

Tiny little rocks sprinkled on top of your food. Without them the food can be bland and sometimes almost inedible. Sprinkled onto sidewalks and sprayed onto roads, it lowers the freezing point of water so we can chip away at the ice to break it apart or the ice melts giving us safer spots to walk and drive. Without the modern conveniences of refrigeration and in-home freezers, you covered your food with them to preserve it and keep your food from rotting. Salt, you really need it.

After white-knuckling the steering wheel trying to peer through the storm, a feeling of relief comes over you as you see the light of the city pierce through the darkness. The heavy fog envelopes everything so you can hardly see until the sunlight from outside of the fog burns the fog away. Power goes out and darkness covers everything. The terrors of the night creep in and imaginations run wild. A battery-powered little whale nightlight turns on and those monsters of the dark can't overcome it. In the dark you stumble along, groping cautiously lest you hurt yourself, until the light shines into your eyes and you see. Light, you need that too. Salt and light, two things we need. Two things this world needs. Two things that without—when you are not doing what Christ has made you—the world, your neighbor, you suffer. Jesus says,

“You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled underfoot.¹⁴ “You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden.¹⁵ Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house.¹⁶ In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.” (Matthew 5:13).

This world is rotting in sin. It is inedible, so-to-speak, to our holy God who hates sin. Until the end this world will only worsen. Rotten actions from rotten people. Seemingly good actions are only good surface deep; when you bite in, they are rotten with hidden agendas and self-serving motivation. Rotten world filled with rotten suffering; things just aren't as good as you know they should be and you see people suffer and decay further. And here you are, the salt of the earth. You keep the rotting from turning worse. You give this world a good flavor. You are the salt that preserves and melts the love of most that is growing freezing cold.

In this dark world filled with the darkness of sin, darkness of half-truths, broken promises, and straight up lies, you are the light. Jesus who is the light of the world no darkness can overcome has made you his light and you shine. You can't help it. The light is intrinsically different from the darkness. The darkness can try as much as it wants to cover it up or swallow it whole, but it can't! The light burns through the darkness, pushes back the shadows, and keeps them at bay, while reaching to the darkest corners. This light wants to be seen and cannot be ignored. Your

neighbor sees the light that shines from your good works. Your neighbor notices they aren't done to serve yourself. They can see that you aren't doing them to try and get ahead like so many else do. They can tell when your good works are actually genuine and authentic. You aren't just doing it to be doing it. They can see your life how you act is so different from the dark world. And they glorify God and God is glorified as a result of your good works.

Did you catch that? This is YOU. Jesus isn't speaking to the unbelieving world. His attention is on YOU. Not your neighbor who isn't here or the member who hasn't been here in a while. We want to have those conversations later. Jesus is speaking to you. So many question and wonder, what is God's plan for my life? What is my purpose? Well, here it is. You are salt. You are light.

So be! Instead of adding to the rotten gossip and talking behind people's back, salt stops it from getting worse or spreading further while taking words and actions in the kindest way they are able. Salt puts a stop to the rotten complaining and whining while putting good flavor in conversation that looks to build up rather than tear down. Salt looks to break up the icy relationships that hold onto injured pride seeking to listen rather than be heard. It melts the ice-hard heart with love and good deeds without hidden motives or agendas. You know what that's like. When someone is good or kind to you and you know she was "just because," we say, "It melted my heart."

In the dark despair of this world, you are the light that gives hope instead of feeding the frenzy of fear and handwringing of worry for the future. As light you expose the sinful deeds of darkness for what they are and not just harmless fun. As light you lovingly reveal sin out of care for your neighbor instead of covering it with more excuses and reasoning to bring them into Jesus' forgiving light. Light shows God's will for your life and his commands are not burdensome but good and good for you. Instead of handing out the dark revenge, we love even those who hurt us and those we care about. It shows love for your neighbor, especially those who make life difficult and frustrating. Light means you are different. This light shines in the world, it shines in our community, it shines in the privacy of our homes and in our church home.

Is this us? Is this you? If you were a stranger who just popped into church one service or someone who hadn't been here a while, how would you feel? When someone sees you at the store, at the cattle auction, the home basketball games, what would they see? When you are in your homes with your family, your relatives, your friends, what do they see? Is the light of Jesus shining through you in everything you think, say, and do?

Or do they see someone who hides their gospel light under the bushel basket? Do you find yourself covering up that light depending on who you are with and the

situation in which you find yourself? It might be because you are afraid of what this is going to do to your relationships. You don't want to be seen as too different. It might be you don't want to be seen as taking this stuff too seriously. You don't want stick out too much.

Instead of pushing out the darkness, do they see someone who brings more with them with how he treats his children and spouse, how she talks about her supposed friends, how they act towards "outsiders" and those who have a different outlook on life? They see someone who is holding onto the grudges and talks behind others backs. They see someone who says their relationship with God is most important while at the same seems to be too busy. The reality is, if we act like the dark-rotting world around us, why would they want to be here in God's house with us? When we are not salt and light in this world, the world, your neighbor, you suffer.

Satan wants you to doubt what Jesus says today. He's more than happy to point out your sin you struggle with and your past sin that haunts you. He wants you to question if God really said this about you, if you really could be and he'll point to your personality, your talents and everything in between to lead you to doubt. Your own sinful nature will insist this is too difficult and God is asking too much from you. It will try and convince you your relationship with God is a private matter and doesn't need to be seen or known by anyone else. This sinful world will throw everything at you to make you feel uncomfortable and frustrated so that we separate church and the rest of life. But if salt is no longer salty, it's worthless. It either is salt or isn't. If it's not light, it's dark. It's either is or isn't.

The thing is this is who we are. It's not a question or maybe. Jesus says you are. Yes, once we were darkness, but by the preaching and teaching of His Word he has called you out of the darkness of sin and unbelief and now you are light in the Lord. Once you had not received God's mercy, now you wake up with it new and fresh every morning. This doesn't come from you trying a little harder and promising to do better next week. You are because Jesus came to this dark world proclaiming, "I am the Light," and his bright light burns away the darkness.

He shines his light so that we see he did not come into the world to get rid of, destroy, annul, or change God's Law. No, the Law is good. What God calls us to do is good and good for you, this world, and your neighbor. Jesus took on flesh and blood to be born under God's law to fulfill it. He takes those expectations and lives up to them. He takes those demands and he does them. He shows how it's never been just about going through the motions and doing the right thing; his heart is pure. His motivation is never flawed. There's no searching for loopholes or how to make it easier. He fulfills it. He knows how hard it is. He knows how you struggle. He lived it. But he doesn't come to just show you how it's supposed to be done. He came to take your place and shines his light to show you: he did it all for you. His

light exposes what I cannot do on my own and shows how completely dependent I am on him. No matter how hard we try, our own righteousness and good works even if it surpassed the religious experts of Jesus' day, it would not be enough. God calls us to be holy, without sin, separated from sin, as he is.

Jesus shines his light to see: in him you are. From before the creation of the world, he chose you. And because Jesus chose you, he went to work to make you his own. So, Jesus who had no sin became sin for us. The Law demanded payment and the only currency accepted would be blood. But not any old blood would do. It had to be sinless, holy, precious—the very blood Jesus willingly sheds for you with his innocent suffering and death. All this he did so that you might be his own and so that you would be right with God. And this is what you are because Jesus would not remain in the dark tomb. When Easter's light shines, we see he who is the Light lives. And because he lives, he clothes you in his own robes of righteousness, his sinlessness in the waters of baptism so not only are you welcomed into the kingdom of heaven, this is yours. It is yours because with water and word in Baptism, you have been made a new creation. This is your identity: child of God, a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God.

You are salt; you are light because this is what Jesus has made you. Now with Jesus' light shining we can see clearly that how calls us to live in this world, it still is a daunting task on our own. But you aren't doing it alone. Jesus is at work in you to will and to act according to his purpose. It's not a burden. It's what we do as children of God. Yes, we will struggle. As long as we live in this world, we are sinners and saints. So, we confess our sins when we fail and Jesus shines his light to show and tell you: "You are forgiven. Come to my table, I'll feed you and give you the nourishment you need in the Lord's Supper. Then depart in peace. Get back that out there. You are salt and you are light. So be." Amen.