

## Douglas Scalise, Brewster Baptist Church

Today we are moving on from the Beatitudes to the beginning of the rest of the Sermon on the Mount. We said the Beatitudes were focused more on being than doing. In today's passage, Jesus begins to talk about the relationship of what we are to be doing because of who God calls us to be.

**"You are the salt of the earth**; but if salt has lost its taste, how can its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything, but is thrown out and trampled under foot.

**You are the light of the world**. A city built on a hill cannot be hid.

No one after *lighting a lamp* puts it under the bushel basket, but on the lampstand, and it *gives light* to the whole house. In the same way, **let your light shine before others**, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven."

Salt light are kind of tired metaphors that been shaken shined by preachers so many times for so long that their power to spice up illuminate communication has perhaps diminished somewhat in the last 2,000 years, but let's take these old favorites off the shelf see what Jesus is using them to illustrate.

Jesus is saying a lot in these two images.

You are the salt of the earth. You are the light of the world.

**The "you" here is plural** which means it is the disciples, the church, the faith community as a whole, not any individual who is the salt of the earth the light of the world. **When Jesus says the church is salt light he is talking about the function the purpose of the church.** Jesus uses examples of salt light when they are not fulfilling their proper function, their purpose, their mission. Salt that has lost its taste. Salt without saltiness is useless. Jesus says it's good for nothing except to be thrown away used to make footpaths for folks to walk on. A lamp that is hidden under a bushel basket is pointless. Why light a lamp if you're not going to let it shine?

**Salt light are two entities that, if they are functioning properly, have the power to transform everything they touch. Jesus is saying this is the way it should be with his followers, that together, if we are functioning properly, we have the power to transform the world.**

What do we know about salt?

First of all, salt adds flavor, zest, gives life to what it touches. When we go to Maine one of the things I anticipate is eating Pier Fries in Old Orchard Beach. They have terrific, thick French fries made from Maine potatoes that keep many a dietician cardiologist in

business. We usually get the largest size, a box, you can eat them plain they're okay, but when you shake some salt on them, they're fabulous.

Just ask anyone who has been placed by their doctor on a low salt diet they will tell you, salt adds flavor, zest, life to food. Jesus is saying his followers, the church, are to add zest, spice, flavor to life in the world.

Now I may be mistaken on this point, but I don't know how many people inside or outside the church if we played a word association game would respond to the word "church" with words like "zesty, spicy, exciting, it makes my mouth water just hearing the word 'church'." Sadly, many people both inside outside the church would describe the nature of the church in exactly the opposite way that Jesus does. They would say the church is bland boring, tasteless, not adding anything to their lives. The image too many people have of the church is nothing like what Jesus envisioned. Wouldn't it be great to hear people say, *"I go to Brewster Baptist Church because it is such a lively, zesty, church – it adds God's flavors of love, joy, hope, peace to my life."*

When the funny pointed movie *Sister Act* came out a number of years ago, the whole premise was that church worship are dull, deady enterprises that have little to do with anything that takes place beyond the church building. When Whoopi Goldberg's character, Deloris, starts using popular music from the 50's 60's with the choir, the Mother Superior flips her lid, but people begin coming in off the streets. When the nuns take the bars off the windows take their faith to the community with a touch of love providing meals, day care, job training to their poor inner city neighborhood, it nets them publicity on the evening news. They begin adding life meaning to the people around them changing their lives in the process. That's what a salty church is supposed to do.

Salt not only adds flavor, zest, life, in Jesus' day **salt also was used as a preservative**. Another way the church is like salt is that it is the vessel that will preserve pass on the teaching story of Jesus. "Pass the salt" takes on new meaning when we think about the salt as the teaching story of what God has done for us in Jesus. Are you passing the salt, or keeping it to yourself? At a dinner table if someone asked you to pass the salt you ignored the request or refused to, it would be rude. Jesus commands us to pass the salt, to share the gospel with those around us, we don't want to share it rudely, but we do want to share the salt of Christ, freely appropriately, not only with those who ask for it, but with those whose plate may be full, or whose plate may be nearly empty who are looking at it wondering, *"Is this all there is to my life, is this what I'm stuck with, is there any way to make this better?"* To which you can reply, *"Would*

*you like some salt with that? Because I've got something that will make what you have in front of you a whole lot easier to swallow."*

**Salt adds flavor, it preserves, it was also used to purify, to fight against corruption decay.** Another function of the followers of Jesus is to fight against the corruption decay in the culture around us wherever we find it whether in the church, business, politics, wherever. Salt purifies cleanses which is also a function of the church. To help purify cleanse not only individuals from their sins, but the culture at large to make it a kinder, more compassionate, holier, more just society.

So salt gives life, preserves, purifies, those of us in the northeast know one other function of salt that's hard to imagine given our weather in recent weeks. Salt is spread in the winter on ice snow on sidewalks, driveways roads to melt the ice **provide better traction** so folks don't slip fall or have accidents. In the same way, the function of the church is to keep people from falling hurting themselves or other people. The church helps people get a grip on life enables us to move forward with greater assurance confidence. The church isn't supposed to knock people down or push them over. On the slick sheer ice of life, we can help provide traction, help folks regain their balance, be a resting place before folks resume their journey.

Salt is pretty remarkable, when you think about it, but before we get to feeling too good about ourselves since Jesus says we are the salt of the earth, Jesus closes his word about salt with a warning, if his followers are not who we are supposed to be, if we're not carrying out our function to add flavor, zest, life, if we aren't preserving passing on Jesus' teaching, if we aren't purifying corruption decay, if we aren't providing traction to people who are slipping falling in life, then Jesus says, we are good for nothing except to be thrown out walked on. God will cast us out seek new salt.

There are all kinds of salt.

A man walked into a little mom-and-pop grocery store and asked, *"Do you sell salt?"* *"Ha!"* said Pop the proprietor. *"Do we sell salt! Just look!"* And Pop showed the customer one entire wall of shelves stocked with nothing but salt—Morton salt, iodized salt, kosher salt, sea salt, rock salt, garlic salt, seasoning salt, Epsom salts—every kind of salt imaginable. *"Wow!"* said the customer.

*"You think that's something?"* said Pop with a wave of his hand. *"That's nothing! Come look."* And Pop led the customer to a back room filled with shelves bins cartons barrels boxes of salt. *"Do we sell salt!"* he said. *"Unbelievable!"* said the customer.

*“You think that's something?” said Pop. “Come! I'll show you salt!”*

And Pop led the customer down some steps into a huge basement, five times as large as the previous room, filled wall, floor, to ceiling, with every imaginable form size shape of salt—even huge ten-pound salt licks for the cow pasture.

*“Incredible!” said the customer. “You really do sell salt!”*

***“No!” said Pop. “That's just the problem! We never sell salt! But that salt salesman—Hoo-boy! Does he sell salt!”<sup>1</sup>***

**Salt that stays on the shelf doesn't do any good at all. Salt is made to get out of the saltshaker into the world.** Salt sitting in a container or in a pretty, ornamental, crystal salt shaker doesn't do any good, doesn't fulfill its function purpose, doesn't add anything to life. In fact, in humid weather like we've been having this summer, what happens to salt in a saltshaker if it isn't used? All the individual grains of salt end up all stuck together they can't get out of the saltshaker like they are supposed to. They get all clumped together, hanging on to each other as a result the salt is useless – it can't do what you put it in the saltshaker to do. The same thing can happen to Christians the church. We can end up spending so much time together with our Christian friends folks from church we can spend so much time at church, hanging out with each other that we end up stuck together we don't do what we were put in the saltshaker to do. Jesus is saying that God will do the same thing with us that we do with our salt shaker, which is take the cap off, throw out the clumpy salt that forgot its function, put new salt in. Now I know right at this moment, that the Julia Childs, Martha Stewarts, Miss Heloise's in church today are all thinking, *“Well if you put rice in the salt shaker, then the salt doesn't stick together.”* That doesn't have anything to do with what Jesus is saying or my sermon; however, I knew you were thinking that it probably says something about the value of diversity in the church. We've got to get some more rice in here that's for sure.

**One really important point about salt is, salt can only fulfill its function purpose when it is in close proximity to that which it is going to flavor, preserve, purify, or provide traction for.** Salt has to be in touch with fried clams or French fries to flavor them. You can put the saltshaker right next to the clam but it won't do any good. Churches Christians are the same way, we can be plunked down on Main Street in the middle of town, but as followers of Jesus we need to be in close proximity to the people for whom we are to be salt light.

---

<sup>1</sup> D. James Kennedy, *Led by the Carpenter* (Thomas Nelson, 1999), p. 46.

Light, that's right, I almost didn't get to the second image of light, but that is one you've probably heard more often. It's important to notice that the salt is for the EARTH, not for our selves. The light is for the WORLD, not for our own benefit, or for our town, our area, or even our nation. Jesus is challenging the faith community as a whole to fulfill its mission of being serving as salt light for **the world**.

Let me say briefly say a little about light. Think for a moment about whom Jesus is talking to when he says, "*You are the light of the world.*" He is talking to uneducated fishermen, tax collectors, the materially poor as well as the poor in spirit, the mournful meek, those hungering thirsting for righteousness, the merciful pure in heart, peacemakers, those being persecuted reviled for Jesus' sake. Now in John's Gospel Jesus says, "*I am the light of the world.*" You may say, "Well which is it, is Jesus the light of the world or are his followers the light of the world?" the answer is, "Both." Jesus is the source of the light. The role of his followers the church is to be a reflector of the light of Christ.

Light exists to be seen, to be shared, to illuminate, even to give life. Once upon a time a little candle stood in a room filled with other candles, most of them much larger and much more beautiful than she was. Some were ornate and some were rather simple, like herself. Some were white, some were blue, some were pink, some were green. She had no idea why she was there, and the other candles made her feel rather small and insignificant.

When the sun went down and the room began to get dark, she noticed a large man walking toward her with a ball of fire on a stick. She suddenly realized that the man was going to set her on fire. "*No, no!!*" she cried, "*Aaaaagghhh! Don't burn me, please!*" But she knew that she could not be heard and prepared for the pain that would surely follow. To her surprise, the room filled with light. She wondered where it came from since the man had extinguished his fire stick. To her delight, she realized that the light came from herself. Then the man struck another fire stick and, one by one, lit the other candles in the room. Each one gave out light as she did.

During the next few hours, she noticed that, slowly, her wax began to flow. She became aware that she would soon die. With this realization came a sense of why she had been created. "*Perhaps my purpose on earth is to give out light until I die,*" she mused.

And that's exactly what she did.

God created us to share light in a dark world. Like that little candle, we all can produce light, no matter how small we are or what color we might be. But we can't produce light until we receive it from an outside source. That source is Jesus Christ, the light of the world.

Many of us associate fear with darkness. When we lose power at night it is amazing how comforting a single candle can be – provided you have matches. One candle burning brightly can transform fear uncertainty into comfort understanding. Menacing shapes are plainly seen to be a familiar table or closet. Light must be visible to fulfill its purpose. A lighthouse built where ships could not see it would be a useless project. The church is to be like a city on a hill, like a lamp in full view. The church is called to visibility. The church is to be a beacon of light hope in the darkness of a despairing world. We are working on replacing the windows in the old part of the church building, that is a good reminder that the church itself is not the light, but only the window for the One who said (John 8:12), **“I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life.”** That light is meant to be seen. It is the light of servanthood. It is a light for the nations.

We live in a world that is filled with the darkness brought by spiritual emptiness, selfish, corrupt incompetent leaders, poverty, diseases such as HIV/AIDS, illiteracy, racism, injustice, immoral business practices, hunger. God created us called us to be salt light in a world desperate for life light. God didn't make bless us to be so we could hide in the safety of a saltshaker or an overturned bushel basket. In an age when many people think the church is no more than useless salt a light unto ourselves, Jesus is longing for us to break out into the world with clear demonstrations of God's love compassion. Every single one of us is a grain of salt in the saltshaker of God. The Almighty is looking upon the people of Cape Cod at the saltshaker that is the church. When God sees someone who needs a little life, love, hope, God picks up the saltshaker turns it upside down starts shaking.

But sometimes nothing comes out. We don't want to be a church where all the people lock hands together, holding on to each other, saying, *“I'm not going out there, do you know what those people are like? I'm not trained, I'm not prepared, I'm too busy, I'm too weak, too old, too young, too poor, too rich, I don't know enough, I know too much, I'm too tired, I'm too busy...”* And all the while God keeps shaking the saltshaker because God made us to be poured out for others just like Jesus was.

So when you're with people in your family, at work, in your neighborhood, in any setting, be thinking, "*Is Jesus trying to get me out of the saltshaker into her or his life? What value can I add to them, how can I be a blessing to them through a word of encouragement, a pray, or an act of compassion?*"

The life, love, light we share is not for our sake or so that folks will say we're wonderful. Jesus says we let our light shine before others, so that they may see our good works and give glory to our Father in heaven.

Some people like to carry around a cross in their pocket or on a necklace as a reminder of Jesus' sacrifice for us. I wish I had the time this week to have gotten a little packet of salt that we could have given you as you left today to carry around in your pocket to remind you how God wants to use you, but I hope every time you see a saltshaker or packet or container or even taste the salt on your lips after a swim, that it will remind of who God called you to be what God wants you to do.

"Jesus tells us in the Sermon on the Mount that we are the salt of the earth.

And he challenges us not to lose our savor - our saltiness. This means - among other things - that we are to be active in the world as his representatives.

We are to get out of the saltshaker and into life itself. Not to be trodden down, but to be zestful witnesses to Jesus as Lord and Savior, as the one who alone gives life and meaning to a dying a world. The rabbit-hole Christian remains insulated and isolated from the world when he is commanded to penetrate it.

How can we be the salt of the earth if we never get out of the saltshaker?

We are not insulated and isolated from the world neither are we complacent and blind to its agonies and sorrows and darkness of heart. We are salt and light.

We make a difference because we are different.

And when we live before God as we truly are,

God will change the world in which we live."

Rebecca Pippert, in her book, *Out of the Saltshaker Into the World*.

Blessing:

**"Have salt in yourselves be at peace with one another."** Mark 9:50b

**"Do all things without murmuring arguing, so that you may be blameless innocent, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked perverse generation, in which you shine like stars in the world."** Philippians 2:14-15

**“For once you were in darkness, but now in the Lord you are light.  
Live as children of the light – for the fruit of the light is found in all that is good  
right true.” Ephesians 5:8-9.**