

Salt and Light  
Matthew 5:13-16  
Rev Jonathan Cornell  
10-6-19

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**“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.**

**14 “You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. 15 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. 16 In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.**

I met Dave Roberts when I was in 7<sup>th</sup> grade. For all of us fresh-faced Junior Highers this was the year we had all waited for. Dave was tall, he had a goatee an earring and best of all he was great at basketball. Really, at that point in my life that was all that mattered. For all of us who were graduating from Boys Brigade and Pioneer Girls into the Junior High Youth Group, Dave was our Youth Pastor.

But it wasn't until Dave volunteered to lead a bible study for Junior High Boys that my true appreciation for him took flight. It was there sometimes with only two or three boys that he began to open up God's word with us in a way that it had never been seen before. He would answer our questions, no matter how juvenile they were, he would read scripture and pray with us in such a way that in Dave, we saw Jesus—some of us for the very first time.

As junior high boys it was there with him that we learned how to treat a lady, as we saw how he cared for his wife Rachel, we learned how to deal with difficult situations as he faced great challenges with people in a large congregation. It was with Dave that I learned what it looked like to live a life that was shaped and molded by Jesus Christ. And it's largely because of Dave Roberts that I am here sharing this message with you.

And I would venture to guess that many of us have a person like Dave in our lives.

It is good to reflect backward, but the kingdom is out there, it's not back there in our memories. At the end of his ministry here on earth, just before ascending to the Father that the disciples were at an impasse and Jesus says in Matthew's Gospel don't just stand there, **“GO and make disciples.”** And again over in John 21, **“you want to follow me? Feed my sheep.”** Jesus didn't say stay where you're at and call people to nostalgia. He said Go, and let the memory of what I've done give you strength for your ministry. The question for today is: “who are you influencing for the kingdom TODAY?”

The fact of the matter is that we are all influencing someone. But the question is: what direction is that influence leading them? There may have been people in our lives like Dave who brought us closer to Christ, there may be others who drew us further away by negatively influencing us. But what would people say of your life? Would they say that

you are influencing them toward the kingdom with your words, with your actions, with the way you conduct your business? When Jesus says the kingdom of God is within you that's not just a statement of status, but a call to action. The kingdom of God is never at rest, but it is always on the move.

So, how are we doing with that? Let me share some statistics that indicate how we're doing on a macro level here in our country. 67% of people in America now claim to have no affiliation with any church or denomination. The Quaker theologian Elton Trueblood said, that "it's hard to exaggerate the degree to which the modern church seems irrelevant to the modern man." With this one word he summed up the current attitude of much of the Christian church in America, and that is irrelevant! Much of the Christian Church in America no longer has an influence on the surrounding culture because their message looks exactly the same. Are we simply a social club for the white middle class value system in America or is there something different about identity?

Jesus, when he begins to preach his sermon on the mount, speaks with a voice of power and authority because he is God's son, and himself God. But his power and authority take a radically different tone. In the beatitudes last week, we learned that Jesus inverts our value system. What the world thinks is fortunate, what the world looks at as blessing is not what God deems blessing. No when Jesus says Blessed are the Poor, the Meek, the Merciful, the Persecuted, he was offering each one of us the opportunity to see the truth about ourselves, to have the shingles removed from our eyes, so that we could see what is true about God's Kingdom. And the next line that Jesus utters is an unequivocal declaration, he says: **"YOU ARE THE SALT OF THE EARTH."**

Now if I told you I was going to give a lecture on the topic of salt, you would probably say to yourself, "wow, that could be the most boring lecture of all time." Because salt is so common, so routine, such an everyday thing, we know much of what there is to know about salt already. Which is exactly why Jesus used this image to describe his disciples. Salt was something everyone could understand. They knew just as you know that salt has two main purposes: 1. As a preservative; and 2. As a flavoring agent. Salt brings out the true flavor of the things with which it is mixed. The disciples knew this about salt, you know this about salt, and that's why Jesus uses the metaphor.

As a condiment salt is something that is added to food from the outside to influence its flavor, to draw out or change the flavor of the food. If you want to influence and flavor your world you've got to get out of the church and into the world. You're no good if your witness never leaves these four walls. Salt doesn't make any lick of difference if it never leaves the saltshaker.

Sometimes we Christians we only go one step further, we like to stand on the outside of things and we're a little apprehensive about immersing ourselves in the world. You ever notice how salt if it's not mixed into the food just gives you three salty bites and then the rest of it is bland? Salt is only useful if it worked into the thing we're trying to influence.

As a church we get to be really good at building our places and fostering our little insular communities where we are shielded from the world. But statistics show that the world is having a greater influence on the church. We are called to be in the world, not separate from it, we are called to love the world, not fear or despise it, Jesus wants our hearts to ache for those we live with in the world who know nothing other than the message it is telling them. And how are they going to know anything different unless the church is actively loving our culture, not standing apart in judgment but immersing ourselves in the hurt, and brokenness and addiction, and temptation that faces our world.

The world is a beautiful place, full of possibility, and the command Jesus issued more than any other in all of scripture...do not be afraid. Knowing that God is at work redeeming this world gives us a whole new outlook on the things that look hopeless around us. Do not fear the world, immerse yourself in it as salt to food.

Do you know where the training ground is for this kingdom flavoring? Right here! We have the opportunity every time we walk in the doors to flavor the lives of those who have not grown up and raised their families at Wabash. Before and after worship, in fellowship time, and simply walking around the building you will certainly see people with whom you are unfamiliar. Say hello, introduce yourselves, say “you know what? I’m glad you’re here. Would you like to come down and have a cup of coffee with me?” And this morning after worship in fellowship time, sit with someone new.

Brad was a member of a former congregation, and he told me a story once that has stuck with me all these years, and it still moves me. There was a man going door to door selling cartons of peaches out of the bed of his truck and this person came up to Brad to purchase a box. But what Brad found out was that his inventory had only a few more days before it would begin to spoil, and he wouldn’t be able to sell them anymore. So what did Brad do? He bought the whole truckload from the man, and the two of them began delivering them door to door and handing them out to his neighbors. With the sweetness of those peaches Brad was adding a little salt to his neighborhood.

One person adding a little saltiness to this world, can flavor a whole batch of people with one little act.

The second quality that salt brings to God’s Kingdom is its ability to preserve. Salt was a preservative, you would rub it on meat or poultry or fish and it would enable you to keep the meat from spoiling.

God is inviting you and me to be a preservative to this world that is in decay. But more often than not we think of ourselves more as salt for potatoes. You know about potatoes right, they don’t need preserving because they are not in decay. Potatoes last a long time. But more often than not we want to go over here and put our salt on the places and lives that aren’t in decay. But God is inviting us to look for those things that are heading for destruction and go be salty there.

Jesus goes on to issue a pretty stern warning about what happens when salt gets diluted, when salt dries up. When salt allows its saltiness to be wasted pretty soon all you have is a pile of white useless dust, that will just blow away in the wind.

You know what's worse than someone who is poorly influencing his or her surroundings? One that's not influencing them at all. Jesus Christ came into this world and lived the most influential life so that we might be influence others. Are you being transformed? And if the answer to that question is no, then I want to ask you, is it time you got reacquainted with Jesus? Is it time you met him for the very first time? You can have a personal and transforming relationship with Almighty God, by getting to know Jesus. When you do so, he's going to begin to use you to season your surroundings. I'll tell you, a good way to know whether you're being continually transformed by Christ, you're a seasoning agent bringing the flavor of God's love and mercy and forgiveness to others in your life.

So friends how salty are we, how willing are we to go out of our way to bring Christ's love to the inconvenient in our lives. God is eager to use us to flavor and preserve the world that will in turn nourish others.