

Ye Are the Light of the World - Ye Are the Salt of the Earth

by William Fitch

The church is called to be the salt of the earth and the light of the world, proclaiming a way of life that is free from corruption, adulteration, and darkness.

Duration: 35:49

Scripture: Matthew 5:3

Topics: "Church Mission", "Spiritual Light"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher emphasizes that history is a reflection of the human heart and its tendencies towards evil. He also highlights the importance of understanding the specific mission of the church in the world. The preacher explains that the church is called to be the light of the world and the salt of the earth, proclaiming a way of life that is free from corruption and darkness. Ultimately, the church is sent out to be the savior of society, drawing people towards the light of God's purity and peace.

Transcript

Jesus said, ye are the light of the world, ye are the salt of the earth. During these Sunday mornings of the month of January, it has been our privilege to engage in a series of studies on the subject of the Church and the world. I said when we began that we would undoubtedly find these to be most important discussions.

And it's very evident from the comments and from the correspondence that has come to me that you have indeed been finding them so. You and I live in this world. We are part of the economy of this world.

We are subject continually to the pressures of this world. And yet, as Christians, our true home is not here. We belong to another country.

Our habitation is in God, and heaven is our only true home. We are called to be in the world, and yet not off the world. And this is one of the supreme tests that every Christian disciple must face.

The dilemma is continually before him. How can he influence the world without going into the world? And yet, how can one go into the world and not become tainted with its spirit and affected by its culture? Our whole way of life, as well as our thought processes, are conditioned by social and cultural patterns which are definitely not in origin, nor in spirit. And you and I have to make up our mind, because we dare not go

along with the tide.

We must, by the grace of God, face the facts and settle it within our hearts what way we are going to go. We must decide who is going to win within us, God or the world. And we must therefore search the scriptures for the truest guidance that we can find, and also cry to the Lord our strength and our life for grace to choose the way that the scriptures of truth do show.

Now that's what we've been trying to do in recent Sundays. It has been under very great constraint that I've been led to these subjects this month, and yet I've known continually that the Lord was sending his word to us at this time, and that for some very particular purpose, and that as he has been leading us to consider the implications of our discipleship in the world, it has been towards this specific end that the church, the church that God has so signally blessed, this church of not, throughout the years, might emerge into a fuller ministry and with a deeper level of dedication than it has ever known before in the service of her Lord and of her King. My constant prayer through these days has been that no word would come to us but only the word of the Holy Ghost, and that all that the Holy Ghost is saying to us we may have found grace to receive and to obey.

This is the last Sunday on this present series of study. Let's take just a moment to recap. We have studied our Lord's ministry and teaching.

We have noted that he has stressed there is an irreconcilable hostility between his church and the world, and that this hostility would not in any sense be eased or ceased by the conversion of the world to the Christian faith. On the contrary, one of the great perils the church would face would be of assimilating the spirit of the world to herself. And when the Son of Man shall come, will he find faith on the earth? And then we studied the Apostles' teaching.

Be not conformed to this world. Be not conformed to the wisdom of this world, to the course of this world, to the cares of this world, to the spirit of this world. And then we moved into that inner sanctum, that holy of holies of the New Testament, in the 17th chapter of St. John's Gospel, the great high priestly prayer.

And we heard our Savior meditating upon the mystery of the gift of his church to himself. We heard him interceding for the purity of the life of the church amongst men. We heard him outlining the authority of the mission that has been committed to the church.

And we heard him expecting the unity of the fellowship of his church. And then last Sunday we moved on to another grand facet of the grand debate, moved on to consider the power behind the world, the prince of this world, of whom our Savior spoke so much. And last Sunday morning we noted some very pregnant and altogether important things.

We noted that behind the pull and the pressure of the world is the God of this world. We noted that to love the world is to become in bondage to the God of this world. We reminded ourselves that Christ has overcome the world.

And then we noted as we closed that in that victory we may share, because this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith. Now today we move forward to our final study. Move forward to ask, what is the specific mission of the church in the world? Why are we here? Why is it that God does not immediately translate a soul to heaven as soon as that soul is born into his family? Why does God leave us here? And to answer that, I have chosen two of the most staggering statements that our Lord ever

made.

Indeed, if it were not Christ who made these statements, if they rested on apostolic authority alone, we might almost dare to question them. But it's our Lord who says it. It's Christ alone who declares them, and who says this.

Ye, to his church he is speaking. Ye are the salt of the earth. You are the light of the world.

By any standard these are daring and daunting and amazing and almost incredible words. You are the light of the world. For who are these men? Look at them just for a moment.

They are the disciples, and none of them are men of the schools. Gifted men certainly, but none of them possessed of the qualities and gifts that the world counts noteworthy. They looked at them, we are told subsequently in the book of Acts, and they perceived that they were ignorant and unlearned men.

They weren't men with the scholar's gown. They weren't the kind who were naturally world leaders. All unknown men.

Subsequently they were to become pioneers in the spread of the glad tidings of the gospel. But as of now, as at this particular moment, when our Savior has gone up into the mountain and has begun to teach them, they are really an unknown band, and seemingly so small a company of insignificant men. And yet our Lord says to them, you are the salt of the earth.

You are the light of the world. Just what did he mean? We must of course recall that in the immediately preceding verses we have the Beatitudes, and we have studied these in the past. And the Beatitudes give to us the portrait of the Christian man.

Here is the blessed man. Here is the truly Christian man. Blessed are the poor in spirit.

Blessed are they that mourn. Blessed are the meek. Blessed are they that hunger and thirst after righteousness.

Here is the true church. Here is the true disciple. And our Lord has been outlining this category of man.

And he's been showing so clearly to his disciples that they are going to fit into this category. That this is the kind of man he's going to make them. And then he says, you, being such men, are going to be the light of the world.

He recognizes in them, even now, though no doubt in a very limited degree, the qualities and the distinguishing characteristics of which he has been speaking. And he says, you, men like you, are going to be the salt of the earth. You are going to be the light of the world.

And in saying that, he declares the great charter truths of the gospel of redeeming grace. Because it's the very heart of our Savior's teaching that it is his church alone, within his church alone, that is and is to be found the light of life. The development of our Savior's teaching in the Sermon on the Mount is very emphatic and very clear.

The good life is delineated. Our Lord states what a Christian really is. He makes it his first business to define Christian character.

And then he begins to apply this description. Having shown what the Christian man really is, he proceeds to show what the Christian man really does. Or to put it in another way, having demonstrated the character of the Christian, he now proceeds to define the conduct of the Christian.

And he says to his church, you are going to be the light of the world. You are going to be the salt of the earth. And any series of studies on the church and the world would be absolutely incomplete, unless we face the implications of this kind of statement, as we are trying to do this morning.

I want you to note first of all the assumption that is basic in these statements. And then we'll examine the mission that's involved in them. And then as we close, we'll study the gospel invitation that's implied.

You are the light of the world. You are the salt of the earth. Let's think about the assumption that is basic to these sayings of our Lord.

And it's a twofold assumption. The first concerns the world, and the second concerns God in his relation to the world. Let's think for a moment about the world, and the assumption that is basic in such a statement of our Lord.

When our Lord says, you are the salt of the earth, and you are the light of the world, there is a very definite assumption. And it is this, that the world in we live as a world in darkness. Because if he is sending his church out to be the salt of the earth, if he is sending his church out to be the light of the world, obviously there is corruptness, and there is darkness on every side.

Now that of course is not popular theology. That is not the kind of popular teaching. This isn't the kind of thing that modern man expects to hear from the church.

However much he may study the march of history, and however much the march of history may remind him that he is not the wanted and boasted being that he would like to consider himself to be, yet man goes on thinking he is. Man goes on believing in what he calls the natural enlightenment of the human spirit. Man goes on continuing to believe that within himself there is the light that he requires upon everything, even upon God.

Man continues to believe in human reliability, and human resourcefulness to tackle the ultimate issues. But against that our Lord says that this world is a corrupt world, and that this world is a world in darkness. Now when our Lord says that, he is repeating obviously what all the Bible has been declaring from the beginning.

And that is what you would expect, because he is the word and all the scriptures give testimony to him. We therefore expect uniformity of testimony from the written word and from the living word. And the testimony of all the Bible is this, the testimony of our Lord concerning man is this, that there is rottenness in the earth, that this world in which you and I live is a fallen world, that the world in which you and I live is a sinful world, that this world in which you and I live is a bad world, that the tendency of this world in which we live is always to evil, that the tendencies of the human heart are always to wars and to strife and to violence and to death, that there are corrosive and degenerative and putrefying elements built into the very constitution of society for which man has found no cure.

And this is the world, this is the kind of world in which you and I are called to live. There is a fatal bias which denies our best intentions. At the heart of our lives there are foul and vile and rotten and hideous things.

That's what our Lord says. You cannot read the Bible without recognizing that, that this is the biblical diagnosis of the human situation. And as it happens there are many allies upon whom we can call today to support this biblical diagnosis, history of which we have already mentioned is eloquent.

During the past three thousand years there have been barely three hundred of them that have been free from war. But in the great era of enlightenment in the days when the whole theory of evolution, scientific evolution, had permeated into the realm of philosophy and man's thinking, and it had got into the whole bloodstream of man's thought concerning his future and the development and course of history and of man, there were many who thought that the world was going to go on getting better and better. It was just a case of enlightenment.

It was a case of education. It was a case of more and more social amelioration and the like. And soon would come the utopia for which man so long had dreamed.

And that went on for nearly fifty years. And then suddenly out of a blue, blue sky there came the thunderbolt of 1914 and the dreadful holocaust of 1914 to 1918, which so many of you still remember, the first great world war. But even then the kind of thinking was this, that this is the war to end war.

There will be nothing more after this. We'll all have learned our lesson. 1919 came, and all the struggles of the twenties.

And then in 1933 there was a certain putsch in Germany. In 1936, 1937, 1938 the Munich crisis, and 1939 the world again was plunged into war. And for these five or six awful years we lived, right within the heart and vortex of the volcanoes, was what resulted.

Surely this is indicative of the heart of man. Surely this is the story of the human heart. Surely history itself in its total concept is just a presentation of that which is basic within each individual breath.

It's just a projection in its fullest possible extent of that which is here within ourselves. Has the world improved since 1945? We've had 16 years, well nine now, of the cold war. And we're being told on many sides that the forces that are hand to Christ are winning better in the cold war than in the so-called hot war.

Story of history, I suggest to you is eloquent reminder of the assumption that our savior here is making. There are corrosive, degenerative, biased, pardeeble tendencies in every heart. But not only history, think of modern psychology and psychiatry.

Think of the great teachers in this school. Think of the way in which, during the past hundred years, there has been such careful examination given to the ego of man. And in the end of the day, this has to be recorded, that those who have gone down deepest into the study of the essential ego have come up with a declaration of the hideous nature of the spirit that they have found, that underneath the subconscious and deep down in these hidden realms that we ourselves scarcely know, there are influences, there are powers, there are forces that are absolutely and unutterably violent.

Why is it that you and I would hesitate ever to have our dreams projected on a screen? Why is it that we would hesitate to have the thoughts of our imagination made public? Why? Because they are evil. And the Lord looked out upon men and saw that the imaginations of their hearts were only evil. There's not only history and psychiatry to cite as allies in support of the biblical diagnosis, there is the whole field of society around us.

And as we look out onto society, see these foul and rotten sores that fester on the body polity, on which we will not and need not particularize this morning, though we well could, because we are not blind to what is going on. And some of us who try to keep abreast in the frontiers of the thinking and of the action of our modern generation know so well what is happening. And some of the kind of things that we could begin to tell you about that are happening even in this city, I say corrosive and degenerative and putrefied, we would need to begin and coin new language to try and describe the unutterable degeneration of the human heart, decaying and deathly and diseased conditions in society.

And that is the unregenerate world. And men and women, let's face the fact again. Let's try and face the biblical analysis and diagnosis of the situation, because it's only as we see the light in the of God that we will be able to go and work the light.

This is a darkened world. In spite of the so-called enlightenment of human culture and philosophy, the Bible declares that there is only darkness. Indeed, it calls it gross darkness.

Do you fellows and girls in your work, in your studies, you meet with some of the most delightful people? Don't be misled. Don't forget our Lord's diagnosis. Apart from him there is only darkness.

This is a world blessed with every facility to create a paradise, a millennium on earth within twenty years. There's nothing lacking. Even with this explosion of population throughout all the world, there's plenty, there's abundance and more and still more to feed everyone and to make everyone know fullness and plenty and blessedness.

But instead, over our head, the shadows of racial suicide become darker with every decade. Sometimes we begin for a little just to feel that that kind of thing has been pushed into a corner and we may forget. But don't let's forget, men and women, that the stockpile grows bigger every month.

The stockpile of the hydrogen bombs and everything beyond are becoming multiple. Think of the situation in personal and social relationships, in industrial problems, in economic issues. Look at the tragic breakdown in personal behavior.

Look at the broken homes of our enlightened century. I say that the man is simply pulling bandages across his eyes who refuses to face the facts that this world is in darkness. But that is not all.

Because, you see, along with this assumption, the assumption that is implicit in our Savior's statement is this other assumption, which is that God has done something about it. That God has provided an antiseptic for the corruption. That God has provided the light of life for those that sit in the darkness of death.

And that this is the glory of the gospel. So much for the assumption. We've spent all our time for this morning, I'm afraid, on that.

This message has become completely unbalanced, homiletically wrong. Let's just take a moment to speak of the church's mission. The church's mission is defined here as salt and light.

The ministerial office is this office of carrying the light into the darkness and of carrying the salt into that which will otherwise become completely corrupt. The Christian is meant to be the salt of society. And our Lord sends his own out to live in workshops and in homes and in offices.

And he sends them out there to radiate the spirit of pure thinking and clean love and sincere goodness. Sends them out there in the midst of men to be, as it were, a little colony of heaven. In the midst of all that corruption, to be a spot of absolute purity.

In the midst of all the darkness, to be a pinpoint of light. In the midst of all these corrosive and degenerative factors, to be a factor of uplift and a pointer and a signal to God. That is what the church is sent to be.

That is what she is called to do. And by doing that, she acts as salt does in the physical realm. And as light does in the darkness.

For who else has the light? Men and women, Christians and friends, let me remind you again that our greatest thinkers today are completely baffled. The greatest thinkers of this generation simply do not understand their generation. Our greatest thinkers today are good at laying out the facts and showing the factors that operate within the problem.

But when you ask them what they propose to do about it, they have nothing to say. But this morning, as we come to the close of this series of studies, I want again to remind you that the Bible has the answer. And that there is the mission that has been committed to the church.

And that the church has been sent out to proclaim that there is a way of life. A way of life that is free from corruption. A way of life that is free from adulteration.

A way of life that is free from darkness. And that this life is in God the Son sent out to be the salt of the earth and the light of the world. In other words, the church is sent out to be the savior of society.

Sent out to be that focal point that will magnetize men God-wise. Sent out to be a living communion, a living fellowship that will become a magnetic field into which men will irresistibly be drawn to the light. And to the light which is purity.

So our Savior says to his church, let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works. And they will too begin to glorify your Father in heaven as they bow the knee to him. As they come and cast themselves at his feet and name him the God of their heart.

What a tremendous mission is ours. We should remind ourselves as we are sent out into this mission, that the surest way in which we will keep ourselves unspotted from the world is by committing ourselves to this quality of mission. By giving ourselves without restraint, without any constraint, but by giving ourselves in total and glad surrender to become the light and the salt as our Savior himself has said.

One final word. There is an invitation here, and that is to come to the light, and to come to him who is the Savior. I wonder if I've been speaking to some of you this morning, and for you this hasn't yet happened.

You're not really yet within the church. You've been coming regularly, you know, and you love to come and to sing these hymns, but you're not yet in Christ. Ah, this morning you may enter in, and he may enter into your life, and as he enters he will bring the light, and he will cleanse and purify your heart and your life forever.

Do you know what else he will do? If you will only let the Lord come into your heart in his fullness, you know what he will do? He will wean your heart forever from all love of the world, and when he does that,

he will make you truly to be the light of the world, and the salt of prayer. Lord, bless this word we pray thee. Help us to go out.

Help us to go forth trusting in thee. Oh, make us to know our mission. Help us to haste to fulfill our mission.

Help us to spread the light, to take it into the darkness where thousands are lying, bound in the dark some prison house of sin. Help us to proclaim to every people, tongue, and nation that God in whom they live and move is love. Oh, help us.

Grant us thy blessing for thy great love's sake.

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