

Something to Pray About

By Cindy Sears – July 2010

“SHAKE & SHINE”

Sermon 1, Part 2

Scripture: Matthew 5:13-16

“You are the salt of the earth; but if salt has lost its taste, how can its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything, but is thrown out and trampled under foot.

“You are the light of the world. A city built on a hill cannot be hid. No one after lighting a lamp puts it under the bushel basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven.”

In the June newsletter, I wrote about the cost of discipleship and how we often underestimate or make light of the true cost of being a follower of Jesus. Because we serve a God of balance, I now want to talk about the other extreme attitude that we Christians are prone to fall into—making the Christian life too difficult.

Although other people in the world keep trying to earn their way to heaven, we, as Christians, know that’s not possible. Yet, even we can be confused in how best to live in Christ.

As the verses above say, we are the salt, but if the salt has lost its flavor, it is good for nothing. Impurities destroy salt’s flavor. Pure salt does not lose its taste. So, living a pure life—avoiding sins—keeps our witness for Christ salty.

We are the light. We dispel darkness. Even a small light in a dark place will draw people’s attention. People are drawn to light. Be that light.

To be salt and light to the world, Christians just need to be different—noticeably different. Our dress, manners, caring attitudes, giving, choices of reading material, what movies or TV shows we watch, the activities we choose to do, how we conduct ourselves in all aspects of our lives from work to play to family life, should be noticeably different from non-believers—even those non-believers who are relatively good people. Our calmness, joy, and strength should shine. Our words and actions should flavor the people around us and make circumstances and situations in which we are involved better “tasting” even for those who do not know Christ. Our presence ought to change outcomes for the better no matter what is going on.

Still, we, who have accepted Christ as Lord and Savior, have such an overwhelming sense of gratitude towards God and our Redeemer that we sometimes go overboard in trying to prove our love for Him. Why? Because we know how unworthy we are of the love Christ showed us by dying on the cross for us. Also, because of our deep sense of unworthiness for such love, we tend to view every setback as a sign that we have sinned, displeased God, and caused Him to turn away from us. We view God as a taskmaster, who is easily angered by even the smallest infraction. If we don’t “toe the line”, we are out of His will, and, therefore, open to disciplinary action.

Love and devotion to the Savior is a wonderful and good thing. It leads us to study His word regularly, to pray often, to attend worship services, and to give of our time, energy, and money to His kingdom’s work here on earth. But how much is enough? You can read the Bible to the exclusion of all other good and helpful writings. You can memorize and quote many Bible verses to every one you meet throughout the day—so much so that people will dread to see you coming. You can pray until you have calluses on your knees, but neglect to spend time with your family or others who simply need a word of encouragement or a little bit of physical help. You can say yes to every request you receive to serve in the church—and end up doing many things in a half-hearted manner because you don’t have time or energy enough or the necessary spiritual gifts to do them well. You can give so much of your money to the Lord’s work, that, when a real emergency comes along, you have no way to pay, and end up in debt.

This all revolves around the problem of discerning God’s will for your life. How do you know what God really wants you to do? It’s easy to fall into the trap of thinking that you have to live on the *dot* of God’s will every minute of your life to truly please Him. But if you have read the Bible, you know that there are few direct commands from God as to what you should or should not do. There are only Ten Commandments. And much of the God’s Word simply calls for us to live justly and to behave in a righteous manner. For the most part, you cannot find a direct

answer to questions, such as, where to live, what church to attend, whom to marry, when to marry or not, what to do for a living, and so on. What you should try to do is live in the *circle* of God's will. If there is a command, then live that command on the *dot*. But in all other circumstances, live in the *circle* of God's will. If you read and study the Bible regularly, pray often, and do unto others as you would have them to do unto you, you will probably be in that circle of His will—and your light will shine; and you will shake salt on those around you—wherever you end up being and whatever you end up doing.

And when you pray and God says, “No” or “Wait”, do not assume that He has given you these answers because you are out of His will. God does not expect us to be perfect, but He does expect us to keep “running the race.” If you have examined your life, and can find no obvious or blatant disregard of God's laws—maybe there aren't any. God's ways are not man's ways; and His thoughts are way above ours. Sometimes, you simply have to *rest* in Him. You are His child. He will not withhold any good thing from you. It is how you as a Christian behave in the rough times that shows the world how much better it is to follow Christ, to live under His Lordship and care, than to live the way the world says you ought to live. Even Paul's request for relief from a physical ailment was denied; yet God used his hands to heal others!

In every situation, you can learn something useful in your walk with God and be a witness for Him. Therefore, joy in your afflictions, as well as in the more obvious blessings that God sends your way. As Chuck Swindoll says in his book, *Simple Faith*, “Do you know the greatest message *we* can deliver? It is the message of Christ-like character. No message on earth is more needed or more powerful.” (p. 216) To be a blessing to the world and to our Lord's kingdom—simply *shake and shine!*