

Remembering Who You Are: Being Salt And Light

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Life As It Was Meant To Be

Matthew 5:13-16

Stephen Van Dop is the evangelism pastor here at Vineyard Columbus. He told me that when he was a teenager, every time he went out at night, his father always said the same thing to him, "Tonight, son, I want you to remember who you are." He said it was an amazing check on his behavior. He would be in one of those compromising teen situations and his dad's words would be echoing in his mind: "Remember who you are. You are a Van Dop, my son, act like it."

There is a man who lived in the 1800's, who ought to be much better known among Christians today than he is. In fact, most Christians have never heard of him. The man's name is Anthony Cooper. He is also known as Lord Shaftesbury. He became a leader in the British Parliament in obtaining legislation on behalf of the poor, and on behalf of workers. His father was a very ambitious politician. His mother was a wealthy socialite, who enjoyed going to parties. Both of his parents almost entirely ignored him but they employed a Christian housekeeper, who taught Anthony about the Bible and how to pray. It was through this Christian housekeeper that Anthony, as a young boy, was converted to Christ.

Like a lot of wealthy English kids, Anthony was sent off to boarding school. It was there at boarding school that he had an experience that changed his life. He was walking in the street and one day saw a group of shouting, cursing drunks carrying the coffin of a poor man to the cemetery. Well, one of the drunks stumbled and the coffin fell to the ground. The dead man's body rolled out into the street. The drunks began laughing and kicking the dead body. Anthony Cooper, who was later known as Lord Shaftesbury, was so horrified as he watched this scene. He said, "Something must be done to lift these poor men out of their depravity."

Well, Lord Shaftesbury became a member of Parliament and he began to work on behalf of the poor. In 1833 he introduced a bill limiting work for those under the age of 18 to 10 hours a day. Before that, it was common to have children as young as 8 working 13-16 hours a day. Children were being whipped by supervisors because they were unable to perform at a sufficient rate. Many children were crippled in factory accidents because they were so fatigued and there were no guards on the machines.

Then he took up the cause of women and children in mines. He found women working as "hurriers" and children as "pushers." The "hurriers" were women who crawled on their hands and knees pulling 200-pound pull carts by belts fastened

around their waists. The pushers were children who pushed the carts with their heads. The children had actually worn bald spots on their heads from pushing these heavy pull carts. He found children ages 4-8 spending 12-14 hours a day in dark mines. Finally, after fighting with powerful interest groups, these wealthy people who owned the mines, he was able to push through a law that prohibited children under the age of 10 from working in the mines. He also set up inspections of mines.

Then he became interested in the lot of chimney sweeps. Many of the chimney sweeps were orphans as young as 8 years old. Their employers often hardened their skin by soaking them in brine. In some cases, fires of damp straw were lit under the children in order to force them to go up into dark chimneys. After years of fighting, he was finally able to get legislation that prohibited using children as chimney sweeps.

He became interested in the issue of housing. He found nearly a thousand families who had one small room per family in London. In one case, he discovered a room that was 33x20 feet and there were 100 people sleeping in it.

Through his work he made life better for millions of people organizing pure water supplies, better drainage, more sanitary cemeteries. He set up schools and places where the poor could get free health care. At his funeral, more than 10,000 people came out. The representatives from 200 missions, schools, and hospitals packed Westminster Abbey and thousands and thousands of people stood outside. His son said, "When I saw the crowds which lined the streets as my father's body was borne to the Abbey – the halt, the blind, the maimed, the poor, standing midst a pelting rain patiently enduring to show their loving reverence to their departed friend, I thought it the most heart-stirring sight my eyes had ever looked upon. And I could only feel how happy was the man to whom it had been given to be thus useful in his life and to be laid at last to his long sleep amidst the sobs of a great nation's heart."

Lord Shaftesbury always remembered who he was. He said, "I'm a follower of Christ. And I want to live my life for two purposes: to honor God, and to promote human happiness."

Today as we continue in our study on the Sermon on the Mount, I've called my message, "Remembering Who You Are: Being Salt and Light." Matthew 5.13-16.

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Mt 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.

Mt 5:14 "You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden.

Mt 5:15 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.

Mt 5:16 In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.

Last week we talked about the negative response that the world can have towards people who have Christian character. We studied Matthew 5.10-12,

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Mt 5:10 Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Mt 5:11 "Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me.

Mt 5:12 Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

But rather than withdraw from the world which is often hostile to followers of Christ, Jesus calls for engagement with the world. He calls us to remember who we are and to act accordingly. We are salt and light.

You know, we Christians make extraordinary claims about Jesus. We say in the Nicene Creed that we believe:

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In one Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God, begotten from the Father before all time, Light from Light, True God from True God, begotten not created, of the same substance of the Father, through Whom all things came into being.

We Christians make extraordinary claims about Jesus. But do you know that Jesus makes extraordinary claims about Christians?

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We Christians Are Called:

- Abraham's Offspring
- The Body Of Christ
- The Bride Of Christ
- Children Of God
- Chosen People
- The Church Of The Living God
- The Dwelling Place Of God
- The Elect Of God
- The Family Of God
- The Flock Of God
- God's Church
- God's Household

- A Holy Nation
- Holy People
- A Holy Priesthood
- A Holy Temple
- The Israel Of God
- The People Of God
- The Pillar Of The Truth
- Priests
- A Pure Virgin
- Sons Of God
- The Temple Of God

And to these extraordinary titles Jesus, in Matthew 5, adds these two names. He says:

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- You Are The Salt Of The Earth
- You Are The Light Of The World

We Christians have to engage in what we might call double hearing about ourselves. We need to listen with both ears. With the left ear we hear the message: In myself I am nothing. In myself I am just a sinner. I am saved by grace. Sometimes Christian witness is described as one beggar telling another beggar where to find bread. The contemporary worship scene majors in left ear hearing, or what I would call, "I'm Just a Worm" songs. You know those songs, "Lord, I failed again. I keep on offending you. I am nothing. I'm crawling into your presence." And in ourselves we are nothing. In the Beatitudes Jesus tells us to come before God poor in spirit, to mourn over our sins, and to hunger and thirst for righteousness.

But we need to hear with the other ear, with our right ear, we need to hear who we are in Christ. Because of your relationship with Christ, here is what the Bible says about you. You are not just a worm or a failure. You are the bride of Christ, the temple of the living God, a son of God, a daughter of God. You are salt and light.

To keep us from pride and self-righteousness, we listen with our left ear. But to keep us from discouragement and despair, we have to listen with our right ear. Jesus is saying to those of you upon whom the kingdom of God has broken in, to those of you to whom the good news is come, if you are a kingdomized person, if you are a gospelized man or woman, Jesus says, "I make this extraordinary claim about you. Listen and let this inform your sense of self, let this shape your understanding of your identity, you are the salt of the earth. You are the light of the world."

The Romans had a saying that there was nothing more useful and necessary than sun and salt. Jesus is saying there is nothing in the world more useful, or more necessary than you who are followers of Christ. What extraordinary dignity Jesus gives to us, his followers.

Do you understand what Christ is saying? He is saying the world can get along without a lot of things. But the world cannot get along without Christians. Families, neighborhoods, schools, the media, and the arts – no place, no group, no legitimate human endeavor can do well without you Christians. You are as necessary to the health and well-being of the world as salt and sun.

Why are we so necessary? Why is the follower of Christ so useful? Some of you remember from high school physics there was something called the Second Law of Thermodynamics and entropy. What entropy means is that all systems tend toward chaos and disorder. It is the tendency of energy systems to run down. The universe, according to the law of entropy gets more random.

I think this is the scientific description of creation under the curse of sin. Things tend towards decay. Things tend towards degeneration. Things tend towards disorder. Look at the backseat of your car. Look at your desk. Look at the floor in your closet. What you are observing is the Second Law of Thermodynamics at work. Things tend to move from order to disorder in a fallen world.

When Jesus calls us salt and light he is communicating something about the nature of the world. Left to itself, the tendency of the world is to decay or spoil like meat. Left to itself, the world grows darker.

You know, at the end of the 19th century the dominant mood of the western world was one of optimism. Progress was the theme of so many magazine articles and political campaigns. People believed that they were living in the age of the ascent of man. In fact, a Christian magazine was so optimistic about the future that it called itself, “The Christian Century.” It is still being printed. But the 20th century was going to be the Christian century. The church was going to usher in the millennial reign of Christ in the 20th century.

But then the world plunged itself into WWI and Europe devoured itself over the course of four years. Still people clung to this idea of progress. They called WWI “the war to end all wars.” They said, “We’ve learned our lesson about war so we are going to form the League of Nations to prevent all wars in the future.”

Of course, we had an even more dreadful, WWII. The world learned about unimaginably horrible places called Auschwitz, Buchenwald, Treblinka, and Dachau. The world learned about unimaginably horrible activities such as gas chambers, mass graves, and medical experimentation on children. Still some people held on to this belief in the inevitable progress of mankind, especially here in the US.

Then we learned about mass killings in the Ukraine under the Soviets and the killing fields of Cambodia. We learned of the genocide in Rwanda. We also learned about our own American crimes in My Lai. We watched on TV in horror as churches were fire bombed with little girls inside, and civil rights workers were killed. We learned about the torture of prisoners in Iraq.

Left to itself, the world decays like meat left outside. Left to itself, the world grows darker and more confused. We lose clarity about what is good and what is bad. We praise moral perversion and we make fun of moral purity. Left to itself, the world is vulnerable to the latest fad, the latest marketing scheme, buzz words, and psycho-babble.

You want an illustration of the tendency of the world towards decay and darkness? Listen to the counsel given to 14-year old girls from a magazine titled *YM* (which stands for Your Magazine). It is a young teen girl magazine. Maybe some of your daughters read it.

Now I will make this a multiple choice test. A 14-year old girl writes in and says:

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My boyfriend isn't affectionate. We've only kissed once in 7 months – 3 months ago. I am miserable with him, but I know I am going to be miserable without him. What do I do?

- A. Stop basing your relationship on getting physical.
- B. Maybe the guy has manners, respect him for it.
- C. Before ending it, try to kiss him.
- D. Where are your parents?

The actual advice given to Lauren, who is age 14 and from Ohio, was, of course, C.

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C. Before ending it, try to kiss him.

The columnist added:

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Not to make light of this, but three months is a long time to go without a follow up move. Nothing says that guys are solely responsible for hooking up.

How about this one:

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I've been developing feelings for one of my girlfriends. The thing is, I am a girl too. I want to tell her, but I fear she doesn't feel the same way and our friendship will be ruined. Plus, students at school will harass me (I've already been teased for liking another girl). What should I do?

- A. Sexuality is very confusing at your age. Ask your parents what they think, and perhaps they can help you find a counselor or pastor to talk to.
- B. Have respect for the feelings of the other girl. While you may be confused about your sexuality, thrusting your confusion onto another girl is wrong.
- C. Join your school's gay-straight alliance, or find a local gay community center. You need more non-judgmental people in your life.
- D. Where are your parents?

Question #2 is from Michelle, who is 15 years old and lives in Ontario. And, you guessed it, "C" was the given advice:

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C. Join your school's gay-straight alliance, or find a local gay community center. You need more non-judgmental people in your life.

The columnist said,

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The possibility of ruining the friendship is high whether you are gay or straight, but sadly the world is a homophobic place and there is a chance your friend will get weirded out. Mention that you know a girl that is interested in her female friend. If she doesn't freak, it is a good sign for you to go for it.

This is the adult counsel for a young teenager: Go for a lesbian relationship! Go for it!

Do you know the only people who are surprised by moral decay, or by darkness in the world are people who do not know their bibles? In Paul's letter to the Romans in chapter 1, we read not about the ascent of mankind, but the descent. We read not about inevitable evolution, but about our devolution. We read not about human progress, but human regress. We read about what happens when the world is left to itself without Christ and without Christians.

SLIDE – Romans 1.21-32

Ro 1:21 For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened.

Ro 1:22 Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools
 Ro 1:23 and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like mortal man and birds and animals and reptiles.
 Ro 1:24 Therefore God gave them over in the sinful desires of their hearts to sexual impurity for the degrading of their bodies with one another.
 Ro 1:25 They exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator—who is forever praised. Amen.
 Ro 1:26 Because of this, God gave them over to shameful lusts. Even their women exchanged natural relations for unnatural ones.
 Ro 1:27 In the same way the men also abandoned natural relations with women and were inflamed with lust for one another. Men committed indecent acts with other men, and received in themselves the due penalty for their perversion.
 Ro 1:28 Furthermore, since they did not think it worthwhile to retain the knowledge of God, he gave them over to a depraved mind, to do what ought not to be done.
 Ro 1:29 They have become filled with every kind of wickedness, evil, greed and depravity. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit and malice. They are gossips,
 Ro 1:30 slanderers, God-haters, insolent, arrogant and boastful; they invent ways of doing evil; they disobey their parents;
 Ro 1:31 they are senseless, faithless, heartless, ruthless.
 Ro 1:32 Although they know God's righteous decree that those who do such things deserve death, they not only continue to do these very things but also approve of those who practice them.

You know, I would say parenthetically that we always think that God's discipline means that God is going to grab us by the choker collar and yank us back. Or that God's discipline means that God is going to put us over his knees and give us a good hard spanking. But you know, the Bible says there is something even more dreadful than being spanked by God. God's discipline often consists precisely in allowing us to obtain whatever we insist upon having.

Three times in this text, the apostle Paul utters these terrible words:

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God gave them over.

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Ro 1:24 **Therefore God gave them over** in the sinful desires of their hearts to sexual impurity for the degrading of their bodies with one another.

Ro 1:26 Because of this, **God gave them over** to shameful lusts. Even their women exchanged natural relations for unnatural ones.

Ro 1:28 Furthermore, since they did not think it worthwhile to retain the knowledge of God, **he gave them over** to a depraved mind, to do what ought not to be done.

Friend, do you understand that the worst thing that could happen to you is not that God will stop you from doing what you want to do, but that God will *not* stop you? That if you insist on crashing through all of God's fences, if you insist on ignoring God's warning signs, if you insist on rejecting God's voice echoing in your conscience saying, "Don't do this, it is against God's will, it is against what the Bible clearly says," then God will let you self-destruct. God will let you have your divorce or your extra-marital affair, or your hidden sexual habit, or your secret addiction. God's judgment on our lives consists precisely in God not stopping us from destroying our lives if that is what we are hell-bent on doing.

So we need to pray: "God have mercy on me. Keep me from my natural tendency to self-destruct. Keep me from my natural tendency to decay and to become darker and darker." Do you see this in yourself – the tendency to move further and further into darkness? Was there any period of your life when you saw this?

Jesus gives such encouragement to us telling us to remember who we are and act accordingly. Matthew 5.13, he says:

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Mt 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.

Jesus is such an amazing encourager. He says: You, Christian, can arrest the decay in the world.

Why does Jesus call us salt? Well, in the ancient world salt was primarily used as a preservative. Wherever the world has not had refrigeration, people have used salt to keep meat wholesome and to prevent spoilage. A little bit of salt rubbed into meat can have an amazing impact of preserving the meat.

It is easy to grow discouraged when we think about how few we Christians are, that we are the only Christians in our departments, or in our workplaces. How you might stand alone in your family. Maybe your spouse is not a Christian, or your parents do not follow Christ. Maybe you are the only Christian in your entire extended family. Have you ever felt totally insignificant as a follower of Christ compared to the size and scope of what you are up against?

When I taught at OSU, I was sometimes overwhelmed by the size of the university. I used to pray for God to visit the college that I was teaching in and in some of the other departments. Some of you who are down at OSU, maybe you feel overwhelmed by the hostility of some of the professors to your Christian faith, or the opposition you might be receiving from some departments or

administrators, or in the dormitories or fraternities. Do you sometimes feel overwhelmed, friend, as you look out on the decay in our city? Do you feel overwhelmed as you look out on the darkness in our world?

Jesus is giving you and me a word of encouragement. He is saying: You do not have to be bigger than the opposition to arrest the decay. The mass of salt doesn't have to be as weighty as the mass of meat into which the salt is rubbed. A little salt will preserve a much larger piece of meat from decaying. Remember who Jesus is talking to when he said these words. He is talking to a small insignificant rag-tag bunch of uneducated disciples who were up against the whole Roman Empire and the whole religious establishment. Jesus is saying: You lonely, isolated, tiny Christian grain of salt, do you know that whenever you refuse to laugh or even smile at a racist joke that is told in your work place, or by a family member, you keep things from decaying further?

You insignificant Christian grain of salt, when you practice forgiveness and mercy, when you choose to take the high road in your family that is wracked by broken relationships and fighting. You, Christian, can bring healing to your whole family system. When you one, single, solitary Christian grain of salt stand up for your faith in a place where it is hard to do that, the whole polluted atmosphere of that place can change. You Christian can be a fresh ocean breeze blowing through a smoke-filled room.

When one single person manifests peace and confidence in Jesus Christ in a situation where everybody else is panicked and hopeless and despairing, the salt is going to do its work. You are keeping the world from despair. Be encouraged. You are the salt of the earth. Be encouraged. Remember who you are, Jesus says: "You are the light of the world."

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Mt 5:14 "You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden.

You know, people everywhere see that there is a problem. There are problems in our schools. There is a breakdown of order and discipline in many schools. There are problems in our families. Many families suffer from domestic violence, from various addictions to alcohol or drugs. People see that there are problems and we often ask: "Is it nature or nurture?" Is the problem one of our genetics? Is that why we have this problem? Is it because of our genes? Do we have this problem because of our family of origin? Genetics can play a role and so can our family of origin, but Jesus says: "You are the light of the world." In part, that means that as light, you shine and reveal the ultimate cause of the world's problems. If we are going to find answers to the problems in the world, or the problems in our family, or the problems in our own life, we have to correctly diagnose the issue. Here is Jesus' diagnosis of the problem in our lives and the problem in the world. John 3.19,

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Jn 3:19 This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but men loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil.

Why is the world condemned? What is the ultimate cause for all the problems in the world – the suicide bombings, the murders here in Columbus, the utter disregard for the poor in Asia and Africa? What is the ultimate cause for the rampant pornography on the Internet, the unbelievable greed and self-indulgence of us as Americans, where nothing is ever enough?

The world says, “Well, the ultimate cause is ignorance.” We constantly look to education to solve our problems. If we can just improve our schools; if we can just lift test scores; if we can just figure out a way to get kids not to drop out. Maybe we could pay kids to stay in school. But John tells us that the problem in the world goes deeper than ignorance. The problem is a twist in our natures. John 3.19,

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Jn 3:19 This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but men loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil.

Here is the diagnosis – people love darkness rather than light. This is the root cause of all of our unhappiness. This is the reason why no one and nothing ever makes us truly happy, no matter how much we have. This is the reason why your boyfriend, or girlfriend, or a possession, or drinking, or drugs, or an experience, or travel doesn't truly make you happy. John 3.19 explains why a moment after we get the latest, greatest thing, we are still not satisfied and there remains a hole inside of us.

The light of the gospel reveals why the world is so confused and so confusing. The problem is with our natures. We have a fallen, polluted, sinful nature. We love darkness rather than light.

But you know, light not only reveals the nature of our problem, it also reveals the solution. If the problem is our natures, there is something inside of us that is twisted and broken, the solution is that you and I need new natures. This is what the Christian gospel message, the good news of Christianity, is all about. You want to understand the essence of Christianity? It consists in this: You must be born again.

Ultimately, friends, you don't need more self-help books, more advice, more clothes, and another couch, some external fix of your body or environment. Ultimately, what you need is a new nature. You need a new heart. A heart that will love the light and hate the darkness. You need a new nature that will love

God and his commandments and hate sin and disobedience. You and I need to be taken hold of by God. Friend, have you ever been taken hold of by God? Do you have a new nature? Are you sure? If you say, "Yes, I'm sure God has put a new nature in me," are you living in accordance with that nature? Do you remember who you are and act accordingly?

It is not enough that we hear the right thing to do. If we hear the right thing to do, but we don't have a new nature, we are never going to want to do that right thing. A person in darkness will never be able to find their way to God. But you Christian, as the light of the world, you are here to tell people that there is a way to God. The way to God is named Jesus. He came from heaven to earth to seek and to save that which is lost. He came to shine in the darkness, to expose the cause of darkness, to allow us to know that there is something wrong inside of us and to make a new and living way out of the darkness so that people can come back to God.

Jesus not only bore the guilt of our sins by dying for us on the cross; Jesus not only offers the forgiveness of our sins. Jesus offers us a totally new nature. He doesn't just give us new teaching or new understanding of our problems. He doesn't just simply forgive our past sins. He makes us new people with new desires and new ambitions. He puts new loves in our hearts so that we have a new orientation towards light. Above everything else that Jesus gives to you or me, he gives us new natures that love the light and hate the darkness.

Friends, you are called to act as salt and light. The world needs you to act – to get out of the salt shaker and to get on top of the light stand. The world needs you, follower of Christ, to act. Matthew 5.15-16,

SLIDE

Mt 5:15 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.

Mt 5:16 In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.

You know, we ask the wrong question all the time. We look out on Iran or Afghanistan and we say: "What's wrong with these folks?" There is so much violence in Central Asia. What's wrong with these folks – with their oppression of women and the repression of freedom?

The question is not what's wrong with these folks as you look out on different parts of the world. The question is: "Where are the Christians?" Why have so few Christians chosen to be missionaries to Muslim countries? Why do churches spend so little on world missions? Do you know that we Americans spend more

on dog food every year than we do on world missions? If something is wrong in the world, we need to ask: "Where is the salt? Where is the light?"

We look at Hollywood and Christians often complain about the violence, the gratuitous sexuality, and the obvious pro-abortion, or pro-euthanasia, or pro-premarital sex messages in so many movies. What's wrong with Hollywood is the wrong question. The right question is, where are the Christians? Where is the influence of the church on Hollywood?

We look at inner-city neighborhoods and see the decay, the gangs, the drug abuse, the crimes, the hopelessness, the joblessness. We say what's wrong with this neighborhood? That is the wrong question. The right question to ask is where are the Christians in the inner city? Where is the salt and the light?

When meat goes bad, we don't blame the meat. As John Stott rightly asks, "where is the salt? When a room is dark, we don't curse the darkness, we turn on a light."

By the grace of God, there are so many hopeful signs in America right now that Christians are beginning to get it. There are many young Christians flocking to Hollywood right now wanting to make a difference. In 1999 Barbara Nicolosi, who was a nun turned into a movie executive, founded Act One to cultivate aspiring Christian screenwriters. Over the last seven years, she has recruited 300 Christians to come to Hollywood and she's taught them how to write screenplays based on Christian moral values, such as the sacredness of human life, the idea that good and evil aren't equal, and the notion that you are never forced to choose something evil.

Christians understand that film is shaping our culture. It is movies that have been shaping our understanding of life and its meaning. Christians have been, up until now, absent from the discussion. But the hopeful thing is that Christians are beginning to get involved.

I believe we need efforts like Act One here locally. We need young orthodox Christians penetrating the arts community in Columbus. We need orthodox Christians penetrating the business community here in Columbus. We need orthodox Christians penetrating the court system and politics and journalism here in Central Ohio.

There are hopeful signs. I see hopeful signs across America in our inner cities. When the church chooses to leave the city and races out towards the country, what do you expect to happen other than decay? But if the church chooses to act as salt and light, things can change. That is why I am so encouraged that this church has chosen to build a community center to offer educational programs, GEDs, parenting classes, addiction recovery programs, free legal

clinics, free medical clinics, after-school programs for young people, and an early childhood center that is opening up next month.

Have you heard of the Dream Center started by 21-year old Matthew Barnett in 1994? The Dream Center – he calls it, “the church that never sleeps.” He has a 200-volunteer staff. Its campus, which is a former hospital, houses 400 people in its rehab and discipleship programs. They feed more than 25,000 people a week. They have a wellness clinic, a mobile medical unit, dozens of effective ministries that are meeting the needs block after block in inner city LA. That is the church acting as salt and light.

The world needs you to remember who you are and to act accordingly. But you know, friends, your own spiritual growth demands that you remember who you are and that you act accordingly. There is a personal reason to act as salt and light. It is for our own spiritual growth. It is so easy for us Christians to stay in the salt shaker around other grains of salt, going from one fellowship meeting to another, moving from Christian school to Christian college, to the church world. A lot of folks falsely think, “I have to grow stronger in my own faith before I can have any impact on the world. I have to hang out in the salt shaker for another year, another two years, and another ten years and then I will really have influence.”

What a satanic lie. Brothers and sisters, do you understand that the way you grow stronger in your faith is by giving yourself away. Here is what Philemon 6 says:

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Phm 1:6 I pray that you may be active in sharing your faith, so that you will have a full understanding of every good thing we have in Christ.

It is as you share your faith that you develop your spiritual muscles. When you share your faith, people are going to ask you questions. They are going to challenge your views. You are forced to think. You are forced to learn. You are forced to grow in love. You are forced to grow in patience. It is as you engage with the world that you sharpen your understanding. Constant separation, constant protection from the world makes you spiritually weak. We grow as we get out of our comfort zones.

As you get nearer the world, as the salt gets rubbed into the meat, that is where it gains its potency. The worst thing in the world is to stay in the salt shaker. The worst thing for you as a Christian is to cover your light with a bowl.

You know, it is easy to believe that the strong winds of this evil world will blow out our little candle of faith. We are so foolish. If we just took Jesus at his word, we

find that the wind actually causes our faith to burn more brightly. Talk with someone in our church who has gone down and accompanied our homeless ministry to one of the homeless camps in Columbus. Typically, middle-class folks go down to a homeless camp for the first time with our ministry team are a little scared. They say, "I've never been with a group of homeless guys before. I don't know what to say. I don't know what to do. I don't know if my little candle of faith is strong enough for this." Invariably, you meet that same, scared, insecure person three hours later and they are absolutely glowing. The light inside is burning white hot. God has shown up and they come away spiritually lit up.

The same thing is true whenever you stretch yourself. People say: "I can't do children's ministry. I am not an expert around kids. I don't know how I will relate. I am not a great teacher." But folks get involved in children's ministry and guess what? For the first time in their lives, they learn the Bible. I have talked to person after person who said, "You know how I really got to learn the Bible? I taught it to children. That is how I learned the Old Testament. I taught it to kids. I didn't even know some of the stories before I read them and prepared them for children."

It is only when we are exposed to the risky wind that we burn bright – learn how to pray for the sick; or learn how to do a deliverance. And friend, listen to me. Whenever you are tempted to cover up your faith, when you are tempted to put a bowl over your witness because something seems risky, because you are getting too vulnerable, understand that it is Satan who is handing you the bowl. You get this thought in your mind: "Don't leave your Bible out on your desk. The wrong person may see it." Satan is saying, "Here, let me give you a bowl to cover up that Bible."

You get this thought: "Don't speak about Jesus Christ. Don't use the name Jesus." Satan is saying, "Let me hand you a bowl. Just talk vaguely about God – even better, talk about spirituality." "Don't share that word of prophecy. It's too risky." Satan hands you a bowl and you had better keep it to yourself.

You get this thought: "I'd better not send a letter into the newspaper about a controversial issue. People are going to see my name and they are going to think poorly of me." Satan is saying, "Here, can I give you a bowl? Just write about popular things. Write in a totally innocuous style. Best of all, drop the idea of writing altogether. Let me give you a bowl."

Friend, you grow as you let the salt in your life penetrate this world. You grow as you let the light that is in you hang from a stand and dispel the darkness. You are the salt of the earth. You are the light of the world. Remember who you are when you leave this place today. Act as salt. Act as light. Let's pray.

Remembering Who You Are: Being Salt And Light

Rich Nathan
February 11-12, 2006
Life As It Was Meant To Be
Matthew 5:13-16

I. You Are The Most Necessary Thing In The World (Mt. 5.13-16)

- A. The Identity Of The Christian In Christ
- B. The Condition Of The World Without Christ (Rom. 1.21ff)

II. You Are The Preservative For The World (Mt. 5.13)

III. You Are The Light Of The World (Mt. 5.14)

- A. Light Reveals The Problem (Jn. 3.19)
- B. Light Reveals The Solution (Jn. 3.7)

IV. You Are Called To Act As Salt And Light

- A. The World Needs You To Act (Mt. 5.15, 10)
- B. Your Own Growth Demands That You Act (Phm. 6)