light because “the glory of God gives it light, and the lamb [of God] is its lamp.” Paul told the Philippians to do everything without complaining or arguing so that they might “become blameless and pure, children of God without fault in a crooked and depraved generation, in which you shine like stars in the universe…” (Phil 2:15-16). “The light of Christ in our lives shines like the light of the stars against the dark night sky.

Jesus then describes the light in terms of a city on a hill. Even in the ancient world where there were not street lights, cities could be seen for some distance because of the lamps people used to see when the sun went down. When the light shines in the darkness, it simply cannot be hidden. What’s more, people don’t light a lamp, which is used to help people see in the darkness, and then turn around and cover up the light, which totally defeats the purpose of the lamp. Instead they place the lamp on a stand so that everyone in the house can use it to see what’s around them and be able to do what they otherwise would not be able to do. The idea that you would have a light and not use it to see in the darkness makes no sense. Just as salt can lose its saltiness, light can grow dim.

So, Jesus concludes, let your light shine before men that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven. So, what are the good deeds Jesus is talking about? He doesn’t specify, but it seems here that Jesus has in mind everything that is a visible expression of our faith in Jesus and citizenship in his kingdom. It’s living out everything that makes us so incredibly different than the people around us. It’s sharing the reason for our hope with those who ask us, and doing so with gentleness and respect (1Peter 3:15). But it’s also the way we conduct our relationships, working through conflict rather than resorting to gossip or slander (2Corinthians 12:20, James 3:9ff), for instance. It’s forgiving others when they sin against us even when they don’t ask for it. It’s giving more than we’re required to give. It’s loving our enemies. It’s all of those things that don’t make sense to the people around us.

Lest we think that our good works are the point, Jesus reminds us that when we do it correctly, the light others see in us will bring glory to Father, and not to us. How does our light bring glory to God? I think it’s because when we live in these ways, there can be no doubt that God’s grace is the source of our lives. Human beings just don’t do the kind of things described in the sermon on the mount. Left to our own devices, we point out other people’s faults rather than admitting our own. We hold grudges. We’re selfish. Just stop by the nursery when we open it back up and you’ll see that as humans, we come with that software preloaded. So, what do we conclude from all of this?

Conclusions

One, there is a fundamental difference between the church and the world. The church and the world are salt and decay, light and darkness. Believers are those who have been born from above, or born again into a new life. There is no reason to make faith in Christ unnecessarily odd or awkward, but neither should we ever think that we can somehow live out our faith with such nuance and sophistication that it will be anything other than at odds with the culture of this world. As Paul says, “What does righteousness have to do with wickedness? What fellowship can light have with darkness? What harmony is there between Christ and Baal (2Cor 6:14)?”

Two, the difference between the church and the world can only be seen in the lives of believers. As God’s people, we know the difference between following the “prince of the power of the air” and the one true living God who revealed himself in Christ (Ephesians 2:2). But other people don’t know that. As God’s people, we have a responsibility to demonstrate the difference between salt and decay, or between light and dark. We do that by the way we live. If we don’t live differently, we functionally erase the distinction between light and darkness in people’s minds and fail to bear witness to who God is. And in spite of what we sometimes assume, being salt and light doesn’t happen by attending church because people out there don’t attend church with us. We are salt and light when we conduct life and business and relationships based on kingdom values—based on things like the beatitudes. If we don’t conduct our lives differently, they have no way of knowing the difference.

Three, if we are not functioning as salt and light, the answer is not to try harder, but to mourn our spiritual poverty and repent. I’ve said several times that the Sermon on the Mount is not a new law. The beatitudes are not Jesus’ version of the ten commandments. They are outward expressions of what God has done in our hearts. Or, to use the example Jesus will use, the beatitudes are the fruit of the changes God has made to our tree—our heart. So when we see that we’re not preserving the world like salt, but sometimes even contributing to its decay, the answer is to mourn our spiritual poverty. When we see that we’re not shining a light, but trafficking in the darkness, the answer is to mourn our spiritual poverty and let God continue to change us so that we naturally begin to produce different fruit.
Matthew 5:13-16

Good morning. Today is our third message in our series on the Sermon on the Mount. If you missed either of the previous sermons in our series, you can listen to or read them at wcag.org/sermons, or you can watch them by going to wcag.org and clicking on the button that says watch online. This morning, we’re going to look at Matthew 5:13-16, which I want to read for us now.

13 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 by men.
14 You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden.
15 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. 

In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.

Salt of the Earth (v 13)

Jesus begins this part of the Sermon on the Mount by saying, “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 by men.” While salt is used to flavor food, it seems unlikely that Jesus is suggesting we can flavor the world. It’s far more likely he’s talking about salt’s ability to preserve things that would otherwise decay, or at least decay at a far quicker rate.

In his mercy, God provided sinful man with several influences intended to keep the world from descending into complete chaos. God provided the family. The fifth commandment provided the family. The fifth commandment described in the beatitudes and that can only happen through repentance and then an ongoing lifestyle of repentance. We can’t change the world when we live and act and talk the very same way the world does. We are also the light of the world.

Light of the World (vv 14-16)

14 You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden.
15 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.

In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.

In John 8:12, Jesus says, “I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.” So how are we the light of the world if Jesus is the light of the world? We are the light of the world, but that light does not originate with us. Jesus is the light and it is his light that shines through our lives. Revelation 21:23 says that in heaven there will be no need for...