

Introduction:

- A. Every once in awhile I feel the need to repeat a poem by Beatrice Cleland titled, "The Portrait of a Christian":

*Not only in the words you say,
Not only in your deeds confessed,
But in the most unconscious way
Is Christ expressed.
Is it a calm and peaceful smile?
A holy light upon your brow?
No, more! I felt his presence when
You laughed just now.
For me, 'twas not the truth you taught,
To you so clear, to me so dim,
But when you came to me you brought
A sense of him.
And from your eyes he beckons me,
And from your lips his love is shed,
Till I lose sight of you, and see
The Christ instead.*

That sense of Jesus, like when someone says, "There's something different about you," how does that work? When they say that, they're seeing something that is natural to us, something we don't think about, like our accent or eye color, but it is striking to them.

- B. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus said to his disciples, "You are the salt of the earth. You are the light of the world." Those are wonderful pictures, but how do we get that way? What is it that makes us salty? What is it that makes us glow? Turn to Matt. 5. The secret to being salt and light lies in the verses *before* those, the Beatitudes.

[Read **vv.1-12**...] These verses describe qualities of the heart and unseen blessings from God. Coming just before the salt and light verses, Jesus is telling us that...

I. WE BECOME CHRISTIAN SALT AND LIGHT FROM THE INSIDE OUT (5:1-12)

- A. Think for a moment about the kind of person these beatitudes describe. Here is someone with a deep sensitivity to sin (people who know they are "poor in spirit" and who "mourn" because of it). Here are people who want righteousness like a hungry man wants food, who know how to work with God to scour and bathe their hearts till they are pure. Here are meek people who come at the world as humbled servants of all, serving up mercy and peace wherever they go, as if they were traveling minstrels of *shalom*. And here are people who will take their lumps for loving Jesus, knowing that our resurrection life is most obvious when something in us is dying.

But it isn't just what they *are* that sets these people apart, it is also the blessings we receive. These beatitudes come bearing gifts. For every heart-habit we pursue, God brings us a happy reward—the deep sense of belonging and hope that comes with heavenly citizenship and being called "*sons and daughters of God*", the cleansing blood-red comfort of God, feasts of righteousness, mercy beyond measure, seeing God—which I take to mean that we *get* God, we know and love him, we understand him as our Father. Here are people who rejoice because our reward in heaven is great!

- B. These qualities are birthed in us when we are born again. Then they become the habits of our hearts and those blessings become our treasury. We talk about how some people have charisma—"a special charm or allure that inspires fascination" [Websters]. **Charisma is exactly what Christians have.** The word

means “a gift of grace.” And that is what gives us a unique flavor and glow; that is what makes us salt of the earth and light of the world.

- C. I’m all for us learning how to share our faith, how to answer unbelievers’ tough questions, how speak God’s truth into the darkness of academia or politics or business. **But what really makes Christians stand out in this dark world is when we cultivate these inward habits of the heart which draw us near to the heart of God.** Out of these *inward* pursuits and gifts grow our abilities to express our faith in words and lifestyle, our sense of relational timing, our unique Christian identity that give people around us a sense of Him. **These are qualities no one else on earth has, and they are qualities that no one on earth can miss.** Now we can look at **v.13...**

II. BEATITUDE-SALTY CHRISTIANS GIVE PEOPLE A TASTE FOR CHRIST (5:13)

- A. Salt does several things, of course. In the ancient world, salt’s main use was as a preservative—rubbed into meat, for example. Secondly, it was used to enhance flavor.
- B. Beatitude-flavored Christians surely are preservatives in this rotting world. We do this when we speak for integrity, for mercy, for goodness at Rotary or the PTA, in business meetings or the classroom, or with neighbors over the back fence. We do this when we consider carefully how to vote and what causes to support. We do this when we pray for our world or community, and when we step into life’s rotten situations with grace. Christians working in jails and in politics, in education and business and entertainment, are like salt rubbed into meat. Illus.: Ellen Vaughn writes about a woman named Caroline who lived in a very upscale suburb in Florida.

Her neighbor was as skittish as a fawn. But gradually, as Fawn began to trust her, Caroline discovered that her husband was addicted to Internet pornography, that her teenaged sons were caught in the same trap, and their house was full of rage, fear, lust, and shame.

Late one night police cars shrieked in the neighborhood and into Fawn's driveway. Caroline could see other neighbors who'd been awakened, peeking thru their drapes and looking out their front doors as it became apparent that there had been some sort of altercation. But no one was going to Fawn's door to help.

“I'm going,” Caroline told her husband. She went across the street and asked what she could do. She hugged her neighbor, talked like a tough aunt to the teenaged boys, one of whom had attacked the other, answered some of the police officers' questions, and made everyone a big pot of tea. No miracles occurred—that evening, anyway.” But Caroline had been salt. [Radical Gratitude, p.219]

- C. I’m especially intrigued with the other use of salt—as flavoring. Beatitude-flavored Christians give people a taste for Jesus. There’s another verse that talks about salt, **Col. 4:6**, “*Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone.*” I’ve noticed that when it comes to witnessing, people often worry a lot about *what* to say, how to explain the gospel, or answer tough questions. But Paul doesn’t train them here in *what* to say, but rather, in *how* to say it. I think one of the coolest things about being a Christian in the world is our capacity to throw kind of a grace wrinkle into conversations. I think the Lord gives us a capacity for this if we pray for it and look for it. And when we do this, I always think it is like handing out **potato chips**.

We speak with salty grace, for example, when we step with genuine interest into a person’s world. We say to someone, “*Your job sounds very difficult. How did you learn this?*” [‘Want a potato chip?’] “*You seem like a really good mom. What is your biggest challenge?*” [‘Want a chip?’] “*Being a cashier must be very hard some days. I’ve watched you and I think you do a great job!*” [‘Want a chip?’]

Another way to talk with salty grace is to ask gently and discretely about heart issues. “*I imagine a situation like yours takes quite a toll on a person.*” [‘Want a chip?’] “*Are the layoffs at your company keeping you awake at night?*” [‘Have a potato chip.’]

Then, sometimes, there is an opportunity to speak more directly: “*You know, there’s a wonderful verse in the Bible that might encourage you.*” [‘Want a chip?’] “*Let me tell you a story about a Father*

whose son broke his heart.” [‘Would you like one?’] *“I like to pray for people. Would it be ok if I started praying for you?”* [‘Want one?’]

Grace-accented conversations give people more than they deserve or expect. They are conversations rich in love and sincere interest, in unexpected sympathy and help. They are conversations which, by the Holy Spirit’s miraculous help, touch something soul-deep. And tho’ people may not realize it, your grace-accented words are giving them a thirst for Jesus. I’ll tell you one thing for sure about everyone who just got a potato chip. Each of those people want another! And that’s how it is with salty Christians who give people a taste for Jesus.

[Read vv.14-16]

III. BEATITUDE-BRIGHT CHRISTIANS GIVE PEOPLE THE LIGHT OF JESUS (5:14-16)

- A. In v.14 Jesus tells his disciples, “You are the light of the world.” How’d that happen? Jesus said in **John 8:12**, *“I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.”* With Jesus, light is contagious. He touches you and you light up. It is as if, when we become Christians, our chemistry changes; **as if we have phosphorus in our blood.** Put us in a dark place and you can see us glow.
- B. Light is a symbol in the Bible of truth. What we shine with is God’s own truth. Truth is something we *tell*, that we *talk about*, and we get it from the Bible. We tell people about God as he is in the Bible, and especially about Christ. Or we step into a conversation with a sure-fire winner: *“That reminds me of a story...”* and we tell a *Bible* story. We tell a story of Jesus, or one of his thought-inducing parables. We tell people what the Bible says about trust in the Lord, or about sin’s effects on people, or about the hope we find in Scripture. Illus.: Brian Dean asked me for a computer version of the little booklet we have in the foyer called *Whistling in the Dark*, a collection of all the verses in the Bible about not being afraid. He’s given that out to some people he knows who have been frightened by these tough times. That’s being light.

But we also live God’s bright truth—the grace-filled truth of the Beatitudes. **V.16** equates our light with our **good deeds**... The thing about Christian good deeds, when done right, is that they are filled with Jesus’ life and light. They convey *more* than human kindness or integrity. They give off a kind of halo! Illus.: In his book, *The Enormous Exception*, **Earl Palmer** tells about a pre-med undergrad at the University of California Berkley who became a Christian after a long journey through doubts and questions. This fellow had been hit with a bout of the flu that had kept him out of school for 10 days. During that critical absence from his organic chemistry class a classmate who happened to be a Christian carefully collected all assignments and work for him in the chemistry class and then took the time away from his own studies to help him catch up to the rest of the class. The fellow told Palmer, *“You know that this just isn’t done and I probably wouldn’t have done it, but he gave that help to me without any fanfare or complaints. I wanted to know what made this friend of mine act the way he did; I found myself asking him if I could go to church with him.”* Palmer wrote, *“I think the best tribute I ever heard concerning a Christian was the tribute spoken of this student. ‘I felt more alive when I was around this friend.’”*

- C. We don’t much like living in dark places but that’s where lights belong. *“Everyone in my school drinks and does drugs!”* Sounds like you’re in the right place! *“My office is the most vulgar, political, backstabbing place I’ve ever worked.”* Perfect! *“There’s no one on my street who is a Christian.”* Sounds like you have found your niche! Dark places can be pretty uncomfortable but that’s where lights belong. **John Stott** writes, *“I sometimes think how splendid it would be if non-Christians, curious to discover the secret and source of our light, were to come up to us and enquire:*

*Twinkle, twinkle, little star,
How I wonder what you are!”*

Conclusion

You've heard the saying, "*Preach the gospel at all times. Use words if necessary.*" It gets at this idea of living as salt and light, of giving a people "*a sense of Him,*" but **sooner or later words are necessary**. We need salt-seasoned words of grace, we need to give an answer for the hope that is within us, we need to be glowing **heralds** of God's good news in Jesus.

But what do we say? How do we talk to others about our faith? I thought I'd conclude today by interviewing a couple of friends to see what they do to be salt and light in the worlds where they live.

Tell me about a time recently when you got to talk to someone about the Lord. How did it open up? Did you say something that started the conversation? Did they?

- Mike McDonough – woman with whom he prayed after church
- Guy Viti -
- Yvette Hammonds: How your relationship with your coworker turned toward this opportunity to do a Bible study together, how she's liked the study, and what kind of progress you're seeing.