

The Church in the World

Matthew 5:13-16

Many desire for the Church to be a place where people can be insulated from the influences of the world. Others see it as a place to hide and live a privatized form of Christianity. And others have what we call a ‘triumphalist’ view of the Church with a condemning and an uncompassionate voice.

But throughout His ministry Jesus condemns such behavior and teaches that the Church does not exist for itself – that there is no private Christianity, and no place for a fortress ‘mentality.’

And nowhere does He make this more clear than in the words we have just read, where He says, ‘You are the salt of the earth,’ and ‘You are the light of the world.’

1 Peter 2:9 – “But 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.”

The Church’s calling is to declare God’s praises – to live for His Glory.

Salt is a preservative. Back then it acted negatively in that it prevented meat from putrefying. It wasn’t merely

sprinkled on meat – it was rubbed into it – a welcomed aggravation – an antiseptic with healing properties.

Jesus is saying that God does His preserving work as He ‘rubs’ His people into the culture. In other words isolationistic thinking isn’t of God. The salt Jesus spoke of was a white powdery dust that easily lost its properties (it’s saltiness). At that point it was nothing more than white dust – it was useless.

Light works positively. It enters darkness, and then all of a sudden it isn’t dark any more. It illuminates everything that otherwise would be hidden and lost to the eye. For Jesus, in His day, a light was a lamp – fueled by some kind of oil. His point is that light is meant to shine – that there is no use for it if covered up.

In a sense light pronounces to the darkness that it doesn’t have to stay that way any more.

And so this is the Church. When you couple this with Jesus’ Beatitudes you get a Community of people who have been called to live differently – who by the very nature of their new life are like salt in a wounded world: often a convicting presence, though not a condescending voice – as well as a ray of hope for those groping for direction in dark places: a joyful announcement that Jesus is real, that He Heals and Renews and brings Peace.

Two Encouragements & Two Challenges:

1. Don't underestimate the Effect of How you Live

I know it is sometimes difficult to believe that Christianity can mean anything to an unbelieving world, or that you can make a difference, but it does and you can.

If you are a Christian you have been called to live differently. The Beatitudes remind us that Christ has rescued us from having to fight on the world's terms and bear the world's fears.

Don't underestimate the influence of your life in an office, with your family and among your friends. All you have to do is be who you are in Christ.

The Challenge: Avail your life. Observe your life as it is – where you are and what you do. And then engage. Grow and serve where God has planted you. You will be amazed at the opportunities that will come your way once you decide you will serve rather than conquer.

2. Don't underestimate the Influence of the One you Serve

The reason the Church often seems to be distasteful to the world is that the Church and its people are often not very nice to the world they have been placed in. The salt has lost its saltiness and the light has been covered – petty arguments and self-promotion unseat vision, passion, calling, and love. I believe that this is due, in

part, to a small view of Christ – ungodly fear that leads to unChristlike behavior – Christ is obscured.

The Cross of Jesus is central. The victory of Jesus over sin and death insures that what we do in His Name is never in vain – that we can ‘subdue the earth’ by giving our lives. This is what Jesus means here when He says, “...that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.”

The Challenge: Learn of Christ in His Word – don’t be an emotionally driven but intellectually ignorant Christian. Eventually your light will dim if you are unwilling to grow in Grace – Grace He desires to dispense through you. Flee to Christ daily and cling to Him. Admit your need for Him. The Gospel reminds us that we don’t have it in us to live counter-culturally – except that we know Jesus.