

February 19, 2006



## Salt and Light

by Rev. Jerry L. McGlone

### Matthew 5:13-16

[Jesus said] *You are the salt of the earth; but if salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything except to be thrown out and trodden under foot by men.*

*You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hid. Nor do men light a lamp and put it under a bushel, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.*

Three little boys were out playing in the front yard when a fire truck zoomed past. Sitting on the front seat beside the driver of the fire truck was a beautiful Dalmatian, its black and white spots standing out in contrast to the red fire truck.

The children saw the dog, and they started trying to figure out why the dog was there. What was the purpose for the dog on the fire truck?

One five-year-old boy said, "I know. They use him to keep the crowds back when they get to the fire." "No," the second little boy said, "he's there for good luck, so nobody'll get burned." The third child, a six-year-old boy, was very definite about his answer. He said, "I know why he's there. They use him to find the fire hydrant!"

Those little boys knew what they were doing. They were trying to figure out why that dog was on the fire truck. What they didn't realize they were doing was dancing very close to the key question of life which every one asks: "Why am I here?"

It's a real struggle to answer that one. "Why are you here?" "What's the purpose for your life?" "What are you supposed to be doing?" Have you ever wondered why you are here?

Maybe that question comes close to home when a friend or a colleague, someone who's a contemporary of yours, dies unexpectedly. When that happens, it really brings your own mortality into question.

Has it ever happened to you? A friend, a co-worker, is there one day, working right alongside you, and the next day, that person is gone. It makes you realize that the same thing could happen to you. And that's when you really start wondering, "why am I here?" It can make you wonder if your life shouldn't be more than what it's been so far.

That's a key question. You're going to struggle to find an answer that will satisfy. And at some point, you're going to see that the trappings of life, everything that you think gives you stability and success, are fleeting. That's when you begin looking for something more, something deeper, something more lasting than the run-of-the-mill life and the temporary fun of party after party.

You ask: shouldn't life be more than that? Shouldn't your life count for something?

In the Bible passage today, Jesus seems to know that you wrestle with the issue of why you are here. This passage is part of what is called The Sermon on the Mount. In this sermon, Jesus demonstrates his understanding of life and human nature, and he tries to help you understand why you are here.

Jesus cuts right to the chase. He tells you why you are here. You're here for two reasons: to be salt-seasoning and to be a light bearer.

Jesus said, "*You are the salt of the earth.*"

Now, salt is a very common, ordinary thing. You find it on virtually every table and in every kitchen. When you go to the grocery store, it's quite cheap.

There was a time when I never thought about salt. I just took it for granted. I didn't even know when it was used. Then, my father fainted.

When I was in junior high school, my father started feeling dizzy. He got real dizzy whenever he walked. That was bad news, because dad was a mailman. He walked for a living.

One day he got so dizzy, he fainted. That's when he went to the doctor to find out what was wrong. It turned out that dad had an inner-ear problem. Today, the doctor would have some technical term for it, but back in the early 1960's it was just called an inner ear problem.

Well, one thing he had to do was give up salt. From that moment on, my mother stopped using all salt in her cooking. The first dinner she cooked after that doctor's appointment was the time when I learned about how very important salt is to my enjoyment of food.

Have you ever eaten mashed potatoes cooked without salt? I guarantee it: they're awful. "Just add some salt," mom said over my gagging noises at the table. Adding salt after the mashed potatoes were already cooked didn't help. Sometimes salt has to be part of the process. That's when I started cooking for myself.

Jesus knew how important salt is. He knew it enhances the flavor of what you're eating. He knew it adds a little zest to your food.

And Jesus says you've got to be salt to the world. Now what do you think it would mean if you were salt to the world?

If salt adds a little zest and brings out the flavors of other things, then maybe that's what you're supposed to do here in the world. Maybe you're supposed to spice up life a bit. Maybe you're supposed to help other people by bringing out their particular flavors - their uniqueness, their gifts and talents.

And when you add a little zest to their life, you help them simmer to perfection. Wouldn't that be something if you did that for somebody else!

One way you can do that is to encourage and nurture other people. You can't just sprinkle on some of your zest after they're all done. You've got to add some zest while they're still cooking, still learning, still growing.

You can help somebody discover his gifts. You can help somebody enhance her life. You can help somebody grow into a healthy, happy, productive, Christian child of God.

That's what happened to Scott Adams. One day he was flipping through the television channels and saw the closing credits for a broadcast called *Funny Business*, a show about cartooning. Scott had always wanted to be a cartoonist, but didn't know how to go about doing it.

The host of the show was a cartoonist named Jack Cassady, and Scott decided to write him a letter. He explained his interest in getting into the profession, and sent along some samples of his work.

A few weeks later, Scott received an encouraging hand-written letter from Jack, who answered all of his specific questions about materials and process.

However, Jack did more than that. He encourage Scott to send his work to publishers, but he went on to warn Scott that he would probably be rejected at first. “Don’t get discouraged,” Jack wrote, adding that Scott’s work was good and worthy of publication.

Scott get really excited. He submitted some of his best cartoons to the best magazines around. All of his work was quickly rejected. After getting rejected, Scott started feeling rejected, and he put all his materials away. The professionals rejected him, and he decided to forget about his far-fetched dream of becoming a cartoonist.

But a year and a half later, out of the blue, Scott received a second letter from Jack Cassady. Jack wrote, “The reason I’m dropping you this note is to again encourage you to submit your ideas to various publications... Sometimes encouragement in the funny business of graphic humor is hard to come by. That’s why I am encouraging you to hang in there and keep drawing.”

Scott was very touched by Jack’s second letter. He acted on his encouragement. He got his art supplies back out; he drew some sample strips, and sent them off to publishers. Eventually, his cartoon strip *Dilbert* was published in over 700 newspapers, and he completed several books - all because a man named Jack Cassady took the time to encourage him.<sup>1</sup>

Jack was the salt-seasoning for Scott. Scott never would have become who he became had it not been for Scott sprinkling some encouragement along the way.

Jesus says that’s a part of your purpose on earth, to be salt-seasoning, and to help others by enhancing their lives and encouraging them as they move through life’s journey.

You can do that. You can encourage other people to expand and grow and fulfill their dreams. You can be somebody’s cheering section;

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<sup>1</sup> *Chicken Soup For the Soul At Work: 101 Stories of Courage, compassion And Creativity In The Workplace* (Chicken Soup for the Soul Series), by Jack Canfield, editor, et al., November 1996.

you can believe in somebody's potential. You can help somebody live a better life.

And the second thing Jesus says is: "*You are the light of the world.*"

Think back to the story of creation. Remember that, in the beginning, everything was total darkness, and the first thing God said was, "Let there be light..." [Genesis 1:3]

Light is important. It attracts you and warms you. It allows you to see where you're going.

Think what it would be like if you had no light, if there was nothing but darkness. Think of some of the things you would not be able to see. You couldn't see the color of your lover's eyes. You couldn't see the redbirds out at your feeder hanging in the tree in your back yard. You couldn't see the smile on your grandchild's face. You couldn't see the sprouts and the flowers that will soon be poking their heads out of the soil in the spring. You couldn't see the oranges and golds of autumn.

Light brings out color and transforms the darkness.

So, what does Jesus mean by saying you are the light of the world? I think he means you're supposed to be a bright spot in an otherwise dark place. I think he means you're suppose to show the way, to illuminate the path, to be a guiding light.

Jesus says that's your purpose. "*Let your light so shine before men,*" he says, that they may "*give glory to your Father who is in heaven.*"

With the Winter Olympics going on in Italy right now, many of you saw the Olympic torch carried into the stadium to open the games. Do you remember back a few years, back to another Olympic year when the Torch was carried through North Tonawanda?

Can you imagine what it must feel like to carry that Torch, to hold high that small flame lighting up the hearts of all who see it pass?

Can you imagine what it would feel like to be a light-bearer for Jesus and God? That's what Jesus wants you to be - the one who carries the light of God for others to see.

The light of God is seen by how you live your life, by how you relate to others, by how you treat your fellow human beings. You are to live your life so that you are an example for some and a guiding light for others.

It is an awesome responsibility. It is also a significant reason for being, to be one of God's light-bearers, reflecting the light and love of God in what you do and who you are.

When I look back over my life, I remember those many people who brought the light of God into my life. There was Professor Richard Wolf at Vanderbilt Divinity School, my teacher and guide. There was Rev. Robert Maphis in Richmond, Virginia, my pastor, my friend, and my mentor. There was Harry Lowers in Shenandoah, Virginia, my tutor and friend who took me under his wing, and showed me how to be a pastor. There were Captain Robert and Nurse Lena Butler, here in our church, my encouragers and witnesses to how people should live as Christians. There was Richard Pierce, my confidant and guide. There was Bob Schasel, my friend and smile-bringer.

And even today, I have Lee Faver, my counselor and advisor. I have Janet, my partner and best friend. I have my children, my joy and my hope.

All of these people, and so many more, bring light into my life, brightening up all my dark places, showing me the path to walk, and helping me navigate the complexities of every day life.

So many people have been important light-bearers in my life. Do you know someone like them, someone whom you'd call a light-bearer? Do you think anyone out there looks at you and sees God's light shining through your life? Is anyone out there going to call you his or her light-bearer?

It's what Jesus says you're supposed to be.

A fellow happened to be in an elevator going up a New York City skyscraper when there was a power failure. He got caught along with several other people, all strangers to one another, stuck and stranded somewhere between floors.

They were riding up in the elevator, shoulder to shoulder, not speaking, when suddenly the elevator jerked to a stop, and everything went dark. Everyone talked at once, then they all got quiet. As time moved on, fear and panic became evident.

Fortunately, the man remembered that he had something to help. He had a tiny flashlight with him, one he always carried in his pocket just for situations like this. He got it out and turned it on, and everything changed.

Just a little bit of light totally transformed the situation. The fear faded, and the trapped comrades began to tell jokes, and laugh. They even sang some songs.

By the time they were rescued forty-five minutes later, they had become friends. It all happened because of that little bit of light which pierced their darkness. Just a little bit of light changed everything.

When you leave here this morning, remember that Jesus said you're here to be salt-seasoning. You're here to be light.

So, carry the light of God into your homes and your schools, into your places of work and play. Carry the light of God with you into every corner of your world. Be the light of God, and let it shine through you.

I think that's a good enough reason to be here!