

## Looking Around: Cultivating an Appetite for Christ in Others

Matthew 5:[1-12] 13-16

We've come to the last week of our series on relationships – we started out by looking back - letting go of our regrets and learning about the importance of forgiving others. We talked about the importance of our priorities and our life in the church and how both impact our relationships. We took selfies to remind ourselves we are loved by Jesus and we need to let God's grace freely flow. Last week, we turned our focus outward to being good neighbors. Today, we're wrapping this series up with these beautiful words from Jesus found in the gospel of Matthew.

### *“You are the salt of the earth”*

What do you know about salt? What is it used for?

- Seasoning/flavor – adds/enhances flavor
- Preservative - Before the days of refrigeration, people used salt to halt the natural decay of food products.
- Necessity of life
- Cleansing / Healing
  - When salt is applied to a wound, the wound stings. This stinging sensation results as the salt attacks infection and cleanses the wound of impurities. The ancient Jewish people rubbed their babies with salt, believing the practice cleansed the child. And the Hebrews sprinkled their sacrifices with salt to signify purity.
- Currency
- Creates thirst

Jesus said *You are the Salt of the Earth* (v. 13)

Note that Jesus doesn't say,

- "Try to be the salt of the earth."
- "You *should be* the salt of the earth and light of the world."
- "You *have to be*,..."
- "You *better be*,..."

- He doesn't say, "It might be good for you to catch some classes at Salt and Light University to learn how to be salt."
- He doesn't say, "Go to the rabbi and elders and have them lay hands on you to beseech God to grant you saltiness."
- He doesn't say, "Take 30 minutes every morning to meditate and try to reach, and to be in touch with, your inner saltiness."

His comment is quite straightforward. **"You are the salt of the earth.** This is what and who you are. Don't forget it.

Think again about the uses of salt and how that compares to our calling as Christians.

**Flavor** Just as salt adds flavor to bland food, we as Christians should add zest to life! And show others how our lives are enhanced by a relationship with Jesus.

**Cleansing** - As the salt of the earth, we've been blessed to be a blessing. We have the honor of applying our salt as a healing balm to the wounded hearts of people.

**Preservative.** Just as salt is used to halt decay, we can act as a preservative in our world – slowing down the moral decay. As we live our lives following the standards God has established and a provided for us in scripture, we can be examples for others.

Salt was rubbed into meat to preserve it. In the same way, we "rub" against others in the world so that we may permeate them with our saltiness. We're called to be set apart and holy, not in a self-righteous way but in a way that sets a standard and clings to the God who loves us.

**Creates thirst.** When Christ interacted with people, he "salted" their lives, leaving them longing for more. Do we make others thirsty for Christ? When people are around us, do their parched souls pant for the water of life that they see flowing in our demeanor, our character, and our attitudes? Remember, Jesus said, **"You are the salt!"** Use that blessing to season our world and to create a thirst in others.

As Christians, we are to play all of these roles in the world, and are to remain salty by staying true to our mission and avoiding contamination of worldly ways. Jesus asked: *"If salt has lost its taste, how can its saltiness be restored?"* It cannot, of course. Contaminated salt *"is no longer good for anything, but is thrown out and trampled underfoot"* (v. 13).

"It's easy to become so saturated by selfishness and materialism, so engrossed by entertainment and politics, so anesthetized by religion and tradition that we're in danger of losing the uniqueness of who we are in Christ."

In case the salt metaphor wasn't clear, Jesus gave a second one: **"You are Light"** - lighthouses, spotlights, flashlights, lamps, candles – all shine light into the darkness. Once again, being light doesn't involve sitting through a college class, reading literature on the subject or meditating about it. It's a description.

And, like salt, light does not exist for its own benefit, but for the benefit of everything it illuminates. Light provides warmth and energy to the world around it, and encourages life and growth. We do the very same thing when we act as the light of the world, and when we reflect the light of Christ to others. Jesus wants to shine in and through us to illuminate the world with his light.

Yesterday at the Rock your Marriage conference, Dave Wilson, talked about this verse and highlighted something I hadn't thought of before - **"You are the light of the world. A city built on a hill cannot be hid."** The Greek doesn't say "built" it has 2 words that literally mean "strategically placed". In ancient times, cities were strategically placed on a hill so that travelers could see where they would find places of safety and refuge. (talk about city planning)

Jesus says: You are the light of the world not randomly placed but strategically placed right where you are to shine - into the next cubicle, the next person on the factory line, the next desk, etc.

Imagine God having a conversation in heaven- hey look there's Ole, heading to his cubicle. He's a believer so just watch this, he's going to shine. Ole sits down at his computer and gets to work.

Come on, Ole, Shine. Coworker leans over the divider, can I borrow your stapler – no, get your own. Wait come on Ole, you are meant to shine.

God wants you to shine, to be a beacon of light to the world. Why? Light attracts attention. Like beckoning blazes, we should attract lost and weary wanderers with the light of Christ. Light also dispels darkness and helps people find their way. Light offers hope to the hopeless. Jesus has commissioned us to carry the torch of his love into our dark world. But unfortunately, many of us only turn on our lights in the safe company of fellow believers. So, let's take off the covers and let God's light shine in and through us.

You know, we all have the same job description – Jesus says: **“You are the salt of the earth, you are the light of the world.”** I'm almost envious of all of you because my work tends to be primarily with other Christians, but all of you get to go out into the world. You get to go out and shine!

The most effective form of evangelism – is how you all live from Monday through Saturday. You are the only Bible some people will ever read. What will they see?

I was talking with a young man this week who shared with me that after work the other day, the guy who is training him in his new job looked at him and asked – are you a Christian? This young man was a bit surprised by the question because they hadn't talked about faith. But I think that's a perfect example of how someone is salt and light in everyday life. There was just something about him that was different and caught the man's attention – it was appealing to him.

When our salt is flavorful and our light is radiant, people take notice. Our challenge is to shine so that others will see what a life of love and faithfulness looks like.

There is so much darkness all around us, so much loneliness and isolation. We can truly be a light to the world through our words and our deeds. -- beacons of peace and reconciliation in a world that is so often full of conflict. Jesus says, If we perform such good

works, people will see them, and they will "give glory to our Father in heaven" (v. 16).

So how do we put this in practice? A few ideas for application:

- 1) Live right following teachings of scripture and we pray for the people you encounter on a regular basis who are not followers of Jesus.
- 2) Care about your neighbors. Start by being friendly. Do you know your neighbors names? Their kids? Show up and love the people around you. Be a good neighbor.
- 3) Be available and listen. As you pray and care for others, they will respond. People will come to you when they realize that you care. Remember that what may seem at first to be interruptions may actually be divine appointments for you to share Christ.
- 4) Share openly and follow through. For three years, Jesus poured his life into people. With words, deeds and attitudes, Jesus embodied the gospel. This is the example we've been given to follow. When the Spirit leads, pick up your saltshaker and light your lamp. Let's give the world a taste of the love of Jesus.

Amen