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SERIES: REWRITING JESUS

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TITLE: Salt and Light Pt. 2

Today, unfortunately, many Christians have defaulted to living behind avatars on social media, but not really going out, speaking up, and spreading the Gospel. You see, we can have programs, we can have articles, we can have little memes to share. We can have the best legislation around, and we should. But unless we go out and begin to address the heart with the Gospel, we will never truly preserve a rich, moral, and thriving culture.

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. Salt creates a **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 sermon 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.

But I want you to 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. Such an example is that of Dr. Nathan Barlow:

Dr. Barlow was a medical doctor who used his skills in Ethiopia. For more than 60 years, Nathan Barlow dedicated his life to helping people with mossy foot. Mossy foot is a debilitating condition that causes swelling and ulcers in the feet and lower legs. The subsequent deformity and secondary infections make people with mossy foot social outcasts, equivalent to lepers. Once, Dr. Barlow got a toothache and had to fly away from the mission field to get medical attention. Well, Dr. Barlow told the dentist he didn’t ever want to leave the mission field for the sake of his teeth again, so he had the dentist pull out all of his teeth, and give him false ones. He never wanted to leave those people again! His daughter brought him to her home from Ethiopia

when his health started to fail. After only a few weeks, he couldn't handle being in the States. The people he loved were still in Ethiopia, so his daughter flew him back home so he could spend his last days there.

This amazing man was the first to help these outcasts, and he spent his life doing it, yet no one really knows about him. It surprised me that such a man of God would faithfully serve for so many years, despite minimal recognition. His actions were silent, hidden, and worked from the inside. There was nothing special about Dr. Barlow. He was just a man who was sold out for Jesus. He understood he was to be the salt of the earth through his actions, with the abilities and opportunities before him.

If you are a student, your salt might be the encouragement of a student who is hurting because of bullying, or maybe you're going to help another student who is struggling with loneliness because of COVID-19. 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. Ask God, how does He want you to be salt through your actions?

DISCUSSION:

N: This is a great place to bring in my discussion partners Arnie Cole and Cara Whitney. Cara, for someone listening who is wondering what they can do to season people's lives with their salt, give them a little encouragement and a starting point.

C: Hope speech, baby, hope speech. [Hope speech?] I always speak with hope and encouragement. My close Bible-believing buddies, I will tell them when I'm frustrated or whatever, and then they sharpen me, but for people in my day-to-day, it's hope speech. And it's not phony. I have so much hope, but we've got to build people up. And I think that shows what the difference is. I mean, ultimately we have the greatest hope of any group of people on the planet. So people want to be around you when you're helpful. People don't want to be around Debbie Downers, right? [Right]. Hope speech.

N: Hope speech and packaging it just the right way. Because as we think about social media today, you can put out very hopeful information, but if it's not packaged well, and it's not wrapped in love, it can still come off very hateful. So be sure if we're going to give that hope speech, let's be hopeful and package it really well.

C: Check your motives. You know, why are you sharing this? Is it because you're trying to get someone to vote for who you want politically? You're not going to change anybody like that. [Right]. But you can be an encouragement to people, especially nonbelievers who have no hope. They just don't. Whether they realize it or not, they have no hope. [Right]. So hope speech - encourage people. Then they're going to want to be around you more. And then you can just keep salting, salting, salting.

N: Salting. Salting and hope speech. That could be a shirt.

A: Here's the deal you youngsters are missing. [Do tell]. As Cara is talking about hope speech, and you guys are hardly halfway through with your lives, [hopefully] those of us who are heading to the shady side of the mountain, if you will - there's this meter that I call the "ain't it awful" meter. And as you get older, which some of our listeners are, you'll notice in your friends, and oftentimes in yourself, that you're the exact opposite of what these youngsters are talking about, in hope speech. It's "ain't it awful", whether it's politics or if it's their health. Oh my goodness. And you get this, "ain't it awful"; you get so wrapped into that, that pretty soon you don't even think of yourself as an encourager. You become so cynical, you're a discourager around all the young folks, and around everybody your age, because you're so focused on the exact opposite of hope speech. It's called "ain't it awful" speech. [Ain't it awful speech].

C: Are you doing that Arnie? Because I don't hear that.

A: No, but my friends do and I work on it. You know, because...

C: Do they know they're doing that though? Have you said something to them? Like, "What's your deal, dude?"

A: No. Oh, no. I think when you start getting older, you go into shock, because you feel like you're mentally alert, but your body just starts not cooperating. And I think people just - they don't get over it. Their arthritis hurts, this or that. And pretty soon, they can't see beyond themselves. And they're, you know...

C: I can't help that. I mean, you're supposed to glorify God through all that. Right?

A: That's the idea.

C: Yeah. So they need to stop doing that.

N: Well, I think what we need to do is using the negative, the things that are going on around us, our body's failing, our hair falling out, whatever the thing is, to remind us that this is not Heaven that we live in now. Thank goodness, it's not Hell either, but this is not our final resting place. This is a place that we are transitioning through, to go to our final destination. And when we do experience the aches and pains, which do happen - and they're not fun - James said, *when you experience trials of various kinds*; they call them trials for a reason. They remind us and help us to refocus on Heaven. And so, as we were having a conversation before we started recording, about the world today, and how it's honestly not ideal - not what we would want - it does remind us that we do, as you said, have hope. And that hope is on Heaven, and eternity with Christ, and even so, there is pain and suffering and disappointment around us. But we don't have to live there. We don't have to stay there, and we can continue to refocus on that hope.

C: The adventure's in the road trip. I mean, we could all ask Scotty to beam us up now, and get there right away. But the adventure is in the road trip. [Right]. And believe me, Nat. I mean,

you've had a kid with cancer. My son's best friend died of cancer. It's hard. It's not when you're young - there's hard things going on all the time - but we have a hope. We have a hope that that's not the end of their story, that things keep going. There's a hope we have that everything we lost will be redeemed on the other side. [Right] We have that hope. So I get it. People's bones are hurting, but they need to talk about the Lord in those problems and enjoy the road trip.

Jesus knew that attractational living was more than just our actions. This is why Jesus would tell us we are to be something else. Matthew 5, Verses 14 – 15 (ESV):

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 to be light. Again, he says, “*you are*”. This is a state of *being* rather than just going and doing. We are to be 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 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).

Salt is silent, hidden, and works from within, but 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 our words and vice versa. But nowhere in Scripture does it suggest, our actions – our service – is 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 attractational living: Being intentional with our words.

Listen to how essential the light is in Africa. Journalist Matthew Parris wrote an article entitled, **“As an Atheist, I Truly Believe Africa Needs God.”** In that article, Parris argued that “Missionaries, not aid money, are the solution to Africa's biggest problem.”

He ended his article with a powerful statement: *“Those who want Africa to walk tall amid 21st-century global competition must not kid themselves that providing the material means or even the knowhow that accompanies what we call development will make the change. A whole belief system must first be supplanted. And I’m afraid it has to be supplanted by another. Removing Christian evangelism from the African equation may leave the continent at the mercy of a malign fusion of Nike, the witch doctor, the mobile phone, and the machete.”*

This devoted atheist recognizes that salt – good works – without that precious light, only provides short term change, when it is long-term heart change that is the only solution.

Some of you might say, “Nat, I’m no evangelist. I do not have that gift.” Great. I don’t believe everyone is an evangelist, but I do believe each of us is called to evangelize – to be light, that is to share the Good News. In fact, Paul wrote Timothy saying, **“As for you, always be sober-minded, endure suffering, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry”** (2 Tim. 4:5). He didn’t call Timothy an evangelist, but he reminded him to always be ready to do that task of sharing the Gospel – the Good News of what Christ has done. And this Gospel is the power of Salvation for all who believe. This is why our saltiness – our actions - need to be in line with our light – our words and preaching.

So as you meet with family members, neighbors, co-workers, managers, or whoever – let your talk be full of grace. Let your words be kind. Be intentional, about not just what we say, but how we say it. “God is so good” <Monotone> or “God loves you!” <*In an angry tone*> does little to shine light in the dark world. So as Peter tells us, when we talk with people about our faith, and answer their questions, let it be with gentleness and respect.

Likewise, as you go through trials and tests, people will be watching and listening. What happens when the transmission on your car goes out? Or you lose the promotion to someone else? You lose the lead in the play to that other kid from school? Or you get verbally attacked because of your faith? How you respond with your words will impact those who are watching you. So let your words be the light of Christ. This will allow our light to shine on the hill for all to see, and it will illuminate the darkness.

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. But what happens if we choose to not be salty? In verse 13, Jesus says if the 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. So, 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, so we get a pat on the back. We don’t do it so we can get a reward. We don’t do it for a free night's rental at Redbox. 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. No one is “just” an anything.

You see, **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 through your actions 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.

N: All right, I have to ask Arnie and Cara. You’re both horse enthusiasts. I know nothing about horses. I don’t know if I can identify one, if I saw one. So talk to me though. I’ve heard about salt licks. What is a salt lick and why is it so important? And what happens when a horse doesn’t get enough salt?

C: You know, you buy specific salt licks for horses, ponies, or whatever - there's nutrients in it. And they need those nutrients. So yeah, they need nutrients, like we need nutrients. But also, I like to put a salt lick right next to the water, because it makes horses thirsty. When they're thirsty, they drink more water.

A: All I know is when I was a young cowboy, a sign of manhood would be to lick the salt lick and drink out of the horse's trough. And if you couldn't do that, you were not a man. This was at 10 years of age.

N: So how does salt, and the thirst it creates, apply to what we've been talking about today?

A: It's the drive. It is the motivation to do something, to grow, to take nourishment. It's a tremendous help.

N: And I think unfortunately, so many of us, we, we settle for insufficient nutrients. Don't we? I mean, you know, if we had a choice sometimes between a plate full of veggies, or a Big Mac, we'd probably take the Big Mac. We do that with our spiritual life too. And people get spiritually stuck. We say, you know what? I won't even read the Bible today. I'm just going to consume some YouTube or Netflix or whatever it is. And we don't go for true nourishment and we get spiritually stuck. I mean, that's part of the reason why we do what we do here at Back to the Bible. We're trying to get people to get moving spiritually, to move them closer to Jesus today than they were yesterday. Why? Because your spiritual journey is our number one priority. So speaking of that, we think about where God has placed us, in our neighborhoods and in our workplaces, wherever. But if God has us right where he wants us, what does that say to us when we're in an uncomfortable situation?

C: I think it says that we need to glorify Him, no matter what circumstance we're in right now, period.

A: And for me, if it's an uncomfortable situation, I look at, "Okay, what's the Holy Spirit trying to tell me here?" That seems to be a helpful thought.

N: Yeah. The reality is we're all going to be in uncomfortable places in this world. And we will experience trials of many kinds. And yet that keeps us in a place dependent upon God, and keeps us in a place where we minister to other people. There's so many reasons why God has us, right where He wants us. Sometimes it's really clear and sometimes it's not. But I'm just curious, because both of you have gone through some really hard trials, health trials, and other trials - so how have you given God glory in the midst of being tested?

C: My whole ministry was started - all the book writing, all that - because I just started writing about the things that I was thinking about God - the answering the questions of "Why?" So I would ask the question, and find the answer, and then I'd write about it. That's the whole - my whole ministry started that way. So I was actually afraid to ask God to take my medical stuff away, because I was afraid I was going to lose that, because there was so much growth in that trial.

N: Hmm. Wow. You leveraged your trial. Yeah. What about you Arnie?

A: My thing was also pretty spiritual. When I was in chemo for four months, that was very rough, very painful. And my mom, one of my mom's favorite verses, was "*This is the day the Lord hath made. I'm going to rejoice and be glad in it*". And I lived by that verse every day - not that I was a glutton for punishment, but "*This is the day the Lord has made.*" You know? And I

may not have tomorrow, and you don't know if you're going to make it through all that stuff. So you're going through all of this stuff, but *“This is the day the Lord has made. So rejoice and be glad in it.”* And that really helped me through some pretty awful times.

C: Not only that, I mean, Arnie always says he's not an evangelist, but at his heart hospital, he evangelized to someone in his therapy clinic. I mean, Arnie's a walking testimony that prayer works. So and Nat too, I mean we've, and your wife, everybody, you have these struggles. When are you more able to discuss spiritual things, than when you're in the middle of something that is extremely dark, you know?

N: Right. That is the time for hope speech, because that's when people are watching. People are watching when we have those major life events. They want to see, how are we going to react? And those are the moments we will show people that we believe what we say we believe, or we'll show them we're actually a bunch of phonies and frauds. Now we won't ever do it perfectly, but again, it is embracing that verse that Arnie shared: *This is the day that the Lord has made. I will rejoice* - in spite of the pain, the suffering, the chemo, whatever it is - *I will rejoice and be glad in it.*