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SERIES: REWRITING JESUS

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TITLE: Salt and Light Pt. 1

Brooke Bronkowski was a beautiful fourteen-year-old girl who was in love with Jesus. When she was in middle school, she started a Bible study at her school. She spent her babysitting money on Bibles, so she could give them out to her unsaved friends. Youth pastors who heard about this brought her boxes of Bibles to give away. Brooke wrote an essay when she was about twelve; the last line of this essay will give you an idea of the kind of girl she was.

“I have my life before me. I will give others the joy I have and God will give me more joy. I will do everything God tells me to do. I will follow the footsteps of God. I will do my best!!!”

During Brooke’s freshman year in high school, Brooke was in a car accident while driving to the movies. Her life on Earth ended when she was fourteen, but her influence didn’t stop. Nearly fifteen hundred people attended Brooke’s memorial service. People from her public high school read poems she had written about her love for God. Everyone spoke of her example and her joy. At her funeral, the Gospel was presented, and 200 students came and bowed before the stage and gave their lives to Christ. The ushers provided each one of them a Bible from Brooke. Brooke only lived fourteen years, but she was sold out for Christ. She did not waste an ounce of her influence. She lived a faith that attracted others to Christ.

Today the notion of evangelism, proselytizing, or leading people to Christ is taboo. It's very popular to think that all roads lead to Heaven, that regardless of our path, if we follow it sincerely, it will work out in the end. Evangelism around the globe is becoming illegal in certain places. There are some who would argue that Jesus didn't really want us to attract people to Him. He came and He died, so we *all* might experience Salvation. That's a form of universalism. This is another way of rewriting Jesus.

But I think there's another way that we rewrite Jesus. And that's in the form of life change. There is this notion that Jesus provides a one-way ticket to Heaven, but it ends there. Salvation and faith can be distilled down to checking a box, or saying, *Yes*. I've even heard that “salvation is powerful enough to save your soul, but impotent to change your life”. Again, this is rewriting Jesus. But what is the truth? Does Salvation change us *today*, or does it simply save our souls? Was Brooke’s influence a waste, or was it an example of exactly what we should do?

So, let's turn to Matthew 5:13-16. This is likely a familiar passage to you: Jesus is giving His famous Sermon on the Mount to His disciples and the crowds that followed Him. He said, *Blessed are the poor in spirit, the pure in heart, the peacemakers*, and so on. He is now shifting

focus from talking to the crowds, and addressing His disciples directly. That's where we pick it up today. Jesus says in verse 13 (ESV):

“You are the salt of the earth, but if salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything except to be thrown out and trampled under people's feet.”

Jesus begins his new address with “you”. Jesus is talking to His disciples. But today, He's speaking to you and me: the church; the body of Christ. Each one of us has a measure of influence. Each one of us has a job to do. But when we do it together, we have a much bigger impact. It's like taking a pebble and throwing it into the water. There is a ripple. It does make a splash. But what happens when you take a handful of pebbles and throw them into the water -the ripples multiply. The splash is far greater.

To use Jesus' illustration of salt and light: 1 grain of salt – yes, it adds flavor – but on a whole piece of steak, it just doesn't do the job. However, when you take that saltshaker and you sprinkle the salt all over the steak – it transforms it. The same is true for light. You light a match. Yes, you have light in the darkness. In a pitch-black room with one match, yes you will see some light. But when you light a bunch of matches, you can see the *whole room*. That's why as believers, we go better together. Our influence increases. Our impact increases. And let's be honest, life gets easier when we do work together as a community. So Jesus is referring to the disciples, and now His message is for *us*, as the body of Christ.

And then He says, *You are the salt of the earth*. *You are!* This emphasizes *being* rather than doing. You see, Jesus here is *not* giving marching orders. He is just stating a fact! As Christians, we ARE salt and light. The question Jesus will ask is – *how effective are we as salt and light?*

But you see this goes back to that issue of rewriting Jesus. This goes back to the issue of life change. There is this relatively new belief that you can take Jesus as Savior, but not Lord. People argue this for different reasons. Some argue it from the point of verses such as John 5:24, which says, “Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life. He does not come into judgment but has passed from death to life.”

Critics will say there's nothing in there about taking Jesus Christ as Lord - it only says, *Believe*. But here's the problem: There are 7776 verses referring to divine lordship. You also have to consider very clear passages that DO connect believing *and* taking Christ as Lord.

DISCUSSION:

N: So, let me turn to Arnie Cole and Cara Whitney and ask: what is your response to the claim that you can have Jesus as Savior, but not Lord?

C: I think it goes against the commandment, *Love the Lord, your God, with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind*. That's what I think. [Pretty clear]. There's a difference - the one says, I'm here for what you can give me, and I don't really love or appreciate Who You are and what You're doing.

N: Wow. What a great observation there, right on the money. What about you Arnie?

A: Yeah, and I lived that going to Christian schools all my life. I really thought Jesus was my good luck piece. He would just save me from anything I got into. And when I found out Jesus didn't work that way, I was done with it. I mean, it was just, you know, He wasn't the Lord of my life. That's for sure. Satan knows who Jesus is. I mean, there's a lot of people, I think, when we do research, we call them notional Christians - you know, you ask them, "Are you going to Heaven?" "Oh yeah. I know the Big Guy in the Sky. They have no concept of the Jesus in the Bible. And yet they say, "Yeah, Jesus is a good guy. You know, He's like all those other guys, Buddha and all of them. I mean all roads lead to Heaven and I'm going to be there. I love Jesus". It's sad. And actually those people - notional Christians - are really the hardest to convert, because they think they've already got it.

N: Right. Yeah. This was one of my biggest frustrations as a pastor in a church, is trying to get people just to understand what you just said. It's really asking Jesus into your heart; that's not a magic equation. You know, you don't find that concept in the Bible, but rather it is a total surrender to Him, turning from your sin and turning to Christ - not just taking Him for what you can get, like what Cara said, but rather a total transformation, and the great pleasure and privilege it is to serve the God of the Universe. What a different way of thinking! But this notion of a notional Christian is quite popular, and it penetrates our church. And I think you identified that that is a major problem in the church today.

Jesus said, "You are the salt of the earth, but if salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything except to be thrown out and trampled under people's feet."

Today in 2020, salt is no big deal. Salt is cheap and common. Salt is one of those items we don't think much about. But when Jesus spoke these words, salt was a very big deal. Salt was a precious commodity. The only thing more precious than salt to the Romans was the sun. Romans soldiers were often paid with salt. Salt was used as a mark of friendship. Salt was even used to secure a covenant or promise.

So what is Jesus getting at by calling his disciples "salt of the earth"? What does salt do? Several things: First, salt provides **flavor**. Christians are not the dull, expression-less robots some people think we are. At least we are not meant to be. Christians are to be involved in all realms of life: science, teaching, art, food, ministry, writing, movies, music, etc. We should be adding flavor to all of these.

Second, salt **preserves**. In the ancient world, they didn't have refrigerators. So the people in Jesus' time would have used salt to preserve their meats from rotting. It was to slow down the process of decay. The same was true for the disciples, and us today as Christians. They were to begin the action of preserving the moral fiber of the day. They were to prevent the decay of society and influence the culture. The same applies to us today.

There are other aspects of salt we could discuss: the **purifying** aspect represented in the white of salt. Salt also **stings** an open wound. Our lifestyle should be different than that of the world, and this can provide a sting of conviction on the world. We also know that salt creates **thirst** for the consumer. Christians should create a thirst for God and spiritual reconciliation with Him.

I think all of these attributes about salt are good, and each could be a message in and of itself. But I want to encapsulate them all in this idea: Jesus says “you *are*” the salt of the Earth. You *are*. He doesn’t say “You be” or “You go act as” salt. No, he says, “you are.” This is a sense of *being* rather than merely *doing*. Yes, you will be doing as you live, but He says “you are”. You, as a follower of Christ, are salt. Think about how salt operates. Salt is **silent**. You can taste it, you can feel its impact, but it is silent. Salt is **hidden**. You don’t always see salt, but you see its effect. It preserves and slows down deterioration. It is working without you observing it. Salt **works from within**. As you consume salt, it creates a thirst from deep inside. You know immediately you’ve consumed it, because you long for relief from its internal effects. Salt is the influence of our daily lives: How we live; how we act; it is who we are.

We are the salt of the earth. **Here is the first essential for those who want to cultivate a faith that attracts others: They are salt through their actions.** We are to be the humble hands and feet of Christ. So, if you are a student, your salt might be the encouragement of a student who is hurting because of bullying. It might be providing them an ear to listen, or a 10 second prayer. If you are a stay-at-home mom, your saltiness might be delivering meals to sick families or new moms. It might be walking alongside single moms in the community. For those of you in a life group, you can be salt of the earth by doing your service project. Find an opportunity to serve the community, a neighbor, or a co-worker. It could be as simple as serving food at a City Mission. Volunteer with us for the next Respite Night. Listen to your heart. Ask God, how does He want you to be salt through your actions?

Jesus knew that attractional living was more than just our actions. This is why Jesus would tell us we are to be something else. Verses 14 – 15:

¹⁴“You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden.¹⁵ Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house.

Jesus says we are light. Again, he says “you *are*”. This is a state of *being*, rather than just going and doing. We are light, just like God is light. 1 John says that **God is light and in Him there is no darkness**. The Bible says, **His Word is light**. Psalm 119 says **His Word is a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path**. The Bible also tells us that *Jesus is light*. In fact, Jesus said, **“I am the Light of the world; he who follows Me will not walk in the darkness, but will have the Light of life”** (John 8:12). And because Jesus sent the Holy Spirit to live in us, we are now light. The apostle Paul wrote in Ephesians, **“You are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light”** (Eph. 5:8-9).

As salt is silent, hidden, and works from within – light works differently. Light is evident, if not undeniable. Light works powerfully. Light works from the outside exposing that which is hidden. Salt is our actions, while the light is our words. And Paul said, **“Let your speech always be**

gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer each person”
(Col. 4:6)

**Here is the second essential for those who want to cultivate a faith that attracts others:
They are to be light through their words.**

There is a popular quote that gets circulated on Facebook and Twitter. It goes like this: “Preach the Gospel at all times. When necessary, use words.” This is often attributed to Francis of Assisi, but there is no record of him actually saying it. What I think people mean by quoting this is: “your actions speak louder than your words”. And there is no doubt, our actions need to match words, and vice versa. But nowhere in Scripture does it suggest that our actions are to be void of the Word of eternal hope.

Jesus describes our being light, as that of a *city on a hill*, and that of a *lamp on a stand*. A city on a hill by day is visible to all who approach it. Its buildings and landscape are not hidden. By night, the lights that are lit illuminate the darkness. It becomes a beacon people move toward. This is part of attractional living: Being intentional with our words. What happens if we choose not to shine our light? Jesus says in verse 15 that it’s like lighting a lamp and immediately hiding it underneath a bowl. It remains light, but it is useless! Hiding your light for any reason doesn’t help you or anyone else.

And what happens if we choose to not be salty? In verse 13, Jesus says if salt loses its saltiness, it is no longer good for anything. The Greek word here is *moranthe* “moe-ran-they”. It means to act foolish or to be a fool. In other words, it’s foolish for Christians to lose their value and influence for the Kingdom.

Does this suggest that Christians can cease to be salt or light? In other words, is Jesus saying that Christians can lose their Salvation? Of course not. Jesus said, **“My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand”** (John 10:27-28). So no, once saved always saved. Christians cannot lose their salvation, but Jesus is saying they can lose their value and Christian influence.

Jesus then wraps up this whole idea of being salt and light by telling His disciples *why* they are to be this way. Verse 16:

¹⁶ In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.

Jesus says let your light shine. Let your grace-seasoned words, let your love-soaked actions be for the glory of God. Jesus says, let others see your “good” works. The word “good” here is from the Greek word *kalos* “kah-los”. This “good” doesn’t just imply quality, but it means beauty, eminent, and precious. Let all you do be excellent.

It is here we find the last essential for those who want to cultivate a faith that attracts others: They give all the glory to God.

We are salt and light in the world all for God's glory. We do it all to influence people and attract people to God, to Jesus, to the Gospel. It is so people might see Jesus in us. We don't do it for a pat on the back. We don't do it so we can get a reward. No, we do it so people can meet Jesus, our Lord and Savior.

And why is it imperative He gets the glory? Because, we did not save ourselves. We can't save ourselves. It's because it is God who made us salt and light. It is in His power through the Holy Spirit that we can be salt. That we can produce good works. It is because of the Spirit that we can speak with gentleness and love. It's not about us. It's all about Him. This is why we do it, because we love Jesus.

So, where do we go from here? We get it. We are to be salt and light for the glory of God. But many of you are thinking to yourself: Nat, you don't get it. I'm just a salesman. I'm just a waitress. I'm just a student. I'm just a retiree. I'm just a stay-at-home mom. I'm just a fill-in-the-blank.

Well, **God has you right where He wants you.** You can be the mom, the salesman, the student, the retiree, or the fill in the blank. God has you right where He wants you to attract others to Jesus. He wants you to be salt wherever you are. He wants you to be light in all the conversations you have. And He wants to you do it all for Him, so people will be drawn to Him. And thankfully, we do it all in His power and by His grace.

N: OK, let's bring in Cara and Arnie. Arnie, not everyone is an evangelist, but all are called on to evangelize. How does that change the game for us today?

A: I'm not a big fan of lifestyle evangelism, because that's a cop out for, I think, most people. So I think you need to be intentional, and I'm speaking for myself. And then, you know, even in my little lab that I have set up here, and we're trying to figure out, ways to keep people inside our discipleship app, that don't know Jesus. I mean, it becomes a part of your entire being, if that makes sense. But at a restaurant, you know, or a dishwasher, repairman comes in the house, it's very hard. I'm not like my sister, Cara, where I can just share, "Hey, do you know Jesus?" It's just, I'm not that bold.

C: But you and Nat are in leadership roles, just at Back to the Bible. And you orchestrate this whole group of people, you know - that's evangelism; you're doing it. It just looks different than how I do it, that's all.

N: Right. What I find fascinating is we are all evangelists in one way, shape or form. I mean, if I love a good restaurant, I tell people about it. If I love a vacation spot, I tell people about it. If I love Pepsi Max, and I do, I tell people about it. And yet, there's this weird hesitancy, [I don't like that]. Oh man. But yet there's this weird hesitancy when we are talking about Jesus Christ. And again, Pepsi doesn't matter. Vacation spots really don't matter. That restaurant doesn't matter, but Christ does. So I think this is just so important for us, to again, go back to remember, we're not all called to be evangelists. And yet we are called to evangelize in our own way, as Arnie had

pointed out. So let's talk about salt for a moment, because salt shows up in our actions. Cara, what kind of actions does our culture need right now?

C: Well, this culture needs Jesus to return, because at this point, He's the only one that can sort this out. But I am a firm believer in changing one heart at a time. So if I invite one for coffee, and you do, and then Arnie does, and then they tell their friends, that's how the Gospel works. It's a relational situation. And it spreads way quicker than COVID-19 does. So, you know, here's three people, and then pretty soon there is six people, and it just keeps spreading out. I mean, that's how it works.

N: Yeah. Well, Arnie, I'd like to hear from your perspective on the other side of this, and that's talking about light. You know, light can show up in our words. So what kind of words are needed right now?

A: You know, I've actually looked at that as a researcher. I think it's safe to say that a canned speech, a pitch, if you will, doesn't work very well. I think that the biggest thing, is sharing your faith, you know, being the salt. And probably the keyword is intentional, and most people aren't. And I'm talking about mature believers aren't intentional, or as intentional about sharing their faith, as they are about sharing their politics. We see this phenomenon in research, even though you've got Christian media like never before - you've got the Bible on your cell phone - you've got all of this stuff that's out there - and tremendous numbers floating around, like 350 or 370 million downloads of YouVersion. You've got all this stuff out there, yet we see in the United States, Christianity is shrinking. It's not growing, it's shrinking in size and rather quickly. And I think the whole issue is not being intentional, that, "Oh yeah, we're going to be the salt". But there's a lot of good people out there. There's a lot of good people at the country club. There's a lot of good people. There's people who will help when your car's broken down. I mean, there's good people out there. Yes, there's bad people, but there's good people. So my thing is - you've got to be intentional. That would be my advice.

N: Right. We need to be intentional with our words, and it's that delicate balance of truth, and also, I think, wrapped in compassion. Because we need to be purveyors of truth, and we need to be willing to communicate that truth with gentleness and respect and with intentionality. And as you brought up politics, in today's world, I think you're right. We're real quick to share political polls, our opinions on masks/no masks, this data, that data, this scientist, that scientist, without necessarily thinking about the theology that should be driving it. You know, as Christians, we are called ultimately to allow our theology to drive our politics, and not our politics to drive our theology. So I think if you are going to share, and you are going to engage in these conversations online, or wherever else, I would just encourage us all to think about the theology behind it, and why we are supporting it. And can we articulate a defense for it? Chances are we can't. It just looks good for what we believe. So instead, be intentional, and put it through the grid of God's Word.