

The Resurrected Gospel – Bringing the Message and our Passion for the Good News Back to Life (Part 2 of 4)

Living the Gospel

Matthew 5:13-16

Mark Vroegop

“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 trampled under people’s feet. “You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.”
(Matthew 5:13–16, ESV)

In this four week series, I’m inviting you to join me in praying a risky and potentially life-changing prayer:

**Lord, would you:
Open a door
Open my mouth
Open their heart**

The impetus behind this prayer is the belief that talking about and practicing personal evangelism is something that will help us to reach people with the glorious news regarding the gospel, but it will also affect us. Personal evangelism is probably one of the riskiest things that we do when it comes to following Christ. Sharing your faith will cause you to pray more fervently, study the Word more carefully, and ask for people to pray with you more frequently.

In fact, this is one area in which we really see the value of community. We are able to be motivated by the stories and struggles of others, and we are able to share our own challenges and receive encouragement. This is one good reason to be in a small group or some other community. Evangelism will be challenging, and we will be the support of others.

Last week: Applying the Gospel

Our plan during this series is to look at the following:

- Applying the Gospel
- Living the Gospel
- Sharing the Gospel
- Celebrating the Gospel

Last week we looked at the idea of applying the gospel. Romans 1:14-17 helped us to see that there is a motivational connection between applying the gospel to your life and your passion to share it with others. In other words, you trump the nature tendency to be quiet or even “ashamed” of the gospel by reminding yourself about what the gospel really does and what a difference it has made. We saw last week that guilt really doesn’t work when it comes to personal evangelism. Instead, we need to resurrect our passion for the Good News. We need to be motivated by affection, not just obligation.

I hope that applying the gospel to your life gave you a greater joy and urgency in sharing the gospel, or even just a part of the gospel ,with someone this week. Even if you were not able to share the entire plan of salvation, perhaps your countenance or a brief word will be used by God to make a difference in a person’s life.

In fact, we’d love to be encouraged with what God is doing in your life. So if you have a moment where God shows up or a testimony of an “Open Door” opportunity, I’d love to have you email our evangelism team at evangelismstory@yourchurch.com. Let’s apply the gospel so that we’ll share the gospel.

Two Metaphors: Salt and Light

Our theme this morning is “Living the Gospel,” and I want to show you two images that Jesus gave of the kind of lives that He wants His followers to live. His instruction is a part of the Sermon on the Mount, a message about what it means to be real. It is hard-hitting material, and 5:13-16 gives us two great metaphors for the way that Jesus wants us to live in the world.

In both cases, Jesus says, “You are . . .” In verse 13 He says, “You are the salt of the earth,” and in verse 14 He says, “You are the light of the world.” So these metaphors, especially set in the context of the Sermon on the Mount, are meant to communicate a way of looking at life or a model of the way that we should live.

Further, both metaphors are set in scenarios where their normal and created purpose malfunctions. Salt and light should do what salt and light are created to do. That’s the point.

Salt of the Earth

In verse 13, Jesus not only talks about His followers being salt; He says that they are salt of the earth. Jesus does not limit this metaphor to a small context. He has a big, sweeping, and global influence in mind. The idea seems to be that in the midst of this vast realm of the earth, there are strategically placed influencers whose presence affects the whole.

In Jesus’ time period, salt was one of the few preservative agents which could prevent decay. Further, salt had the ability to add flavoring to food. Therefore, salt was an additive that was very valuable.¹ Its presence might be small, but its impact would be great.

¹ R.T. France, New International Commentary on the New Testament – Matthew, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans Publishing, 2007),175

What's more, it seems that the salt metaphor is somehow connected to relationships. The two other instances where salt is used seem to highlight this:

"Salt is good, but if the salt has lost its saltiness, how will you make it salty again? Have salt in yourselves, and be at peace with one another." (Mark 9:50, ESV)

"Walk in wisdom toward outsiders, making the best use of the time. Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer each person." (Colossians 4:5-6, ESV)

Given the context of the Sermon on the Mount, it seems that the point here is about the way that followers of Jesus are to conduct themselves with others, especially those who are not part of "kingdom." In other words the followers of Jesus have a mission in the world. The purpose of their redemption and their righteousness is to be influencers of the culture. The disciples of Jesus add divine flavor to life and serve as a God-given gift of preservation.

Do you realize what this means? The implications are sweeping. It means that every arena of life in which you are placed is to be impacted by the flavoring of the gospel. You not only apply the gospel to your personal life. You apply it to everything. God has placed you where you are – your career, your neighborhood, your dorm room, your gym, your school, your swim club, your family, and thousands of other areas of life – in order for you to bring the aroma of the gospel into every arena of life.

Here's how Paul captured this in 2 Corinthians 2:14-15 –

"But thanks be to God, who in Christ always leads us in triumphal procession, and through us spreads the fragrance of the knowledge of him everywhere. For we are the aroma of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing." (2 Corinthians 2:14-15, ESV)

And the implications of this should be obvious, but let me just be sure that you get it. We are not here on earth with the same mission as everyone else. We have a purpose and meaning far beyond earning a living, getting an education, hanging out with friends, raising children, saving for retirement, and enjoying life. None of those things are bad. But they are not complete.

Our mission in life is transformative. And if we fail at that mission by virtue of our lack of focus or our lack of godliness, Matthew 5:14 says, "It is no longer good for anything . . ." In other words, if salt isn't salty, what's the point? And when it comes to following Jesus, the meaning is simple and blunt: If your mission isn't gospel transformation, what is the point of the gospel?

You cannot separate the transformation of the gospel from the gospel. They are as linked as saltiness is to salt. Therefore, Jesus says "You are the salt of the earth."

Light of the World

The next metaphor that is used in the text is light, but notice how the metaphor is framed in verse 14: "You are the light of the world." Again we see that the metaphor is specific (light) and its context is very broad. The image here is of a light that is broadcast to the world. Just like "salt of the earth," the image of "light of the world" is broad, sweeping, and invasive.

Light, after all, is only useful if there is darkness. So the implication is that there is a dark world, and in the midst of this bleak condition, a light shines forth. Jesus says that is what His followers are like. They are darkness-dispelling lights.

The next sentence in verse 14 is repeated in verse 15. In the same way that salt loses its value and impact if it loses its saltiness, a light has no purpose if it is hidden. Here is what Jesus says:

"You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house." (Matthew 5:14–15, ESV)

Now I know that many of you have a song running through your head right now, don't you? "This little light of mine, I'm gonna let it shine . . . hide it under a bushel? No! I'm gonna let it shine." What are we saying? Well, we are acknowledging that lighting a light only to put it under a basket and hide it makes absolutely no sense. Lights were meant to shine. Why have a light if you are not going to let it shine?

Do you see the point and the connection? A light was meant to shine. It loses its value and purpose when you do not use it for that purpose. In the same way, the followers of Jesus are in the world to be a light to the world. To hide the gospel, to not take the gospel to the darkness, to keep the light to ourselves just doesn't even make sense. Why would you light a light only to hide it? Why would you receive the gospel only to keep it to yourself?

Verse 16 brings the lesson into a clear message:

"In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven." (Matthew 5:16, ESV)

Now Jesus is not talking about broadcasting your transformed life because you want to receive credit, but He is talking about the real power and value of living in such a way – through words and deeds – that the world realizes that there is something really different about you.

On April 27 our Local Outreach Ministry is hosting SERVE|13. Like we have done in years before, we will have 38 different service opportunities, each with the goal of building bridges of grace that can bear the weight of truth. But this year we are adding a twist. We are calling it "Serve with A Friend." The vision is to serve, but to do it with someone who might be influenced by the overwhelming power of the church at work. In other words, serve with someone who could taste and see the power of the gospel in action. The goal is to be a light to a world filled with darkness.

Salt and light are powerful metaphors with a single vision: namely, that the gospel was not just something to deal with the issue of your sin and your eternal destiny. Certainly that is part of it – a very important part. The gospel was meant to be transformative in the world. And that happens

as gospel-centered people embrace a “deployment mindset.” They look at life differently. They look at their neighborhoods, their workplace, their school, and their daily lives. A “salt and light orientation” means that you understand that God not only saved you from something, He saved you to something.

Why are you here?

This is really important because it sets the pace for why God has placed you where you are. This relates to the lens through which you view the relationships around you, where you work, where you live, and the daily encounters that you have. In other words, the big picture question is this: **what is the role of Christians in the world?**

Or to make it more personal: what is your role in the world? Or to apply it to the church: what is our role in the world?

Understanding how you view your role and the church’s role in the world is critical because it will determine a number of things. I just read a book called *The Externally Focused Quest – Becoming the Best Church FOR the Community*. The authors, Eric Swanson and Rick Rusaw, suggest that there have been two predominant views of the church’s role in the world, but they believe there is a third.

1. **Fortress Church** – the world is viewed as dangerous, a threat, our enemy, and something that we must protect ourselves against. Churches with this mentality build high relational walls with the hope that they can ride out the storm or survive the battle. The focus is to protect ourselves from them.
2. **Attractional Church** – the world is viewed as our audience, and there is an attempt to get the community into the church. The church tries to woo people in or “cool” people in through our skills, talent and services. The focus is to win them by impressing them.

Now you need to know that there are certain aspects of the fortress and the attractional model that are helpful and right. But there is another model that I’d like for you to think about – one that I think is probably more balanced and more strategic in our present culture.

3. **Incarnational Church** – this model is about getting the church into the community. It is about helping believers live out their calling among people who do not yet believe. It is about not just being the best church in our community; rather, it is about becoming the best church for our community. Or to ask the question a little more pointedly: If your church disappeared, would your community notice? Let me make it more personal: If you disappeared from your community, would anyone miss your Christian influence?

So the question that we have to ask ourselves is whether or not our fundamental posture in the world is to protect ourselves, to impress others or to go to others. Swanson and Rusaw observed the following: “Churches that transform communities are those that are inwardly strong but outwardly focused.”² Inwardly strong but outwardly focused.

² Eric Swanson and Rick Rusaw, *The Externally Focused Quest – Becoming the Best Church FOR the Community*, (San Francisco, CA: Jossey- Bass Publishing, 2010), 42.

This is a very important philosophy to embrace, and it relates to how we see the world, ourselves, and the mission of the church. It also is connected to the best strategy for evangelism, and I want to suggest to you that while there is something powerful about the mobilization of God's people in every arena of life. My vision for evangelism is not a special campaign or an event that you invite people to (as worthy as those can be at times). Rather, I want to challenge us to be the best church for our community. Here's another gripping quotation:

*"Church people think about how to get people into the church; Kingdom people think about how to get the church into the world. Church people worry that the world might change the church; Kingdom people work to see the church change the world."*³

I think we need to be reminded about why God has placed us in the world. We need to remember what our mission in life really is. I feel it, and I'm sure that you do as well: it is too easy to slip into a daily existence where we neglect the real reason that we are here.

Let me illustrate this with a not-so-great story. About two months ago, Sarah was preparing her science lesson for a class that she teaches. It was late, I was tired from a long day, and I was home close to bedtime because of an evening meeting. We were working to get ready for the next day – packing lunches, searching for lost assignments, and coordinating the morning's activities. As Sarah reviewed her lesson plan, she realized that she needed Alka-Seltzer tablets. I offered to run to the drug store to get them. I offered, but I didn't really want to. Remember, I was tired.

I found the tablets in the store, and as I checked out, I was complaining in my spirit about how tired I was and how I just wanted to get home and into bed. I handed the product to the clerk, and I barely even noticed her. I had a "get-the-tablets-and-get-to-bed" mindset. I wasn't rude. I just wasn't "there." Then the clerk said, "How do I know you? I think I've seen you before." Her question snapped me out of my over-focused, self-concerned, just-get-the-Alka-Seltzer mindset. Sure enough, she had attended College Park, and we had a nice talk.

As I left the store, the Lord brought to mind the fact that I'm not on the planet to get Alka-Seltzer. I'm here on a gospel mission. And I realized that part of the problem with that mission is the fact that I can easily drift into another kind of existence that misses open doors, or worse, doesn't even look for them. I found myself repenting of my selfish heart and asking the Lord to help me remember why I am really on the earth.

Do you resonate with that? I would imagine that many of you do. In order for us to get evangelism right, we need to understand our role in the world. And we need to keep that focus sharp because our tendency is to drift away from our mission.

Live Strategically

We've been praying that the Lord would open a door, but I want to take that another step today. If we are really going to be salt and light in the world, then we need to think strategically about how we are living and what we are doing, as well as about our priorities. Frankly, the pace of life and all

³ Swanson and Rusaw, 76.

the opportunities in our economic “Disneyland” can pull us off course. And if we really start to live strategically, it will require intentionality, risk, and time.

We will have to plan in order to make it happen. We will have to step outside of our comfort zone. And it will take time. We’ll have to create some margin in our lives in order to make room for the kind of conversations that are part of being salt and light.

- Our recent survey told us that many of us don’t know our neighbors at all, and many of us do not know them well enough to have a conversation about spiritual things. So what am I asking you to do? Let me give you some suggestions:
- Find creative ways to get to know your neighbors. Walk around your neighborhood. Invite them over for a back yard cook out. Help them with projects around the house. When they ask you to watch their dog, say “Yes!” And when their kids are selling stuff, if it isn’t illegal – buy it!
- When your kids join baseball, soccer, swim, tennis, the chess club, or the marching band, use the hours upon hours that you’ll spend with other parents to build into their lives.
- Be the kind of person at work who really cares for people. Do your job really, really well, but get below the surface of people’s lives. Talk to them. Get to know them.
- Ask people how you can pray for them. I have rarely had someone get offended when I’ve asked them how I can pray.
- Frequent the same places of business. Eat at the same restaurants. Build relationships with the people who are around you.
- Learn to ask good questions and plan to ask good questions. I have found that the people who ask the best questions spend time thinking about how to ask the right questions. I have found one question to be a great start: What has your spiritual journey in life been like? What was the religious background of your childhood? The point is that you would think about the questions that you would ask.
- Join a discussion group, book club, or playgroup. I know a retired church member who goes to Starbucks every day, and he noticed a group of men who sit around and “solve all the world’s problems.” He asked if he could join them, and now he’s become part of their group. He’s the lone evangelical in the midst.

I could give you many more suggestions, but I think you get the point. What we need to do is to think about where God has placed us and how we could maximize that for His glory and the advancement of His kingdom.

So where has God placed you? What doors are right in front of you? Whose conversion are you presently praying for? How long has it been since you’ve done something risky in the name of Christ?

The resurrected gospel is a gospel that has transformative power, but its message is carried by people – the kind of people who pray:

Open a door
Open my mouth
Open their heart

Last week we talk about the importance of applying the gospel to our lives – to get our affections elevated such that we cannot help ourselves. It starts there, but it cannot stop there. We also need to realize that God has a purpose and plan for our lives.

There are no accidents or coincidences with God. He's placed us where He wants us to be salt and light in the world.

We are called to live the gospel.

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