

CIC 7/11/25: Salt and Light

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Pull Quote: 1. As salt and light must be different from their surroundings to fulfill their role, followers of Jesus must be different from their surroundings to fulfill our role

2. If we know our place of work or education, our neighborhood, our family needs Christ and his likeness, let's not wait for someone else to be the salt and the light.

Message Summary: This message helps us to understand the imperative to be Salt and Light to our communities and relationships, to be agents of change and life, to be different from our surroundings

Discussion Questions:

1. Please share your high, low, or a buffalo (something interesting, funny, unique).
2. What stood out to you in today's message?
3. What are some ways you've seen the church be salt and light before? How does the church bring change and life to the world?
4. How have we not been different, how have we not been life-giving?
5. What are the situations, who the people around us where we need to be salt, to be light?
6. Pray for one another

The past few weeks, we've been in a series about the beatitudes, Jesus' opening of the sermon on the mount. I was invited to preach today to give a little bit of a break from the beatitudes, but I'm not going to move very far

Matthew 5:13-16 NIV

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 underfoot.

14 “You are the light of the world. A town built 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 others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.

What are the things one uses Salt and Light for?

We normally think of salt in terms of food. Salt preserves the food it's mixed in with. Salt brings its own sharp, savory flavor and makes other flavors stronger. Some might know I like to cook, and in cooking, salt in small doses helps make baked goods sweeter, and when you're cooking onions, it helps caramelize them a lot quicker. As much as Salt isn't healthy in excess, we would actually die without consuming it. Salt can also be used as a cleaning agent. For the DIY people in church, you've probably seen some mixtures of salt and vinegar recommended for home-made remedies, which is why salt and vinegar chips taste so sour, you're actually consuming a cleaning solution.

Light illuminates the environments it enters, it enables creatures like us to see, it brings warmth, and provides the fuel plants need to grow, thus it enables everything else in the world to live. I've also been a gardener, and my fellow gardeners know how frustrating it is when you think a plant would look great in a certain spot, but the lighting is off.

Salt and light bring life and change for the better. And they have always done so. So Jesus' contemporary audience, his disciples, would have understood that.

How are salt and light *able* to bring life and change?

Not HOW do they, we just addressed that, but how are they ABLE to? Its a pretty simple answer

They're different.

While a piece of food can taste salty, it is not salt, it only tastes that way because salt was added to it. While a beach can be sunny, the beach itself isn't the sun. The sun is what makes the beach sunny. Salt and light are different from what they are applied to.

In fact, in order to work, Salt and Light MUST be different. If you want to make a potato taste salty, you don't add more potato. If you want to make a room bright, you don't build another wall, you build a window. If you want to change an environment, you need a change agent, not just more of the same.

So by telling his disciples "You are the salt of the earth," and "You are the light of the world," what is Jesus communicating to his followers?

Jesus is communicating that like salt and light, his followers' intended role is to be life-giving change agents in the midst of their surroundings. Like salt, where there is death and decay, they should be sources of vitality and renewal. Where there is dreariness, they should bring flavor. Like light, where there is cold, darkness, confusion they should bring warmth, illumination and vision.

And he is communicating that:

As salt and light must be different from their surroundings to fulfill their role, followers of Jesus must be different from their surroundings to fulfill our role.

There is a bigger context surrounding what Jesus is saying here. Right before he talks to his disciples about being salt and light, he communicates

the beatitudes. I know we've read these multiple times the past few weeks, but please indulge me, let's read them once more.

Matthew 5:3-12

3 “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. **4** Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted. **5** Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth. **6** Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled. **7** Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy. **8** Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God. **9** Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God. **10** Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. **11** “Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. **12** Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

In summary, What is Jesus saying through the Beatitudes? We've gone over what they individually communicate. But taken altogether, what is the unified message Jesus wants to convey?

Through the beatitudes, Jesus describes how his Kingdom operates, and how it doesn't work the way the world tends to operate; Like and Salt and Light, his Kingdom is different.

It is the poor in spirit that have citizenship in his Kingdom, not the triumphant.

Unlike the norm, those who mourn need not be hopeless in his kingdom; they are not alone; there is comfort here.

It is not the mighty who will inherit the earth, but the meek.

Those who hunger and thirst for righteousness will be filled, not the corrupt and the manipulative.

Blessed are the merciful, not the unforgiving and unapologetic.

It is the pure in heart that will see God, not the ambitious,

It is the peacemakers that will be called children of God, not the proud and the fighters.

Blessed are those who are persecuted, insulted, not those who have favor, success, and acclaim in society's eyes.

Rejoice and be glad when you are persecuted, not be discouraged, or return the favor.

Jesus is telling his disciples that his way is a different way of operating, a different kind of kingdom. And he follows it up by telling them that they are to be change agents, the agents of this different kingdom, bringing about a different way of living, a different way of thinking, of treating others, of viewing their own lives.

And the world needs different, it needs change agents because the world is *in* need of change. There is still dysfunction, there is still greed, there is still abuse, there is still manipulation, there is still brokenness, there is still hopelessness. While there are many beautiful things about the world, and beautiful moments living in it, being glad for what is good does not mean that we should be ignorant of what isn't, just because we might not be experiencing suffering in the present, does not mean that we should be uncaring of those that are. And even if we are experiencing difficulty, it shouldn't be an excuse to prioritize ourselves at others' expense.

But even though the world needs different, Christians have not always been successful at meeting that need.

In a much quoted interview, Mahatma Gandhi, the famous non-violent Indian independence activist reportedly said. "I like your Christ, but not your Christianity." "I believe in the teachings of Christ, but you on the other side of the world do not, I read the Bible faithfully and see little in Christendom that those who profess faith pretend to see.

One of my friends in New Orleans, Jen, has a dear friend who is Muslim. We'll call her friend Z. Z once told Jen that one of her biggest obstacles to considering Christianity was how Christians she knew used God's

forgiveness as reason to not change their behavior, because they believed that they could always seek forgiveness after sinning. Thus they believed they were effectively fine wronging others and God, fine living life opposite the spirit of Jesus' words. Fine treating God's forgiveness as an excuse to misbehave. Not a different life but a life as messed up as everyone else's.

These two examples aside, most of us know or have known Christians that owned the label of Christian but did not seem particularly life-giving or different. Some people dismiss or disown Christianity and Jesus entirely because of poor examples. They might think, this can't be a God worth following, when all along those they saw claiming to follow God were misrepresenting Him the whole time.

These stories should be sobering. They show what happens when we aren't salt, when we aren't light, when we aren't living life according to the bigger picture of Jesus' radically different kingdom.

What did he say about Salt that loses its saltiness? He told his disciples that it "is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled underfoot." That is to say, it is useless.

I have no desire to be useless, for us to be useless. I want us, and I think God definitely wants us, to be agents of change and life, here and now, where we are, in Massachusetts and Rhode Island. To be Salt and Light in Attleboro, Pawtucket, Providence, Lincoln, Cumberland, Mansfield, Plainville, and Boston and Beyond.

I can guarantee you that there are those who are poor in spirit in need of encouragement and those in mourning needing to know they aren't alone, even here at CIC. Particularly in the aftermath of so much death in our community the past few weeks. There are situations in your community in need of a leader willing to lead and engage by being meek, gentle, quiet, someone who can listen, instead of someone who's loud, proud, and puffed up. There are those, particularly Gen Z, who want to know that God is righteous, and that his followers are capable of being the same. Others are longing for a friend capable of mercy, not just fickleness or pettiness.

People in the marketplace or school need to witness other workers and students who are pure in heart, not just concerned with their own selfish ambitions. Neighbors need to see neighbors that make peace where there is confrontation, not just prolonging fights. Non believers really, really, need to see Christians that can rejoice when they are persecuted, like Pastor JD talked about last week, not just getting angry at being victimized.

In these ways and in countless others, the people around us need the salt and light of Christ's Kingdom. Your co-workers, your neighbors, your classmates, your family need the salt and light of Christ. There is no one with a better opportunity to show it to them than you. No one. Nobody with a better opportunity to share what makes you so salty, Nobody with a better chance to invite them into a community where they can find others like you. If we know our place of work or education, our neighborhood, our family needs Christ and his likeness, let's not wait for someone else to be the salt and the light.

I really believe God's heart for us today is to ask ourselves 2 things

1. How have we not been different, how have we not been life-giving?
2. What are the situations, who the people around us where we need to be salt, to be light?