

A People with Purpose * Matthew 5:13-16

Hey! How are you? Does anyone else feel like it's a goofy week? Between the snow days and the state basketball tournament, I don't even remember what grade my kids are in! In the last 10 days, my kids have been in school a total of 1 day. We have no food in the house... none. We had cereal for supper last night!

It is a different week around here; I can see people squinting in the balcony and you are like, is that the same bald guy as last week? No, I'm a different bald guy. My name is Jeremy, I'm one of 3 bald guys on staff here at Harmony. As many of you know, Pastor Chris is in China this morning. He was gone some of last week and he will be gone all of this week. So I know some of you are sitting there and you are wondering 2 things: 1. What do pastors do on snow days anyway? And 2. What happens when the boss is away for an extended period of time? Well, I have a video that will answer both of those questions. *(Insert video of Leonard Schantz spinning cookies in the parking lot.)* There you go; now you know!

All joking aside, I want to do one more thing real quick this morning, ok? You know Chris and Eva are in China picking up their kids. So I thought we would try this so we are ready when they return ok? Repeat after me, **NIE – SHY – ME-EYE LY - DAY**, "you are beautiful" in Chinese. We had this verified by the way. I wanted to be sure I wasn't teaching 900 people how to say, "Hey kid, pull my finger."

Let's pray for them, for us, and for our time this morning.

Ok, we have work to do this morning in the Gospel of Matthew, so hopefully your Bibles are already open to chapter 5, because that's where we are this morning. Chapter 5 starting in verse 13. Let's read the scripture together and then look at it, ok?

I don't think we can separate verses 11 and 12 from the rest of the passage – so if you'll allow me – I'm going to back up and start there. Let's read it.

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.

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 ^[a] they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.

If you've been in Sunday school, gone to Vacation Bible School, or been around a church very long, you've heard this right? Salt and light. If I start to sing a song, I'll bet many of you can finish it. "This little light of mine..." (*Crowd finishes.*) See, many of you have heard this; but just because you can sing that song doesn't mean we're done. We just learned 3 words in Chinese but that doesn't mean we're ready to move to Hong Kong yet! Let's talk about what the purposes of salt and light is. I guess Jesus could have said, "You are the sugar and oil of the world." He could have said, "You are the water and mortar of the earth," But he didn't. He specifically said salt and light; and he specifically said 'of the earth.'

Now, we're going to get to the salt and the light, but let's talk for a minute about the world. Why does the world need salt and light? So let me ask you, in regards to the world, how do you think it's going? How's it going out there? In today's language, the cool people would say, "So how's that working out for you?" This shouldn't take too much convincing for you.

I know this is going to date me a little bit, but whenever Captain Kirk on Star Trek would encounter a new world, there was one thing he couldn't do. There was one rule he had to follow (Kids in here are like, who's captain Kirk? Does he mean Captain Crunch?) C'mon, you Trekkies in here, what did Captain Kirk have to follow? The prime directive. The prime directive was this important rule on Star Trek that said that if they encountered another world – they couldn't interfere with the evolution of any world or civilization. Why? Well the assumption was that all civilization and all creatures were inevitably evolving toward higher and higher social and mental life forms – so man can't go in there (even Captain Kirk) and muck it up. If we just leave things alone, that civilization will just get better and better. And it was based upon this idea that's been around for about the last 200 years that man is evolving to higher and better ways of living and treating each other. That's what the worldly "high thinkers" would say.

If we just have better education, better access to health care, better technology, then eventually we will get to a place where we can create our own utopia! If we would just educate the kids. That's all they need is education, teach them math and history and computer skills and proper hygiene... and look, I'm all for good education. I yell at my kids all the time to "do your homework." Oh, but if we could just make a few more advancements in technology, we'll solve all of our problems with cheaper energy, better health, greater efficiencies. For years and years we have been reading and hearing from poets, to philosophers, to politicians, to scientists about the eventual pinnacle of human progress that was headed our way! The world keeps telling us over and over again that we are making it. That we're making progress, that human society is getting closer and closer to the world as it should be. How's that going out there?

But what does the evidence tell us? I could drown you in statistics: 3.5 million people die every year from dirty water, yet we have the technology to make it clean. Over a million abortions end the lives of babies in the US every year, yet it costs tens of thousands of dollars and there is a waiting list of parents desperate to adopt. Drug abuse is through the roof, person on person crime is through the roof. Not just in the US – but World Wide – we are better educated, have more information, technology is growing faster than ever imagined

and yet we butcher and mistreat each other and ourselves in a tidal wave of sin. I learned from Bruce and Vicki Widbin that in PNG, a neighboring country wants to annex parts of PNG for its natural resources. And because some vote to do so has failed, they've sent thousands of prostitutes who are HIV positive into the major towns and cities, knowing that the disease will spread like wildfire, and they will have their way.

The world is falling apart. From a macro level, on a big scale, all the way down to the micro level, from countries to families. The Bible tells us this about ourselves: Jeremiah 17:9 **The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it?** Mark 7:21 **For from within, out of the heart of man, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery,** Even King David in Psalm 51:5 laments that he was sinful before he was even born: **Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me.**

The world left to itself is rotting. It started in Genesis. Adam and Eve choose to disobey God and just a few years later their son kills his brother. That didn't take long did it? Unchanged man then, unchanged man now, same results, dead in sin, dark heart, you can see the world was in desperate need of salt and light.

Are you sufficiently depressed? Well don't be, because Jesus, the only Son of God, who the Bible makes clear over and over that "through Him all things were created," this is not some weak King, begins to lay out how He's going to change the world. Through this small group of rag-tag followers. Imagine who Jesus was speaking to. A bunch of rough, stinky fishermen and crooked tax collectors. I'm telling you that professional church consultants would have pulled Jesus aside and said, "Uh Jesus...this is **not** the core group you're looking for." But King Jesus says "We're not retreating anymore. I've come to change the world – and I'm going to do it in my Power – through my people." Beginning with this Sermon on the Mount, Jesus starts a chain reaction, and it's come all the way around the world to this strange little group of people who meet on Sundays to worship a risen Savior on about 25 acres of Iowa farm ground. And don't think for a second that you are any different from the people Jesus spoke to when he verbally gave that sermon. We aren't any goofier, messier, or any smarter. Let's look at what he tells us.

"You are the salt of the earth." I don't always get overly scholarly when it comes to Greek and all, but a straight translation would better read to us today: "You folks (you common folks)... only... are the salt of the earth." You alone are the salt of the earth. There is no other plan, and it's not a command. Jesus didn't tell them they "ought to be." Jesus didn't tell them they "should be." He just says that, "You folks **who are actually following me**, (remember – not all of them were) are the salt of the earth."

Let's talk about salt for a minute. I am pretty certain that Jesus meant two things when He talked about salt. Everyone who was listening to Him knew that the primary purpose of salt is a preservative. They did not have refrigerators in Jesus' day. If they were fortunate enough to have some meat, they would have to salt the meat to keep it from spoiling. Salt is a preservative. Salt has another purpose of course, and Jesus mentions it in verse 13 – taste. So salt is a preservative primarily and it's also adds flavor; it makes things taste different. It makes

things different. Salt makes a difference! Believe me, there's lots of other stuff I could tell you about salt, we could draw lots of conclusions and points of application, but let's not do that. Let's keep it at the main thing. I don't think Jesus meant 19 different things when he said salt and light, just saying.

My disciples are the salt that is going to preserve and change the whole earth. We don't make ourselves salty, we don't create salt. Jesus just simply says that when we follow Him, all those Beatitudes we read last week will begin to show up in our lives. When you follow Jesus, you're going to hunger and thirst for righteousness because you'll know you don't have any righteousness of your own. When you follow Jesus you're going to love mercy because you know that if he hadn't had mercy upon you, you would be so completely doomed. And when you love mercy, because of His mercy, you are salt to the rest of the world. Your life will be different to those around you. It's going to taste salty. The Mercy He showed you is going to show up as mercy in your life – and the world gets changed – it gets preserved, even if just a little bit.

Listen, salt is a good thing. Especially in that day, salt was very, very valuable! He's telling them and us that we are **very** valuable! Jesus tells his disciples that when they follow him – they are going to change the world. Now this may be stating the obvious, but you realize that salt will do no good if it sits in a pile somewhere! A big pile of salt preserves nothing, no matter how salty or how tasty it is, it actually has to interact with something to do any good. You know this right? If they had a lamb or a goat or some beef and they got it all ready, and they put 50 pounds of salt, and that salt was ¼ inch away from that meat, it does nothing. The pile of salt will sit there and watch that meat rot. And it doesn't matter how big the pile of salt is and no matter how salty and pure the pile is, church. If it just sits around in a big pile, the meat still rots.

And just for the record, they didn't have these big storehouses of salt back in that day where everyone would bring their meat to. I mean, I suppose they could have this big old tent – and inside the tent were these piles and piles of salt – and everyone would drag their goat carcass to the salt house. I mean it would work, but it wouldn't be very effective. No – the most effective way was for the people to take the salt to where it was needed. People out there need the influence of your life. You are the salt of the earth. Now Jesus' statement of fact that his followers are the only salt of the earth – comes with a warning doesn't it.

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."

Now in the context of that day, pretty much all of the salt came from the Dead Sea. And when they would gather the salt it would be gathered with other impurities: gypsum, sand, rock etc. So while pure salt can actually chemically never lose its saltiness, if it gets so mixed in with other impurities, it would lose its taste. And Jesus says that if salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored? He isn't looking for an answer there, it's a rhetorical question; it can't. Then He just states the obvious: it's not good for anything, it's thrown out. They would

just throw that out on the pathways to make the pathway smoother or less muddy for people's feet.

If salt loses its taste, it's useless. What good is tasteless salt? Jesus isn't talking about losing your salvation; He's talking about usefulness! Salt is supposed to change things. If it doesn't, what good is it? It's an important warning. **To claim to believe, but not to practice is worthless!** To say we follow Jesus, but never attempt to obey Him; to say we believe, but never look or live any different, we become flavorless salt. Look at the general state of "the church" in America. I'm talking about how the world sees it, so go ahead and lump them all together: Catholics, Methodists, Lutherans, Evangelicals. What does the culture think about "the Church?" How is "the Church" portrayed in the media and in movies? What do the kids at school, especially you high schoolers, or your buddy at work think about "the Church?" Most likely they think it's a joke, or at least irrelevant, trampled under people's feet. And I'm being generalized here, but by and large society looks at us or the church in general and they see people who know some stuff, but very little transformation. They see something that claims to be salt, but has little or no taste. It's the reason Pastor Chris spent 9 weeks on a series called "Disciple." It's why if you go to an Elder meeting you'll see them praying and talking about disciple, disciple, authentic community, disciple, to shepherd people so that all of life is worship. We don't want to be a people or a church that's flavorless salt! The world doesn't need...and Jesus doesn't want **more** flavorless salt.

Jesus says the same thing in Luke chapter 14, ³⁴ "Salt is good, but if salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored? ³⁵ It is of no use either for the soil or for the manure pile. It is thrown away. He who has ears to hear, let him hear."

Jesus is saying, salt is good, it's good. He's going to change the world with us, but if it's lost its flavor because we look like everyone else, what good is it? He says you can't throw it in the dirt because dirt is good, things grow in it, you can't do that. He says, it's not even fit for the manure pile! Because manure is good – it's fertilizer – it makes things grow. And if you put that flavorless salt on it, it could ruin it. In this passage in Luke, Jesus is talking to a huge crowd. He's just got done telling them they should hate their mother and father, and that they should pick up their cross, this instrument of death, deny themselves and follow Him. And He's like, I want you to follow me. It's not going to be easy because people are going to revile you, make fun of you, and beat up on you. He looks at this big crowd that's very soon going to start shrinking, and he says, I don't even know what to do with you, you're like flavorless salt! What am I supposed to do with flavorless salt? I mean, this killed me this week, think about what he's saying. Flavorless salt, there's nothing to do with it, it's worse than dirt. He says it's worse than poo. He's like, if I had a pile of manure here, and you're standing on it, He'd be like, "Get off, you're ruining my manure." It's pretty sad that if we are flavorless salt, we'd ruin poo! Jesus is something isn't He?

Do you know when Jesus is going to look good to the world? When because of how precious He is to you, you sacrifice for the good of others so that it looks to them that you **must** have treasure somewhere else than in your stuff. I think it's the only way, it's the only way it's going to look like they should ask you the question, "What is the reason for the hope that is in you?"

Has anyone ever asked you 1 Peter 3:15? The reason they don't ask us is because we look like we're hoping in all the stuff they hope in. It's not impressive to the world to be a really good law keeper. What's impressive to people is sacrifice! That's salty! **Because sacrifice in the cause of love, and in His name looks like we have a treasure that's different from the rest of the world.**

Look, there are times when I'm not so salty. There are times when the world sees me and I don't taste very different. And those times are always times when what I treasure and how I live look like a carbon copy of what the rest of the world wants. I get lost sometimes; maybe you do too. But if I go back to the Beatitudes, go back to Him, run right back to being poor in spirit, run right back to hungering and thirsting for His righteousness, **then** are following Him. And remember where we started, Jesus said "YOU, you followers of me, you are the salt of the earth." We're a people with purpose!

Now Jesus switches metaphors and gives us another image; He tells us that in addition to salt, He pictures believers as light. 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 ^[a] they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.

Just as in the salt, Jesus simply tells us that because of Him we just **are** the light of the world. Again it would read, "You folks alone are the light of the world." We've already agreed that the world is thick with darkness, but we need to agree that it's actually His light that shines and we simply reflect it. Jesus tells us in John 8:12, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life."

None of us came into this world with any light. This verse in Ephesians chapter 2 is talking about every single person in this room, Ephesians 2:3, among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body ^[a] and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind. We all start out in the same place. Even the disciples, even the nicest, neatest person you see here today, until Jesus gave them the light of life, they were **not** the light of the world. I stumbled around for 33 years and I had no idea I was in darkness. He has to light you. You cannot light yourself. You will try like I did. Reach for this, that will give me light. Reach for that, maybe that thing will give me light. Maybe that job, maybe that girl, maybe the admiration of those people, maybe that will give me light! Isaiah 59:10 says We grope for the wall like the blind; we grope like those who have no eyes; we stumble at noon as in the twilight, among those in full vigor we are like dead men.

He has to light you. If you have never been "lit" – I'm betting you know who you are.

I pray that today you will come to the end of yourself, and by faith you will say to Him – I've got nothing, Jesus, I turn to you. I'm done going my way. I'm banking everything that you will do what you say you'll do: that you'll forgive my sins and give me your light, your life, eternal life. And whether you did that today, yesterday or 30 years ago – the promise is the same: John 10:28 ²⁸ I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them

out of my hand. If that is true of you, then Jesus is speaking to you today when He says you are the light of the World.

And verse 14 has another promise for you. First the statement, you followers of me, you are the light of the world, and then He says "A city on a hill cannot be hidden." Jesus promises that He's going to use you. He's going to make you visible. People are going to have to notice you! Jesus promises that He isn't going to light your light and then because you don't have the right skill set, or you aren't rich, or handsome, that somehow He's going to just keep you out of sight. No way. Wherever your life is at, He's put you there to be seen. If you are sweeping the floor in some factory, or you are the CEO of the whole joint, He lit you. And He's put us all over the place, and in every place because we are the light of the world! I believe when He says that a city on a hill cannot be hidden – it's a guarantee that our light will be effective; it will be seen.

He's like, you don't light a lamp and put it under some basket; that's ridiculous. Why on earth would anyone light a lamp and put it under a basket? Jesus didn't do that! He doesn't intend for that, He's totally being sarcastic here; nobody would do that. He says no, you put it on a stand so it can give light to everyone in the house. So why on earth would we ask Jesus to light our lamp – to give us eternal life – and then all we do is come here to this church building, or any other church building, sing some songs, listen to a sermon and then leave and be totally secretive and private, mum about everything, serve no one, live like we have no light. And then come back a week later and sing songs about how thankful we are that He's lit our light? Jesus is saying, how ridiculous is that?

I believe that the church, and I'm not talking about what the world thinks is the church, I'm referring to all the followers of Jesus Christ, is what Jesus is referencing when he says a city on a hill cannot be hidden. Jesus is saying that my church – my disciples – there's no way to hide them. My church cannot be hidden. The church does not exist for the church. If it does then it's a bunch of light stuck under some basket somewhere, and Jesus emphatically says that's ridiculous, nobody does that. The church is a city on a hill that cannot be hidden.

Then church, followers of Jesus, He gives us the only command in this text. Verse 16, "In the same way, let your light shine before others (*that's the command*) so that (*here comes the reason – or the motivation*) they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven."

Now, there's something going on there, when Jesus says "Let your light shine before others," that light... is that just the equivalent to deeds? I mean is that all it is? Because let's be honest, lots of people see good deeds and don't give glory to their Father in heaven. So it must be more than just deeds, so what's the salt and what's the light?

And this is why I think there is no way to read these verses without having the context of verses 11 and 12. Let's trace this back for just a second; let's get the right train of thought. Let me read it, 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. You are the salt of the earth. You are the light of the world.

What's the light and the salt? I think the light and the salt are not just the deeds, but the way the heart is working when the deeds are being done, namely, rejoice in that day, and be glad, for great is your reward in heaven. When you are being persecuted.

I'll tell you what shines in the world: when you are being beat up, beat up by circumstances, disease, beat up by job situation, beat up by people who don't care about you, don't understand you, beat up by people at the workplace who think you're an idiot because you follow Jesus, beat up by kids who've walked away from Jesus, beat up in a marriage, beat up in a church, beat up, and because you see the reward **who is Jesus** – and the joy set before you – you sacrifice for others! You sacrifice and you don't murmur, you don't grumble, you don't criticize and you don't do vengeance and lash out! You rejoice.

Now when people see that - that's bright and salty! They're like what is that? I've never seen that before. They've seen people happy with prosperity. The devil is happy with prosperity. But when people are beat up – and because they know their reward is coming– and they rejoice and their patient. When they're meek merciful, and even though they are taking a beating, they still have some resources (time, love, money) that spill over into lives of those around them, that's the miracle of salt and light.

When people see that, they say, "God must be real to this person – because everything I see that they are going through would incline me – to get out of that situation and take care of myself." Most of the time when we put a basket over our light, we do so because we fear persecution. We think people are going to make fun of us, or won't think we are the coolest thing ever, fear of persecution. When actually this scripture tells us it's when we are persecuted and we still have joy because of this unbelievably awesome reward that's coming that we have the most taste, and the brightest light.

Closing.

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