Northwest Community Evangelical Free Church

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Dave Smith

Sermon manuscript

HAPPY FATHER'S DAY!

Sermon Series: Salt and Light
(Impacting our world for Jesus)

Winsome Witnesses

Study #1

(Matthew 5…and more)

Introduction: Jesus' life-changing message…delivered by changed-life messengers…

After the Day of Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit was given to Jesus' disciples, the gospel spread like wildfire throughout the Roman world.

People in far-flung places heard about Jesus and believed in Jesus. What they heard and believed changed lives and families and whole communities.

The message that LIFE - spiritual, eternal life - is offered as a gift to the one who believes in Jesus - changed everything. Those who were redeemed learned that following Jesus brought abundant life, here and now.

The world had never seen anything like the life-changing message of Jesus' gospel…and there was something about the messengers who delivered that message.

They ***"abided"*** in Jesus, like all good branches do, and drew their life from Him. (John 15) They ***"followed"*** wherever He led, like all good sheep do. (John 10)

And as Jesus had said when He cast vision for what His followers were to be, they became ***"the salt of the earth"*** and ***"the light of the world."*** (Matthew 5:13, 14)

Both of those metaphors - salt and light - are rich symbols, as Jesus' audience would have understood.

In the first-century world, salt was a pricy commodity. Nations with good supplies of salt would use salt as currency. Wars were fought over salt.

Salt was valuable because of its many uses. For instance…
…as a preservative, to keep meats from spoiling.
…as a seasoning agent, to flavor foods.
…as a medicine / as an antiseptic.
…as an element in some Old Testament sacrifices
…as an ingredient in fertilizer.
…as something that creates thirst.[1]

It didn't back then (and it doesn't today) take much salt to make a big difference in whatever it is placed. The presence of even a pinch of salt makes impact.

The world needs what salt provides. And if the world is desperate for salt, it is also desperate for light.

Light brightens a dark room and exposes what's in it. Light shines on a dark path, allowing nighttime travel. Today, we take light for granted. But especially in the nights before the light bulb, the world was a dark place. The world needs light.

Jesus told His disciples that, for the benefit of the world, they would be ***[13a] the salt of the earth.***

[1] Salt was sometimes sown in enemies' fields to keep those fields from producing a crop.

They would be a preserving, protecting, healing force in their world as they walked with Jesus. They were to provide spice for life as they exhibited joy in Jesus. They were to create a thirst - not for food or drink - but for God in the lives of those they knew and loved.

Now, that assignment comes to us. WE are to be the salt of the earth to our 2026 world.

Then, Jesus said, ***[14a] You are the light of the world.***

When He was in the world, He was the LIGHT.[2] In His physical absence, He appointed *"lights"* - the disciples - to shine.[3]

Fast forward to 2026, and we are to be Jesus' solution to the world's darkness problem. We are to shine in the darkness. We are to expose the dangers of the darkness. We are to point the way to the beauty and safety and power of Jesus' light.

That's all exciting stuff. But, along with Jesus' vision-casting about ***"salt and light,"*** He also issued warnings.

Regarding salt, He said, ***[5:13] "You are the salt of the earth; BUT if the salt has become tasteless, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled under foot by men."***[4]

Concerning light, Jesus warned, ***[Matthew 6:22] "The eye is the lamp of the body; so then if your eye is clear, your whole body will be full of light. [23] BUT if your eye is bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light that is in you is darkness, how great is the darkness!"***

So, while it is our birthright and assignment to be ***"salt and light,"*** it is possible that we might not be all that salty or bright.

For that reason, we're going to explore ways in which each of us AND our church can be the saltiest salt and the brightest light possible for Jesus to our world.

Over four Sundays we'll lean into a ***"salt and light"*** life by:
(1) learning from great New Testament evangelists.
(2) learning how to relate to human government in Jesus' Name.
(3) learning the joy and the value of building friendships with those who don't yet believe.

Today, we launch our exploration of ***"salt and light"*** by learning about the impact on people we can make for Jesus, both by the way we each <u>live</u> and by the way we, together, <u>church</u>.

In recent weeks, I've been paging through the New Testament, looking for help from the biblical writers about becoming *"winsome witnesses"* for Jesus. Today, I'm sharing some of what I've discovered.

First, we'll look at two very obvious ways each one of us can shine…and one exceptionally powerful way to shine that you might not have ever considered.

<u>The Way That We LIVE Matters to the World</u>

Help Where You Can (Galatians 6:10)

[Galatians 6:10] So then, while we have opportunity, let's do good to all people, and especially to those who are of the household of the faith.

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[2] John's Gospel explicitly says that. (John 1:1-13)

[3] Paul wrote that before we believed in Jesus, we were ***"darkness."*** Now, though, we are ***"light in the Lord."*** (Ephesians 5:8)

[4] When you buy salt today, it won't go "tasteless." The salt we buy is pure sodium chloride and sodium chloride, by definition, is "salty." But the salt in Jesus' day was often a mixture of salt and gypsum. When a family reached the bottom of their salt barrel, all that was left was gypsum and they would say, *"This salt has become tasteless."* That *"salt"* didn't do what salt was to do. It was worthless for the purpose for which the salt had been bought. Jesus took that well-known experience and issued a warning. *"You ARE salt - so be salty!"* A disciple who is not "salty" for Jesus is as useless as tasteless salt. He or she is not fulfilling the purpose for which they were saved. See also Luke 14:34-35 for the same thought, from Jesus.

Especially…

You'll notice, first, that we are to take special care to ***"do good"*** to those who are brothers and sisters in Jesus.

We get that. We want to *"be there"* for each other. And this very often happens here at Northwest.

We offer food, financial assistance, counsel, prayer, and often much, much more to our family in Christ.

We don't do this perfectly, but we are committed to meeting needs in Jesus' Name here, with each other.

But Paul expands the scope of ***"do good"*** beyond our faith family to include ***"all people."***

…and to all people

Doing good ***"to all people"*** makes us saltier and brighter. And, throughout history, when Jesus' church has been at its healthiest, it has always given to meet needs of ***"all people."***[5]

We are to be generous to those outside the church with our resources of money, energy, and time.[6]

2026 is a very timely time to give to ALL PEOPLE, without distinction, without prejudice, and without expectation - no strings attached.

As we have received, so let us give.

We can each be a pinch of salt and a ray of light when we simply provide help to someone in need. Do good. Help where you can. Meet needs in Jesus' Name.

Second, there is this from the Apostle Peter.

Live Out Your Faith (1 Peter 2:11-12)

[1 Peter 2:11] Beloved, I urge you as foreigners and strangers to abstain from fleshly lusts, which wage war against the soul.

Peter urged his first-century readers to adopt the mindset of an alien or of a refugee. Imagine a refugee here in the US whose mission is to live out the culture of their home nation here on foreign soil.

Peter's message to Christians is that we are to live out heaven's values here on earth, where heaven's values often don't fit. Peter would say, *"I know you won't 'fit in.' That's what being a foreigner is all about."*

He would also say, *"But don't be misfits. Stand out! Shine!"*

[1 Peter 2:12a] Keep your behavior excellent among the Gentiles…

We are to display the culture of Jesus' kingdom - sacrificial love, heartfelt compassion, genuine humility, kingdom-of-God centered generosity, integrity, purity - here and now.

Peter casts vision for the impact we can make for Jesus when our friends and families and neighbors see our ***"excellent behavior."*** They'll be drawn to the Jesus who has changed us and will come to faith in our Jesus.

[1 Peter 2:12]…so that in the thing in which they slander you as evildoers, they may because of your good deeds, as they observe them, glorify God on the day of visitation.

[5] Our Christian family has built orphanages, hospitals, schools, and nursing homes. It has fought for prison reforms, child labor laws, and the abolition of slavery. Today, it fights euthanasia, infanticide, and abortion. It delivers meals to shut-ins and builds decent homes and provides food for the poor - and more.

[6] We see it as a privilege when our church gets to help people in our community with food or finances who have nothing to do with our church. We are blessed to provide duffel bags to allow foster children dignity as they move to a new home.

And then, there is one *"other way"* to be ***"salt and light"*** that you may not have ever thought about. This one is, again, from the Apostle Paul.

Be Done with Complaining; Embrace Contentment (Philippians 2:14-15)

A compelling path for life

It proves our testimony

Without revealing what this *"other way"* is, we'll listen as Paul describes the result of doing this *"other way"* thing.

[Philippians 2:15]…you will prove yourselves to be blameless and innocent, children of God above reproach in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation…

Paul's friends in Philippi were living in a ***"crooked and perverse"*** culture.

Idolatry was rampant. So was sexual immorality, injustice, violence, and all kinds of other vices.

In that setting, they were to stand out as winsome witnesses for Jesus. They will prove themselves ***"to be blameless and innocent, children of God above reproach."***

When they went - or when we, today, go - that *"other way"* that Paul instructs, we will have a solid, strong testimony.

In addition, we will have fulfilled the mission Jesus cast vision for in His Sermon on the Mount.

It fulfills Jesus' vision

[Philippians 2:15]…among whom you appear as lights in the world.

Remember Jesus' words. ***[Matthew 5:14] "You are the light of the world."***? We do remember, and we do want to shine for Jesus.

So, let's do what Paul instructs.

The "other way": Refuse to complain

[Philippians 2:14] Do all things without complaining or arguments.

The people of God - and complaining

Of all the behaviors Paul could have highlighted to increase our ***"light"*** quotient and to pave the way for evangelistic fruitfulness, why list complaining?

He mentions complaining because it turns out that complaining (while one of our favorite indoor sports) is a problem more serious than we may have ever imagined.

The most famous complainers in biblical history were the Israelites who complained their way through forty years of wilderness wanderings as they (kinda-sorta of) followed Moses.

They complained about their leaders' decisions. They complained about the lack of meat. They complained about the monotony of manna.

And there was one time - among several we could choose from - where the people's complaints against God became so intense that His ***[Numbers 11:1] anger was kindled, and the fire of the LORD burned among them and consumed some at the outskirts of the camp.***

God really objected to His people's complaints. Even though they were facing all sorts of adversity (v. 1), God took personal offense at their response of complaining and He punished them for it.

When Paul wrote his letter to the Christians in Philippi, he may have known that he was writing to complainers.

He may have gotten word that they were complaining about Roman rulers, church leaders, the weather, or personal hardships.

As it is in many places today, in Paul's day many Christians suffered simply because they were Christians. So, persecution was very likely in play.

That undeserved suffering may have tempted them to complain against their persecutors, against each other, and even against God.

Any or all of this might have prompted his exhortation. But Paul wrote what he wrote, categorically: ***[2:14] Do ALL THINGS without complaining or arguments.***

Why? What's the big deal with complaining?

The problem with complaining

Well, when I complain, I am reflecting a lack of contentment and a lack of gratitude for what God has provided.

When I complain, I am saying that despite having been redeemed, justified, and adopted into God's forever family, my hardships outweigh my blessings and my complaint is well-placed.

When I complain, I'm telling God that despite have been forgiven all my sins and having receive eternal life on the basis of faith alone in Jesus alone, the balance swings toward lack, not fulness; toward need, not abundance. So, my complaint is warranted.

I have now come to see - far later in life than I should have - the seriousness of the problem of complaining. The way God sees it, I am lodging all my complaints against Him.

So, we are to turn from complaining.

And if we're ready to make that turn, we will find no better examples to follow than that of the Apostle Paul and his good friend, Silas.

The contented Christian's gift to the world (Acts 16)

The Philippians reading this letter would have remembered that those two had been beaten and arrested for casting a demon out of a slave girl. And they would have remembered that for that miracle, they were both thrown into the Philippian city jail.

They would have also remembered how these men, with feet fastened to the stocks in the dungeon, sang their hearts out to God with hymns of praise.

I like to think that if I had been with them on that night, I would have joined their choir. Knowing myself a bit, the odds are better that I might have been singing a different tune.

But Paul's and Silas' jail house testimony is the kind of attitude - contentment - we are to demonstrate. No complaining, no whining. Instead, gratitude and praise.

Their prison praise sent a message to their fellow inmates.

It said, *"We trust God on mountaintops and in valleys, in comfort or in this prison. Our sins are forgiven, our eternity is secure, we are free in Christ. God is good. All is well. No complaints here."*

That's supernatural living!

I have wondered if the fact that that weren't complaining shouted **"GOSPEL!"** every bit as loudly as their preaching and miracle had done.

When Paul wrote to the Philippians, he was saying that when we put aside complaining and display a trusting contentment in God, a watching non-believing community sits up and takes notice.

That seems to me to be just what the jailer did.

He rushed into the jail after the earthquake (see Acts 16) and saw that the other prisoners had not taken advantage of their freedom to escape.

They were content to stay and listen to Paul's and Silas' heartfelt worship. THAT was the context in which that jailer asked Paul and Silas, ***[Acts 16:30] "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?"***

To complain or not strikes right at the heart of our walk with God. It vitally impacts our testimony before a watching world.

And that's not just my opinion. That's what the Bible says.

IF we don't complain…
…THEN we ***"prove ourselves to be blameless and innocent, children of God above reproach in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation."***

IF we don't complain…
…THEN we will ***"appear as lights"*** in the world, exactly what Jesus has assigned us to be.

How can each one of us be ***"salt and light"*** for Jesus? A short (and incomplete) list from the New Testament would include:

- DO look for ways to meet needs in Jesus' Name.
- DO lead a life marked by love, joy, courage, and integrity.
- DON'T complain.

But the New Testament also lays out ways that ALL of us - together - can be ***"salt and light"*** for Jesus. Here at the end, we'll listen as Paul gives us three ways to *"do church"* that result in us giving a winsome witness to the outside world.

First, writing to his spiritual son, Timothy, he provided a list of qualifications for a man who would serve as an Elder in a local church. Here is the last one on Paul's list.

<u>The Way That We CHURCH Matters to the World</u>

The Reputations of Leaders (1 Timothy 3:7)

[1 Timothy 3:7] And he must have a good reputation with those outside the church, so that he will not fall into disgrace and the snare of the devil.

Most of the items in the list relate directly to character. This one is different. This is about reputation.

Paul would disqualify a man from serving in the role of Elder if he didn't have a good reputation with the outside community.

Remember that much of the first century culture was hostile to Christianity. So, the concern was that if a leader was regarded poorly by outsiders, it would reflect poorly on the church, which would reflect poorly on the faith.

That all makes sense and we take that idea seriously here for Elders and for others in leadership roles.

But I'm calling attention to this verse so that we'll see that Paul was very concerned about how the church did church for the outside world's sake. The impact of the church on the surrounding community was very much on Paul's radar.

We find more evidence of this concern in another passage in another one of his letters.

Resolve Internal Conflict Internally (1 Corinthians 6:1-8)

Litigious societies…and churches

It is true for Christians, as it is true for all, that from time to time, we'll have "issues" with each other.

There will inevitably be personality and style clashes, opinion clashes. And in the church, there will be clashes about beliefs and practices.

All of that was happening in the church in Corinth. But the Christians there had adopted a terrible approach to dealing with those clashes.

Corinthian Christians were taking each other to secular courts to settle their disputes.

[6:1] Does any one of you, when he has a case against his neighbor, dare to go to law before the unrighteous and not before the saints?

That's right. The church at Corinth was a litigious church.[7]

Paul argued that these conflicts should be resolved internally, and for three very good reasons. First, we're family.

Conflicts in the church should be resolved internally …

…because members of the church are family

[6:6] but brother goes to law with brother…

Can you imagine how hard it would be to take the bread and the cup of communion with someone you had just sued - or been sued by - in small claims court at the Bexar County Courthouse.

That's reason #1. Here's reason #2.

…because of the saints' future role in judging

[6:2] Or do you not know that the saints will judge the world? If the world is judged by you, are you not competent to form the smallest law courts? [3] Do you not know that we will judge angels? How much more matters of this life?[8]

No doubt, Paul had taught the Corinthians while he had been with them that faithful Christians would be given ruling authority during Jesus' thousand-year earthly reign. (The Millennium)

They were all aware of the possibility of their future role as the world's judges. But they evidently hadn't considered the implications of that for the here and now. So, Paul spelled it out for them.

[2]…If the world is judged by you, are you not competent to form the smallest law courts?… [5]…Is it so, that there is not among you anyone wise who will be able to decide between his brothers and sisters?

Christians who will one day have a hand in judging the world AND angels can't plead inability to judge conflicts in the church.

But then, Paul gave a third reason for resolving internal conflicts internally. Hauling fellow Christians to court damaged the church's witness to those who didn't yet believe in Jesus.

…because of the impact of not doing so on outsiders

Put yourself in the shoes of an unbelieving Roman judge.

As you heard accusations from a Christian against another Christian, you might question the validity of Christianity. You might reject the gospel on account of the lovelessness shown by Christian to Christian.

Paul's point here is that believers in Jesus have to remember at every point that people who don't know Jesus are watching us.

They're taking notes. They are learning about our faith by the way we live. So, in whatever actions we take should take into account the effects of those actions on that observer.[9]

Paul summarized: *"It is better to lose than to go to court to win."*

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[7] The first century Roman society of which the Corinthian church was a part, was a litigious society. Just like ours.

[8] Paul was referring to one of the many types of rewards Christians will receive for faithfulness in this life. One involves the privilege of ruling and reigning during Jesus' future, one-thousand-year reign. We find the seed of that idea in Matthew 19:28 and Luke 22:28ff… John makes the point in the book of Revelation. (20:4)

[9] First-century Jewish rabbis said that lawsuits between fellow Jews should never be tried in secular courts. Their internal disputes were always to be settled within the community, lest their internal conflict bring them into reproach by the Gentiles. Religious groups from among the Romans and Greeks held to the same practice. They knew that internal squabbling reflected poorly on their group's reputation in a city.

So, it was on Paul's radar that leaders in the church should have good reputations with those outside the church (1 Timothy 3:7) and that church members should protect the church's reputation by resolving conflicts internally. (1 Corinthians 6:1-8)

He also was concerned for what happened during the church's regular times of worship…for the sake of the outsider.

A Worship Time That Blesses the Guest (1 Corinthians 14:20-25)

Exercise spiritual gifts when the church gathers

Paul devoted a lot of space in his first letter to the Corinthian church to the theme of spiritual gifts. (chapters 12-14)

He gave a list of some of the gifts that the Spirit gives to believers, many of which were on display during the church's weekly times of worship. (1 Corinthians 14:26)

These included prophecy (what we would call "preaching"), teaching, reading or singing a psalm, a revelation, speaking in tongues along with giving an interpretation (and this, with guidelines, 1 Corinthians 14:27-28)

He makes it clear that these various gifts were for the edification of the church.

But there is one section in this passage that shows us that something else is at stake when the church gathers for worship.

Organize the worship gathering with the guest in mind (1 Corinthians 14:16-25)

Paul knew that people in Corinth who didn't believe in Jesus would sometimes attend the church's Sunday morning gatherings.

They might attend out of curiosity, or because of a friend's invitation, or out of spiritual hunger.

Paul wondered out loud, *"What if that person who is just exploring our faith comes into the worship service and finds lots of people speaking in tongues?"*[10]

Here is his answer to his wonderings.

[23] Therefore if the whole church gathers together and all the people speak in tongues, and outsiders or unbelievers enter, will they not say that you are insane?

For that reason, when the church gathers, the emphasis is to be on clear, compelling prophecy / preaching.

And the hoped-for result is that the unbeliever will be ***[1 Corinthians 14:24]…convicted by all, he is called to account by all; [25] the secrets of his heart are disclosed; and so he will fall on his face and worship God, declaring that God is certainly among you.***

So, when we gather on Sundays, as we are right now, we're ready to worship, ready to learn, and ready to connect with others who are on the same Jesus-following path we're on.

AND we are grateful that our meetings are open to everyone who wants to be here. All are welcome.

Would you who are regular attenders add to your weekly preparations for coming to church…
…a prayer that you will help everyone will be well-welcomed here.
…a sensitivity to the one who is new to learning about Jesus.
…an eagerness to show hospitality.

By keeping in our minds and hearts that our gatherings are for us and not only for us, together we can be saltier salt and brighter lights for Jesus.

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[10] Paul knew well that interpreted tongues could be of great benefit when exercised publicly and he says more about that in the rest of the chapter. But he knew that this was not the way the gift was being exercised at Corinth. The tongues-speakers were expressing themselves in an unrestrained manner that edified no one.