

## Living Distinctively Christian Lives, part 2

There are many distinctions that set us apart as human beings. Some are big-some are small. Some are hyper-some are laid back. Some are incredibly wealthy-some are incredibly poor. We speak differently-even if we speak the same language. Listen to these 2 people as they read the same paragraph. One is from Pine Bluff, Arkansas, and the other is from Syracuse, New York.

All the human distinctions that exist are nothing compared to the distinctions that exist between those who know God and those who don't know Him. God has always called His people to be distinct from the world around them. We are to be distinct in who we are and distinct in what we do and don't do. It was this distinction that caused Daniel to refuse to eat the regular food served to the Babylonians. There is no question that Joseph retained his distinction in Egypt. Although he lived far away from home in a foreign land, he would not compromise God's law. And it is no different today. We are to live distinctly Christian lives and part of doing so is found in Matthew 5:13-16. Jesus said, "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 by men."<sup>14</sup>"You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden."<sup>15</sup>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.<sup>16</sup>In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven."

We have been given the distinctive task of being salt and light to our generation. One of the great Christians of the 18<sup>th</sup> century was John Wesley. He traveled over 250,000 miles on horseback, and he preached an estimated 40,000 sermons. John Wesley commented on Matthew five: 13-16, and he said, "I will endeavor to show that Christianity is a social religion and that to return it to a solitary religion is to destroy Christianity." John Wesley was right. If we don't seek to do what Jesus told us to do, then we cease having Christianity in the biblical sense of the word. According to Jesus, true Christianity will always have an impact on its world. It is part of our distinctiveness to do so.

## We are the salt of the earth

*Matthew 5:13 "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 by men."*

What did Jesus mean when he told us that we are to be the salt of the earth? What does salt do?

## ***1. Salt prevents decay***

In the days when Jesus lived on earth, refrigeration was beyond man's wildest dreams. The way that you prevented decay in Jesus day was to salt it down. What Jesus is telling us is that apart from God, our world is in a decaying state, and we have been placed in the midst of this decaying culture as a preservative. Our presence in our world as believers should reduce crime, promote honesty and raise the moral standards of our society. Salty Christians should make a difference. Unfortunately, the pollster, George barna, tells us that the lives of Christians in our culture are many times no different than those who do not know Christ. Instead of being the salt of the earth, we're many times not distinguishable.

A baby camel asked his mother," mom, why do I have these huge three toed feet?" His mother said to them, "son, to help you stay on top of the sand as we trek across the desert." "Why do we have the long eyelashes?" the mother replied, "son, that is to keep sand out of our eyes as we go across the desert." "Why the three humps?" "That is to store water as we go across the desert." "That's great mom. We have long eyelashes to keep the sand out of our eyes, and we have humps to store water." Why, then, do we live in the zoo?

That baby elephant was asking, "Why have we been given these abilities if we are not using them? We need to ask ourselves the same thing. Why aren't we using what we've been given?"

## ***2. Salt provides flavor***

It is common for us, while eating, for someone to say, "Pass the salt please. That's because people use salt to flavor almost anything. When I was a young boy, watermelon was a fairly common delicacy in our home, and I remember putting plenty of salt to put on that melon. When I was in my early twenties, I began going to a friend's house after church, and he got me started eating salt on apples.

Salt is tasty, and it is an illustration of the fact that there is something missing in this world without God. The world, apart from God, just doesn't taste right. Its pleasures become empty. They are enjoyed for a while, and then we find ourselves sensing the same vacuum that was there before. But when Jesus Christ enters your life and controls your life, he adds flavor to life, and that changes everything.

When a Christian does his work, he should do it without complaint, and he should do it with excellence. If you look back in history, some of the greatest painters, musicians and scientists were Christian people. They were people who were dedicated to God, and they brought flavor to a bland society. So should we. Wherever we go, whatever our job may

be, we should bring the influence of Christ into our work. That is the flavor the world longs to have but does not know where to get it.

### **3. Salt promotes thirst**

When I was a little boy growing up in East Texas, I was always outside playing in the summer. I wore no shirt no socks and no shoes. The only thing I wore was a pair of shorts. My feet became so calloused that I could walk over hot concrete without it bothering me. I lived in the blistering heat of the sun. When I finally came in the house, I was headed for one place and one place alone, the refrigerator. I would get some water, and then I would get more water. I was beyond being thirsty. I was about ready to turn into a raisin. Jesus says to us, "I want you to live such a good life that the world will see your life and become thirsty for me.

In ancient times during the feast of the tabernacles in the city of Jerusalem, it was the custom of the priests to go to the pool of Siloam each day and to return to the feast bearing large containers of water. The water would then be emptied on the altars of the temple. This happened for seven days of the feast, and on the last day, the ritual was repeated for 7 times. At that very point in time, Jesus stood up and spoke.

*John 7: 37-38, "On the last and greatest day of the Feast, Jesus stood and said in a loud voice, "If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink. <sup>38</sup>Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him."*

Jesus said you have carried this water all week long, and today you have carried it seven times. If you'll come to me, I'll give you living water so that you'll never thirst again. Jesus Christ is the answer to the thirst that we all have for God, and our lives should make others thirsty for Him.

David Livingston was a very famous missionary to African years ago. He was so famous that the British newspaper sent Henry Stanley to find him and report on his work. Henry Stanley stayed there with him for a while, observing his every action. When he left he said, "if I'd stayed there any longer. I would have been compelled to become a Christian, even though he never spoke to me about it."

Francis of Assisi once said, "preach the gospel at all times, and if necessary, use words." We are to live in such a way that we stand out and shine forth the glory of God in the culture that we live in. If Jesus Christ can live in you, and you not be any different than the world around you, something got short circuited somewhere because Jesus makes a difference.

## **4. Salt permeates food**

A little salt goes a long way. Have you ever meant to put a little salt on your food and a whole lot poured out instead? The effectiveness of salt isn't measured by its size. Just as salt is small, we often see ourselves as being very small. Sometimes we feel so small and inadequate that we don't even try to make an impact on people. We need to remember that one person plus God is always a majority, and history is full of examples of people like Moses, Abraham and David. They were small within themselves, but they did great things for God. That is because salt is powerful, and does not have to be big to make a big impact.

Political philosopher Edmund Burke, "nobody ever made a greater mistake than he who did nothing because he could only do a little." You may not be able to do a whole lot for a whole lot of people, but you can do a whole lot for some people. It may be that when you get to heaven you'll find that some word you spoke to someone you never saw again changed that person's life for God.

## **We are the light of the world**

Salt is the ministry that God has given us in holding back the evil of this world. Light is the ministry that God has given us to hold forth the good in this world, and He wants us to do both.

### **1. Light detects evil**

*Jesus said in John 3:19–21, "This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but men loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil. <sup>20</sup>Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that his deeds will be exposed.*

*<sup>21</sup>But whoever lives by the truth comes into the light, so that it may be seen plainly that what he has done has been done through God."*

There is an old story about a desert nomad who became hungry one night. So he sat up in his tent, lit a candle and began eating some dates. Unfortunately in the light of that candle, he could see worms in the dates. After having thrown out a number of dates because of the worms, he reasoned in his heart that if things continued to go the way they were, pretty soon he would have no dates to eat. So he did the only reasonable thing a man can do. He blew out the candle and quickly ate the rest of the dates. Many people don't want to see the evil they consume. That's why they don't want to be around the light.

## **2. Light defines Christianity**

*Ephesians 5:8, "For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light."*

*1 Thessalonians 5:5 "You are all sons of the light and sons of the day. We do not belong to the night or to the darkness."*

The Bible does not say that we bring light. It says that we are light. As light, we are able to offer hope to those in darkness. You can become very depressed watching the television news at night because things just seem to be getting worse and worse. Those who study the future tell us that there's no way to stop the darkness that just keeps coming down on us. The good news is that the darker the night the brighter the light. Whatever circumstances we find ourselves in the coming days months and years, Jesus Christ was to continue to shine his life through us.

## **3. Light demands exposure**

*Matthew 5: 14 – 16 "You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. <sup>15</sup>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. <sup>16</sup>In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.*

We are the light, and it is our job to make sure that it is not hidden. We cannot hide our lights under the bushel of our homes or church auditorium or any other place. We must be in contact with people who will know that we are Christians and who will glorify God because of the way they see as living and acting among them. That is our purpose.

### **Stubborn Candles**

A few nights ago a peculiar thing happened. An electrical storm caused a blackout in our neighborhood. When the lights went out, I felt my way through the darkness into the storage closet where we keep the candles for nights like this. Through the glow of a lit match I looked up on the shelf where the candles were stored. There they were, already positioned in their stands, melted to various degrees by previous missions. I took my match and lit four of them.

"How great it is to have light!" I said out loud, and then spoke to the candles. "If you do such a good job here in the storage closet, just wait till I get you out of where you're really needed! I'll put one of you on my table so we can eat. I'll put one of you on my desk so I can read. And I'll set you, "I took down the largest one, " in the living room where you can light

up the whole area," (I felt a bit foolish talking to candles - but what do you do when the lights go out?)

I was turning to leave with the large candle in my hand when I heard a voice,

"Now, hold it right there."

Hmmm, maybe it was the wind. I took another step.

"Hold it, I said! "There was that voice again. My hands began to sweat.

"Who said that?"

"I did." The voice was near my hand.

"Who are you? What are you?"

"I'm a candle."

I looked at the candle I was holding.

"Don't take me out of here!"

"What do you mean? I have to take you out. You're a candle. Your job is to give light. It's dark out there. People are stubbing their toes and walking into walls. You have to come out and light up the place!"

"But you can't take me out. I'm not ready,," the candle explained with pleading eyes. "I need more preparation."

I couldn't believe my ears.

"More preparation?"

"Yeah, I've decided I need to research this job of light-giving so I won't go out and make a bunch of mistakes. I just finished a book on wind resistance.

"All right then," I said. "You're not the only candle on the shelf. I'll blow you out and take the others!" But just as I got my cheeks full of air, I heard other voices.

"We're not going either!" It was a conspiracy. I turned around and looked at the three other candles; each with flames dancing above a miniature face.

"Well, that may be what you think," said the candle on the far left - a long thin fellow with a goatee and British accent. "You may think we have to go, but I'm busy."

"Busy?"

"Yes, I'm meditating."

"What? A candle that meditates?"

"Yes. I'm meditating on the importance of light. It's really enlightening."

I decided to reason with them.

"Listen, I appreciate what you guys are doing. I'm all for meditation time. And everyone needs to study and research; but for goodness' sake, you guys have been here for weeks! Haven't you had enough time to get your wick on straight?"

"And you other two," I asked, "are you going to stay in here as well?" A short, fat, purple candle with plump cheeks that reminded me of Santa Claus spoke up.

**Fellowship Bible Church**

Pastor: Don Griffin

"I'm waiting to get my life together. I'm not stable enough. I lose my temper easily. I guess you could say that I'm a hothead." The last candle had a female voice, very pleasant to the ear.

"I'd like to help," she explained, "but lighting the darkness is not my gift." "Not your gift?" What do you mean?"

"Well, I'm a singer. I sing to other candles to encourage them to burn more brightly."

Without asking my permission, she began a rendition of "This Little Light of Mine." The other three joined in, filling the storage room with singing.

"Hey, I shouted above the music,

"I don't mind if you sing while you work! In fact, we could use a little music out there!" They didn't hear me. They were singing too loudly. I yelled louder. "Come on, you guys. We've got a crisis on our hands." They wouldn't stop. I considered the absurdity of it all. Four perfectly healthy candles singing to each other about light but refusing to come out of the closet. I had all I could take. One by one I blew them out. I stuck my hands in my pockets and walked back out into the darkness. I bumped my knee on the same freezer. Then I bumped into my wife.

"Where are the candles?" she asked.

"They don't....they won't work. Where did you buy those candles anyway?"

"Oh, they're church candles. Remember the church that closed down across the town? I bought them there."

I understood.