

Love By Giving
Series: I ♥ My Church
Matthew 5:13-16
November 13, 2016

VIDEO

OFFERING REPORT

A great dining experience really comes down to those two things: food and atmosphere. It's all about what you see and what you taste. For the math people in the house, here's the equation: Food + Atmosphere = Experience. If you hear about a new restaurant coming to town, aren't those the two things you ask about? How's the food? What's the feel/look?

JAPANESE STEAKHOUSE

Apply this to our *I Love My Church* series. Jesus has given us new lives without fences, lives that are part of the new community He is creating. This life in this community, in His kingdom, is life as it was meant to be, giving us a new identity and a new set of values and ethics to live by. Our reputation as people of this new community should be one of love. God wants all people to know this life of salvation, forgiveness, peace, healing, purpose, and hope.

Here's the question we have to consider as we close our series: How do people come to this new life with God? How do people hear and discover, how do they experience the kingdom of God?

Turn to page 6 in your bulletin so that you can take notes. Our Scripture passage today is from Matthew 5:13-16:

"You are the salt of the earth. But what good is salt if it has lost its flavor? Can you make it salty again? It will be thrown out and trampled underfoot as worthless. "You are the light of the world—like a city on a hilltop that cannot be hidden. No one lights a lamp and then puts it under a basket. Instead, a lamp is placed on a stand, where it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your good deeds shine out for all to see, so that everyone will praise your heavenly Father."¹

Here is a truth for us today. Write this down:

God entrusts us to create the kingdom experience.

Jesus said:

You are the salt of the earth. (Matthew 5:13)

Salt brings taste. It is a flavoring agent. It brings taste to bland food. It preserves. Someone gives you a plate of food really not up to snuff and what are the first words out of your mouth? "Can you please pass the salt, please?"

So don't miss what Jesus is telling us in this metaphor. He is making it clear how necessary and important **we are** for the welfare of the world. Let me repeat that: we are necessary and important for the welfare of the world. The Father provides the evidence in the world of a plan for salvation, Jesus provides the means to salvation, the Holy Spirit provides the small voice wooing us to be saved, but it is we kingdom citizens who provide the experience and message of salvation. We have experienced a transformation in our lives as we have come to the kingdom of heaven. Now our presence is necessary as God's means of influencing the world for good. Regardless of

¹ Matthew 5:13-16 (NLT)

status or profession, the kingdom life that we possess is invaluable for the effect it will have in our daily circles of influence.

Jesus also said:

You are the light of the world. (Matthew 5:14)

In Jesus' time, they had small wicker oil lamps, which gave little light in the average home that had few windows; they were most effective when set on a lampstand. Even the smallest of lights lifted up can chase away darkness. Light removes the darkness.

In the same way that Jesus' life and message of salvation brought light to us.² His disciples are a living demonstration of the arrival of the kingdom of heaven.

So don't miss this metaphor either: Light removes the darkness. We not only carry the light of the gospel of the kingdom of God, but we **are that light**. Because of the work of the Spirit in our lives, our transformation has produced kingdom light in us, affecting every aspect of our being, turning us into positive influencers in this sin-darkened world.

As salt and light, we bring the taste and atmosphere of Jesus' kingdom to our world. If Food + Atmosphere = Experience, then the experience of the kingdom comes from His followers!

And that just amazes me to think of what God entrusts His church with! God trusted people to curate His creation, to manage and take care of it, and that was the plan from the very beginning.

Genesis 1:26 says,

Then God said, "Let us make human beings in our image, to be like ourselves. They will reign over the fish in the sea, the birds in the sky, the livestock, all the wild animals on the earth, and the small animals that scurry along the ground."³

And now when He establishes His kingdom, Jesus entrusts us to curate His culture. We are to bring the taste, we are to bring the light, we are to bring the Jesus experience to our community so they can know God, find Him, repent, and find new life!

Think about it like this: Don't like how our community, our country is? Ask yourself if you are salting it. Discouraged that our culture is so dark? Ask yourself if you are lighting it up. If our world is bland and dark, then we need to get to salting and lighting.

When we intentionally love one another, when we intentionally use our gifting and live out the love of God toward one another and to the world outside these walls, we are salting the bland and bringing light to the darkness. Saying "I love my church" isn't just about us, doesn't just impact us; it's about everyone outside these walls as well.

How do we bring the *I Love My Church* experience to our culture?

Well first, **people will experience Jesus' community when we live its values**.

Our salt and light passage follows immediately after Jesus' famous Beatitudes. We can't separate them. The Beatitudes are not an intro, and then the salt and light part really begins the sermon. They are part of the same thought. The salt and light metaphors come out of the Beatitudes.

Jesus has brought the kingdom of God through regeneration and renewal by the

² See Matthew 4:15-16

³ Genesis 1:26 (NLT)

Spirit. He transforms us. The Spirit produces in us poverty of spirit, mourning, meekness, righteousness, mercy, purity, and peace. These are the characteristics of Jesus' disciples that allow God to establish His kingdom in His way. This is the kingdom life God puts in us and that we then demonstrate to the world. The Beatitudes are a character profile of a person who says, "I Love My Church."

So seasoning and shining isn't only about the message we declare with our lips, it's about how we go about our lives – lifestyle is the emphasis here. Being salt and light is about the message we declare with our actions, reactions, and everything in between. **We can't separate message from lifestyle – this is about who we are and how we are.** The values in you as you live the kingdom bring flavor to a bland, rotting world. The values in you as you live the kingdom bring the light to a world of darkness. People will experience the kingdom when we live its values; this helps us realize how to be effective agents of salt and light. These show us how to love the church outside of the church.

The second way we bring the *I Love My Church* experience to our culture is that **we live the values of Jesus' community in our daily ordinary.**

There was a not-so brilliant guy who almost OD'd on soy sauce recently. A young man who drank a quart of soy sauce went into a coma and nearly died from an excess of salt in his body, according to a recent case report. The nineteen-year-old who drank the soy sauce after being dared by friends is the first person known to have deliberately overdosed on such a high amount of salt and survived with no lasting neurological problems.

I share this story because it applies directly to how we live. We are called to bring salt and light to our world so that people can experience the kingdom, not so that they can OD on sodium or be blinded by the sun. So the question we have to answer is: Are we seasoning and shining, or are we gagging and blinding?

Let me give you an example of gagging and blinding.

I read a story about a pastor who went to a street festival with his family. One of those where there are a lot of food vendors, games, music, and more food. It was packed. Literally wall-to-wall people covering about a mile of street. Scattered through the crowd were a few people who were carrying signs that said, "Repent of your sins and trust Jesus!" He started watching the crowd around the people with the signs, and he saw no one praying, no one repenting, no one who looked moved or touched in their spirit. If anything, people were just making fun of them and laughing.

Now, was there truth to the message of the sign? Yes, absolutely! Everyone needs to repent of their sins and trust Jesus! But just because it is correct doesn't mean that it is effective. I'd argue that this is pouring a gallon of soy sauce down someone's throat. No one walked away from those signs thinking, "I need Jesus." And I'd be willing to put money on it. No one walked passed them thinking, "I want Jesus."

Now let me give you an example of seasoning and shining.

A young woman moved back to the city and got her old job back. Many of the servers/employees were surprised to see her. About a week later, on a slow night, she began to have a conversation with an older worker. The conversation moved to families, and the older woman started to share her troubles about her daughter leaving and that she was afraid. The younger woman shared her testimony about how her mom and her didn't speak for two years, and how, throughout the past years, she had found God and

their relationship started to grow because God had changed her and cares about our relationships.

Later that night, she was helping out in the kitchen, putting away dishes even though she didn't have to. One of the dishwashers said: "You are a good worker. I always see you helping out people and you don't have to." The young woman said to him, "I am working for the Lord." He smiled and said, "All the other servers come back here and complain, but I can tell you are believing that and acting on that. I am wanting to get back into my faith and I don't know how. I would like to know more." That night, they talked about her faith.

You see, it's really easy to carry a sign around in a crowd. It's a lot more difficult to be Jesus in the ordinary and in the mundane. But it's in the trivial day-to-day stuff, at the office, at school, at the gym, on the job that people need to experience Jesus when they experience us. It's in the trivial day-to-day stuff that we need to be salting and lighting, not gagging and blinding.

Think about your daily routine. Think about your coworkers. Your classmates. Your neighbor. The people you run into while you go about your day. Know this – people will experience the kingdom from you in the normal, and in those moments the normal becomes extraordinary as people taste and see – from you – that the Lord is good.

Finally, **those who have truly experienced Jesus will help others experience Jesus.**

Jesus said:

*No one lights a lamp and then puts it under a basket. Instead, a lamp is placed on a stand, where it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your good deeds shine out for all to see, so that everyone will praise your heavenly Father.*⁴

I hope that if we've learned anything over these last few weeks, we've learned that loving the church isn't about the building, it's not about the programs. It's about relationships – primarily our relationship with God, but also our relationships with one another. But it doesn't stop there. We also have to love those outside of these walls.

Think about the very first week when we read John 13:35

*Your love for one another will prove to the world that you are my disciples.*⁵

Here's the thing: How can all people observe us having a reputation of love if we are never around people?

You can't season and shine when your ordinary is separate from the bland darkness. Our church, small groups, and the rest of our programs assist us to grow and become a stronger community of faith. We are strengthening our saltiness and brightness if you will.

But if we never are interacting with people outside of our church, then we have failed. We are to live Jesus' values while in connection with our world. What are ways that you can begin making connections with your neighborhood?

A question sometimes asked, one which really needs to be asked by all churches, is, "If our church ceased to exist, would the neighborhood mourn? Would they say, 'No! You can't go!' Or, if we were to cease to exist, would the neighborhood even notice?"

⁴ Matthew 5:15-16 (NLT)

⁵ John 13:35 (NLT)

We must be a church that they would miss – not for our own sakes or our own reputations, but because they are experiencing Jesus when they experience us.

Who do you know that needs flavoring, needs light? Who do you know who needs to get out of the bland and the darkness? Who do you know who would love to find the real love found only in Jesus?

It's time for us to step up our seasoning and shining, time to be in the bland and change it, time to go into the darkness and cast it out with the light of the kingdom. Just as we changed the life of a family in our church last week, let's be willing to empty not our wallets, but ourselves to a world that is terribly bland and awful dark. Let us be salt and light.