

Salt and Light

A Peanuts cartoon showed Peppermint Patty talking to Charlie Brown in which she said, “Guess what, Chuck? The first day of school, and I got sent to the principal’s office. It was your fault, Chuck.” Charlie Brown responds, “My fault? How could it be my fault? Why do you say everything is my fault?” To which she declares, “You’re my friend, aren’t you, Chuck? You should have been a better influence on me.”

- While Peppermint Patty was trying to pass the buck, she was also speaking some truth. We should be a good influence on those around us.

People are watching us. I heard of a minister who was making a wooden trellis to support a climbing vine. As he was pounding away, he noticed that a little boy was watching him. The little guy didn’t say a word, so the preacher kept on working, thinking the lad would leave. But he didn’t. Pleased at the thought that his work was being admired, the pastor finally said, “Are you trying to pick up some pointers on gardening?” “No,” he replied. “I’m just waiting to hear what a preacher says when he hits his thumb with a hammer.”

- We’re always influencing someone, either positively or negatively and people are watching you! What do they see? What they see has an influence on them... and it should. Jesus has energized us to be persuaders for Him.

We are going to do one of two things in life:

- **influence out of faith – which will be positive...**
- **or influence out of our own desires – which will be negative!**

If we want to talk about being a positive influencer in the world, an influencer that functions through faith in Christ - it would help if we knew a little more about faith.

John Wesley talked about the faith from 2 angles, 2 perspectives if you will! **First** - there is the faith of a child of God. And **second** - in contrast to the faith of a child of God there is the faith of a servant of God! Now there’s an emphasis on the word child and the word servant.

Although faith may start as the faith of a servant of God – this is the recognition of duty and the desire to obey. This is where we obey God because we believe that it’s the right thing to do, but the faith of a servant of God has no deep relationship or intimacy with the Lord! This is a good place to start - but not a good place to live our lives – our faith in God must become much more than that.

A person with the faith of a child of God, unlike one with the faith of a servant, *knows God's love directly, intimately, and powerfully*. They experienced God's gracious love in a personal, intimate way. One that evokes a faith that’s characterized by trust and confidence.

Having been assured of being loved, Christians **with this faith** are filled with love for God and others. Then they live without fear and doubt, and their lives can start taking on a different motivation than before. Instead of trying to please God through their efforts, a Christian who has the faith of a child of God gratefully and gladly will embrace whatever kind of life the Lord would have them live.

The question is – what type of or facet of faith do we have?

If we want to know what kind of faith we have, ask yourself:

- Do you experience and participate in God’s love intentionally, directly, intimately – and powerfully?
- Is your faith characterized by trust and confidence in God and do you live your faith intentionally every day?

Let’s look back **at today’s scripture Matthew 5:13-16. Look and pay attention to how Jesus talks and uses images that can – if we allow Him – build a faith that is characterized by trust and confidence.**

1. When Jesus speaks of salt and light in today's scripture, He uses two images that were and still are, very common. Truth is, in our world today, we miss the real value of salt. For many of us, it's just a little container on our counter or stove.

Ancient societies understood the value of salt far better than we do. The Romans believed, for instance, that there was nothing as valuable as salt and often time's Roman soldiers received their pay in salt. That's where the phrase "not worth his salt" comes from.

When Jesus talks about light, in Jesus world, light was very important! Remember, they didn't have electricity or flashlights or street lights and when there was no light, most work and productivity of the day came to an end. The best light that the typical household had was a simple small olive oil or rendered fat lamp to light a room. Light was very important if you needed to live after the sun went down. Light was important if you wanted to live in the dark!

2. Now, notice that Jesus doesn't say - you are like salt, or that you will be light some time in the future. He says, "You are the salt of the earth...you are the light of the world." Jesus is talking about identity! It means that as a Christian you have a new identity, you are not who you thought you were before Jesus Christ came into your life!

You are a new person! If you take the New Testament... you will find that there are 33 places in the New Testament where God tells us clearly and unmistakably – that we now have an identity that goes beyond our roles in life, beyond the expectations placed on us by others or even ourselves. We have an identity that no human being can take away or diminish in any way.

You see - who we are and why we live in this world has been completely transformed in our life – if we have received Jesus as our Lord and Savior! We simply need to discover who we really are and start living according to that identity and that is why we are having the sermon series on the Gospel of John! We are the salt of the earth and the light of the world.

3. God calls us to be influencers in the world we live in! In today's scripture, Jesus implies that some believers have slipped spiritually.

- Just as it's silly to think of salt that is not salty
- Or lighting a lamp and putting a bushel over it

In the same way, it's unimaginable to Jesus that a believer would stop engaging a lost and hurting world, a world filled with people who need to hear that Jesus loves them and can receive a faith that'll grow into the faith of a Child of God. People can hear about the faith of a Child of God... from you and me!

You and I have at least two roles. Salt can actually preserve or delay decay, and light can bring light to the things in this world that are robbing us of life in a sin-darkened world.

- **Let's look at the Salt of the Earth**

Look at Matthew 5:13: "*You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled by men.*" If you've spent more than 20 minutes in church you've probably heard that you are the salt of the earth. Most of what you heard growing up probably made you feel guilty about not doing more with the faith you have.

It doesn't make sense for salt to lose its saltiness. Technically, if salt isn't salty, it's not really salt. But salt can lose its salt characteristics if it gets contaminated with a foreign substance; when it does and it is spoiled – it has to be thrown out. I wonder how many times that happens in our lives? When we take our eyes off Christ and live under our own power and we get contaminated by the world and lose our effectiveness for Christ.

So what do we do? How do we get saltier? As we look at what salt does, we can see how we can be saltier:

1. **Salt gives taste.** Have you ever made something and forget to add salt. It looks OK, but doesn't taste OK. None one would want to eat it because it will be bland. Salt by itself doesn't taste very good but when it's applied to food it unleashes the flavor.

As Christians we are God's seasoning in the world - just as salt adds zest and fires up the taste buds, so too we should be making life more "tasty" for others. Christians should be adding spice to a spiritually bland world.

Some of us are way too boring and devoid of joy.

2. **Salt is also a preservative.** Salt holds back decay. If you know how to pickles, you know what I mean. Centuries ago back when there were no refrigerators, so they put salt in their meat to keep it from rotting. Used in this way, salt doesn't make something good; but it keep things from going bad.

Christians are to be a preservative in our culture. God has put us into a rotting and dead world in order to preserve it. That's why we are to be willing to live counter-cultural lives that are distinctively Christian. Christ-followers are to be a preserving influence to retard moral and spiritual spoilage in the world. But, to do that, salt must be brought into contact with its object in order for its power to be released. That's why we're to be involved in mission in the community and world we live in!

- **Let's look at being the light of the world!**

The New Testament presents Christ as the personification of light in 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." Matthew 5:14-15 explains "You are the light of the world. A city 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."

Think of the world Jesus lived in! Homes generally had just one room which served as a combination living and dining area. When it got dark, a lamp would be carefully lit and placed on a table in the center of the room. It was the only light in the room. Those listening knew how important that one light was, and when Jesus talked about someone taking a bowl and putting it over the light, imagine them laughing at the foolishness of the thought it was to cover the only light in the room!

Being Light - There are at least three functions of light.

1. **It gets rid of darkness** - so we can see. Jesus came to get rid of the darkness, but many people don't like having His light around – because it reveals things you don't want to see and things you want to hide.

2. **It Gives guidance.** When we live our faith in front of family, friends, and neighbors, our life can guide people. Psalm 119:130 says, "The unfolding of your words gives light; it gives understanding to the simple."

3. **It Reveals What Is There.** Psalm 34:5 says, "Those who look to Him are radiant." As we turn our attention to Christ and enjoy His presence, people will want to experience what we have. Jesus said in verse 16: "In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your father in heaven."

So what do we do to increase our impact? How can we become saltier and brighter? There are at least three things we can do.

1. **Faith is a gift from God – Eph 2:8 - Move from the Faith of a Servant of God to the faith of a Child of God.** To be the light of the world, we need to reflect the light of Christ. Start seeking God and participating intentionally in your relationship with Christ.

2. **Live In the presence of God.** Who is the one person you spend the most time with? What specifically can you do to spend more time with God?
3. **Practice being Dense.** When we stick together we will make a greater impact. When light is focused it's at its brightest and most powerful.

When salt is packed tightly and then sprinkled all over food, it enhances the flavor.

There was an old ad campaign by the U.S. Army – be an Army of One.

In Christianity, we're not an "army of one," we are the Army of God which is also the Body of Christ. Is the light of Christ shining through you? Are you allowing His light to be made visible in your life? This is participating in ministry! Don't hide the light under a basket. Take it out and hold it high.