

Salt and Light: Giving Glory to God

In my initial article in this series I laid out the biblical principle that the instrument that God uses to bring about genuine and lasting change in this dark and decaying world is the church—not secular governments, e.g., Washington D.C. For those who ask how Christians are able to make such a difference, the answer is, at least, this: We must continue to connect to the local church and the Scriptures.

Addressing how Christians made a lasting difference by their influence in the founding of this nation, Yale historian Harry Stout writes,

“Over the span of the colonial era, American ministers delivered approximately 8 million sermons each lasting one to one-and-a-half hours. The average 70 year old colonial churchgoer would have listened to some 7,000 sermons in his or her lifetime totaling nearly 10,000 hours of concentrated listening. This is the number of classroom hours it would take to receive ten separate undergraduate degrees in a modern university without ever repeating the same course!...Events were perceived not from the mundane, human vantage point but from God’s. Thus colonial audiences learned to perceive themselves not as a ragtag settlement of religious exiles and eccentrics but as God’s special people.”

In this latest series of articles we’re looking at Jesus’ teaching on the importance of Christians being salt and light in a world of decay and darkness. We’ve unpacked the purpose and promise of salt, and last time we considered the purpose of light. Today, as we conclude this series, we’ll look at:

—The Promise of Light

Let’s look now at Matthew 5:16: “In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.” Jesus is pointing to the fact that Christians’ should live in such a way that our “good works” shine into the darkness of the world around us. The adjective translated “good,” at the very least, points to lives that are “attractive” in every way. Lives that point to the beauty of Jesus Christ and all that he is. Our lives must be informed by the Scriptures which reflect the mind and will of God. We’re to be living as those who are seeking, by grace, to be transformed by the renewing of our minds (Romans 12:2) and trusting the Holy Spirit to teach us, convict us and enable our good works.

This is not a person whose only connection to Christianity is that they occasionally—or even regularly—go to church. This is someone who can be said to, “walk the walk and talk the talk” of a true and flourishing Christian life. This directs us back to our responsibility to rightly engage the culture as “salt and light.” Listen to these words from 1 Peter 2:12: “Keep your conduct among the Gentiles (pagans) honorable, so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good works and glorify God on the day of visitation.”

Throughout the history of Christianity many have turned to Jesus by faith and were saved while many others saw his loveliness and for them it was foolishness; for them his beauty was ugliness and he was persecuted. We conclude then that when we're seeking to be "salt and light" we won't always be received with joy, which is why Jesus prefaced this section with instructions on the blessings of being persecuted on his behalf (Mt. 5:10-12). It needs to be noted that no one has ever lived this type of life perfectly except our Lord Jesus. Christians are, ultimately, resting in his obedience for salvation and not our own. So, then, the promise of light is that, when we seek a gospel-motivated obedience it will bring blessing to us and glory to God. Although we're not responsible for the results, we are responsible to be "salt and light."

Twentieth century British pastor and author, Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones writes, "[The non-believing world is] watching us. Do they see something different about us? Are our lives a silent rebuke to them? Do we live so as to lead them to come and ask us, 'Why do you always look so peaceful? How is it you're so balanced? How can you stand up to things as you do?....What is this thing that you have got?' If they do we can then tell them the wondrous, amazing, but tragically neglected news, that 'Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners,' and to give men a new nature and a new life and to make them children of God." What a blessing for Christians to be called by our Savior to be "salt and light" in a world of decay and darkness.

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