

“Salt, Light – Some of the Right Stuff”

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Matthew 5:13-16

Former Astronaut Scott Carpenter is a man of extreme accomplishments. On the one hand he has explored the heavens. Second American to orbit the earth and fourth American in space. He flew the second American manned orbital flight on May 24, 1962.

But are you aware that Carpenter, a Navy pilot, has also explored the ocean floor. On leave of absence from NASA, he participated in the Navy's Man-in-the-Sea Project as an aquanaut—the naval equivalent of an astronaut. It was in the SEALAB II program off the coast of California back in 1965. During that 45 day experiment, he spent 30 days living and working on the ocean floor. He is an American who is an astronaut and also an aquanaut.

Thus, we could say that Scott Carpenter is a man of extreme accomplishments and deep commitments. He once said, “. . .*being an astronaut. . .give me the possibility of using all of my capabilities and all of my interests and gifts at once. This is something that I would be willing to give my life for. . .*”

He was willing to give his life to be an astronaut. In a letter to his wife while he was preparing for one hazardous space mission, he wrote that if this mission were to come to a fatal, screaming fiery end for him, he would have three main regrets. First, he would have lost the opportunity to prepare for his children's life here on this planet. Second, he would miss the pleasure of seeing her and loving her when she was a grandmother. The third, regret was that he never learned to play the guitar. A little whimsical, perhaps, but Scott Carpenter knew the dangers of his profession and he was willing to give his life for our space program.

Here's why I have turned to this story. I believe it reminds us that a person of deep commitments will inevitably become a person of significant accomplishments. Maybe not the kind he was able to accomplish - but - significant accomplishments in each of the person's own right.

Which brings me to the point - that Jesus is looking for people who have “the right stuff” also. People who are willing to make deep commitments with the results of making significant accomplishments.

Listen to Jesus' words for today. Read Matthew 5:13-16.

The right stuff. Deep commitments. People who make significant accomplishments. Having something worth dying for. . .or worth living for.

Yes, each of us is aware of salt and light. Try eating popcorn without salt. Not much there. But then we are aware of the fact that there are people who are on salt-free diets. And for some of these persons it is a tough sacrifice. Because we all know salt adds flavor. We also know that it is a preservative. In the days before refrigerators, salt was needed to keep some foods from spoiling. Further, a

certain amount of salt is essential to good health. That is why, before Gatorade, athletic teams kept a supply of salt tablets on their sidelines. Sweat too much and you may lose too much salt, and you run the risk of developing cramps in your muscles.

So Jesus is suggesting that if we are not making a good impact on others in our life, we are not worth much for the sake of the kingdom. We have lost our importance. We no longer have the right stuff.

Light is essential to health and growth, just as it is for finding our way in the world. Imagine a world without light or salt. Both are essential to our survival. Listen again to Jesus' words: "*You are like salt for everyone on earth. . . You are like light for the whole world.*" He is saying that can be us! Now, you may say that you thought Jesus was the light of the world. Yes, that's true, but as his followers that means we can be and must be also. That is essential to our world's survival - at least in our world where we live and to some one! God is counting on us to be the seasoning and guiding light to others. Look around you for a moment. Where, when and how is or will God be able to use you to be impacting their life for Jesus' sake?

So what does it mean to be the salt and light of the world? I want to suggest that it means the message of Jesus is the world's only hope of salvation. The message of Jesus is essential to saving humanity from its own deep depravity in this world as well as the world to come.

Unless we learn to love one another, regardless of who we are, regardless of our color, regardless of our nationality, regardless of our religion—we just won't make it! Education, law or politics are not going to do it. It is up to us as Jesus' followers to be the salt and light to one another.

Martin Luther King, Jr. once called our attention to the obvious when he said, "*Darkness cannot drive out darkness; only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate; only love can do that.*"

This would suggest that the surest way to transform human society is to transform human hearts. We do that by bringing people to Jesus. Or, perhaps even more important for our day is by taking Jesus out into the world. The days are gone when you can "build it and they will come", the church must be a people who go out into the world being Jesus to others.

Terence Fretheim has written: "*The righteousness of a few can* so permeate a wicked society that they can save it from the destructive effects of its own evil ways." The really puzzling question is why we as followers of Jesus are not having more influence on society. Could it be, because we are waiting for them to come us, rather than our going out to them? Do you see some potential here for our learnings of our church-wide study - Three Simple Rules - Do No Harm, Do Good, & Stay in love with God? Yes, to practice what we are learning will get us going in the right direction!

Sometime back, it was noted in the magazine Christianity Today that by modest estimate, more than a quarter of the entire population of the United States profess to be committed Christians. William Iverson once observed that, "A pound

of meat would surely be affected by a quarter pound of salt. If this is real Christianity, the 'salt of the earth' where is the effect of which Jesus spoke?"

My friends, we have the message, we have the process (Three Simple Rules). Let me go back to my opening story of Scott Carpenter - he accomplished great things because of his commitment. And for us as Christians we have one thing more - Jesus has promised that we can be empowered by the Holy Spirit as we go.

In the latter part of our scripture lesson for today - Jesus has said, "You are like salt for everyone on earth. . . You are like light for the whole world" Then he adds, "Make your light shine, so that others will see the good that you do and will praise your Father in heaven." Notice, this translation doesn't say "let it shine" it says "Make it shine." For our day and time, that may be a very important difference. We must be intentional and take the initiative and go out to our world and with a sense of commitment make our light shine!

This is Jesus' solution to the world's darkness: Each of us is a small mirror, reflecting Jesus' love to the world. "This little light of mine, I'm going to make it shine. . ."

This is why worship is so important. This is where continued study and small groups are so important. Here is where we come into contact with the light!

A man went camping with his wife. He brought a matchbox with him. Printed on the box was a promise that the matchbox would glow in the dark. When the couple turned the lights out in their tent, they couldn't find the matchbox. It didn't glow in the dark as advertised. Finding a flashlight, the wife looked at the print once more on the matchbox. She found these words: "If you want me to shine in the night, keep me in the light." Think about that. "If you want me to shine in the night, keep me in the light."

Perhaps the reason why so many people can't reflect the light of Jesus is that they spend so little time in his presence, in worship, study and fellowship with God's people.

"You are like salt for everyone on earth. . . You are like light for the whole world. . ." What a responsibility! BUT what an opportunity to be part of something bigger than ourselves!

One of the ways that happens is- To do no harm, To do good, and To stay in love with God.

Deep commitments produce significant accomplishments.

"This little light of mine, I'm going to make it shine. . ."

May we be found living that song!