

# A CITY ON OUR HILL | Matthew 5:13-16

## INTRO:

Was America ever great? Is it great now? How can America become great again?

- Now that I have your attention...
- I don't think there will be a unanimous consensus here and this isn't a political statement or message, but I think its very fair to say that America has been exceptional, not perfect or without her sins, but exceptional. One could say America is a great country and there is no other place like it on earth, and I would agree with that. I love our country.
- I was reminded by our host in India that we have so much to be thankful for here in the US. We should give God praise for all that we have... and he wasn't talking about stuff. He was talking about the order, the systems, the freedoms, even the cleanliness, but also the opportunities, and especially the freedom to worship and the fellowship of believers.
- Andrew's class on Wednesday has brought to light the Christian faith, principles and worldview on which this nation was founded. I'm not prepared to comment much further, other than to say as a culture, we've been lied to about our origins and founders. I'd recommend the following material that the class has worked through and I'm working through.
  - Mark David Hall's "Did America Have A Christian Founding"
  - David and Tim Barton's "The American Story"
- There is a popularized paraphrase/quote often attributed to Alexis de Tocqueville, but its thought rather likely to be a combination of several writings and sayings from several English preachers around 1835 combined with Tocqueville's views. It's been popularized and reshared by several presidents (Eisenhower, Reagan, Clinton) and statesmen over the years.
  - "I sought for the greatness and genius of America in her commodious harbors and her ample rivers, and it was not there. I sought for it in her fertile fields and boundless forests, and it was not there. I sought for it in her rich mines and her vast world commerce, and it was not there. Not until I went into the churches of America and heard her pulpits aflame with righteousness did I understand the secret of her genius and power. America is great because America is good. If America ever ceases to be good, America will cease to be great."

Regardless of the exact origin and wording of the statement, the substance is fairly prophetic and accurate. It's what made America great (and what recognized it as great). And if America's people cease to be good it will then cease to be great. I ask again, is America great today? Is America good today? How do we become great again?

- The answer isn't by creating a strong economy, better immigration policies, or mere military might... although those could/should be the results.
- The answer is to become good again.
- Good in moral character.
- Good in character by way of the Gospel of Jesus.
- The gospel is the only solution, the only answer for a lost people, nation and world.

- (of all of America's greatest exports, by the way, America sharing the gospel through missionary efforts, bible printing, Christian/bible training and education has been among its greatest.)

But Pastor Matt, America is a big place with a lot of people, a lot of problems, and a great deal of sinfulness. It's a bit overwhelming to think about. What can we honestly do?

- We can only do our part and no more.
- But when we all do our part, much can and will be accomplished.
- Although honestly, we collectively might not be able to impact Madison, WI or Washington DC, the truth is that we CAN have a great impact and influence here in Mayville and Dodge county.
  - This is our calling. This is our opportunity. Here is where we can really make a difference.
  - No one else has the influence an opportunities that we do for Dodge County (except those of us here in Dodge county—not just CLF).
- Look around at all that God has done and is doing at CLF over the past few years? Consider his hand of blessing upon us. Consider the young families, the children and teenagers and consider the potential and calling we have to make a tremendous impact... if we all do our part.
  - So what? So how?

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## SCRIPTURE:

### **Matthew 5:13-16 NIV**

<sup>13</sup> “You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled underfoot. <sup>14</sup> “You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden. <sup>15</sup> Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. <sup>16</sup> In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.

NOTE: Who's the audience? Who is Jesus speaking to?

- He's talking to his disciples.
- He's looking his followers in the eyes and saying “All y'all are to be salt and light, a city on a hill”
- It's worth mentioning that this applies to all followers of Christ and this isn't optional, this is part of our call and purpose.
  - We talked a few weeks back about Jonah being saved, rescued and called for a purpose... here's ours.

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## **1: THE CHURCH IS TO BE THE SALT OF THE EARTH**

### **A: SALT IN THE ANCIENT WORLD WAS PRIMARILY A MEANS FOR PRESERVATION**

- Before refrigeration, salt was the primary way people kept meat and fish from spoiling. You'd pack meat in salt, or soak it in brine, and the salt would draw moisture out of the meat. Bacteria needs

moisture to grow and cause decay, so removing that moisture stops the bacteria before they can multiply.

- The salt doesn't undo spoilage that's already happened. It prevents spoilage from starting or spreading further.

#### **B: IN ORDER FOR SALT TO DO ITS WORK OF PRESERVATION IT HAD TO BE IN CONTACT AND GENUINE**

- IN CONTACT: Salt has to touch the meat directly. You can't preserve meat by keeping salt in a separate jar next to it. It has to be worked in, in contact with the thing that's at risk of decaying (further).
- BE GENUINE: Salt has to actually be salt. Ancient salt, especially from sources like the Dead Sea, was often mixed with gypsum and other minerals. Over time or through poor handling, the actual sodium chloride could leach out, leaving behind a white residue that looked like salt but had lost the properties that make salt work. It wasn't that pure salt somehow stopped being salty (that's chemically impossible). It's that what people were using had become "defiled" or diluted to the point of uselessness. It looked the part but couldn't do the job.

#### **C: THE CHURCH IS TO DO IT'S WORK BY BEING "IN THE WORLD, BUT NOT OF IT"**

- That means that the church is called to be present and engaged in our world, our communities, our families while keeping our identity in Christ and producing the fruit of the Spirit.
- It means we are not to conform to the patterns of this world.
- It means that we are to be the ones who influence the culture for good and not for evil
- That if we separate ourselves we stop being influencers due to lack of relationship (No holy huddles— salt in a jar)
- That if we compromise our character and integrity we become saltless salt and useless in regards to godly influence.

#### **D: PRACTICALLY SPEAKING**

##### **Matthew 2. Paradigmatic Preaching: The Sermon on the Mount (5:1–7:29)**

Christians must permeate society as agents of redemption. Of the numerous things to which salt could refer in antiquity, its use as a preservative in food was probably its most basic function. Jesus thus calls his disciples to arrest corruption and prevent moral decay in their world. (Craig Blomberg)

- The Lord is charging his church to be agents of redemption, those who arrest corruption and prevent moral decay in our world.
  - Go be salt (not salty) in the community — take a stand for righteousness, godliness, and goodness
  - We must address the issues of our day — we cannot cower or run or stay silent
  - We must apply biblical truth, counsel, and wisdom to all areas of our lives
  - We must live what we preach

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## **2: THE CHURCH IS TO BE THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD**

*SCIENTIFICALLY: Light is radiant energy that travels outward from its source until something stops it.*

## A: JESUS IS ULTIMATELY THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD

### John 8:12 NIV

<sup>12</sup> When Jesus spoke again to the people, he said, “I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.”

### John 12:46 NIV

<sup>46</sup> I have come into the world as a light, so that no one who believes in me should stay in darkness.

- But he extends this imagery to us:

### Ephesians 5:8 NIV

<sup>8</sup> For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light

### 1 Thessalonians 5:5 NIV

<sup>5</sup> You are all children of the light and children of the day. We do not belong to the night or to the darkness.

### Philippians 2:15 NIV

<sup>15</sup> so that you may become blameless and pure, “children of God without fault in a warped and crooked generation.” Then you will shine among them like stars in the sky

- He is the Light, we are his lights, reflecting his glory, nature, and gospel.

## B: LIGHT DISPELS DARKNESS BY ITS PRESENCE

- Light doesn't have to fight darkness, it just has to shine.
  - Darkness is merely the absence of light
  - The dark areas of the world NEED the presence of light — Christ followers filled with his Holy Spirit and producing his fruit
- Light will shine until something blocks it
  - Think about the light of the stars that reach us — even remote distances can't hinder it.
  - Something has to physically block the light.
    - In this passage its the bowl intended to hide the light (which is antithetical to its purpose)
    - The implication, is that the light will shine, unless the church hides its own light
      - Whether through cowardice or compromise
- So take courage and live boldly and faithfully before all
  - Worth noting this passage follows the beatitudes
  - Living that way is radically countercultural — you will stand out, but as God intended — a city on a hill

## C: LIGHT IS GIVEN TO LIVE IN

- How would one live without light? It's unimaginable
- The light of Christ, the truth of his word, the power of the gospel enables true freedom, abundant life, and eternal life.
  - We're supposed to reflect that light to the world. This is the way to FULLY LIVE as God intended.
- The light of Christ in and through the church is SUPPOSED to attract those fleeing darkness so that they too can live in the freedom Jesus provides.

- When they see LIFE in the LIGHT, many will be drawn out of darkness into his glorious light.
- But how will they see, if we do not shine.

## **D: THE CITY ON A HILL**

- Remember, this wasn't spoken to an individual, it was spoken to the group of disciples and ultimately to the church.
- If one light can make a difference, imagine what a city of light perched up on a hill could become
  - This is what Jesus is calling his church to be — a community of light to the world.
- One of us living faithfully for God in our community or workplace WILL make a difference
  - But several of us a greater impact
  - A great number of us even more.
- We have an incredible opportunity before us.
  - Together we can shine as God's lights — a city on a hill — to all of Mayville and Dodge county
  - We can live out godly lives, full of the spirit, truth and grace to our neighbors and friends.
  - There are those who need the light of Jesus we have — shine brightly to the glory of God.

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## **RESPONSE:**

### **IF WE ARE TO SEE AMERICA GREAT AGAIN, WE MUST SEE AMERICA GOOD AGAIN.**

- If we are to see America good again, we need a mighty move of God.
  - First in his church, Lord make us good, whole, and full of your Spirit
  - Then through his church, Lord make us salt and light, your agents of redemption
    - Empower us to do our part in influencing our communities with the light of Christ
- Without both reformation within and courageous witness without... we will not succeed.
  - But by God's grace and power we can make an eternal difference.

### **Before we conclude, I challenge you to take a moment and consider:**

- How might God want to use me? This week? Today?
- How can I arrest corruption or be an agent of redemption in my world?

### **End in Communion**