

**The Rev. Charlie Holt**

you may have noticed we have a bunch of, scouts here for Scout Sunday. So grateful to see the Cub Scouts and the Boy Scouts that are here and their troop leaders. Welcome. Today we're talking about the salt and the light and the power that makes salt and light happen in our lives, which is the power of God's word and its authority and our engagement with the scriptures in the Bible.

And so let me let me start by just thinking about this idea of salt in Israel, which is all the way on the other side of the planet. There is a lake there, or it's called a sea. Actually, it's a big, big lake that is called the Dead Sea. You ever heard of that body of water, the Dead Sea?

It, it is the actually the lowest place on the planet. And so water can drain into that sea from all over and mainly from the river Jordan. And it goes down, but it only comes out of there by evaporation. And so what's happened year after year after year of water going in, but only coming out by evaporation, is that that has become a very salty sea.

And they call it dead, because the salt content of the Dead Sea is ten times that of the ocean. Have you ever drank ocean water? That's right. It's very, very salty, which you don't. You wouldn't consume ocean water because it's so salty. But imagine ocean water times ten in terms of salty flavor and minerals. And that's the Dead Sea.

In fact, when you go there, and this is one of the things that people do, is they go and float around in the Dead Sea. It actually makes your body, come almost halfway out of the water when you're floating around in the Dead Sea. You don't swim in the Dead Sea. You would never put your face in.

Because if you ingested that water, it would actually poison you. It's that strong. But people, when Jesus says you are the salt of the earth, people knew exactly what he was talking about when he said, you can lose your saltiness because if you took salt from the Dead Sea, it's not just the compound sodium chloride, which is salt, sodium chloride, in its pure forms is a lot of what we're eating when we eat table salt and we sprinkle that on our food.

But you wouldn't sprinkle the Dead Sea salt on your food. It wouldn't taste good because it had other minerals in there, and it was used to preserve things like tanning leather and, and, it was used as a mineral bath for healing. It was very, very strong. But one of the things that happens with salt is it gets diluted.

And when you're when it's full of other compounds and minerals and the sodium chloride part, the salty part actually gets diluted by water and moisture. And what you end up left with is a dry, white powdery residue, which is not really good for much. And so what they would do in their olden days is they would take that residue and they just throw it on the road because it was no longer useful, because the moisture had taken all the salt content out of the out of the other minerals.

And this is the picture that Jesus is saying about our lives, is that we actually need to hold on to our saltiness when it comes to the culture around us, that all of us have pressure in our life. We sometimes call it peer pressure. If we're, in class and in school, it's peer pressure. And we know that there are helpful friends and there are unhelpful friends.

Right. And the unhelpful friends that we have in our life are, are, in a sense, encouraging us to take on some of the corruption of our culture. And that could be in, in the realm of, of morals and doing the right and wrong thing. And, and so there's always a pull upon those of us who claim the name of Christ to conform to the culture around us, rather than being transformative with the culture.

A lot of studies have been done about this, but just looking at the church in the United States of America, which unfortunately compared to Christians in other parts of the world, is very cultural conforming. And it happens both on, the political spectrum of the progressive or liberal or Democrat, whatever you want to call and the conservative side of the equation or the, what would be the Republicans or what you find is in the church is the churches tend to divide along the political spectrum.

And what that saying about the church is that the church is actually being more formed by the culture than the church and forming the culture and transforming the culture, and that we are

just simply a reflection of the prevailing philosophical ideologies of our day and not allowing our Christian ideologies to influence things. And so what Jesus is saying is, you have to be the salt of the world.

You need to be different from the world around you and the people around you. And they're not ought to be a distinctiveness to your life that does, that preserves the world around us and keeps it from getting as corrupt and manipulated by evil as it could be. And that means being a testimony and a witness in this world, and standing for things like truth and what is right and what is wrong.

And that can be really hard. And in a culture where, there's a lot of relativism and moral relativism and it and it's tough to know what is right and what is wrong even. And that's gets us back to the scriptures where Jesus says, there's how you know, what it means to be salty is engagement with the Bible teaches you what is of God and what is not of God.

Paul, in his letter to the Corinthians, talks about the wisdom of the world. And then he says, then there's the wisdom of God. And so we have to be wise and discerning what is the wisdom of the world and what is the wisdom of God? And how would we know what the wisdom of God is? But right here, this is what teaches us the wisdom of God is the is the scriptures.

So on one level, we need to be distinctive in a way and in a sense rub against the grain of the way the culture is be different in a way that actually might not feel comfortable or conforming. But then the other thing about Christians is that when we live the Christian life, we start to bear qualities in our life that are very attractive.

We become loving and kind and that holiness even has an attractive quality. We become, people who forgive and know how to confess our sins well and admit when we've done wrong and say that we're sorry and we don't have pride. We have humility. And so those qualities of the Christian life that are manifesting Jesus describes as the light of the world.

And when you have both the salt and the light shining in your in your hearts and in your life, you become what is described as a city on a hill that cannot be hidden. You will stand out, others

will see you and they'll say, that's different. That person is behaving in a way, and they're talking in a way, and they're living their life in such a way that one it's attractive, but it's also, it's unusual and it's different and it stands out.

It's bright. So light is the way Jesus says, and if you have the light of God in your heart and in your life, you don't want to put a basket on it. There's a children's song that you all may know. This little light of mine. I'm going to let it shine. You want to sing it with me?

This little light of mine. I'm going to let it shine. This little light of mine. I'm gonna let it shine. Let it shine, let it shine, let it shine. Good job. Great singers hide it under a bushel. No, I'm going to let it shine. We won't keep going. But, you don't want to hide your light under the bushel, is what Jesus saying.

But you need to allow your Christian character and your Christian discipleship to be visible. And I think Jesus, one of the things that Jesus is saying, and we can think about this, whether it's whether it's an authentic expression of a Scout troop or a church where we are trying to live by a set of Christian values and beliefs and principles, that and upholding those.

And one of the reasons why the Scouts was founded, actually was, was to raise up Christian, young people that would have the, the values that our culture desperately needs and to teach those to you in a way that helps you to be strong as young men and women in this world. And so scouting has always been about that formation in the lives of young people.

But that's what the church is all about, is that we are to be formed in the scriptures in a way that teaches us truth, and also the character of Christ that we may call love. And to bring those two things together. There was, a study that was done of a church in, in Chicago's called Willow Creek Church still exists, but at the time of the study, it was one of the largest churches in the entire country.

And one of the things that the leaders of that church noticed was that the people in their, in their pews were not much different than the people of the world. And what they were wanting

to see and study was, what led to this sort of salt and light being manifest in our members? And so they found some members that fit the example and they identified a subset, and they isolated the people that they saw this sort of character transformation that they were looking for.

And they said, okay, that's one set. And then we'll put everybody else and we'll do this survey and we'll try to figure out what made the difference with these people versus these people. You know what the number one thing that they found that made the biggest difference was the engagement with this. That was the number one thing that the study just discerned is that the people that were being transformed into the light and the salt in their congregation were the people that were spending time daily meditating on and reflecting on the scriptures, not just learning it as an academic exercise of what it says, but opening it up and trying to figure

out how this applies to my life. What is God trying to teach me and what I'm reading right here? What is how does my story fit into this larger, bigger story? And I think that's at the heart of what Jesus is trying to get across to us when he says, you got to be salt, you got to be light.

And let me tell you, the means by which this happens, which is the scriptures. And not one thing in this book, not one jot or tittle, is not relevant to your life. Every single aspect of it, every single word in here is important to apply to our lives and to find fulfillment. Because this is the key. We didn't actually need to do a reveal study in order to figure that out.

Jesus had taught that to us all along, that it's the principles and the pages of the Bible that actually help us to be the people that God is calling us to be. I'm going to at the next service, I'm going to interview a young lady who is a missionary in India. She was somebody I met one of my daughter's friends, and she was talking to me about the persecution that is happening in India of Christians.

There's become this Hindu nationalist movement in the government. And so they're not allowing, Christians inside the country to receive outside support and help. And, and they're really trying to put pressure on Christian organizations and churches to shut down in the country of India. And so she was telling me that and I we were very concerned about her because we love this young lady.

She said, young lady in her 20s and, and so we, we were asking, well, what is the implication of that sort of pressure on Christians, to conform to that political pressure on you? And she, she's so full of joy and, and, one of the things that she said is, well, it just means that it's more important for us to live the Christian life than to be, and to be a witness, because that's what's going to get people to, find Jesus is that we have to we have to show in our lives that we actually authentically believe, what we teach and preach.

And, and this, this is the point that the risk of the church is not as much persecution and the pressure from the culture as it is dilution and compromise. And this is, this is, the heart of what Jesus is saying to us, stay true to his word and don't lose your testimony and your witness out of pressure to dilute your faith.