

What Does Jesus Want the Church to Do in 2023?

Matthew 5:13-16

January 1, 2023, Pastor Jeremy Cagle

Good morning, everyone. This morning, as you can tell by looking at your calendars, we're coming to the first day of the year, so welcome to 2023. I said this last year, but when I was growing up, 2023 was a title of some futuristic space age movie; and now you're living in it. And this is a little unusual on a church calendar because it's not very often you celebrate Christmas Day on one week, and then you turn around and celebrate New Year's the week after, but that's the way things turned out this year. And we want to take advantage of it and talk about that a little bit. Because to be honest, as I was reflecting on this, 2022 was a good year for us as a church. It was a real blessing because we got to see some growth here at Grace. And we got to welcome in some new members and do some baptisms, while at the same time continuing our children's ministry, youth ministry, and men's and women's ministry, among other things. We had a ladies conference in February with Martha Peace, many of you remember that. We had two Backyard Bible Clubs over the summer where more than 60 kids came and we had a blast. We had several big Christmas events to close out the year, which was wonderful. It was really neat to reflect on that. I'm going to say more about that next week when we talk about our vision statement.

But for this week, I want to talk about the future of our church, and set a tone for next year by walking you through a well-known verse of the Bible. So let's just get into it. If you would, open your Bibles to the Gospel of Matthew. That's the book we're in today, so if you have a Bible with you, please open to the Gospel of Matthew, which has been called the Gospel of the Kingdom because the word kingdom is found more than 50 times in this book, almost twice per chapter. Because Matthew wrote in order to tell you that the King has come, the Messiah was here, the Saviour has arrived, so you don't have to wait for Him anymore. You can just believe on Christ and be saved. That's the message of the book. You don't need to turn here but Matthew 21:4 says that when Jesus was entering Jerusalem, to the sound of Hosanna, and the people were taking off their coats and putting them on the road and waving palm branches, Matthew said, "Behold, your King is coming to you, gentle and mounted on a donkey." And that's the theme of this gospel. Your King has come. He's arrived. And as he talks about this, Matthew begins the book by giving you one of the greatest sermons that king ever preached. It's called the Sermon on the Mount because it was preached from a mountainside in Israel in order to tell you about the law of the kingdom. The Sermon tells you what Jesus the King expects you to do if you're going to follow Him as Lord. And if you would look in Matthew five, starting in verse one, I just want to read this to you so we can get our minds around this. But the book says this

When Jesus saw the crowds, He went up on the mountain; and after He sat down, His disciples came to Him. He opened His mouth and began to teach them, saying,
"Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
"Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.
"Blessed are the gentle, for they shall inherit the earth.

“Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.

“Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy.

“Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God

“Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.

“Blessed are those who have been persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

“Blessed are you when people insult you and persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of Me. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward in heaven is great; for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

“You are the salt of the earth; but if the salt has become tasteless, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything except to be thrown out and trampled under foot by men.

“You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden; nor does anyone light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house. Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven.”

I want to stop there with the reading, and just point out to you that Jesus says this is what you are to do if you're part of His kingdom now. He wants you to be poor in spirit and gentle and merciful and pure in heart and be blessed as a result, which means that He will reward you for it. This idea of blessing here means that if you follow Him this way, He'll pay you back by giving you heaven in verse three, and comforting you in verse four, and satisfying you in verse six, and He will show you mercy in verse seven, and make you a son in verse nine, and bring you joy in verse 12, because He won't leave you empty handed. And after saying that in the first few verses, Jesus says another thing He'll do for you, if you follow Him as your King, is make you the salt of the earth. You won't try to become the salt; you'll just be the salt. And you won't try to change your nature in order to make it happen because Jesus will change it for you, so you'll have an impact on others. This whole idea of salt and light is that you will be an influence in the world around you. That's what salt does. The whole point of salt is that you taste it, you always know when salt is in a meal, and you know when it's not in the meal, too, right? And the whole point of light is that you see it. You don't have to wonder if the lights on in the room, you know it's on. Nobody goes into a dark room and turns on the light and doesn't notice it. You all notice it. Everybody stumbles for a minute when the light comes upon you. And Jesus says it's the same way when a Christian walks in the room; it's supposed to make the world wake up. If you notice, He tells you in this verse, where this is supposed to happen when He says “You are the salt of the earth.” And what that means is that this is where your salt is felt, on the earth. And this is where your light needs to shine, that's in the world, not just in heaven, but in the world; not just in church, or in a Bible study or a care group, or you're surrounded by other Christians, and talking to other Christians, and praying with other Christians, it's supposed to take place in the culture as well. Because that's where they need it the most. That's where people are starving for the light, so that's where Christ commanded you to go and give it to them freely. So if you go to work, give them the light at work. Tell them the gospel there. If you go to

the store, give them the gospel there. Be the salt of the store. If you go to the bank, be the salt of the bank, if you go to the office, be the salt of the office. If you go to the playground to watch your kids, you get a pass there because it's hard. No, no, that's not what it says; you're gonna be the salt there as well, you do this everywhere. It says "Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see you." And that means Jesus saved you and made you a part of His kingdom, so you can be seen. The whole point is that the world can watch you.

But I think it goes without saying that that can only happen if people can see you. And this can only take place if you make yourself available for them to observe. Otherwise, it's impossible. Can't happen if you go hide in a corner somewhere. And I mentioned that because I'm afraid a lot of people are forgetting that today because they don't want to be seen by the world, they want to avoid it. And they don't want to make themselves available to be observed, they want to go into hiding instead. And what I mean is you see a lot of people leaving the Lower Mainland right now. And you see them moving out of places like Vancouver and British Columbia, because of all the wickedness that is there. And to be fair, I mean, some of them are doing it for other reasons, and that's okay. And some people are moving out because they can't afford it, and there's nothing wrong with that. We all have to make decisions like that. You have freedom to do that. But I'm referring to people who are doing it because the Liberals are taking over. And I'm talking about the ones who are tempted to move out because the drug users and alcoholics and LGBTQ people are running the show and making things difficult for everybody. Because when you look at this passage, what Jesus is saying is that idea is wrong. You're not here to be safe in the world, you're here to be salt in it, amen? And you're not placed in this earth to be warm and comfortable, and live in a nice Christian bubble where you talk to Christians all the time, and pray with Christians all the time and do things with Christians all the time. You're here to shine your light and spread the good news of the kingdom for all to see. But that the only way to do that is to stick around. It won't happen if everyone runs away. Some of us are going to make a sacrifice and stay put and show compassion for the lost around you. I tell you, if there's anything that's missing in a lot of churches today, it's a sense of compassion for the lost. There are a lot of believers today who have no sympathy at all for the dying world around them. On the contrary, they can't stand them. They say "If they live like the devil, let the devil have them. And if they want to go to hell so badly, let them go to hell. They deserve it. Just look at them. These people aren't worth saving." Jesus doesn't say that. Can you imagine if He said that to you? You were just as lost as they were before you came to faith in Christ. You were just as depraved in your own way, and yet He showed you compassion. So the least thing you can do is show that to others.

Look, I understand why this is hard for people. I mean, I've talked to you guys, and a lot of you have told me how much this area has changed in the last 50 years. In British Columbia is not what it used to be. I get that. I mean, some of you grew up here. And you told me it wasn't that long ago, when you prayed in the public schools, can you believe that? And some of you recited the 10 commandments before class started. Now you're just as likely to have a time of meditation and recite something from the Dalai Lama and then have a yoga lesson, which is messed up. But friends, don't you see, that's what you're here for. That's why God puts you on the earth. He did it, so you could tell them God is offering

you something better than yoga, amen? I mean this obliterates the idea of monasticism. It destroys the idea that you can be a Christian, and go live in a monastery somewhere surrounded by no one but people who think like you do. God doesn't want you to do that. He wants you to reach the lost in order to tell them that we live in a real world with real problems. God has given you a real solution for it, and this is what we're going to talk about this morning by looking at five things Jesus wants the church to do in 2023. So if you're taking notes this morning, this is our outline for today. But in Matthew five, starting in verse 13, we're gonna look at five things Jesus wants the church to do in this passage. And we're gonna do this as a New Year's resolution because like I said earlier, last year was a real blessing for us as a church. We really enjoyed 2022. But to be honest, it wasn't a blessing for the nation of Canada, it wasn't. I mean, last year was pretty rough. It started off with Bill C-4, or the banning of conversion therapy. And from there, the government went back and forth on the COVID mandates that drove everyone nuts, then the year closed out with the school board here in Chilliwack, being taken over by the LGBTQ community, and those who support it, which was mind blowing, it was hard to process. And it doesn't seem like things are getting better. And the question is, how are we supposed to respond to that as a church? I think you need to follow your King. I think you need to let Jesus shepherd you and guide you through it, and there's no better passage to do it than to study this one; so let's do that by looking at five things He wants the church to do.

The first one is to be the salt of the earth. We're gonna get all these straight from the text. But the first thing Christ wants the church to do in 2023 is to be the salt of the earth. Which means that He wants the church to help disinfect the sin you see around you, and to have an impact that way. That's what salt does. You put salt in a wound, and it makes you say, "ouch!" Sterilizes it. The church is supposed to have some type of impact like that on the culture.

And, and I've already said a little bit about why Matthew wrote this gospel about the kingdom; but I didn't tell you, as he writes this gospel, Matthew gives you three sermons on the subject of the kingdom. The first one is the Sermon on the Mount right here, which is on the law of the kingdom. It talks about the conduct or the way Jesus wants you to live if you're under the kingdom now. And the second sermon He gives is the parables of the kingdom in Matthew 13. That tells you that the kingdom of God is like this, and the kingdom of God is like that. It's like a sower in 11, and a mustard seed, and a treasure that a man found in a field. And the third sermon is called the Olivet Discourse that talks about the establishment of Christ's kingdom and tells you what happens when He returns in Matthew 24, because then He will bring the angels with Him and conquer the nations and set up the kingdom on the earth. But it all begins with what you're looking at here in chapter five.

This is called the Sermon on the Mount because verse one says, "When Jesus saw the crowds, He went up on the mountain." Now, we don't know what mountain that is, because the text doesn't say, some have thought it was the mountains around the Sea of Galilee because that's where He was. He was in the province of Galilee at this time, which could be the case but it does tell you something about the crowds.

If you look in chapter 4:24, these are the people that we're coming to hear Him during this message. And it says,

The news about Him spread throughout all Syria; and they brought to Him all who were ill, those suffering with various diseases and pains, demoniacs, epileptics, paralytics, and He healed them. Large crowds followed Him from Galilee and the Decapolis and Jerusalem and Judea and from beyond the Jordan.

Now, that may not mean a lot to you when you read it, but what Matthew says there is that large crowds followed Jesus from everywhere. Those words Galilee, Decapolis, Judea, that's a way of saying from all over the place. Galilee was the most northern part of Israel; Judea was the most southern part; so that's top to bottom. And then Syria and Decapolis were the regions beyond that, and so the fame of Jesus had spread so much at this time that people were coming from just all over the place to listen to Him. We often think of Jesus traveling around Israel with 12 disciples and that's it, but here there was more than that. And as they all come to Him to listen to Him, He goes on a mountainside and He says these words that we're considering this morning, "You are the salt of the earth."

Now, what does that mean? Well, the word salt here is the Greek word, *halas*. It basically means everything the English word salt does and more because salt had a very important role in the ancient world. It was used in so many different things. For example, they would use it in cooking like we do, in order to flavor their food and put a little spice in it. And they would also use it in butchering as well, in order to make the meat last longer because they had no refrigeration back then. I have relatives who were farmers in Tennessee that tell me they did this to keep the meat from spoiling; they would rub salt in and hang it up in the barn. They would also use it in medicine because they understood salt had certain antiseptic qualities to it, and it could serve as a disinfectant for lacerations and wounds and sores. They would use it as an herbicide to help a farmer kill weeds in his field because anytime he wanted to do that, he could put salt in there and it would take care of the problem. But the point is that it was used in everything. And there was really no end to the things that salt could do. In fact, the ancient people treasured salt so much that the Romans believed that it was the greatest thing on earth next to the sun. And they even paid their soldiers in salt, because it was as precious as gold to them; you could take salt and trade it in for goods and services.

And with all that background in mind and all that context, Jesus tells His followers in verse 13, "You are the salt of the earth," which means that you are the ones that give flavour to the earth. You are here to make sure the culture has something of the taste of God in its mouth, so they don't forget, and turn their back on Him and ignore the fact He's there. And it also means you're there to preserve the culture as well, and keep it from going down the tubes. Your life serves as a warning to the world around them, that there is a God, He does exist, and He doesn't approve of their behavior, so you need to stop or else something will happen. It means you're there to give healing to the world and serve as a medicine, because you tell them the gospel and that God is angry, but He cares. And He sent Christ to save them

and on and on and on. But Jesus says this in order to tell you, it's not someone else's job to do that, it's your job. And it's not someone else's role to be all those different things to the world, that's what God put you on this earth to do. In fact, the word "you" in verse 13, is plural, which means all of you, everyone listening to this sermon, everyone hearing this message, everyone reading the words in this book is responsible for this. This is not just for the leaders and pastors and elders of the church, or the super spiritual people, whoever they may be. That's not the pastors and elders. We're not super spiritual, but you get the point. It applies to everybody. And the word "you" it's also emphatic here. So it's like Jesus is saying this, *you* are the salt. *You* are the ones who are here to make a difference, not the politicians and governments and rulers of the day.

Which is important because you hear so many Christians say right now, things are so bad because of the government. And things are so ugly in places like Vancouver and British Columbia because of the politicians. And that's true to a degree. I don't think anybody can deny they're responsible for a lot of the chaos, but the truth is, they're not the ones Jesus is pointing His finger at here to fix it. He's pointing it at us. It's a spiritual problem, so it only takes spiritual resources. Amen? We're the ones who have that. Look, if the past 200 years have taught us anything in the US and Canada, is that you can't just put a new guy into office and expect him to change everything. And you can't vote a new guy into the president's chair or prime minister's chair and think he will fix the world. It doesn't work that way. It wasn't that long ago that we voted in a guy in the United States as president because he ran on the platform of change. And then when his term was finished, we voted in another one who promised to make America great again. You know what happened? Both of them failed. America didn't change that much, and it's not as great as it used to be. And that's okay because you're not called to put your hope in those things, you put it in the Lord. The lesson of this passage is simple. Listen friends, Canada won't change until the government changes, the government won't change until the voters change, the voters won't change until the people change, and the people won't change until their hearts change. It all goes back to the power of God.

In fact, if you want to see an example of this, of how the Lord has chosen to preserve things in history, you can look at the history of the US. And you can see that if it were not for the Lord and His mercy, that country would have torn itself apart a long time ago. And what I mean is that when the American Revolution happened, do you know what was happening simultaneously, to keep the colonists united? It was the first Great Awakening. You won't read about that in your history books. But it was said there were more people that knew the face of George Whitfield, the evangelist than the face of George Washington. And the reason you see so many of those people like Benjamin Franklin and Thomas Jefferson saying spiritual things is because the whole world was being turned upside down by the gospel. Thousands of people were being saved by the ministry of men like Jonathan Edwards, and George Whitfield, and John Wesley. Then the Civil War happened in the States, and at that time, the Second Great Awakening was going on. And more souls were being saved on the influence of people like Timothy Dwight and Lyman Beecher and men like that. Then during World War One, you saw a revival in the States. And then in World War Two, you saw another revival. Then during the Vietnam

War, you saw another one, because the Jesus movement went underway and hippies were being saved. Why? Because that's how God preserves nations. That's how He keeps them from falling apart. He doesn't change their politics first, He changes the people first, through the ministry of the church.

You hear so many people complaining nowadays about the church, don't you? And they say things like the church is full of hypocrites, and there's no one in here but a bunch of phonies. But you know what would happen to this area, if all the churches closed tomorrow? It would be chaos, spiritually. It would go straight into the darkness. You know what would happen if all the Christians left their jobs and their places of business? All the salt would go out. So we don't want to do that today. Which brings it to another thing Jesus wants the church to do in 2023, and that is to remember not to become tasteless.

A second thing Christ wants the church to do in this passage is to remember not to become tasteless, which means you need to remember not to lose your testimony. As bad as things get, and as dark as they become, you don't want to lose your godly witness for Christ. You may lose your mind at times, but you can't lose your integrity. And as you read this next part of the passage, you may be wondering why Jesus goes on about this because as you read the Sermon on the Mount, one thing you can tell is that He moves through a lot of the passages on the front end very quickly. Because He says that "Blessed are the poor in spirit", and then He moves on, doesn't really say a lot about that. And then He says "Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted." And He does the same thing there. Then He says, "Blessed are the gentle for they shall inherit the earth." And "Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy." And "Blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God." But once He mentioned this issue of salt, He begins to expand upon it a little bit. He starts to expose it. And the reason He did that is because apparently He understood how shocking these words were for the Jews, because He says "You are the salt of the earth." And the Jews didn't care about the Earth. They were interested in one thing only, and that's Israel. They just wanted to fix Palestine. That's all they cared about. But now the Lord is telling them, you need to expand your boundaries and care about the rest of the world. And this is how you do it.

If you look in the passage, He says "You are the salt of the earth; but if the salt has become tasteless, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything except to be thrown out and trampled under foot by men." Now I wanted to read that entire verse to you because if you notice, Jesus puts this in the form of a question here to get the Jews thinking because He tells him "You are the salt of the earth." In other words, "I've made you that way. I have put My salt in you. You don't have to try to earn it now with your behavior, but there is something you have to do and that is to stay salty". Because He says if the salt has become tasteless, how can it be made salty again? And I'm going to explain all that in a moment. But let me just say the word tasteless here is the Greek word *mōrainō*. It means tasteless, because it refers to something that loses its flavor because it spoils or rots, or sours over time. But it can also refer to this in the spiritual realm because the word *mōrainō* sounds a lot like our English word, moron. And that's where you get it from. Because the word was often used in Greek literature to refer to a person who becomes tasteless because he's stupid, because he keeps making the same mistakes. And

that's how the word's being used because He says, "You are the salt of the earth." But if you squander that privilege because you're a moron, how can you be made salty again? And if you blow it due to sin and foolish behavior, how can you fix it? You can't, so you have to be careful not to do that. Don't blow your witness.

When He refers to losing your taste here, He's not saying you can lose your salvation because you can't. It's not possible, once saved, always saved, as we often say here, but He's saying you can lose the impact it has. You can lose the influence your godly witness has upon others and ruin your personal testimony if you give into sin too much. So that's what He's warning you not to do. The world plunges into sin, you don't follow them. The world goes into darkness, you don't imitate their behavior.

In my studies this week, I came across a very interesting translation of this word in the Scottish Bible, the old Scottish Bible. Because it says "You are the salt of the earth, but if the salt has lost its tang, how can it be made tangy again." And I really like that. I think it drives the point home because there's lots of Christians who have lost their tang for Christ, haven't they? They've lost their flavor because they gave into temptation. And what happened as a result? The world laughed at them. The world made fun of them because they said "You're no better than us because you tell us not to sin, but you sin. And you tell us not to act that way, but you act that way." And as a result, they throw them out. They trample on the church. And this is what this is talking about. Jesus says "Yes, you're the salt of the earth. Yes, you have an influence on the culture, but only if you remain faithful to Me." So you need to remain faithful.

To add to this, some background here, the people of Israel, they got their salt from the Dead Sea, which was a lake that was full of salt that had become tasteless because the Dead Sea is a body of water that's located 1400 feet below sea level. It's the lowest point on Earth because it rests in a giant hole in the ground. Some of you have seen pictures of it, but if you actually get into the sea, you can float. Because there's so much salt there. The Great Salt Lake City in Utah is made up of about 15% salt, the Dead Sea is like 35%. And that's why it got its nickname the Salt Sea because all the salt and minerals and ores from the desert flow down into that crater in the ground, which causes the salt to go bad. All that material getting mixed in with it contaminates it, makes it dirty. And Christ is telling the church here, you want to make sure you don't do that with your testimony. Don't let the world contaminate you because you're in the world, but you're not of the world. And you're in the culture, but you're not part of the culture, there always needs to be a separation there. I mean, the point of salt is that it's different. And the whole idea behind it is that it doesn't blend in with the surrounding environment. It stands out with the way it tastes. And it's the same way with the church.

Some of you will remember this, but there was a popular preacher in Seattle several years ago, who made quite a name for himself by teaching the Bible and cussing. And he would preach sound doctrine, a lot of sound doctrine, some of it wasn't sound, but at the same time, he would talk about vulgar things. And when he was asked why, he said it was because that was the only way he could reach the city of Seattle. But let me ask you, when you read a passage like this, where do you see that? Where do you see

Jesus telling you to reach the world by cussing? You don't, because that's not how you reach it, you reach it by sticking out. I mean, this is an area where the church has failed in recent years because we haven't stood out from the world enough. You go to some churches and you find people that they lie like the world, and lust like the world, they curse like the world, and swear like the world. They steal like the world, and cheat like the world, and stab each other in the back because they're very vicious. And as a result, the world looks at the church and says "Why do I want what you have? It's no different from my life."

In fact, I would argue one reason the culture has embraced certain things like homosexuality and abortion so much is because the church has given them the thumbs up. Some churches promote that stuff just as much as the culture, and Jesus says that's what's got to stop. And as one commentator said, "Surely if words mean anything, we were meant to learn from this figure of salt, that there must be something marked and distinct and peculiar about our lives if we call ourselves Christians. Do you have grace? You have to be seen? Do you have the Spirit? It must bear fruit. Do you have saving religion? Then people need to be able to see it in your habits taste and conduct. Because it's not enough just to go to the church, you need to be the church for the lost world."

Which brings us to another thing Jesus wants the church to do in 2023, and that is to be the light of the world. A third thing that Christ wants the church to do in this passage, is to be the light of the world. Which means He wants the church to be seen and observed because that's the purpose of light. You put light in a room so everyone can look at it, and feel its glow. And as you come to this next verse, you're going to see Jesus changes the metaphor here because He gives you a different image when He says in verse 14, that you are the light of the world. Now, earlier in verse 13, He says, "You are the salt." Now He says, "You are the light." Before He told you that you're a mineral that spices up things; now He tells you that you're an object that gives some illumination.

In fact, the best way to understand this image of light in verse 14 is to compare it to the word salt in verse 13, and when you do that, you find that the salt cleanses things, but the light illuminates. And salt heals things, but the light reveals; and salt disinfects, but the light discloses; and salt preserves things, but the light brings them out in the open for all to see. Because it opens your eyes, and it shows you what's there. And the idea is that that's what Jesus wants you to do for the world, He wants you to show them that God is there because the world can't see Him. They don't know and they have no idea, so it's your job to help them with that.

Because just like it was with the previous verse, Jesus says, "You are the light." And what that means is that there's only one light the world has, and that's you. And there's only one place where they can go in order to get help with their spiritual issues, and that's the church; they don't get it anywhere else. There's no plan B. And He says, "You are the light of the world," which means if the world is going to get help, it's going to come from one place and one place only, and that's Christians. It's not going to come from the Muslims, and it's not going to come from the Buddhists, and it's not going to come from the Sikhs.

They're not going to get light from the Hindus. It won't come from the Mormons; they won't get it from the philosophers who teach up the road. And the reason, if you want to write this verse down, is because in John 8:12, Jesus said, "I am the light." Which means that whatever light you have is derivative from Him. Christ is the source, fountain, cause, and origin of all light upon the earth. And He's the spring, root, core, and essence of it, which means the closer you are to Jesus, the more light you have; and the nearer you are to Him, the more this bears power in you. Because He's the fuel and you're the fire. He's the sun, and you're the moon. He's the torch, and you're the mirror, because this is not about you, it's about Him. And all those people don't know that. All those religions I just described, they don't understand Christ, so the world can't go to them for answers, it has to go back to us.

I mean, the way this works is very simple friends, in order to witness to someone and help them, you just need to find a person who knows less about Jesus than you do and tell them what you know. Lay it all out there. Example of this, I'll never forget the time one of our truck drivers in the church told me he was riding along with one of his coworkers, when the man asked him "Why do you think the world is so bad right now?" Ever had that conversation before? And this brother in the church said it's because of sin. He didn't plan on saying that. It wasn't scripted. It just sort of fell out of him in the truck. He said the world is so bad because all is messed up and fallen short of the glory of God, and that's why Jesus came to save us from it. And the man driving the trucks said "I didn't know that. I had no idea that was in the Bible. Can you tell me more?" You see he was being a light for him. That man's in the dark. He's driving that truck and he's blind. He can't see a thing about God, and this Christian brother was helping him by showing him the gospel. I don't have to tell you why this is so important, but we need Christian truck drivers to do that, don't we? We need men of God to hit the road and sit beside people so they can be a witness for them and answer their questions because who else is going to do it? I can't do it; I don't work for the company. You can't do it; you have other things to do than sit there. So we need those men to be a witness. We need Christian builders and doctors and nurses as well. We need Christian lawyers and bankers and businessmen. We need believing electricians and plumbers and salesmen and engineers and pharmacists and teachers and farmers and coaches and managers and policemen because this the way the church grows. It happens as one person speaks to another about the goodness of Christ wherever they go.

You know, when you read a statement like this, when the Lord says "You are the light of the world," and you put this in the context of where it was said, it wouldn't be that long after He said this, that the church would take over the Roman Empire. And they did it as Christians. They just went out about their daily business and shared Christ with others. They did it in their shops, they did it in their kitchens, they did it in their streets. It's the same way with us., and it brings it to another thing Christ wants the church to do this year. And that is to remember not to hide your light.

A fourth thing Jesus wants the church to do in this passage, is to remember not to hide your light, which is another way of saying the same thing He said earlier, and that is you want to make sure you keep up a good testimony. Apparently, this was so important to the Lord, that He repeats the idea twice here for

the sake of emphasis. But He goes on to say in verse 14, He says, “You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden; nor does anyone light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house. As He goes on in the text here, Jesus explains this statement, “you are the light of the world” by giving the Jews two examples of light they were familiar with. You might not catch these when you read it living in the 21st century, but they would have caught it. Jesus was very good at this by the way. He was very skilled at giving people illustrations from the world around them. He's preaching to the woman at the well and he says I will give you waters of life. He always did that sort of thing. And here, the first thing He mentions regarding light, is a city on a hill, which was a common thing in Israel at the time because most of the cities were built on hills back then. In order to protect them from attack, they would set them as high up as possible and surround them with stone walls. So when the invading force came against them, the people could hide behind the walls and be safe. And Jesus says here you're to do the same thing here because you can't hide something like that. There's no way to conceal a city that's on a hill because you can see it for miles around by day. And then at night, you can see the lights in the windows. And your faith needs to be like that as a Christian. People need to be able to see it by day and by night.

And then the next example here He gives, is that of a lamp, which doesn't refer to a large round lamp that you would put beside your easy chair in your living room. It refers to something like this. Everybody can see this? I got this souvenir in my trip to Israel several years ago because this is a replica of a lamp in the first century. And as you can see, it's pretty small. It wasn't made to put forth a lot of light. It was made to be portable, so you could take it with you wherever you went because the way it worked is they would put oil in here or some kind of candle. And then they would light it and carry it around in their journeys like a flashlight. And when they got home, they would stick it on the lamp stand in their house as verse 15 says, and when they wanted to snuff it out, they would put it under a basket and leave it there until they wanted to use it later. And in the similar way, Jesus says you need to carry your light with you wherever you go, and keep it high upon a stand instead of hiding it under something. And if you're wondering what this phrase, “put your lamp under a basket” means, it means several things. For example, some have taken it to mean you shouldn't hide your faith out of fear. You shouldn't conceal the gospel because you're worried about what people might think about you. You need to be indifferent to those things. And others have taken it to mean you shouldn't hide it out of apathy either because you're too lazy. Some have referred this to the issue of compromise or you're getting too wrapped up in your sin, like we just talked about; but all that's wrapped up in this expression, because Jesus says you shouldn't hide your light for anything, no matter what it is, it's too important. I think it goes without saying, but there's something unnatural about a man who takes a light and hides it. And there's something wrong with a person who has answers, and knows the Bible, and understands the gospel because he goes to church, but he refuses to share it with anybody that he knows. This passage actually says it stronger than that, because it says that a city on a hill *cannot* be hidden. And the word cannot means such a thing cannot be done, it's impossible. The light of Christ is too strong for that. You put it under a basket, it's gonna burn a hole in the basket. And unfortunately, like we're saying this morning, some people are tempted to do that, aren't they? They want to hide their light, by leaving this

area right now or leaving places like Vancouver because the Liberals are taking over and all those things I just mentioned. And Jesus says you shouldn't do that God has given you a light, you need to use it. He's given you the gospel, you shouldn't keep it to yourself. It needs to go out for all to see. In fact, I didn't tell you this earlier, but one reason Jesus' statement is so powerful here is because the ancient world was pretty dark at night. It was not very bright if you went anywhere past 7pm or something like that, because they didn't have streetlights everywhere. And they didn't have electricity. And they didn't have lights by the roads and all that kind of stuff, which made things look scary; but it also made your light shine out all the more. It made something like this seem very stark in contrast to the world around it, and it's the same way with you. It's been said the darker the night, the brighter the light. And if this world is dark right now and sinful and evil, it only makes your light shine brighter. It should not intimidate you. Mordecai told Queen Esther, "Who knows but that you have come to the throne for such a time as this?" And I would say the same thing for the church. I mean friends, who knows but you've come to Chilliwack to be a light to someone for such a time as this?

And it brings us to one more thing the Lord wants the church to do in 2023, just to review these other ones. The first one is to be the salt of the earth. And then secondly, you want to remember not to become tasteless. Thirdly, remember to be the light of the world. Fourthly, remember not to hide your light. Here's one more thing the church should do this year, as a New Year's resolution, and that is to glorify God through your works.

The fifth thing Christ wants the church to do in this passage is to glorify God through your works, which means He wants you to do all these things, so that the name of God will be exalted. Because that's what the kingdom of God is about. That's the whole purpose of the Sermon on the Mount. Jesus told you to be poor in spirit and gentle and merciful, so that people will look at you and see the glory of Christ shining in you. And they do it through your works. So if you look in verse 16, it says this, it says, "Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven."

Now, as you read this, you can tell that Christ is coming to a conclusion. And He's driving the point home here, because He gives us the first command in the passage when He says to let your light shine. In other words, He says "You are the light. Now let it shine. You are the lamp. Now let the lamp keep burning inside of you."

Alistair Begg once said, "If you can't make it burn, at least you can make it twinkle a little bit." Do something for the Lord because the command here it's not to do something extravagant. And the Lord is not telling you to be someone you're not, He's telling you to be the average normal person you are with the light of Christ coming out of you. The only thing that should be unusual about you is the light. And if you're wondering what this looks like, it says to let your light shine before men. That can be translated, let your light shine in front of men or face to face with them. In other words, don't let it shine only when you're at church. And don't let your light shine only when you're at the Bible studies. And

don't let your light shine only when you're at care group. You need to do it at the store and the office and the playground too. And you shouldn't just do it with other Christians because it says "Let your light shine before men," and the word "men" there, it's open ended, it can refer to anybody no matter who they are. Let your light shine to the man at the shop, let your light shine to the man at the bank, let your light shine to the woman at the mall, let it shine to the person serving coffee to you. You need to do this for anyone you come in contact with. It says "in such a way that people may see your good works," which means this is what you shine with, and that is your works. And that's important because if you notice here, He doesn't tell you just shine with your good arguments, although there's a place for that. And He doesn't tell you to shine with your good logic, although that's important, too. We want to give a good gospel presentation when we talk to people. But here in this context, He tells you to do it with your good behavior, because that's something anybody can do. An old Christian can shine with their good works and a young Christian can do it. A strong Christian can please God with their behavior and a weak one can do it. A poor one can do it and a rich one can do it. No one's left out of this. This is a command that anybody can follow. In fact, if you if you look back at the passage here, you can see that He says the word "works" is plural here, because He's not referring to one work you do, but many works. Because Jesus is not calling for perfection, He's calling for consistency. He wants you to work for the glory of God over and over and over again. Do it day in and day out, month in and month out, year in and year out; so the person sitting next to you in the truck can see it. And so the person sitting across the desk from you at work can observe it because if you think about it, this is something the world can't do. They can imitate your behavior a little bit but the one thing they can't fake is your perseverance. They don't have the power to love like you do, and forgive like you do, and pardon like you do consistently. And the world can do it once. They might do it occasionally, but they can't do it over and over again; they don't have the strength. They don't have the ability to speak the truth like you do, and bear one another's burdens like you do, and consider it all joy whenever they face trials, because they don't have the Holy Spirit living in them and giving them a new heart, they still have the same old one. They can't put off the old man and put on the new. They can't kill their flesh and mortify their sin. They can't trust in Christ and receive His mercy, and raise a godly family, and have a godly home, and have a godly marriage because that's something that you and you alone can do.

In fact, when you ask the question, how is the church supposed to respond to all the sin we see around us right now? The answer is that you need to go back to the basics. Everything Jesus says in here is so simple. Jesus is telling you to respond to the wicked world by loving God and loving your neighbor. You do it by believing in Him and doing good works. Share your faith. Let your light shine, be a witness, pray for God to use it. But I'll tell you, the one thing you can't do is to sit around complaining all the time. The one thing you can do in light of the wicked world is to rant and rave and throw your hands up in the air and say "I give up because I don't want to have anything to do with this anymore." That option is not in here. Listen, your world is wicked, but their world was wicked too. If you study the history at this time in the first century, that place was awful. The Roman emperors were depraved, wretched people. And Jesus tells these people here to keep fighting and persevere because that's what My disciples do. They don't quit.

And the reason this is so important for us to talk about today on January 1st in 2023, is because it doesn't seem like the country is going to get any better this year, spiritually speaking. It seems like things will get worse. And the Chilliwack Progress recently did an article I believe it was last fall, which said that British Columbia has become the least religious province in Canada right now, you guys remember that? You might have read that. For the first time in history, there are more lost people living here than saved ones, which is surprising because Canada is already lost in many ways. It's a very secular country, so to think that this is the most secular place makes you cringe. But I'll tell you something. That's okay because we belong to another kingdom first, Amen? And not this one. And we belong to another country and we submit to another King ultimately, and not the ones that rule over British Columbia first. Which means that if British Columbia continues to drift further and further from God, we don't follow them. And if Canada continues to lose its mind more and more in the years to come, it doesn't change our priorities, our goal is still the same. We just want to glorify God. That's it. That's what we're put on earth to do. I know some of you come from different parts of the earth, you're not all from this area, and when you're an immigrant, sometimes you wonder, what am I here for? Why am I in this place? Well, you're in this place to be salt and light. That's why God brought you here.

Next week, since this is the beginning of the year, I do want to talk about another big picture thing; and that's our vision statement. Because I know that many of you are new to our church, and you haven't heard about our vision before. But when our church first started, Grace Advance encouraged us to write a document that explains who we were, and what we were trying to accomplish as a ministry. And I think it would be good to present that to you before we go back to the book of Hebrews. And so we are going to go back into Hebrews after one more week, but we're going to talk about our mission. So please come back and join us for that.

But for this week in my studies, you know, I came across a time, the American pastor Donald Grey Barnhouse visited England for the first time. And he said that it was nice, because the people were friendly and very good to him, but no matter where he went, he was uncomfortable because everything was strange. The food was strange, and the cars were strange, and they drove on the wrong side of the road. Why? Well, because he wasn't from there. He said the reason it was all strange is because that's not his home. My friends, can I remind you this morning, this is not your home? You're just passing through, so don't be surprised when the culture seems strange. You just need to learn how to handle it in a God honouring way. Can we do that this morning? And let me pray that the Lord will give us grace to take the things we've learned and apply them.

Heavenly Father, we always marvel anytime we open the Bible and read the words of Jesus Christ. And the reason we do that, Lord is because what Christ says is always so simple, and so easy to understand. And yet it's so deep and profound. Lord, we thank You that He had conversations and sermons with the people of His day like this, that we can go back and reflect on. Because we do live in a world that has gone off the hinges. In many ways it continues to do so, and there's a temptation for all of us to be

hopeless in the midst of that, and to want to throw in the towel. And yet, You've reminded us here that we have a mission; we can't throw in the towel. We have a goal to achieve. We have a job to do in this world. There's not a man, woman or child in here, that doesn't talk to lost people regularly. We all do. We have lost neighbors, lost coworkers, we have lost family, lost friends; there's people dying and going to hell all around us. And sometimes we lose sight of what our job is supposed to do with them.

Father, would You give us a heart of compassion this morning for this area? Would You take away the heart of cynicism and bitterness that some of us may have toward the evil around us? And instead give us a spirit of boldness and courage to go to those people and tell them there is another way? Father, they're hurting. Cities like Chilliwack, Vancouver, provinces like British Columbia, they're struggling right now. They may be getting wealthier with money, but they're not getting wealthier with the things of God. And we're here to go reach them for Christ. Would you give our church a vision of this in 2023? Would You help us to take these words seriously from Christ and change our priorities, so that we're not trying to be too comfortable?

Lord, thank You for this time this morning. Thank You for Your church that loves Your word and wants to honor it every day. Lord, would You use what we've talked about today to give us grace, to be light in this darkness and I pray this in Jesus' name, Amen.