

Life Improvements --- Mountaintop Makeover --- Salt & Light = Praise

Isaiah 2:1-8 & Matthew 5:13-16

“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.” Matthew 5:16

Isaiah 2:1-5

The word that Isaiah son of Amoz saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem. ² In days to come the mountain of the LORD's house shall be established as the highest of the mountains, and shall be raised above the hills; all the nations shall stream to it. ³ Many peoples shall come and say, “Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob; that he may teach us his ways and that we may walk in his paths.” For out of Zion shall go forth instruction, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem. ⁴ He shall judge between the nations, and shall arbitrate for many peoples; they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more. ⁵ O house of Jacob, come, let us walk in the light of the LORD!

The other day I received an e-mail with some church humor in it. A very gracious lady was mailing an old family Bible to her brother in another part of the country. “Is there anything breakable in here?” asked the postal clerk. “Only the Ten Commandments.”

We aren't studying the Ten Commandments but we are spending some time taking a long drink from the well of wisdom found in the Sermon on the Mount. Today's passage is a very famous passage teaching about the influence we as Christians should have in our world.

Let us listen for God's word for us today from Jesus' teaching on the Sermon on the Mount, found in Matthew. Let us pray --- May God's word be alive and redemptive. May God's word shape us and mold us. May we become salt and the light for our world. Amen

Matthew 5:13-16

¹³ *“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.”* ¹⁴ *“You are the light of the world. A city built on a hill cannot be hid. ¹⁵ No one after lighting a lamp puts it under the bushel basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all in the house. ¹⁶ 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.”*

In the Beatitudes, Jesus tells us that we are to be poor in spirit, called to be merciful and meek, hungering and thirsting for righteousness in order that we may be “the salt of the earth and the light of the world.” In essence, what Jesus is telling the people gathered on that mountainside is that they are to not to just sit around listening about how to be a Christian, they are to go out and BE a Christian. Jesus clearly states the purpose of the Christian life --- to be salt and light in our world!

SALT: PRESERVATIVE and FLAVOR

In the days of Jesus and for many centuries thereafter, salt was the most common preservative used. There were no refrigerators, no deep-freezers in ancient times. Salt was used to keep things from going bad and becoming rotten, particularly meat. When Jesus said, *“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 underfoot.”* He was telling His disciples that they were called to be the preserving agent to a decaying world. The simple principle is that you and I are called to be a preserving force in the world--wherever we are called to live, work, and play.

Think of it this way --- salt that never leaves the shelf will do no good in preserving anything. To be effective, the salt had to be rubbed into the meat. Have you gone into the grocery store and looked at all of the “rubs” they have for seasoning your steak? In the same way we must allow God to use as flavorful seasoning for our homes, workplaces, neighborhoods, families, and church. A small amount of love and kindness goes a long way in making our world a better place. Did you hear that the Hollywood stars turned out and collected 54 MILLION DOLLARS for Haiti the other night? One hundred stars joined together—and the nation of Haiti will begin to be preserved.

The other day I went to the grocery store to do some shopping for the Elder/ Deacon Retreat that we had here yesterday. When I went to buy some juice, I came across an insight on flavoring. I was holding a bottle of Blueberry Pomegranate Juice. There was a picture of a ripe pomegranate spilling its exotic, glistening seeds onto mounds of fat, perfect blueberries. I read the ingredient list: "Filtered water, pear juice concentrate, apple juice concentrate, grape juice concentrate." Where was the blueberry? Where was the pomegranate? Finally I found them, fifth and seventh in a list of nine ingredients.

By law, food ingredients are listed in descending order of weight. Meaning a product contains the greatest proportion of the first ingredient on the list and successively less of those farther down the list. According to the jug in my hand, it contained mostly water—a few other juices, with just enough blueberry and pomegranate for flavor and color.

In the bottom corner of the front label in small, easy-to-miss type, were the tell-tale words: "Flavored juice blend with other natural ingredients." The enticing pictures and clever labeling were decoys to sell a diluted, blueberry-pomegranate *flavored* product convincingly disguised to look like something it wasn't. I put the juice back on the shelf. I chose the juice that was more costly—but it had more of what I was looking for.

What if we had an ingredients list printed on us? Would Jesus be the main ingredient? If not, how far down the list would He be? Would our "label" accurately represent our contents? Or would we falsely project a misleading outward-appearance that cleverly masked our diluted ingredients? Our packaging may be convincing. We may look and sound like the real thing but what if someone came looking for Jesus and found something else?

Oliver Wendell Holmes once said, “I might have entered the ministry if certain clergymen I knew had not looked and acted so much like undertakers.”ⁱⁱ

More than a hundred years ago the atheist philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche reproached a group of Christians. Nietzsche said: "Yuck, you make me sick!" When their spokesman asked why, he answered, "because you redeemed don't look like you are redeemed. You are as fearful, guilt-ridden, anxious confused, and adrift in an alien environment as I am. I am allowed. I don't believe. I have nothing to hope for. But you people claim you have a Savior. Why don't you look like you are saved?"ⁱⁱⁱ

LIGHT IN A DARK WORLD

Last week, I challenged you to consider on what kind of foundation you are building on. Are you going to be a wise-builder or a foolish-builder? Are you going to build your life on sinking sand or are you going to build your life on the ROCK of Christ? As I have been working on this sermon series, I came across this great illustration about building on the ROCK and letting your light shine.

Eleven miles off the east coast of Scotland, in the North Sea, stands the Bell Rock Lighthouse. It has endured the ferocious onslaught of the North Sea's violent storms since 1811. It rests upon less than one acre of solid rock. That small reef is covered by seawater for 20 hours of every day. The builder of the lighthouse, Robert Stevenson and his band of 65 skilled artisans, had only four hours each day to chink away the stone and gouge a foundation in the rock. As a result of this painstakingly patient work, the 115-foot-tall lighthouse is still in use today.

In 1972, a young Egyptian businessman named Farahat lost an \$11,000 watch. He was stunned when a garbage man dressed in filthy rags found it and returned it to him. Farahat asked him why he didn't just keep the watch. The garbage man said, "My Christ told me to be honest until death." Farahat later told a reporter: "I didn't know Christ at the time, but I told [the garbage man] that I saw Christ in him. I told [him], 'Because of what you have done and your great example, I will worship the Christ you are worshiping.'"

Farahat studied the Bible and grew in his faith. Two years later he visited the garbage man's village outside Cairo, where between 15,000 and 30,000 people were living in poverty and squalor. There was no electricity or running water. Alcohol, drugs, and gambling were pervasive. Men, women, and children sifted through huge mountains of garbage, looking for something of value that could be sold for cash or traded for food. Farahat found himself reflecting on the words of Jesus: "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." He also remembered the words of the apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 4:13: "We have become as the scum of the world, the dregs of all things." It was soon thereafter that Farahat and his wife began ministering to people's spiritual and material needs. They preached the gospel throughout Egypt, and thousands of people turned to Christ.

In 1978, Farahat was ordained by the Coptic Orthodox Church and became known as Father Sama'an. Now, about 10,000 believers meet in a large cave outside the garbage village. It is the largest church of believers in the Middle East. In May of 2005, a day of prayer was held for Muslims to turn to Christ. More than 20,000 Arab Christians gathered. The event was also broadcast on a Christian satellite TV network, where millions were watching. All this, because one garbage man chose to humbly return a watch that would have made him the richest man in town.^{iv}

SO WHAT?

Jesus is on the mountaintop teaching us how to improve our lives:

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

Do we really come to church to worship the living God? Are we allowing the Holy Spirit to RUB the love of God into our hearts each Sunday? Do we let our daily devotionals and weekly Bible Studies season our lives so that we are ready to flavor our world—our home, work places, schools, neighborhoods and church? If we had an ingredient list—how far down would the Jesus-factor be?

Jesus was onto something at that mountaintop. From His viewpoint, he saw a decaying world. If we really listen and are building our life upon the rock of Christ, we will do whatever it takes to be the salt and light of the world. Robert Stevenson only had four hours each day to gouge a foundation into solid rock but that lighthouse is still in use--200 years later.

The work that we do in our lifetime has the opportunity to light up the darkness for years to come.

The “so what” for us today? Look at this picture. (lighthouse in the sea)

Here’s the so what: when the waves of the world are crashing all around us, we can stand safely and securely in the midst of the storm...because we have built our foundation on the solid rock of Jesus Christ.

First: **YOU BUILD YOUR HOUSE ON SOLID ROCK**, like the wise person

Second: **YOU** Let your light shine as you are called to be the salt of the earth.

Sooner or later those billowing waves will come. If we’ve done our homework and had our mountaintop makeover—we can simply let our light shine in the darkest night.

Let us pray ...

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ⁱ *The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version*. 1989. Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers.

ⁱⁱ James Boice, *The Sermon on the Mount*, 1972, Grand Rapids, Baker Books

ⁱⁱⁱ Brennan Manning, *Souvenirs of Solitude*, 2009, Colorado Springs, NavPress

^{iv} Jerry DeLuca, *Montreal West, Canada*; source: Joel C. Rosenberg, *Epicenter*, Tyndale House Publishers (2006)