

I LOVE MY CHURCH – WEEK 5 – SHARING – Matthew 5:13-16

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A great dining experience really comes down to 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?

Fred & Fuzzy's Waterfront Bar & Grill – Sister Bay, WI – Great atmosphere, lousy service
Psycho Suzy's Motor Lounge (old site) – anticipated biker bar – great food and atmosphere

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. We concluded the first week that 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 last question we have to consider in our series: How do people come to this new life in Christ? How do people hear and discover, how do they experience the kingdom of God? Today we are going to discover how God entrusts us to create the kingdom experience.

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?"

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

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 – **read Matt. 4:16.**

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!**

It always amazes me to think of what God entrusts His church with us! 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 community/kingdom experience to our city so they can know God, find Him, repent, and find new life! Think about it like this: Don't like how our city is? Ask yourself if you are salting it. Discouraged that our culture is so dark? Ask yourself if you are lighting it up. If the culture 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!

So, how do we bring the *I Love My Church* experience to our culture? 3 quick things:

1. People will experience Jesus' community when we live its values.

We can't separate Matthew 5:2-12, Jesus' Beatitudes from 5:13-16, Jesus' salt & light discourse. 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 Beatitudes—the values of the kingdom, and 5:13-16 is the charge, the call.

The salt and light metaphors come out of the Beatitudes.

Jesus has brought the kingdom of God through regeneration and renewal by the Holy 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 and rotting world. The values in you as

you live out the kingdom bring the light to a world of darkness. People will experience the kingdom when we live its values. These show us how to love the church outside of the church.

2. We live the values of Jesus' community in our daily ordinary lives.

There was a brilliant guy who almost died drinking soy sauce in 2013. 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. The nineteen-year-old who drank it 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 they can experience the kingdom, not so that they can be blinded by the sun or OD on sodium. So the question we have to answer is: Are we seasoning and shining, or are we blinding and gagging?

Let me give you an example of blinding and gagging. State Fair this year – several t-shirts w/John 3:16 or “Repent! The kingdom is near!” I saw no one talking to them, no one being convinced of the truth of their message or their approach. Just many looks and some snickering...

Is there truth to the message of those shirts? Yes, absolutely! 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 there are plenty of examples of seasoning and shining, too. Members witness in everyday life...

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 person you carpool with. 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.

As I have reminded you before, so will I again, there is a world around us that desperately

needs Jesus. They are lost and drowning in sin. That's why Jesus came, to save lost and condemned creatures with His holy, innocent blood, and through His suffering and death. His death and resurrection saved each and every one of us who were lost and blinded by darkness. We need to bring people Jesus, so that they, too, may experience His light, love and peace.

3. Those who have truly experienced Jesus will help others experience Jesus. Read 5:14-16.

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, **“By this all people will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.”** 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.

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? Be intentional - think about some, write them down, post them and make a plan.

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?” 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.

What are some ways you can do that? Well, you can come and volunteer in our foodshelf ministry and spend time with those around us in need. You can volunteer to help at one of our midweek meals, or just come and eat and sit and talk with some of our neighbors there. You will find out some interesting and even amazing things about the folks who come here. You'll learn their stories, hear their joys, fears and concerns. As you listen and get to know them, they will see Jesus in your presence and words. Join one of groups going to Feed My Starving People, the Operation Christmas Child warehouse, or at Global Health Ministries. Even better yet, join a local book club or sports league or local food shelf or homeless shelter and get know people and you season and light up that group or activity. You can plot out your

work space, your classroom, and your neighborhood and make a specific plan for getting to know your co-workers, your classmates, and your neighbors.

Finally, it's been said that Christians make horrible neighbors. Let that never be said of us. As we grow in our love and knowledge of God, as we grow in our relationships with others inside and outside our church, as we truly love our church in both word and action, we will truly realize the faith community God truly intended for us and in us. In the name of Jesus. Amen.