

A RADIANT CHRISTIAN

"Ye are the salt of the earth: but if the salt have lost his savour, wherewith shall it be salted? it is thenceforth good for nothing, but to be cast out, and to be trodden under foot of men. Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on an hill cannot be hid. Neither do men light a candle, and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick; and it giveth light unto all that are in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven." Matthew 5:13-16.

It was part of our Lord's greatness and uniqueness as a teacher that He was able to take the common and simple things of life and use them as metaphors to present great spiritual truths to His hearers in a way which they could easily grasp and understand.

Having described the characteristics and blessings of His true followers, Christ speaks of their responsibilities and influence. Having made us realize what we are, He wants us to consider what we should be.

Christ used two very familiar things to set forth the real nature of Christian living-- salt and light.

I. Christ likened Christians to salt.

Christ regards His people as the salt of the earth. It is the highest tribute we can pay to anyone to say that he or she is one of "the salt of the earth." It means that his or her spirit is of the very essence of self-forgetfulness. What is this spirit that makes Christian people what Christ calls the salt of the earth? It is not one or two deeds or habits, an occasional act of generosity, or a spurt of self-sacrifice; still less is it negative virtues, or the fact that we do not do certain things.

Salt is one of the necessities of life. All beings must have it. Without salt all animal life would soon perish. Every continent has vast supplies of it. Three-fourths of the globe is covered with salty seas. Salt is good, and that is one reason why God made so much of it.

Salt does its work by being brought into close contact with the substances upon which it is to work.

Salt serves a number of purposes--it keeps things sweet and fresh, it imparts a portion of its taste to the food with which it is mixed thus making it palatable, it whets the appetite, it creates a thirst, it serves as an aseptic, and it preserves from corruption and decay that with which it is mingled.

Salt has three outstanding properties--penetration, purification and preservation. It exists for others and it does its work gradually, silently and inconspicuously.

Salt has two functions--to season and to preserve. Salt gives taste to food and saves it from being flat and insipid. As a child once explained, "Salt is what makes food taste bad when you don't put it in." When added to food, salt takes away its tastelessness. If added in the right proportion, the food becomes wholesome and the bodies of those who eat it are refreshed by it. Salt gives taste to whatever it touches. For civilized people it is a necessity.

Salt is to preserve that on which it is sprinkled from corrupting. Corruption calls for the presence and application of salt. If there were no tendency to corruption, then salt would be little needed. Salt exercises a restraining and a preserving

influence. It destroys germs and prevents decay. Because germs are on the surface of meat, it is in danger of becoming putrid. The business of the salt which is rubbed into that meat is to preserve it against those agencies that are tending to its putrefaction. It is to prevent the process of decay from proceeding.

Salt is something that cannot be ignored. It is a positive quantity. If it is present, one must recognize it. If it is absent, it is certain to be missed. It is the antithesis of the negative and the neutral. It is the sworn antagonist of the insipid. Sometimes its presence is exceedingly welcome. At other times it is keenly resented, but always it must be recognized.

Neither are Christians mere moral minus signs. They are positive, pungent, strengthful folks. You may like them or dislike them, but you cannot ignore them.

"Ye are the salt of the earth." What does that imply? It clearly implies rottenness in the earth, a tendency to pollution and to becoming foul and offensive. That is what the Bible has to say about this world. It is a fallen and sinful world. Its tendency is to evil, to wars, etc. It is like something which can only be kept wholesome by means of a preservative. The world is sinful, and any optimism with regard to it in and of itself is not only unscriptural but has actually been falsified by history itself.

Since we are salt, where are we to unloose our preventive and purifying powers? Some have exercised all their preserving and purifying powers years ago. They were genuine salt in the old home church years ago, but, sad to say, they are doing nothing now. Nor are we to salt some ideal situation in some tomorrow that may never come. We are to exercise our sweetening and preserving and purifying powers in the here and now. It is our business to serve in the time and place where we live. What is the method by which we can accomplish Christ's purpose for us? We are to do so through character and contact. It is important to do, but to be is of supreme and fundamental importance.

When we used to kill our meat on the farm, we did not salt it by putting the meat in one place and the salt in another. The two had to be brought into contact. Not only was the salt placed on the meat, but it passed out of sight altogether. It saved the meat at the expense of itself. It could not have saved it in any other way.

The character of the influence which you exert is determined by what you are. One exerts influence over others by what he says to them only as what he says is the outcome of what he is in his innermost being. Our influence comes out of what we are. Unless you are salt, you lack the power to exercise the aseptic function.

Christians are the only ones who can add real savor to life. The preservation of the world depends upon the presence of the Lord's people. Whether men realize it or not, it is the presence of believers in Christ that saves the world from destruction. We cannot estimate the value of the presence in the world of pure-minded, earnest, unselfish, sacrificial and godly people. All such check the progress of corruption. Christians are in the world to influence those around them by lives that are zealous for Christ and against every form of evil. They are to create a thirst for the things of God.

Salt is beautiful. Salt crystals under a microscope reveal a wonderful beauty. Each is like a diamond sending forth rays of light and marvelous beauty. So, Christians, as the salt of the earth, are to reveal the beauty and glory of Christ.

The Christian is to function as the salt of the earth by being just the person that he or she is in every sphere in which he or she moves. Does it not often happen that a number of people are talking together in an unworthy manner? Suddenly a Christian enters the circle, and immediately he has an effect. He does not say a word, but they begin to modify their language. He is already acting as salt, and is controlling the tendency to pollution.

When salt has lost its saltiness, it is of no use at all. So, the only thing to do is to get rid of it. If the salt becomes insipid, it is fit only to be thrown outside and trodden under the feet of men. If the Christian ceases to represent the character and spirit of Christ in the world, he becomes uninfluential. The world does not have any use for a savorless Christian. It treads him under foot. It repudiates him, scorns him, despises him, and will not have anything to do with him.

II. Christ likened Christians to light.

Christ referred to His followers as "the light of the world." This is one of the most astounding and extraordinary statements that was ever made. It is one of the most striking and remarkable things which is said about the Christian. It is full of profound implications with regard to an understanding of the nature of the Christian life. It should make us lift up our heads and realize what a glorious thing it is to be a Christian.

The emphasis of the scriptures in dealing with the Christian is always upon his being what he is, before they begin to mention what he does.

Now, that Christ's bodily presence is no longer manifested, His followers furnish the only light this world has. Without them the world would be in utter spiritual darkness. What a glorious privilege is the believer's of giving forth light to the world by reflecting the true light! Christ is the only true light, but He shines through the lives of those who know Him and walk in His footsteps. He will shine through the lives of all Christians if they will let Him. Each Christian is responsible for keeping the reflector of his soul clean so that Christ may shine forth unhindered.

We are expected to witness openly and boldly for Christ with our lips and our lives. What our Lord desires, and our world needs, is a genuine, positive, active, righteous and useful life. We are to shine freely, fully and conspicuously. There is no thought here of proud or selfish display. Light does not shout about itself; it just shines.

What does light really do? The first thing that it does is to expose the darkness. Just by being a Christian one exposes the other kind of life. Even if he does not say a word, just by being what he is, a Christian, one makes others feel ashamed of what they are doing, and in that way he is truly functioning as light. He is providing a standard, and is showing that there is another kind of life which is possible to mankind. He brings out the error and the failure of their way of thinking and living.

"Ye are the light of the world." Being light, we can shine. That is our business. That is the purpose which Christ has in our salvation that reaches beyond ourselves. Nobody is saved simply and solely for himself. No lamp is ever lighted just for its own benefit. It is lighted in order that it may give light.

How then are we to shine? Naturally, willingly, openly, sacrificially and faithfully. Light is a positive something. Wherever it shines, it is going to be seen. It is something that cannot be ignored. Black night might say, "I am not going to pay a

bit of attention to the sun. I am not going to give an inch." But, in spite of its boasting, when the sun rises it takes to its heels. Light is positive, and the positive forces win.

Christ's light burns within His followers, shines forth in their looks, their words and their deeds, and illuminates their environment. The possession of this light makes them conspicuous, like a city set on a hill. They cannot be hidden. They are seen by men. Their conduct is watched and scrutinized.

They must let their light shine before men so that its beauty and brightness may be seen. It will draw others into the circle of its light and warmth. Christians must let others see their good works, but it must not be for the sake of human praise or glory. They are to strive to draw others to the true Light in order that the Heavenly Father may be glorified. If and when you have "let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven", you have thereby performed your greatest service to the world.

God has given us the ability to glow, to radiate light, or to shine. He is encouraging us to let this luminous quality of life have a chance. Christians are to be lighted, shining personalities. Our Saviour was a radiant personality in the highest and best sense. And He wants us to be attractive persons. As we practice the Christian spirit and rehearse the Christian faith our lives become radiant with the divine grace and appeal. And the radiant Christian always reflects the spirit of Christ in its beauty and power. He is understanding, forgiving, thoughtful and helpful. He is high in faith and low in criticism. He lets the light of Christ shine through. He stands out above the crowd. He is unmistakably different in his actions and attitudes. We cannot know how much good we do by being radiant personalities. Many today need this ministry. They live in the shadow of sin and fear. They do not need arguments or blame. They need encouragement and the example of radiant lives. This is the high privilege of the Christian.

The place for the light to shine is before men. The purpose of the light is to show our good works. Good works must exist before they can be shown. And these good works for Christ must be under the spotlight and the worker in the background. The power of the light is to glorify God. There is to be a complete absence of ostentation or display. Instead of having showmanship and calling attention to self, the Christian is to do all these things for the glory of God. We glorify Him by living so that His light shines out through our conduct.