

## Sermon Notes

### **“The Christian and the Social Order”**

Material for this message was drawn from a series of sermons by Dr. Calvin Wittman (2009)

#### **Focal Scripture References: Matthew 5:13-16, 6:10**

Article 15 of the Baptist Faith and Message deals specifically with the Christian and the Social Order.

Here is what Article 15 says:

"All Christians are under obligation to seek to make the will of Christ supreme in our own lives and in human society. Means and methods used for the improvement of society and the establishment of righteousness among men can be truly and permanently helpful only when they are rooted in the regeneration of the individual by the saving grace of God in Jesus Christ.

In the Spirit of Christ, Christians should oppose racism, every form of greed, selfishness, and vice, and all forms of sexual immorality, including adultery, homosexuality, and pornography. We should work to provide for the orphaned, the needy, the abused, the aged, the helpless and the sick. We should speak on behalf of the unborn and contend for the sanctity of human life from conception to natural death.

Every Christian should seek to bring industry, government and society as a whole under the sway of the principles of righteousness, truth and brotherly love. In order to promote these ends Christians should be ready to work with all men of good will in any good cause, always being careful to act in the spirit of love without compromising their loyalty to Christ and His truth."

As we consider this topic, let's explore what God's Word has to say. To that end, I would ask you turn to **Matthew 5:13-16**, and **6:10** in your Bibles to two well-known passages from the Sermon on the Mount, and listen to the words of Jesus.

#### **Matthew 5:13-16 (NIV 1984)**

<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 by men. <sup>14</sup>"You are the light of the world. A city 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 men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.**

## **Matthew 6:10 (NIV 1984)**

**... your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.**

We will examine first the role Christ has called us to play in the society in which He has placed us; secondly, we will consider some of the specific issues within our culture that we as Christians are called to address, and finally, we will look at some practical ways to do this.

First a brief word about our text is in order.

Far from being merely a great moral teaching about good behavior, our Lord calls us to a radical way of life, a way of life different from the standard of the world. In these scriptures, Jesus describes the characteristics that mark the true Christian, telling us that if we want to be citizens of His kingdom, we must become more and more like Him.

And, we should note, if we truly become like Him the world will respond to us much like it responded to Him. It is to that end that we are to live to see His kingdom come and His will done on earth as it is in heaven and to be salt and light in the world in which we live.

### **1. We are Called to be Salt and Light**

In **Matthew 5:13**, a corporate or collective responsibility is indicated, a shared responsibility by all who follow Christ. The emphasis is placed upon being rather than doing. That is because what we are will always be more important than what we do. That may sound a little strange but consider this: Jesus says that our actions spring forth from our hearts or from our character, so that means what we are always ultimately determines what we do.

Before we can do what we have been created to do we must be what Christ intends for us to be, namely, we must be born again. Religion cannot change us, only relationship with Jesus can do that. Jesus says that those who are born again are the salt of the earth, and He uses the metaphor of salt to describe the function of His people in this world.

I would like to share with you six basic functions of salt

#### **A. It Seasons**

Salt it adds flavor to life, it enhances. Christians in the world should give life a wonderful flavor; we should show others what abundant life is all about. The way we live our lives and serve our Savior ought to make Christianity attractive and desirable.

## **B. It Preserves**

Salt has long been used as a preservative. It is used to keep things from rotting or to slow down the process of decay. Christians are to be that agent of society that keeps a fallen culture from rotting even further. We are to exert a moral influence on our culture, to keep it from becoming totally wicked.

## **C. It Heals**

Through the witness of His people, Jesus Christ wants to draw the hurting and broken of this world to Himself. Our lives are to have a healing effect upon those around us.

## **D. It Creates Thirst**

Our lives are to be such that as we interact with others, a thirst is created within them for the water of life that flows from within us.

Jesus told the woman at the well, in **John chapter 4**, **“Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks the water I give him will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life.”**

If we are in fact the salt of the earth as Christ has called us to be, our lives will create within those around us a thirst for Jesus.

## **E. It Irritates**

As salt in an open wound stings like fire, so the righteous life of a Christian is often an irritant to those whose lives are filled with the open sores of sin. If we live like Jesus lived we will suffer persecution because our lives will be an indictment against the lives of those who continue to be in rebellion against God.

## **F. It is Valuable**

Salt has a long history of being highly prized and valued. Jesus is clearly saying that as His people in this world we are also of great value. But He also says that we are the light of the world.

Whereas salt is tangible, light is visible. Salt does its work in the ordinary, many times unseen areas of life; light does its work out where everyone can see. Light shatters darkness, it illuminates the pathway, and it enables all to see things as they really are.

As we allow Jesus to live in and through us, we will help to illuminate the truth to the world around us.

Furthermore, He says when a lamp is lit it is not hidden under a basket but put on a lamp stand so all who are close by can benefit from the light. So what is the bottom line? We are the salt of the earth, but salt does no good unless it gets out of the saltshaker. We are the light of the world, but a light does no one any good if it is hidden. With this in mind, what are some issues we have been called to address as salt and light in our culture?

## **2. We are Called to Preserve and Illuminate**

True belief always includes action. If we claim to believe something but then fail to act on it, we don't really believe it. Article 15 of the Baptist Faith and Message lists several areas that we, as Christians, are called to action:

### **A. Racism**

We should condemn racism, and advocate for the biblical position that in God's eyes all people are of equal worth. **Revelation 5:9** tells us that Jesus sacrificial death on the cross, redeemed [people] for God ... **"from every tribe and language and people and nation."** As Christians, we are called to welcome all people, irrespective of their ethnicity or social standing, into the body of Christ.

### **B. Greed and Selfishness**

The materialistic spirit of our age seeks to justify greed and selfishness, but scripture strongly warns against it.

**1 Timothy 6:9-10** says,

**<sup>9</sup>People who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge men into ruin and destruction.**

**<sup>10</sup>For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs.**

Greed and selfishness are all sins which demonstrate a lack of faith in Jesus Christ and a sense of self-sufficiency.

### **C. Sexual Immorality**

If there were ever a day and age when sexual immorality was enjoying a heyday, it is today in the United States of America. Adultery is rampant in our culture. Homosexuality is celebrated. Pornography is prevalent. We must oppose and

avoid sexual immorality in any form it takes and we must defend the sanctity of marriage at every opportunity.

#### **D. Helping People in Need**

As Christians, we have a responsibility to reach out to those who are not as blessed as we are and to minister God's love to them physically and tangibly. As individuals and as a church we are called to help the poor, to feed the hungry and to speak out for those who have no voice. Nowhere is this truth more clear than in **Matthew 25:35-40** where Jesus says,

**<sup>35</sup>For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, <sup>36</sup>I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.’ <sup>37</sup>“Then the righteous will answer him, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? <sup>38</sup>When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? <sup>39</sup>When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?’ <sup>40</sup>“The King will reply, ‘I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me.’**

It is clear that Jesus has called us to help meet the needs of those around us. But it doesn't stop there, we are also called to share Christ as we do so.

#### **E. Sanctity of Life**

As Christians we must hold to the truth that all human life is sacred from the moment of conception till natural death. Thus, we must oppose abortion, euthanasia, and any form of assisted suicide. Don't be fooled into thinking these are only social issues. They are spiritual issues that have tragic social consequences.

### **3. What are we to do?**

Allow me to suggest three practical ways in which we can be salt and light and put what our Lord has called us to be into practice.

#### **A. We Should Use Our Voices**

We are to be vocal, to speak out in our culture for God's truth. As Christians, we are not called to be the silent majority. The world has no problem with us believing whatever we want to believe, as long as we keep it to ourselves and are not vocal about it. If we are called to anything, we are called to speak God's truth to the culture in which we live.

## **B. We Should Vote**

We often hear people “vote with their wallets” or that they vote based on the charisma of a particular candidate. Still others simply vote along party lines, voting for the same political party they have always supported. But for Christians, our vote has more to do with eternity than the economy and it certainly has more to do with Christ than with charisma. For Christians, our vote is an extension of what God has called us to be rather than about a party to which we belong.

Remember, our citizenship is ultimately in heaven. God Himself will be on the throne and will judge each of us according to our works. As Christians we no longer belong to ourselves, as scripture says, we are not our own, we have been bought with a price. We who have been crucified with Christ no longer live unto ourselves, but it is Christ who lives in us.

How would you answer these questions?

Would Jesus vote for a candidate who supports abortion on demand?

Would Jesus vote for a candidate who supports homosexual marriage?

Would Jesus vote for a candidate that stands against what His word clearly teaches?

If Jesus would not vote for them, how can we vote for them and still call ourselves His people? Make no mistake about it. The world always hopes that Christians will stay home on Election Day. But be certain about this as well, God will hold us responsible for how we exercise His will in the voting booth.

## **C. We Should be Visible**

This is our witness - ultimately it comes down to this doesn't it? We can give the finest speeches and cast our votes for the very best candidate, but at the end of the day, what really matters is how we live, what our witness is really like. How we live tells the tale. How we treat others, how we conduct our business, how we spend our time, our money, all of these things clearly and visibly demonstrate whether or not we are really believers. And whether or not you realize it, someone is always watching, looking to see if what you claim is true about Jesus, is true in you.

This is why Jesus says in **Matthew 5:16**, “**Let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.**”