

<b>Series:</b> All Peoples	<b>Reference:</b> <i>Various Passages</i>	<b>Title:</b> Salt & Light	<b>Date:</b> 08.09.2020
<b>Website Writeup:</b> Today we talk about being salt & light in a world which may not appreciate it.			

*(Opening prayer - Invitation to a Journey, by Robert Mulholland ch13, 1st page.)*

The aim of these sermons as of late is to make clear statements from a Christian Worldview concerning our current social climate, gaining confidence in the issues we face. To *focus* on Christ, developing a firm *foundation* in Him. We've said all diverse people groups are created in the image of God, so we treat everyone with dignity, justice & fairness in humility before God. And the human race, created in the image of God, is so special God said in Genesis 9:6... "Whoever sheds human blood, by humans shall their blood be shed; for in the image of God has God made mankind. And the 5<sup>th</sup> of the Ten Commandments states... "You shall not murder." (Ex 20:13) Which oddly seems like an American pastime.

As God's increasingly incised out of our social fabric, a deceptive nihilistic Humanism takes over as mankind replaces God at the center as definer of morality, values, goodness & beliefs. Humanism as it claims to care about humanity has, as its inherent problem, deceptive human hearts! Since you may've noticed, people have differing views as to what is right & moral! If we don't begin from the standpoint of God as Creator & definer of human value, and only see the world as material, hopelessness eventually takes over. As Nietzsche said, 'God is dead, and we have killed him.'

When civil law governing human relationships is no longer based on the inalienable rights attributed by God, law becomes increasingly arbitrary, changing & blowing with winds of human desire. As God's taken out of the equation, the State then defines human value & rights, which is fluctuating, ever-changing, dependent on the loudest voices at any given time. If the State defines human value & rights, then it can also take them away.

And we find that what becomes legal, eventually is viewed as ethical - but not all things legal in our country are ethical in reflecting God's heart. It's been said, whatever isn't forbidden becomes compulsory in time. Certain beliefs & values contradictory to a Christian worldview have been legalized in America & are now becoming compulsory, firstly through social pressure, eventually legislated for punishment of non-compliance.

Francis Shaeffer said in a prophetic talk in 1982 that Christians have been seeing in only bits & pieces, thinking that singular changes in society, for instance, Roe V Wade allowing for abortion, are just individual instances instead of overall signs of moving from a Christian Worldview to a Humanistic Worldview.

For instance, the question in the medical field has always been, 'How can I save this life?' But it's now increasingly becoming, "Should I save this life?" We're asking now,

when does someone have *personhood* in reference to children, even into toddler years. The life of a child is now outweighed by the desires & perceived happiness of a mother, instead of its inalienable right to exist as God's creation. It leads to questions on the other end of life concerning the 'usefulness' of the elderly as well. There are plenty of instances to which we could point in these areas, all couched in 'compassionate' language masking the hopelessness of a cold humanistic worldview which increasingly devalues life because it draws a line between the spiritual & natural. Holding up the mirror of the Gospel to the world truly reflects a decaying humanity.

But as Christians we hold to God creating the human race, endowing it with value. *We affirm the sanctity of all human life, from conception to natural death. We are fully pro-life, not simply pro-birth. We encourage godly lament, prayer, biblical advocacy & peaceful activism in the face of legal & illegal forms of injustice, murder, eugenics or genocide against any individual or ethnic people-group.*

Schaeffer asked in that talk, "*Where are the Bible believing Christians?*" As this suffocating humanism takes over, what voice & role does the Christian have? Since like Peter answered in Acts 5:29... "*We must obey God rather than men.*" And as Jesus answered the Tempter in Matthew 4:4... '*Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.*' And in 4:10, '*Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only.*' Our existence extends beyond the material, guided by the heart of God in the Scriptures. Our worship centers on Jesus, not the human spirit.

In light of this, let's consider Matthew 5:13-16, where Jesus says... "*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 & trampled under people's feet.*"<sup>14</sup> "*You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden.*"<sup>15</sup> "*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.*"<sup>16</sup> "*In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.*"

Jesus promised persecution due to the message we bear. Why though if our desire is only the good of people? We understand, but sometimes the illogical arguments of those vehemently opposed to Christ is confusing. Jesus challenges people in how they live, what they value & what they believe & worship. That's touchy - bearing His words we sometimes receive the brunt of anger, driven by underlying fear. Fear that we may be right where their worldview is confronted & dismantled. Jesus convicts, calling for repentance & alignment in unity under Him for the good of people.

There are plenty of persecution stories, old & new...Paul's success at Ephesus provoked a riot to defend the cult of the goddess Artemis. In 64AD a fire destroyed much of Rome. In order to escape blame, Nero killed a vast multitude of Christians as scapegoats.

Or more recently, 'the teacher in New Jersey suspended for giving a student a Bible; the football coach in Washington placed on leave for saying a prayer on the field at the end of a game; the fire chief in Atlanta fired for self-publishing a book defending Christian

moral teaching; the Marine court-martialed for pasting a Bible verse above her desk; are some examples of the new intolerance leading to persecution.

Christian institutions face pressure to conform to secularist ideology - or else. Gordon & Kings Colleges have had their accreditation questioned. Some argue Christian schools don't deserve accreditation, period. Atheist Richard Dawkins & others have equated homeschooling tantamount to child abuse. Student groups like InterVarsity have been kicked off campuses. Christian charities, including adoption agencies, Catholic hospitals & crisis pregnancy centers have become objects of attack.<sup>1</sup> YoungLife is being attacked across the board on their biblical views concerning social issues.

Persecution brings out a feeling of fight or flight in us. We may get angry & strike back, but most tend to withdraw & go silent. Out of fear, we don't engage. But Jesus says neither is the reaction to which He calls us. He calls for engagement as salt & light no matter the cost to reputation or safety. That we engage with others in love, compassion & humility, bearing the fruit of the Spirit, but also in boldness. As Paul said in Romans 1:16...*I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes: first to the Jew, then to the Gentile.*

Schaeffer's question pointed out that much of Christianity was either intentionally silent, or indifferent - not being salt & light. If Christians are indifferent, or cowardly in the face of need & calling, we're no longer salty.

Salt has two purposes. Firstly, to preserve (to hold off rot). They'd pack meat in it, without refrigeration, it's the only thing able to preserve it. We still have salted meats, originating from a time when salt was the only choice. The Christian church is like salt packed around a decaying world holding back the rot of sin by engaging the world with the Gospel.

Secondly, salt is a flavor enhancer (to make things better). It was so valuable at the time, Roman soldiers were often paid in salt. Hence the phrase, 'He's worth his salt.' Some of us put salt on everything, even before we taste it - salt makes food better. Likewise, Christians engaging in a society make it better. Stories abound at how Christianity, not only preserved, but made society better over the ages.

Christianity was very popular among women in early Christianity for good reason... 'In ancient cultures, a wife was the property of her husband. Aristotle said a woman was somewhere between a free man & a slave. According to the book *Reasons for God* by Tim Keller (p249), "It was extremely common in the Greco-Roman world to throw out new female infants to die from exposure, because of the low status of women in society. The church forbade its members to do so. Greco-Roman society saw no value in an unmarried woman...it was illegal for a widow to go more than two years without remarrying. Christianity was the first religion to *not* force widows to marry. They were supported financially & honored within the community so that they were not under

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<sup>1</sup> <https://time.com/4385755/faith-in-america/>

great pressure to remarry if they didn't want to. Pagan widows lost all control of their husband's estate when they remarried, but the church allowed widows to maintain their husband's estate. Christians didn't believe in cohabitation. If a Christian man wanted to live with a woman he had to marry her, and this gave women far greater security. Also, the pagan double standard of allowing married men to have extramarital sex & mistresses was forbidden.

In all these ways Christian women enjoyed far greater security & equality than did women in the surrounding culture. In India, widows were voluntarily or involuntarily burned on their husbands' funeral pyres. Christian missionaries were a major influence in stopping these century-old practices & ideas.<sup>2</sup>

Christian blessing doesn't stop there, extending into every niche of society: human rights, children, slavery, the ending of gladiator spectacles, cannibalism in tribes, marriage & family, education, government of people, etc... We could relay stories for days on end of Christianity's betterment in societies. Before Christ, we find little trace of any organized charitable effort in history. Jesus preached it & Christians answered His call in building hospitals, orphanages, schools, soup kitchens, thrift shops, ending slavery & sex trafficking, etc & still are. I'd love to take you all to see our ministry partners in the Middle East & the work they do, of which we support & they're busy now in light of the recent explosion in Beirut. Our own cultures powerful emphasis on compassion sprouts from Christian roots. What would the world be if Christ hadn't come - we may've killed each other off by now!

One author said, *"Christianity is responsible for the way our society is organized & for the way we currently live. So extensive is the Christian contribution to our laws, our economics, our politics, our arts, our calendar, our holidays, and our moral & cultural priorities that [one historian] writes, 'We could none of us today be what we are if a handful of Jews nearly two thousand years ago had not believed that they had known a great teacher, seen him crucified, dead, and buried, and then rise again.'"*<sup>3</sup>

Have you ever bought a new car, so excited about it, only to have your excitement wane over time? Familiarity breeds contempt. We grow unappreciative of blessings. We take the stories & teaching in Scripture for granted. We say, "I just can't get into the Word. It's just so dry to me right now." But we fail to recognize, not everyone always had these words & that their lives have been bettered drastically as a result of them - hearts have been transformed which has transformed the world, preserving it & making it a better place for all! Likewise, we take all the blessings we have for granted...what if the Scriptures were never penned? Or were taken away? Fall in love with the Word of God again, ingest it & allow it to transform your heart & mind.

Paul wrote of us as light in Ephesians 5:8-16 as well...*For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light* <sup>9</sup> *(for the fruit of the light*

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<sup>2</sup> <http://www.faithfacts.org/christ-and-the-culture/the-impact-of-christianity#impact>

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.faithfacts.org/christ-and-the-culture/the-impact-of-christianity#impact>

*consists in all goodness, righteousness & truth)* <sup>10</sup> and find out what pleases the Lord. <sup>11</sup> Have nothing to do with the fruitless deeds of darkness, but rather expose them. <sup>12</sup> It is shameful even to mention what the disobedient do in secret. <sup>13</sup> But everything exposed by the light becomes visible - and everything that is illuminated becomes a light. <sup>14</sup> This is why it is said: "Wake up, sleeper, rise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you." <sup>15</sup> Be very careful, then, how you live - not as unwise but as wise, <sup>16</sup> making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil.

You may feel it's negative to say the days are evil, but Scripturally it's true, the wise regard them as such. It's not a despairing sentiment, rather it's hopeful, spurring us to be salt & light until Christ returns. Those stand as prophetic words to every generation of Christians growing indifferent to the life & words of Christ - "Wake up, sleeper, rise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you." We also take light for granted don't we. Spend a week in a village in any third world country & you begin to have a deeper appreciation of it! Nights in Indonesian villages I spent time in were often lit by one dim bulb or candle for the whole house. Light is a precious commodity.

Jesus claimed to be the light of the world & has passed us the torch! In Christ we become His light to the world as His unified Body entrusted with the words of life. We don't take our light off into the corner for ourselves, or hide under a bed with it, retreating due to some difficulty in expressing Jesus to others. Rather we put it up high on a stand to illuminate everyone in the room! This light in me isn't for me, but for everyone around me, beginning in my home, extending into the world from there.

Sometimes it's easier to be a light at church than it is at work, or at home! Maybe you need to make some changes. When a father says to their family, "I have to apologize, I've not been living as a light of Christ to you." Are you going to think lower or higher of him? If at work you stand for some virtuous biblical principle you risk persecution, but your being a light is more important than your career & who knows how it's received.

Put your light up high, not under a basket. When Jesus spoke these words it's believed He was pointing to a city called *Safed* in the distance, the highest city in Galilee & Israel, 3000 feet in elevation. You could see it from far away. As He pointed to it, illuminated at night, it was a powerful image - a city as directional marker for travelers, drawing them to itself. It was recognizable, the pinnacle, the highest you could go! An oasis, a safe place of commerce & fellowship. That's what Jesus wants for His church to be, a recognizable city on a hill giving light & direction to all peoples.

Traditional lights in a home were small oil lamps. One by itself gave off only a small amount of light, but in a dark house without ambient light from cities, or street lights, as we have today, it was highly valued. You may be the only light a person sees in their darkness, but one light exposes the things which hold back the warmth & truth of Christ.

Imagine placing a hundred lamps all around a room at varying heights - it's illuminated much more strongly - that's what someone sees when they get around the powerful unified Church in Christ & to which He calls us to be. We're not strobe lights going on &

off, we're not on a dimmer switch growing fainter when trials come our way, we're the reliable consistent light of a burning warm flame of Jesus to the world around us!

Notice, Jesus doesn't say if you do all the right things you'll be salt & light. He declares us to be salt & light in Him. Being salt & light isn't how we gain salvation, it's how we live in Christ to peoples around us due to His life in us. Neither of these passages in Matthew or Ephesians 5 speaks of how to become a Christian. They call the Christian who's already saved by grace through faith in Christ to live the life & words of Jesus out in the world. How can salt lose its saltiness, it really can't, salt is salt. You're salt & light because you are in Jesus alone...but it can sit unused. Meals can be bland & meat rots without it. But if it's used, it preserves & makes all things better.

But to live in obedience to Jesus takes risk & intentionality. Indifference & fear are the enemies. We need to focus on Jesus, allowing Him to build a solid foundation in us, our families & our church, overflowing to all peoples of the world. Your personal light may be one small flame in a dark world, but it is a light illuminating & exposing those things which would normally hold back the blessings of Gods kingdom. And placed alongside lights of other Believers in the unity of Jesus, that influence is made exponentially brighter & influential.

Be salt & light in Christ. Use your salt to flavor & preserve. Take the basket off your light & put it up on a stand for all to see. Don't succumb to indifference or fear, perfect love drives out all fear. Don't conform to the patterns of this world, be transformed by the renewing of your mind & then we'll be like the city of Samed to the world.

We think hard about how we speak into the lives of others when our message is unpopular, or doesn't fit the cultural narrative. Considering how we love them well in justice, fairness & humility, valuing all people as the creation of God. This has implications in all areas of life beginning in the home, church, work, politics, our neighbors & the work we've chosen to do through cross-cultural mission efforts. It's about Gods Glory & Gods mission - be Jesus, preach His whole message, no matter the cost!

Let's end by reading from p191-192 from Invitation to a Journey which sums up much of what we've been saying in these sermons...(read)