



## **“Be Bright Light, Be Strong Flavor”**

Pastor Andy CastroLang

June 23, 2019

### **Scripture (CEV):**

#### **Matthew 5:13-16**

<sup>13</sup> You are like salt for everyone on earth. But if salt no longer tastes like salt, how can it make food salty? All it is good for is to be thrown out and walked on.

<sup>14</sup> You are like light for the whole world. A city built on top of a hill cannot be hidden, <sup>15</sup> and no one would light a lamp and put it under a clay pot. A lamp is placed on a lampstand, where it can give light to everyone in the house. <sup>16</sup> Make your light shine, so that others will see the good that you do and will praise your Father in heaven.

### **Sermon:**

If you drive into Spokane from I-90 west, you know you are home when you see it, that distinctive view, as you crest the hill and look down into the valley, and you see the familiar outline of the city spread below you. We all know that view! It is unique to Spokane and we sigh when we see it, knowing we are almost home!

I grew up in Boulder CO, and the “flatirons” big slabs of flat rock vaguely shaped like the bottom of an iron, were tilted up eons ago. They stand like gigantic sentinels at the front edge of the foothills, and they are the distinctive feature that you see as you drive over the rise, and look west to the town. We all knew we were home when we saw the flatirons.

Tiberias is a city on the western shore of the Sea of Galilee. It was a new city at the time of Jesus, built by Herod Antipas. You need to know that the Sea of Galilee is the second lowest

body of water on the planet, only the Dead Sea is lower. The Sea of Galilee sits in the bottom of a bowl of land, sloping up on all sides. The city of Tiberias sits on the hill on the west side, and you cannot miss it. It is built in light colored stone, and it climbs from the waterfront all the way up the hill.

It is beyond a doubt, a very obvious city on a hill.

You can't miss it. It is a thoroughly Jewish city today, in the state of Israel/Palestine. In Jesus' day it was a notorious city, built by a despised ruler, (Herod Antipas) who was sucking up to Roman power by building and naming the city after the despised Roman emperor. No observant Jew would choose to go there. It was a city that could not hide its violence, its power, its oppression. Unlike the holy city of Jerusalem, it was empty of God.

Now, as far as I know, salt is salt. Until it isn't. I have never heard of unsalty salt. A city is too big to hide, and salt cannot be unsalty. If it is, it isn't salt, it's sand! Walk on it.

Light is taken for granted in our world...it is cheap and it is everywhere. Not so in the time of Jesus. Houses were small and dark, and the sky would be very dark and very full of stars at night.

The houses of ancient Israel remind me a lot of adobe houses in the southwest, made with thick walls of mud brick, they would keep out the heat in the summer, and keep in the warmth in winter. But there would be no big panes of glass...they would be dark. Most activity was done outside in the daytime, and a lamp was a necessity in the dark of the night.

So, salt is for flavor, and a light is for shining, and a city, whether Tiberias or Spokane, is too big to hide.

Jesus wasn't being vague, but very down to earth and concrete.

He wasn't wanting his followers to ponder philosophy, he wanted them to be clear, and grounded; as obvious as salt, and as clear and bright as a light in a house.

It is very straightforward, shine with goodness, be about doing the right, change the world you are in, where you are, in it, for the better.

He didn't say that you needed a Ph.D. first.

He didn't say you needed to go far away, or have extraordinary powers.

You are like salt, you are like light...obvious, necessary, there in life...every day.

I know that you have experienced, and I have shared with you, some of my experiences, of angry fundamentalist evangelicals telling me how wrong I am, telling you how wrong you are.

We are given chapter and verse of selected texts that tell us how wrong we are. Something from the purity code of Leviticus, or something from the letters attributed to Paul.

But they never share Jesus' words. Never words like this.

So blunt, with no room for ambiguity...

"Make your light shine, so that others will see the good that you do and will praise your Father in heaven."

Shine out on others, in the doing of good.

Don't hide yourself away, either in false humility, or in fear.

Do good, and let others see you at it, that they might get a glimmer of hope, or joy, or peace from you.

Speak out, and be strong in your voice that is a voice of love and justice, a voice of hope against despair, life over death.

Perhaps, from your goodness, others will glimpse the goodness of our God, the love of the Creator.

And in our society, which is so jaded, and so suspicious of Christians; in our society that is so overwhelmed by the terrible problems we see all around us...then in that society, you will

walk as a beacon of light in darkness, and a salty word, a strong word, of God's love and God's hope for creation.

Really, if we say we follow Jesus, then we must admit that we are like a city on a hill...we cannot hide.

Like salt and light, we are necessary.

We are called to restore the world, to give glory to God, and to help others see God's love, through our love.

It isn't so complicated.

It is both filled with hope, and filled with God.

Jesus told us we could do this. He didn't make it complicated or esoteric, or vague.

As straightforward as salt, as obvious as light, in a life that won't be hidden.

Jesus gave us the lesson.

We can do it, we do it, we will do it.

Amen.