

Jesus on Christian Witness

Text: Matthew 5:13-16

Introduction: John was a member of his First Baptist Church. He faithfully attended church with his family every Sunday. He even taught Sunday School and served as one of the church's deacons. He was a successful businessman, and many in the church looked to him as a leader because of his success.

But Monday morning told a different story. Everyone at work knew that John was a leader in his church. But there was a deep disconnect between the kind of man John was at church and the kind of man he was at work. John was known at work for his temper. He had a short fuse and could erupt over the smallest mistake. And when John blew up, profanity-laced rants spewed from his mouth. Unfortunately, no one at work wanted to know the Jesus John claimed to follow.

Jane was a godly widow. She was also a member of the same First Baptist Church as John. She too faithfully attended church every Sunday. She didn't teach a Sunday School class, but she sacrificially gave of her time to serve in the church's nursery. When she wasn't serving in the nursery, you could find her in her pew fully engaged in the church's worship. Jane loved the Lord and His church.

Jane did not have the same kind of impact in the marketplace that John had. She had been a homemaker for most of her adult life. But when her husband died, she decided to go back to work. Not for employment. But because she cared about people. She took a volunteer position as a librarian at the local public library. People appreciated her kind spirit. She was generous with her time and never considered it an inconvenience to help someone find a book. Sometimes people would share their life problems with Jane. Then she would always ask if she could pray for them. People couldn't always explain what it was, but they knew there was something different about Jane. And when they asked, Jane was eager to tell them about Jesus. In fact, some of the members of First Baptist Church had come there because they were first invited by Jane.

We're talking this morning about Christian witness. John and Jane aren't real people. But you've met people like them. Perhaps you've worked with people like them. Maybe you've even been like one of them.

Why did John's life push people away from Jesus while Jane's life drew people toward Him? Jesus answers that question in Matthew 5:13-16.

Go ahead and turn there in your Bible to Matthew 5. I'm going to read verses 1-16, and then we'll focus our attention this morning on verses 13-16. If you're using the black pew Bible, you can find it on page 759. You can also find the text of these verses in the Sermon on the Mount Scripture journal that we've made available to you. If you don't own a Bible, we invite you to take the pew Bible with you when you leave.

(Read Matthew 5:1-16...Pray)

We've seen what it looks like to live a life that is blessed. Blessed are the poor in spirit. Blessed are those who mourn. Blessed are the meek. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness. Blessed are the merciful. Blessed are the pure in heart. Blessed are the peacemakers. And blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake.

This morning we turn our attention to what Jesus has to say about Christian witness. We should note, however, that Jesus' teaching on Christian witness does not arise in a vacuum. It's not disconnected from what Jesus has just said about the blessed life. It flows quite logically from what Jesus has just said in the Beatitudes. Those who live in light of the Beatitudes will serve as salt and light in a decaying and dark world.

That's our main idea for this morning's sermon: **Followers of Jesus are God's witnesses in a decaying and dark world.**

Let's talk first about the need for Christian witness.

I. The need for Christian witness – A decaying and dark world.

- A. We know this intuitively. We see it all around us. But we also see it in the text.**
- 1. The metaphors that Jesus uses for Christian witness here in the Sermon on the Mount show us that we live in a decaying and dark world.**
 - 2. Take first the metaphor of salt. Jesus says, “You are the salt of the earth.”**
 - a. When we think of salt, we think first about seasoning our food. I love green beans, but green beans need salt. For some of you, the doctor may have told you that you need to lay off the salt. I remember as a child seeing my grandfather take the saltshaker to the garden with him. After picking a ripe tomato off the vine, he would sit there with the tomato in one hand, the saltshaker in the other, and he would eat the tomato like an apple. He’s 90-years-old, and I expect he still does that. We use salt primarily to season our food.**
 - b. But in the ancient world, one of the primary uses of salt was as a preservative. You couldn’t put your meat in the refrigerator or the freezer because those things didn’t exist. So, the only way to preserve meat then was to salt it down or soak it in a saline solution. We’re familiar with this to some extent today. I love a good country ham. But then it was essential.**
 - c. So, if in the ancient world salt was primarily a preservative, and Jesus says to His disciples, “You are the salt of the earth,” what does that say about the earth? The world? It needs to be preserved from decay.**
 - d. We live in a world that is naturally in a state of decay.**
 - 3. Let’s talk about the second metaphor. Light. Jesus says, “You are the light of the world.”**
 - a. What does this imply about the world? It’s a place of darkness.**

- b. I think it’s hard for us who have only ever known life with electricity and light bulbs to fully appreciate what Jesus says here. Except Wade Haney. He remembers a time when there was no electricity in his home as a child.**
 - c. But think about what it was like during the time of Jesus. There was no electricity. There were no streetlights. No flashlights. Nothing. When it got dark, it was DARK. Unless you lit a fire. Some kind of candle or lamp. Otherwise, darkness. Pitch black darkness.**
 - d. So, when Jesus says, “You are the light of the world,” what does that say about the world? It’s dark.**
 - e. We live in a world that is naturally in a state of darkness.**
- B. And as Christians, we know why this is the case. The Bible tells us.**
- 1. See, in Genesis 1:2 we read that in the beginning, “The earth was without form and void, and darkness was over the face of the earth.”**
 - 2. But then, God spoke into the darkness and created the light. He said, “Let there be light,” and there was light. God proceeded then to create everything that is. Sun, moon, and stars. The dry ground and the sea. Trees, plants, and all kinds of vegetation. Birds, and fish, and land animals. And ultimately, the pinnacle of God’s creation: mankind. Male and female. Made in the very image of God.**
 - 3. And when God came to the end of His creative work, the Bible says, “God saw everything that he had made, and behold it was very good.”**
 - 4. Sadly, we know that God’s very good creation didn’t stay very good for long. For in Genesis 3 we read of the first sin of the first man and the first woman, Adam and Eve. They rebelled against God. They did the very thing God told them not to do. They took, and they ate of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.**

5. And with that one act, sin came into the world. Paul writes in Romans 5:12, “Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned.”
6. Sin brought decay to God’s good creation. Sin brought darkness to the world.
7. I don’t have to tell you. You see it around you every day. In the news. At work. On the television screen. In the lives of those around you. In your own life. This world is a broken place. Things are not as they should be. Things are not as God created them to be. The world is in a state of decay. In many ways, the world is a dark place.

C. That’s the situation that Jesus is speaking into here in the Sermon on the Mount.

1. Remember, He’s talking to believers. Most directly His disciples. And by extension you and me.
2. He knows that the earth is in a state of decay. He knows that the world is a place of darkness.
3. And He calls His followers to be His witnesses.

That brings us to...

II. The nature of Christian witness – Salt and light.

A. Christians throughout history have sought different ways of dealing with the fact that we live in a decaying and dark world.

1. Some have thought that the best thing for us to do as Christians in a decaying and dark world is to withdraw from the world. After all, we don’t want to be negatively influenced by the lost world around us.
2. Others have given in to the pressures and influence of a decaying and dark world to such an extent that it’s difficult to see any difference between those who claim the name of Jesus and the lost world around them.

3. Still others have thought that politics is the best way for Christians to involve themselves in a decaying and dark world. If we can just get enough Christians to elect good Christian leaders, then we can turn this thing around. In fact, just yesterday I was reading a Facebook post from a popular Christian radio host, and he actually used this text in Matthew 5 to argue that more pastors need to preach about politics from the pulpit. While it is good and right for Christians to engage in the political process, I don’t think that’s what Jesus had in mind when He spoke these words in His Sermon on the Mount.
4. We could probably come up with other ways that Christians have sought to deal with the fact that we live in a decaying and dark world.

B. But here in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus uses these two metaphors of salt and light to show us how we are to live as His followers.

1. Jesus says, “You are the salt of the earth” (vs. 13a).
 - a. Notice that this statement is first an indicative rather than an imperative. Just like with the Beatitudes, I think that there is an imperative that lays under the indicative. But first the indicative. Jesus doesn’t say, “BE the salt of the earth.” He says, “You ARE the salt of the earth.” This is who you are, Christian. You are the salt of the earth.
 - b. Commentators also note that the pronoun “you” is emphatic in the Greek text (Akin, 17 & Quarles, 80). The idea is, “You, and no one else, are the salt of the earth.” It’s a plural “you.” Jesus is talking to His disciples. His followers. If you are a follower of Jesus, it includes you. Y’all are the salt of the earth.
 - c. But what does it mean to be the salt of the earth? We’ve already noted the preserving function of salt. But Chuck Quarles also points out that the Bible often refers to salt as a purifying agent (Quarles, 78). And really, these two functions of purifying and

preserving go together in our understanding of what Jesus is talking about here.

- d. We should also point out the definite article “the” in Jesus’ statement. Christians are not A means of purification and preservation in a decaying world. Christians are THE means of purification and preservation in a decaying world.
- e. I love what Quarles writes here. He says, “[Jesus’] emphasis on His disciples’ unique ability to purify the world suggests that they do so by means other than moral protest, political involvement, or social activism” (Quarles, 80). Anyone can do those things. But only Jesus followers can truly be salt in this decaying world.
- f. So, how do we do it? How do we as Christians purify and preserve a world that is otherwise in a state of decay? It’s simpler than you might think. We do it by living out the Beatitudes. By being who we already are as followers of Jesus. Are you poor in spirit? Do you mourn your sin? Are you meek? Do you hunger and thirst for righteousness? Are you merciful? Are you pure in heart? Are you a peacemaker? Do you face persecution for righteousness sake with grace? That’s salty, isn’t it? That stands out. That has an impact. If you live in light of the Beatitudes, you will inevitably have a purifying and preserving effect on those around you.
- g. Like Jane at the beginning of the sermon. Jane wasn’t flashy. In one sense, Jane’s life was very ordinary. She went to church. She served in the nursery. She worshiped the Lord. She went to her volunteer job at the library. She worked hard. She cared for people. And that was pretty much it. But there was also something about Jane that stood out. Something that could really be described as extraordinary. She wasn’t like other people. She was poor in spirit. She was meek. She was merciful toward others. As a follower of Jesus, Jane exemplified the Sermon on the Mount, specifically

the Beatitudes, and people took notice. They wanted to be around Jane. And when Jane talked about Jesus, people listened. She was salty. And not in the negative way that we sometimes use that word. In the biblical sense. The Jesus sense. Jane was the salt of the earth.

- 2. Let’s talk about the second metaphor. Light. Jesus says, “You are the light of the world” (vs. 14a).
 - a. Perhaps this metaphor is more readily understood. The primary function of light both then and now is to shine in the darkness.
 - b. But it’s interesting to remind ourselves that Jesus also referred to Himself as the light of the world in John 8. He said, “I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life” (Jn. 8:12).
 - c. This reminds us that Jesus is the one who left His throne in heaven, took on flesh, lived a sinless life, and then went to the cross to die to redeem a dark a world.
 - d. The Apostle John writes in the introduction to His Gospel, “In him was life, and the life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it” (Jn. 1:4-5).
 - e. Goshen, Jesus is the light of the world! Jesus is the only hope of the world. The only way for sinful mankind to be reconciled to a holy God is through Jesus. You must turn from your sin and put your faith in Jesus. He is your only hope. He is the light of the world.
 - f. But here in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus says to His disciples, “YOU are the light of the world.” So, what does He mean?
 - g. As followers of Jesus, we reflect the light of Jesus in the world. Have you ever looked up into the sky and thought, “The moon sure is bright tonight”? Of course you have. We all have. But we know that the moon doesn’t actually have any light of its own. It reflects the light of the sun.

- h. In a similar way, our light as Christians is a reflected light. The light comes from Jesus. But as we follow Him, we reflect His light in the world.
- i. As we live out the Beatitudes, which we know that Jesus perfectly exemplified during His life and ministry on earth, we reflect the light of Jesus. And people take notice.

C. Now, Jesus also makes clear with both metaphors that it is possible for our witness as Christians to be compromised.

1. Look at verse 13. Jesus says, “But if salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored” (vs. 13b).
 - a. The problem is that the verb translated “lost its taste” here does not mean “to lose flavor” anywhere else in all ancient literature. The verb normally means “to become foolish.” The idea here is likely about losing effectiveness or becoming worthless rather than losing flavor (Quarles, 81). After all, salt can’t actually lose its taste. But it can become defiled by being mixed with impurities.
 - b. The point is that followers of Jesus are to purify and preserve the world. But we can only do this as we maintain our own purity. Salt that has been corrupted is unable to purify or preserve and has thus become worthless.
 - c. Think about John from the beginning of the sermon. He was a faithful Sunday School teacher and deacon in his church. But his anger and harshness at work prevented him from being salt. There was no preserving or purifying effect of John’s life on those around him. His witness for Jesus was non-existent. It had become worthless. It was no longer good for anything except to be thrown out and trampled under people’s feet.
2. We see something similar with the second metaphor Jesus uses. Look at verse 14. Jesus says, “A city on a hill cannot be hidden.” (vs. 14b).

- a. Notice that Jesus does not say, “A city on a hill **SHOULD NOT** be hidden.” He says, “A city on a hill **CANNOT** be hidden.”
- b. And who is the city on the hill to which Jesus refers? We’ve sometimes heard that language used by politicians in relation to our country. But America is not the city on the hill that Jesus is talking about here. Nor is any country the city on the hill. The city on the hill is us. Followers of Jesus. The church. If we are living out the Beatitudes as followers of Jesus, our light will so shine in a dark world that it cannot be hidden.
- c. Jesus extends the metaphor further when He says, “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” (vs. 15).
- d. Imagine lighting a lamp and then hiding it under a basket. That wouldn’t make any sense, would it? You would never do that. And that’s the point. Hiding the lamp defeats the purpose of the lamp.
- e. As followers of Jesus, we want as many people as possible to see the light of Jesus in our lives so that they too can experience the same hope that we have in Him. And this starts with our lives. It starts by being poor in spirit, and meek, and merciful, and a peacemaker.
- f. And that kind of godly living opens the door for us to open our mouths and speak the truth of the gospel. It stands out. People notice something different. And we get the opportunity to tell them what’s different. We’ve been transformed by the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. Peter wrote that you are to “always [be] prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you” (1 Pet. 3:15).
- g. That’s what we saw with Jane at the beginning of the sermon, isn’t it? Her life commended the gospel, which gave her opportunities to testify to what was different in her life. Namely Jesus. She wasn’t just a nice person. She was a person who had been

redeemed by the blood of Jesus. And Jesus had transformed her life.

Now, let's quickly turn our attention to...

III. The goal of Christian witness – Glory to God.

A. We see it in verse 16. (Read vs. 16)

- 1. The goal of our witness for Jesus is glory to our Father who is in heaven.**
- 2. In his commentary on this passage, Danny Akin tells the story of a man named Ion Keith-Falconer. He was a Scottish missionary and Arabic scholar. He won the world cycling championship in 1878 at the age of twenty-two but left all of that behind to move to Egypt and later Yemen as a missionary for Jesus. Sadly, Ion Keith-Falconer died at the age of just thirty-one due to Malaria. He's quoted as saying, "I have but one candle to burn, and I would rather burn it out in a land filled with darkness than in a land flooded with light" (Akin, 22).**
- 3. Ion Keith-Falconer understood that his life was not about his own glory. It was about the glory of God. And he was committed to putting his lamp on a lampstand so it could give light to all in the house.**

B. You'll notice the imperative here in verse 16. Jesus says, "Let your light shine before others."

- 1. Earlier we noted the indicatives in verses 13 and 14. This is who we are as followers of Jesus. We are the salt of the earth. We are the light of the world. That's who we are in Jesus.**
- 2. Now we must live like it. As salt that purifies and preserves and light that shines brightly in the darkness leading to glory for our Father who is in heaven.**

Conclusion: Goshen, we live in a decaying and dark world.

Jesus came the first time as the light of the world. He stepped down into the darkness of this world to live a sinless life and die to pay for our sin. He came to save us. To redeem us. To reconcile us to God our Creator.

And one day Jesus will return to this earth, and He will bring to an end all decay and darkness. He will establish a new heaven and a new earth. Free of decay. Free of brokenness. Free of all that ails this present world.

In the meantime, we are His witnesses. We serve as salt and light. As followers of Jesus, we are God's witnesses in a decaying and dark world.

I started out the sermon talking about John and Jane. The point was to get you thinking about yourself. Your life. Your witness. Which one do you more closely resemble? John or Jane?

Is your light shining brightly for Jesus? Or have you hidden it under a basket? What needs to change in your life so that you can shine brightly for Jesus?

Maybe there is no light in your life because you are not truly in Christ. (Repent and believe today)

Or maybe the light is there. But it's hidden by sin. It's hidden by a desire for your own glory. Whatever it is. Turn that over to the Lord this morning. Remove the basket from over your light so that you may glorify your Father who is in heaven.