

The Witness We Need

Matthew 5:13-16

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Introduction:

- Over the past two weeks, we looked at 8 characteristics of the Christian heart.
 - We saw how we need to examine ourselves to see if these beatitudes are developing in us.
 - And if we don't have them, we saw how all these can be true of us, if we trust in Christ for salvation.
- This morning, as we continue in our series, we're going to look at the influence Christians can have in this world.
 - The difference we can make in this world.
- As you watch the news, as you see so many bad things happening in the world. You see people you care about struggling with life. Don't you wish you could do something to help?
 - Well, the Bible tells us that Christians have power to influence the world for good. We have the power to influence our families, our neighbors, our communities, even nations.
 - In Acts 17:6, a mob says of Paul and Silas, *"These men have turned the world upside down..."*
 - Christians have the power to turn the world upside down.
 - To truly make a difference.
- Not only do we have power in Christ to influence the world, but we learn from our passage that it's our responsibility to engage the world.
 - This passage isn't just for pastors and leaders in the church. This passage is for every single Christian believer.
 - If you're follower of Christ, you have a responsibility to engage and pray for those who don't know Christ.
 - We may forget about this command, or we may want to engage only with other Christians and disengage from the world.
 - But Jesus clearly commands every believer, *"Let your light shine before others,"* (Matthew 5:16).
- I know that sharing Christ with others can feel intimidating and overwhelming. It might even feel impossible.
 - You may be sitting in your seat thinking, "Pastor, I really can't do this."
 - "I know I'm supposed to, but every time I hear a sermon about sharing my faith, I can't help but feel anxious and incapable."
- If that is you, I want to encourage you, to remember Jesus' promise.
 - Jesus says, *"And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age,"* (Matthew 28:20).
 - Jesus is with you and he can help you.
- And do you remember what Paul said to Timothy?

- Timothy was timid and scared to pastor his church.
- But the Apostle Paul reminds this timid servant, *"God gave us a spirit not of fear but of power and love and self-control,"* (2 Timothy 1:7).
- I know that sharing Christ with others isn't easy.
 - There will always be people who reject Christ.
 - But let's remember there will also be people who believe in him and find salvation as you live as salt and light.
- And so, the question we need to ask ourselves today is, how can we lead others to Christ?
 - How can we lead others to glorify God?

Point 1:

- First, we see how we have the power to slow down the effects of sin in our world.
 - Take a look at verse 13.
 - Jesus says:
 - *"You are the salt of the earth..."* (Matthew 5:13).
 - Now, what in the world does it mean to be salt?
 - What is Jesus saying here?
- In the ancient world, people used salt to season their food just like we do today.
 - But more than seasoning for food, salt was also used to preserve food.
 - There were no refrigerators or freezers in the ancient world, so salt was used to keep meat from rotting.
 - And the point Jesus is making, is that his followers can in some sense, preserve the earth from decay.
 - And so, you could say that Jesus is saying, you are the preservative of the earth.
- Now, there are three things we need to remember, for us to understand what Jesus means by this.
- The first thing we need to remember is that this world isn't getting better, but worse as time goes on.
 - If you remember from Genesis 3, after Adam and Eve sinned against God, God cursed the ground, and they were told they'd have to work and toil.
 - That thorns and thistles would come out of the ground.
 - And because of sin, Adam and Eve began to die.
 - And that's what we see in the world today.
 - Because of sin, everything in this world is decaying and dying.
 - The world isn't getting any better.
- And no matter what we do, we can't reverse the effects of sin on earth.
 - That's why even today, we still have poverty, disease, drug addiction, suicide, human trafficking, murder, theft, prostitution, and crime.
 - You could even argue that things have gotten worse.
 - That darkness in this world is even darker than before.

- That's why Jesus says in Matthew 24:12 that in the last days, *"Lawlessness will be increased, the love of man will grow cold."*
- The Bible shows how rebellion against God will continue to grow as time goes on.
- And so, to be salt doesn't mean that we can completely reverse the effects of sin.
- We can't preserve this world from its final judgement and death.
- But the second truth we need to remember is that Christian believers are able to slow down the effects of sin in our world.
 - We can't keep it from complete decay, but we're able to slow it down.
 - That's why God tells his people in Babylon (and remember this was a city that God destined for judgment) he says to his people in exile, *"But seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the Lord on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare,"* (Jeremiah 29:7).
 - God commands his people to live in the city of Babylon, and to seek its welfare so that it might go well with them.
 - In other words, God's people were able to slow down the effects of sin and judgement in Babylon.
- Not only the example of Babylon but think of all the examples we find throughout history, where God's people slow down sin.
 - Think of Joseph who saved the people from starvation.
 - Think of Esther who saved her people from being killed.
 - Think of Jonah, and how he saved a whole nation from God's judgment.
 - Think of Martin Luther and the reformers who fought against the effects of darkness in the church.
 - And because of what they did, there was a revival in Europe, and you could argue that it spread throughout the whole world slowing down the effects of sin.
 - Or think of William Wilberforce, and Martin Luther King Jr., who fought against slavery and racism, in the name of Christ.
 - Or think of all the Christians who built hospitals and schools, those who built programs for troubled neighborhoods, those you're bringing clean water to places with no water, those who are caring for widows and orphans, those who're serving their neighbors and community, those who are planting churches all over the world.
 - Though we can't completely stop the effects of sin in this world, we're able to slow it down.
 - Just like salt is able to slow down the process of rotting.
- And the reason this is important is because it gives us more time to share the gospel with more people.
 - If the fruit of the gospel didn't rub into society like salt, the end of this age would come pretty quickly.
 - That's exactly what happened in the time of Noah.
 - Evil grew so fast, that God had to send the flood and bring judgement.
 - But after Noah, and in our time today, God has given us the power to slow down the effect of sin.
 - And by seeking the welfare of others, we have more time to share the gospel of Christ to all the world.

- And so, we see how Christians are able to slow down the effects of sin in our world.
- The world isn't getting better but darker.
 - Christians are able to slow down the effects of sin.
 - But there's a third truth we need to remember, it's that even though the kingdom of darkness is growing, the kingdom of God is also growing as well.
 - In Matthew 13, Jesus tells a parable about weeds and wheat growing in the field.
 - The weeds represent those who belong to the devil, and the wheat represent those who belong to God.
 - And in the parable God shows how they grow together.
 - Yes, the darkness grows, but so does God's kingdom.
 - Jesus says in Matthew 13:30, *Let both grow together until the harvest, and at harvest time I will tell the reapers, "Gather the weeds first and bind them in bundles to be burned, but gather the wheat into my barn."* Matthew 13:30
 - Or, just in the next verse, in Matthew 13:31 and 32, Jesus says:
"The kingdom of heaven is like a grain of mustard seed that a man took and sowed in his field. It is the smallest of all seeds, but when it has grown it is larger than all the garden plants and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and make nests in its branches."
 - Just as the darkness is getting darker, the kingdom of God is also growing like a mustard seed.
 - And in the end, we'll see that it reaches all over the world, as more and more people come to know Jesus Christ.
- This is really important to remember, because it can be really discouraging when so many bad things happen in our world.
 - Many people get discouraged because of the effects of sin and injustice.
 - They feel helpless as they see these effects of sin getting worse and worse.
- And it's here we need to remember the words of Jesus.
 - He says in John 18:36, *"Jesus answered, 'My kingdom is not of this world. If my kingdom were of this world, my servants would have been fighting, that I might not be delivered over to the Jews. But my kingdom is not from the world.'"*
 - Jesus is saying that this world we live in, isn't where he's going to establish his kingdom.
- This means that it's not our job to fully eradicate the effects of sin and injustice in this world.
 - In this world, there will always be evil leaders. There will always be poverty. There will always be injustice, no matter what you do.
 - Jesus even says, *"For you always have the poor..."* Matthew 26:11
 - And so, to be salt doesn't mean we try to bring God's kingdom to this physical world.
 - Rather it means that we do our best to slow down the effects of sin.
 - To preserve, as best as we can, things in this world from decay, through our love, compassion, and mercy, and good works.
- Well, the question we have to ask then, is what can we do to grow the kingdom of God?
 - Is there a role we can play?
 - This leads us to the second point.

Point 2:

- Second, through the ministry of the gospel, God is able to use us to completely reverse the effects of sin.
- In Matthew 5:14, Jesus says, *"You are the light of the world."*
 - Now, what does this mean that you are the light of the world?
 - It means you're able to expose the darkness in this world.
 - People who don't know Christ are blind to their own sin and their need for salvation.
 - They're living in darkness.
 - And for you to be light means, that you're able to show the truth, and as sin is exposed, we're able to lead people to Jesus Christ as they repent.
 - You're able to bring the light of the gospel into darkness and God will use you to lead people into his kingdom.
 - You are the light of the world.
- Not only that, but Jesus also says, that you're a city on a hill.
 - In ancient times it was very dark.
 - There was no electricity, so it would get very dark at night.
 - And a city that was set on a hill could be seen for many miles.
 - In other words, not only are you light, but you're collective light.
 - You're a community that shines the gospel.
 - This means that the work of being a faithful witness requires us to be with other believers.
 - Yes, we can individually share the truth of the gospel to others.
 - But it's through the church, that we can shine even brighter the gospel of Jesus.
 - One light can shine.
 - But multiple lights together will shine even brighter as they love one another.
- Unfortunately, what's so sad is that there are so many people who're giving up on church these days.
 - In fact, I'm not sure if you attended our last Friday forum, but Pastor Brad stated that around 40 million people have left the church since 1995 in the United States.
 - Now, he gave several reasons for why people have left the church, and we can't go into everything he said.
 - But I wonder if one reason why so many people have stopped going to church is because Christians have stopped loving the church as Christ loves the church.
 - Yes, the church is imperfect.
 - Yes, sometimes we can be hurt by the church.
 - Yes, sometimes, the church can seem broken and blemished.
 - But we need to remember that Jesus loves the church.
 - He died for the church.
 - And the way we can shine the light of Christ is by loving the church just as Christ loves the church.
 - Why would anyone want to come to church when all believers do is criticize, ridicule, distrust, and put the church down?
 - I'm not saying that we shouldn't try to correct things that are wrong.
 - Of course we should.

- I'm not saying you should never leave one church to go to another.
 - There are many reasons why God may call you to do that.
 - But we need to learn to love the church.
 - To love one another as Christ loved us.
 - *'And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near,'* (Hebrews 10:24-25).
 - In the book of John, Jesus says, *"Love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another,"* (John 13:34-35).
 - It's in loving community, that we can let the world know the truth and love of Jesus Christ.
- We are the light of the world that proclaims the gospel, we are a city on a hill, the body of believers reflecting God's love.
 - But we also need to see how it's possible for us to put our light under a bowl.
 - *"You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the 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 who is in heaven,"* (Matthew 5:14-16).
 - You're supposed to put a lamp on a stand so that it can fully shine its light.
 - You're also not supposed to put a bowl over the lamp and cover it up.
 - In the same way, Jesus commands us to brightly shine our light to the world.
- Now, let me ask you this, what do you think we can do to better shine our light and not put it under a bowl?
 - Let's say I had a whiteboard here and asked you all to contribute some ideas.
 - What would you say?
 - Perhaps we could make an evangelism or outreach committee to help assimilate visitors.
 - We could hire a great outreach pastor to run outreach events and connect with our local community.
 - We could hold an evangelism training session for our church to better equip each person for evangelism.
 - All these are great things to do, and I do hope to implement some of these ideas.
- But you know what's the most important way for us to shine the love of Christ?
 - We need to love Jesus more.
 - We need to cultivate a deeper love for Jesus Christ.
 - Why?
 - Because people share most passionately, what they love most passionately.
- And it's by seeing what Christ has done for us, that we can grow in our love for him.
 - We have to see how we're poor in spirit and how desperately we need God.
 - We need to mourn over our sin and ask God for mercy.
 - And as we look to the love of Christ, we'll be led to worship, and love the Lord with all our heart, and our mind, and our soul, and our strength.
 - And God will send more people to our church, so they can love him too.

- I've been reading a book on reaching people for Christ.
 - And listen to what the author says, "Love for God is the foundation of...outreach. If we fail to love God, he will not draw people to our church. When we love God passionately, he will entrust people to our congregation so we can lavish them with his grace," (Organic Outreach, 21).
 - Do you see what the author is saying?
 - He's saying it doesn't matter what you do in the church, if you don't have love for God.
 - If we're not loving God and worshipping him, why would he send more people to our church?
- This is exactly what Jesus says to the church in Ephesus, in the book of Revelation.
 - Listen what Jesus says:
 - *"I know your works, your toil and your patient endurance, and how you cannot bear with those who are evil, but have tested those who call themselves apostles and are not, and found them to be false. I know you are enduring patiently and bearing up for my name's sake, and you have not grown weary. But I have this against you, that you have abandoned the love you had at first. Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent, and do the works you did at first. If not, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place, unless you repent,"* (Revelation 2:2-5).
 - Jesus is saying, "it's great that you're working hard, and doing so many good things, and even enduring for my name."
 - "But don't forget, you need to love me."
 - In fact, he says, "if you don't love me, I'll remove your lampstand, and you won't be able to shine my light."
- It's when you see how much Christ has done for you, that you can worship with all your heart, and love God with all your mind, heart, soul, and strength.
 - And when that happens, that's when we'll be able to brightly shine the light of Christ.

Application:

- Now, at this part of the sermon, I was thinking of listing a bunch of practical ways, we could be salt and light to the world.
 - And perhaps in another sermon, I can do that.
 - But today, I just want to leave you with 2 applications.
- First, let's ask the Lord to give us a greater love for him.
 - Let me ask you, would Jesus say of you today, that your love for him has grown cold or is it growing?
 - Would Jesus say that you've been more concerned with yourself, and with your life, and then with him?
 - Have you abandoned the love you had at first?
 - If that is you, ask him to show you his mercy, and ask him to give you a greater love for him.
- Second, let's ask the Lord to give us a greater love for each other.
 - In the church, you're going to be hurt.
 - There's going to be misunderstanding.

- But love for each other means that we learn to care, forgive, serve each other, and sacrifice for each other, even when we don't get it back.
- It's when we begin to love others as Christ loved us, that we can be a city on a hill.
- Isn't that what Jesus did for us?
 - He humbled himself and died a shameful death. He lost his reputation. He sacrificed himself. He gave of himself so that we could be saved.
- There's a movie called *Angels with Dirty Faces*.
 - It's about two friends named Jerry and Rocky.
 - They both grow up in the slums of New York and live a life of crime as young boys.
 - Eventually, Jerry becomes a priest who tries to help troubled youth in the city, while Rocky becomes a famous gangster, who all the kids in the neighborhood look up to.
 - Finally, Rocky's life of crime catches up to him, and he's caught and sentenced to death.
 - And right before Rocky's about to die, Jerry visits him in jail and says to him.
 - "Listen, I need you to die a coward.
 - I need you to scream and be scared."
 - And Rocky says, "Why would I do that?"
 - Jerry says, "These boys look up to you, they think you're a hero, they want to be just like you, and if you don't die a coward, they're going to follow in your foot steps and ruin their lives."
 - Rocky says, "I can't do that, my reputation is all I got now. It'll be shameful for me to die a coward. My pride is all I've got."
 - A few moments later, as Rocky's about to die, he begins to scream, and cry.
 - He decided to die a coward.
 - He gave up the only thing he had left, to save these boys.
 - And so, he dies in shame, so these kids could be saved from a ruined life.
- And isn't that's exactly what Jesus for us.
 - He died in shame. He lost his reputation so we could go free.
 - Yes, there will be hurt. Yes, there will be sacrifice. Yes, relationships can be difficult. Yes, life can be busy. But it's when we put others first before ourselves that we can truly be salt and light in this world.
 - It's when we lose ourselves for God and for others, that others can come to know Christ.
 - *"A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another,"* (John 13:34-35).

¹Unless otherwise noted, all references to the Bible are from the English Standard Version (ESV).

²Harney, Kevin G. *Organic Outreach*, pg. 21. 2009.