goodness. That is the heart of the kingdom of God. Now let's go live it out. Let me say a benediction over you.

Heavenly Father, God, I pray that as we go from here, God, we would not go with the weight of feeling like we have to prove ourselves to the world, that we would not feel the weight of trying to demonstrate that we are enough. I pray that we would go in the truth that Jesus is stronger, that Jesus is better, and that Jesus Himself is enough. May we magnify that truth with our lives this week in the joy of the Lord, and it is in his name that we pray, amen. You may go in peace.

45:13 minutes

Edited by Tom Kenaston

Message #881

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