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Sermon Notes

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## **Salt and Light: The Christian and Society**

### **Matthew 5:13-16**

It was the winter of 1699, and a stately trade ship was sailing along the southern coast of England. As she approached the Eddystone portion of the coastline, the ship's captain tensed. His navigator announced that they were nearing the infamous Eddystone reef, which had caused untold countless wrecks over the years, costing hundreds of sailors their lives and sending thousands of pounds worth of cargo to the bottom of the English channel. The reef consisted of a cluster of rocky pinnacles just below the surface, invisible to the eye but deadly to the hulls of sailing vessels. The captain knew that the reef, nine miles off the shore of England, was at its worst in the winter, especially during foggy weather. Suddenly the watchman called out, "There's light just off the starboard side, captain!" The captain stared through the fog at a glowing beacon and suddenly realized that the rumors were true... someone had actually built a light house on the Eddystone reef... the lighthouse saved his life and his ship as he instantly ordered the navigator to sail wide around it.

The Eddystone lighthouse was built by Henry Winstanley in 1698, and it was one of the greatest achievements of civil engineering in history. It was the first lighthouse built fully exposed to the sea, nine miles off the shore. The lightkeepers lived there all winter, and kept the light alive by replacing each of the sixty candles as they burned out, and by keeping the fire going in the great hanging lamp. Those lightkeepers risked their lives that winter in Winstanley's lighthouse, but the winter of 1699 was the first that saw no shipwrecks off the Eddystone reef.

#### **I. Christ's Teaching Technique**

A. Christ's constant use of everyday objects to teach spiritual principles

***John 3:12 "I have spoken to you in an earthly form of speech and you do not believe; how then will you believe if I speak of heavenly things?"***

B. Earthly teaching in the Sermon on the Mount

1. Storing up treasures in heaven... Matt. 6:19
  2. The healthy eye—the “lamp of the body”... 6:22
  3. On serving two masters... 6:24
  4. Birds of the air and lilies of the field... 6:26
  5. The speck in the eye... 7:3
  6. Two roads: one good, one bad... 7:13
  7. “Wolves in sheep’s clothing”... 7:15
  8. Trees that bear no fruit... 7:19
  9. Houses built on rocks or on sand... 7:24
- C. So also here... salt of the earth and the light of the world

## II. The Flow of the Sermon

- A. Beatitudes... everything starts with the HEART... who you really are inside
- B. Culmination: spiritual beggars who humbly mourn over sin, who hunger and thirst for righteousness and who are constantly growing in heart purity... who go out into the world as peacemakers and who expect to be persecuted and who actually rejoice in the persecution
- C. “Salt and light” is the perfect summation of the effect of such people on the world!!

## III. “Salt of the Earth” (vs. 13)

Two senses: preservative & flavor enhancer

- A. Preservative

Illus. Salt as preservative

- BEFORE REFRIGERATION: Constant threat of food poisoning from decaying meat & fish... thus people only ate meat after large feasts or when calf & bull were slaughtered for sacrifices

- Salt delays decay... retards it by drying up the moisture which carries harmful bacteria
- Romans placed very high value on salt for this reason... troops always on the move... sometimes soldiers paid in salt cakes; a soldier not doing his duty was said not to be "worth his salt"; from the Latin root of this word we get the English word "salary"
- Many rock salt mines around Jerusalem area... largest was at Jedel Usdum just south of Dead Sea;

1. spiritual analogy

- a. sin has a decaying effect on society... like Sodom and Gomorrah, unchecked it gets worse and worse
- b. Christians who live Beatitude Christianity have greatly retarded the spread of evil through the world

Illus. "England before and after John Wesley"

- c. Without it, evil leads to anarchy... with chaos in the streets the gospel cannot advance

***1 Timothy 2:1-4 I urge, then, first of all, that requests, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for everyone—<sup>2</sup> for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness. <sup>3</sup> This is good, and pleases God our Savior, <sup>4</sup> who wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth.***

2. America today is heading down the road to chaos

- a. more and more openness to immorality and perversion
- b. more and more disdain for spiritual things
- c. sense of boredom and fatigue when precious and crucial issues are being debated and valuable ideas being challenged
- d. love of pleasure rather than love of God

3. BUT must be kept in perspective... danger of social gospel

- a. morality is NOT Christianity

- b. many Mormons, radical feminists, cult members could support our stand on pornography, for example
  - c. morality can actually be a great enemy to true Christianity
  - d. also... we cannot bring the kingdom in by moral effort or legislation... all we try to do is retard the spread of the corruption to buy the gospel more time
4. YET God does call on us to make an impact on the world around us
  5. Only a powerful revival of Christian witness led by the church will restore this nation

#### B. Salt as Flavor Enhancer

Illus. Story of princess' expression of love for her father... Arabian nights

1. Food is bland without seasoning... salt brings out flavor in foods

***Job 6:6 "Is tasteless food eaten without salt, or is there flavor in the white of an egg? I refuse to touch it... such food makes me ill."***

2. Sin deadens the heart so that "nothing tastes" anymore

Illus. Charles Darwin near the end of his life:

Up to the age of 30 or beyond it, poetry of many kinds... gave me great pleasure, and even as a schoolboy I took intense delight in Shakespeare.... Formerly pictures gave me considerable, and music, very great delight. But now for many years I cannot endure to read a line of poetry: I have tried to read Shakespeare, and found it so intolerably dull that it nauseated me. I have also almost lost any taste for pictures or music... I retain some taste for fine scenery, but it does not cause me the exquisite delight which it formerly did.... The loss of these tastes is a loss of happiness..."

C.S. Lewis wrote that this dulling of pleasure in life is an integral part of Satan's strategy in tempting us. In his remarkable book , *The Screwtape Letters*, Lewis writes as a senior demon instructs a junior demon on the whole matter of pleasure in sin:

3. By stark contrast, Jesus is the Good Shepherd who give full and abundant life:

***John 10:10 "The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I have come that they may have life, and have it abundantly."***

## **Jesus puts the taste back in life... he makes our tastebuds alive again!**

4. By calling us “Salt of the earth”, he challenges us to rekindle hope in hardened sinners of a life full of joy and passion... a life that tastes again!
5. How is this done? Paul shows us

***Colossians 4:6 “Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone.”***

- a. “full of grace” = full of God’s grace in Christ, the gospel
  - b. full of God’s wisdom as well... the richness of God’s word for every situation
  - c. full of life... the joy of an abundant walk with Jesus
- Look at that!! That majestic sunset!! God is so majestic to make something that beautiful! If this is so beautiful, I wonder what heaven will look like!
  - [Marital counseling at office] Proverbs 15:1 “A gentle answer turns away wrath”
  - God is so good to forgive a sinner like me [humility in front of non-Christians]

This kind of salt makes them thirsty for Christ!!

C. DANGER: the salt loses its saltiness

## ***Salt stops beings salty... it therefore becomes useless***

1. Sodium chloride very stable... how can “salt lose its saltiness”
- Merchant of Sidon had hidden away 20 years supply of rock salt & stored it in mountain cabins to evade the Roman salt tax, only to find that the damp earthen floor had caused the supply to disintegrate & leach away
  - Blocks of salt were also used by village bakers in their ovens to maintain a moist atmosphere, so the soft bread could be torn and used for dipping in stews... after a period of time, the intense heat caused the blocks of salt to become savorless, and the bread came out hard... the blocks were then thrown away as useless
  - Rock salt was mined from mountains near the Dead Sea... but the salt on the surface was so mixed with sand and other minerals that it was hardly salty at all... it was useless

- MOST TELLINGLY sometimes salt merchants would mix their salt with sand to cheat their customers... if the sand was mixed sufficiently, the supply was useless

The church can become so worldly, so mixed with ideas and practices from the surrounding culture that it is no longer salty and is therefore useless

- a. why is it true that so many polled claim to be born again, yet there is so little effect on popular culture?
  - b. why is the church so much like the world? Why do we entertain ourselves with the world's entertainment? Why do we laugh at the world's jokes, and buy the world's wares, and tolerate the world's perversions in our midst?
2. American church no longer salty??
- a. worldly in lifestyle: permissive! No longer salty as preservative!
  - b. worldly in doctrine: tolerant of wide views! No longer salty as flavor enhancer!

Radical difference between the church and the world in doctrine and lifestyle makes us salty... when we are worldly in doctrine and in lifestyle, we have lost our saltiness

3. Jesus' haunting question

***“If the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again?”***

4. Jesus' convicting judgment

***“It is no longer good for anything except to be thrown out and trampled by men.”***

- a. amazing: we try to please the world by becoming worldly, and the world ends up trampling us!
- b. KEY idea: Christians are supposed to be “good for something”!!!

***God wants a return for His investment... Christians are to make a powerful impact on the world around us... if we don't, we have become USELESS***

IV. “Light of the World” (vs. 14-16)

Flaming, piercing, radiating, majestic light... God's first declaration of creation: “Let there be light.” And there was light!

A. Who is the true “Light of the World?”

1. Jesus the True Light (Jn. 8:12)

***John 1:5,9 “The light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not understood it.”  
“The true light, that gives light to every man was coming into the world.”***

***John 8:12 “I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life.”***

2. We shine in His place (Phil. 2)

***Ephesians 5:8 “For you were once darkness but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of the light, for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness, righteousness, and truth...”***

***Philippians 2:14-16 “Do everything without complaining or arguing so that you may become blameless and pure, children of God without fault in a crooked and depraved generation in which you shine like stars in the universe as you hold out the word of life...”***

B. HOW did we become the light of the world? The miracle of conversion!

1. God caused light to come in us by His Spirit

***2 Corinthians 4:6 “For God, who said ‘Let light shine out of darkness,’ made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ.”***

***Colossians 1:12-13 “..he has qualified us to share in the inheritance of the saints in the kingdom of light; for he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves.”***

2. The world around us is therefore characterized by darkness... hardened hearts, spiritual death, no understanding of the true nature of the world

3. Jesus’ life itself brought light... as we watched Him live, we saw what life was

***John 1:4 “In Him was life, that life was the light of men.”***

4. As we now follow in His steps, we become also the light of the world... we are light as we imitate Christ!

***John 8:12 “I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life.”***

***John 12:46 “I have come into the world as a light, so that no one who believes in me should stay in darkness.”***

Salt’s two ministries: preservative and flavor enhancer (one negative and one positive)

Light’s four ministries (one negative, three positive): Exposing Danger, Showing the Way, Illuminating Beauty, Producing Fruit

### C. Exposing Danger (Evil)

Illus. Without light, we fail to see dangers... we easily go over a cliff... spelunkers in Mammoth cave in Kentucky

1. Light makes all things visible (Eph. 5)

***Ephesians 5:11-14 “Have nothing to do with the fruitless deeds of darkness, but rather expose them. For it is shameful even to mention what the disobedient do in secret. But everything exposed by the light becomes visible, for it is light that makes everything visible.”***

- a. Christians are to expose evil by their lives and words
- b. Conviction comes from observing our lives

2. Light forces decision about Christ, creates context for conversion AND persecution

***John 3:19-21 “This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but men loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil. Everyone who does evil hates the light and will not come into the light for fear that his deeds will be exposed. But whoever lives by the truth comes into the light...”***

### D. Showing the Way

“It is light that makes everything visible...”

1. There is a journey to be traveled, and we light the way by pointing to Christ & living in His example



**Matthew 7:13-14** *“Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it.”*

**John 14:6** *“I am the way and the truth and the life... no one comes to the Father except through me.”*

2. The way of life gets lit by Christ’s followers

**Isaiah 30:21** *“This is the way, walk in it.”*

**1 Corinthians 11:1** *“Follow me as I follow Christ.”*

3. So also the perfection of God’s word gets opened up

**Psalms 119:105** *“Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light for my path.”*

4. Our ongoing fellowship with each other is “walking in the light”

**1 John 1:7** *“If we walk in the light as He is in the light we have fellowship with one another and the blood of Jesus His Son purifies us from every sin.”*

#### E. Illuminating Beauty

Illus. Prisms reveal the hidden beauty of light

1. Satan blinds unbelievers to the beauty of God & His ways... everything becomes grey-scale
2. Our love for God is a light in a dark place to show the perfections of God

*“That they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.”*

**1 Peter 2:9** *“You are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.”*

3. The path is lit by other believers, and it is beautiful, and so is its destination

**Revelation 21:18-25** [Perfect prisms showing the glory of God’s light!!]

#### F. Producing Fruit

Illus. The amazing creation of photosynthesis... fruit comes from light!

***Ephesians 5:11 “Have nothing to do with the fruitless deeds of darkness...”***

***Ephesians 5:9-10 “The fruit of the light consists in all goodness, righteousness and truth... and find out what pleases the Lord.”***

1. As people see our good deeds, they want to imitate them
2. They also praise our Father in heaven, which is itself a fruit
3. This is also the method of discipleship... older Christians train the younger in a pattern of fruitful living... your example becomes the light God uses to produce fruit in their lives

***Philippians 3:17 “Join with others in following my example brothers, and take note of those who live according to the pattern we gave you.”***

G. Intended to be openly seen

1. God’s intention: an open display

***A city on a hill cannot be hidden.***

- a. City on a hill = Jerusalem
- b. Architect chooses high location so his work can be on display

Illus. Medieval cathedrals almost always built on a hill for visibility

2. Again: picture of uselessness

***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.”***

- a. with tasteless salt, the question is “what good is it?”
- b. so also with a hidden light... what good is it?
- c. light is meant to give wisdom, warnings, and to show the way... it is also meant to give pleasure through beauty
- d. hidden light does none of these things

H. What is the shining of the light? GOOD DEEDS

***“In the same way, let your light shine before men that they may see your good deeds...”***

1. Any act of service to God reveals His nature... this is the shining of the light
2. All of our good deeds are meant to entice people into a relationship with God

I. What is the outcome of the shining? GLORY AND PRAISE TO THE FATHER

***“... and praise your Father who is in heaven.”***

**And why not? The light is His anyway, and we are merely the reflectors of His light!**

IV. Application

A. Are you acting as salt in your world?

- 1) Do you leave a distinct Christian impact on those around you, or are you tasteless... do you fit right in like everybody else?
- 2) When your co-worker tells that lewd joke or filthy story, do laugh along with all the others?
- 3) When a neighbor expresses the idea that all religions are basically the same, do you remain silent, or do you point her to God’s grace in Christ?
- 4) When your local library carries pornography, do you act or remain silent?
- 5) Do you leave people thirsty to know God better when they hear the way you talk?

B. Are you acting as light in the world?

- 1) Do you shine out or are you looking for the nearest bushel under which you can hide?
- 2) Do you expose the evil around you by your life and words?
- 3) Do you follow Christ’s example, and thus point the way to God?
- 4) Do you speak the words of the Gospel to those still in darkness?
- 5) Is there any darkness in your own life that needs to be cleared out by the Holy Spirit?
- 6) Are you actively discipling anyone else... seeking to say to a young believer “Follow my example as I follow Christ’s?”