

**Matthew 5:13-16 – August 8, 2021**  
**“Let Your Light Shine”**

8:15am & 11:00am Morning Services  
Faith Presbyterian Church, Tacoma, WA  
*Pastor Nathaniel H. Gutiérrez*

The Apostle Peter tells us that we are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his God’s own possession, that we may proclaim the excellencies of him who called us out of darkness into his marvelous light. Once we were not a people, but now you are God’s people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.  
[Paraphrased: 1 Peter 2:9-10]

In these verses, Peter describes who we are as God’s holy people....and once he has explained that....it is as though he leans in and says, “now here is what you are going to do.” You are going to proclaim the excellencies of Jesus – who pulled us out of darkness and brought us into his marvelous light! You are going to share the good news!

That message that Peter taught in his letter, he actually got directly from Jesus. Jesus taught that every child of God has a purpose and calling bigger than himself. It is a calling to bring glory to God by proclaiming the light to those in darkness. Listen to how Jesus himself teaches us our purpose in his own words from Matthew 5:13-16:

**Matthew 5:13** “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.

<sup>14</sup> “You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. <sup>15</sup> 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. <sup>16</sup> 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.

**This is the Word of the Lord.**

*Thanks be to God.*

Let’s pray together.

***The world is in decay***

I don’t know about you, but the news is not the place I normally go to if I’m looking for an uplifting story. With the expansion of internet and cell phone data, dashcams, go-pros, camera doorbells, camera security systems and cell phones, we are getting more footage, information, and news than ever before.

Along with being able to view live feeds of New York City’s Time Square, live streams of zoo animals giving birth to their young, we also get the footage of accidents, break-ins, shootings, vandalism and much, much, much worse.

With so much out there, we can find ourselves getting overwhelmed by the bad news. We start to get desensitized to horrible stories of abuse, murder and worse. Sometimes shocking news isn't so shocking anymore. But every once in a while, you get an article that reminds you of the state of our world.

This past Friday, Texas governor Greg Abbott directed the Department of Family Protective Services to make a determination on whether gender-transition surgery on children constitutes child abuse. This came after federal judges temporarily blocked an Arkansas law banning gender-transition procedures for minors late last month. "Those who back the legislation say they aim to protect children from irreversible procedures they could later regret." [National Review]

It seeks to categorize sterilizations, hysterectomies, and the removing of otherwise healthy body parts on minors as abuse. The ban is not yet in effect as it is being challenged by the ACLU.

We read of the state of abortions worldwide and the heinous numbers of abuse against children.

As we read and hear of these stories it is hard not to get discouraged. We shake our heads, or sigh deeply and rightly plead for our "Lord Jesus to come quickly."

This is the world that we live in.

John Stott writes that the apostle Paul paints a grim picture at the end of Romans 1 about what happens...

"...when society suppresses (out of love for evil) the truth it knows by nature. It deteriorates. It's values and standards steadily decline until it becomes utterly corrupt. When men reject what they know of God, God gives them up to their own distorted notions and perverted passions, until society stinks in the nostrils of God and of all good people. [Stott, 65]

What Stott is highlighting here is that the Bible teaches us that when a society suppresses the truth about God, it loses its standards, and it becomes further and further corrupt. It moves into spiritual and moral decay.

Martin Lloyd Jones agrees and explains that when Jesus says we are the salt, it is because the world is rotten, polluted, and offensive. He writes,

"That is what the Bible has to say about the world. It is sinful and bad. Its tendency is to evil and to wars. It is like meat which has a tendency to putrefy and to become polluted. It is like something which can only be kept wholesome by means of a preservative or antiseptic. As the result of sin and the fall, life in the world in general tends to get into a putrid state....Far from there being a tendency in life and the world to go upwards, it is the exact opposite." [Jones, 152]

In two brief snapshots, Jesus communicates that the world around us lacks salt and lives in darkness. They need salt and they also need the light.

***The world is lost and living in darkness and does not know it.***

We can see the depravity and corruption in the world. And Paul says in Romans, that the world's very thinking and their hearts mislead them. They become futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts are **darkened**. Claiming to be wise, they become fools. Though they know that God's word prohibits and condemns to hell such sinful living, they not only continue in their ways, but give their approval to those who practice these things.

Paul isn't saying that the world is misguided. He isn't saying if people just work a little harder, they will realign themselves with God and achieve salvation. He is saying that the whole world is corrupt. That they think they are wise, and they know God's word, but they continue in their sin and approve of others who sin.

Now some of our young people are getting their driver's licenses. And I am sure that they have learned the importance of checking their blind spot to make sure no car is in the one spot you cannot normally see with your mirrors.

Blind spots can be pretty dangerous, and the world has a lot of them. The problem is that often they are not aware of these blind spots. They are blind to the fact that they live in darkness. They think they are just a little off, but Paul sees it differently.

In Romans 3:23 Paul writes, "all have sinned." Before that he writes, "none is righteous, (and if you weren't sure what he meant he adds:), "no, not one. No one understands, no one seeks for God; all have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one. ...There is no fear of God before their eyes." [Romans 3]

This as a real problem to Paul. The result of sin is death *forever*. And the Bible says that everyone has sinned, but the world lives in darkness. It is fooling itself and refuses to face the fact that they will face God's judgement in hell if they do not repent. Eternal death and misery.

The world around us is perishing and they are deceiving themselves into thinking that they are going to heaven based on doing more "good" in their life than bad. They are deceived in thinking that all they need is a refocus or redirection. They think that if they just put more barricades in their lives in place, to stop them from being as bad as they could be, then all would be right in their lives. "But fallen human beings need more than barricades to stop them from being as bad as they could be." [Stott, 67]

So what hope does a world in decay and darkness and eternal punishment have?

## **The Cure**

For many of us here, we may take this message for granted, but we need to hear it again. This is the cure for our sins. The antidote for our sins.

### ***The solution to the problem of decay and darkness in the world is the same solution God had for you and me. Jesus.***

For God, who [at creation] said, "Let light shine out of darkness," has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. [2 Cor. 4:6]

Jesus, himself said, "I am the light of the world; he who comes with me will not be walking in the dark but will have the light of life." [John 8:12] And later adds, "I am the way, the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me." [John 14:6]

The only way that we can be free from the darkness and see God is through the life, light, and face of Jesus. Our own achievements or accomplishments are not enough. Only Jesus' lived a perfect life. His perfect righteousness has been freely given to us by grace, through faith. And this is not our own doing, it is the gift of God, not the result of works, so that no one can boast. [Eph. 2:8-9]

Jesus is the salt and light of the world and as his children and messengers, he sends us out as the salt and light into the world to rescue those who are perishing from certain and eternal death. It is a great privilege and honor, *and* it is our responsibility.

One of my favorite evangelistic passages is the account of the Philippian jailer.

Paul and Silas had been singing hymns in prison and suddenly there was a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison were shaken. And immediately all the doors were opened, and everyone's bonds were unfastened. The jailer woke up and seeing the doors open, he drew his sword and was about to kill himself, but Paul told him they were all there and not to do harm to himself. The jailer called for lights, fell before them, and asked, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" And they said, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household....Then he brought them up into his house and set food before them. And he rejoiced along with his entire household that he had believed in God." [Acts 16:25-31] What an incredible story.

God used Paul and Silas to bring the jailer and his whole family from death to life. Physically and spiritually. He went from almost dying to eternal and abundant life! And the family celebrated their conversion with great joy.

Imagine what that celebration must have been like! How they must have praised God for bringing Paul and Silas into their lives. And Jesus calls us to this same work!

And Jesus calls us to be the light: "You are the light of the world....**let your light shine before others....**"

Martin Lloyd Jones notes the danger in these sorts of commands. He notes that it is easy to read a statement like this and think about *somebody else*, the first Christians, or Christian people in general. But if you are a Christian, it refers to you. [Jones, 159]

This makes sense to me, because when we ask our kids to do a particular chore, or to let the dogs out, I've noticed the danger there is in asking this statement generally. When I say, "can one of you" or "can someone" take out the dogs, nothing ever happens. But if I ask them by name, it gets done almost always.

And I mention this, because I want to caution us all not to pass this teaching off. Being a light in the world was not just for the apostles. It is not just for the missionaries, for pastors or elders. We can't just pass on that responsibility. We are all called to *BE* the light of the world.

Jesus saw his disciples and followers, *and no others*, to be the light of the world. All Jesus' followers constitute "the true *locus* of the people of God, the outpost of the consummated kingdom, and the means of witness to the world." [Carson, 140]

Carson put it well. We are the means of witness to the world. We are the people God has chosen to carry on the torch of the gospel light. There is no plan B, *you are it*.

The omnipotent God, who created this universe and said "let light shine out of darkness" would have no difficulty bringing all his lost sheep into the fold. He could with a word, or a gesture, bring all mankind to their knees.

God could use angels, he could use animals, but instead he chose to use us. To make us his means of witness in the world.

And though we have no power to change people in and of ourselves, we know that God uses our witness, our evangelism, to literally change people. In his perfect plan of salvation, he allows us to be the means—the instrument—to literally save the lost from eternal death.

### ***We must be distinct from the world***

Last week in the beatitudes, Jesus called us to be distinct from the world.

And while it is Holy Spirit who actually calls and regenerates sinners, he actually and truly uses us, and he uses our testimony and our character as part of the conversion process. Jesus says, "it is through your good works" that people will change and glorify God. This is the saltiness that we need to bear in our lives.

As our lives conform to Kingdom living, the world around us that has lost its way in darkness will be penetrated by the light. If we are just like the darkness around us, if we are not distinct from the world and the church is just like everyone else, what do we have to offer?

Those who observe us should see how we serve, how we sacrifice our will and our desires for the glory of God.

We must strive that they might see in us the fruit of the spirit. Our saltiness is seen in the overflowing of our love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. As we live our faith, and meditate on God's word and in prayer, our lives will display the fruit of a tree planted by streams of living water.

Through these means, God brings his lost to himself. What a great honor.

### ***Let Your Light Shine***

A few years ago, I got an EpiPen thinking that I might have a shellfish allergy. I had a slightly itchy throat after eating some shrimp one night and since we were in a third-world country and I wanted to play it safe, I got an EpiPen. That EpiPen could have saved my life if I started having an allergic reaction to the shrimp.

But if I had an allergic reaction and didn't have the EpiPen handy, or no one knew I had it, it would be useless. If someone else needed that EpiPen in an emergency situation, and I had it hidden away, it would be completely useless to them.

In a very simple and basic manner, this illustrates the importance of what Jesus is teaching in this passage.

Jesus teaches us here that we have the life-giving antidote for the world. We literally have in our hands, the light of the world. We have the antidote for sin. We have the cure that can move people from judgment in hell to life in heaven in Jesus.

But we cannot hide it. That isn't what light is meant for. It is meant to shine and overwhelm the darkness. In the same way it would be absurd for me to withhold my EpiPen if someone could truly use it in a life-or-death situation. So also, if we do not let our light shine for the world to see, we are not only *not* shining our light, we are hiding it under a basket.

Bonhoeffer writes, "Flight into the invisible is a denial of the call. A community of Jesus which seeks to hide itself has ceased to follow him." [Bonhoeffer, 106]

I believe that Jesus opens his sermon on the mount with this message, because it is very common for Christians to make excuses about being a witness out of fear.

When we think of letting our light shine, many thoughts come to mind. We think of people like Billy Graham who is said to have reached millions of people in his 58 years of ministry. We think we can't do what he did, so we dismiss ourselves from the responsibility.

But God has called us to live out our faith, and has not put super-star evangelists as our standard for witnessing. No matter how small our part may be in this world, we should not despise it. [Stott, 67] God uses us all, in all our ways, for his glory.

I'd love to share an example of how God used just one small act to shine the light of the gospel. This past week, I overheard Kim St. John engaging the mail lady (Dawn) in conversation. When Kim learned that she had been suffering with daily headaches for quite some time, she told her that we'd pray for her at church. That Wednesday our church prayed for Dawn.

The next day, Ally Bennet was working at Cutter's Point and saw Dawn and said to her "we prayed for you at church yesterday!" Dawn was so thankful. She said that after having headaches for 19 days straight, that day, the day after prayer meeting, she woke up and it was gone. She exclaimed, "prayer works!"

In an expression of the love and care of the gospel, Kim, Ally, and our prayer meeting team were able to show Jesus' light. And it impacted someone outside of our congregation in a meaningful and substantial way.

One author writes that there are many things that push us away from our evangelistic responsibility. We have many fears, and misconceptions about what it means to be a light in the world. "For some, the thought of witnessing leads to clammy hands, weak knees, a cracked voice, and a mind that turns to mush when opportunities are available to share the gospel." (Leon Brown)

If you get weak knees at the thought of witnessing, you are not alone, and I encourage you to start small. Begin by talking to strangers (that is for the adults – not you kids). It sounds basic, but be intentional about saying hello and make intentional conversation with people who aren't Christians. People you run into at the grocery store, clerks, greeters, and others who sometimes go unnoticed.

Ask people how they are doing (and listen to their answer). Learn their names, pray for them, and go through their check-out lines intentionally. Talk to the people at the gym, at your favorite restaurants. Talk to your neighbors. Learn their names and greet them by name when you see them. Invite them over for drinks, or for a meal. I know a dear family in our church that has meals with their neighborhood friends every week. To make our light shine before others, we actually have to leave our homes and church. We need to spend time with non-Christians, and make friends with people that are different from us. With people who are same sex attracted, who are atheists, with people from other political parties.

Be a witness at work. Invest in your co-worker's lives. Participate in activities and groups from your neighborhoods, invite non-Christians to your birthday parties and holiday celebrations. Those are just some to get started! Note, I didn't say you needed to lay out a full gospel presentation with everyone you see. You can't really do that until you have someone's trust. You can only gain someone's trust by loving them and caring for them.

Be careful not to put too high a burden on yourselves. Jesus did not call us to *produce light* in others, he just called us to be the light. To be the witness. He will do the work of

regeneration. Our calling is to be a light to all those around us. To a world that so desperately needs the light.

Martin Lloyd Jones challenges us that the Christian is not someone who lives in isolation. He is in the world, though he is not of it; and he bears a relationship to the world. [Jones. 149]

Another commentator writes, “...When society does go bad, we Christians tend to throw up our hands in pious horror and reproach the non-Christian world; but should we not rather reproach ourselves? One can hardly blame unsalted meat for going bad. It cannot do anything else. The real question to ask is: where is the salt?” [Stott, 65]

May we flee the temptation or unintentional practice of modern-day monasticism – living a life separate from society. Instead, may God help us to lift high the cross in all the spheres of our lives boldly.

May we, as Christian individuals, shine the light in the political, economic, and social spheres of life. As Christians, may we out-do the world by leading in generosity and service. May we lead the charge in saving lives from abortion, and also in adopting, fostering, and caring for the helpless.

We are the solution Jesus gives for a dying world. We are the light God had provided to bring a world living in darkness into the light. “Christians are set in secular society by God to hinder this process [of decay]. God intends us to penetrate the world [and to change it]. [And] Christian salt has no business to remain snugly in *elegant little ecclesiastical salt [shakers]*.... our place is to be rubbed into the secular community, as salt is rubbed into the meat, to stop it from going bad. [Stott, 65]

In conclusion, as we go out this week, may we ask God to help us to shine the light of the gospel. May we thoughtfully and intentionally look for ways to be a witness.

For we know that then, when people see our light and good works, they will glorify God.

For as John Stott put it, “they will inevitably recognize that it is by the grace of God that we are what we are, that our light is his light, and that our works are his works done in us and through us.

So it is the light they will praise, not the lamp which bears it; [and] it is our father in heaven whom they will glorify.” [Stott, 62]

Amen.

**This sermon draws on material from:**

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<https://www.nationalreview.com/news/texas-governor-orders-review-of-whether-gender-transition-surgery-constitutes-child-abuse/>

T: *Jesus calls us to be salt and light in a dying world*.