**Pastor Tim’s Message Notes 1-28-2024
The Church as Salt & Light**

I know it is warmer now and the snow has mostly melted, but this month we have had a few snowfalls, didn’t we? One of those was back on January 15th. It began to snow in the evening and we ended up getting a few inches that night.

But on that Monday night, my daughter Anna had dance until 9 and I was driving over to Enola to pick her up. And the roads were not great that night. You can probably identify with me on several times when you’ve been out in less than great conditions.

My little red Camry was struggling at times, particularly on a couple of the turns. And I was grateful when I made it to dance and even more grateful when I made it back home, safe and sound.

After I picked Anna up, she shared with me about her time at dance and then I shared about the poor conditions of the road and invited her to pray for us to make it home safely. I also remember telling her about how important and helpful it is for the roads after they are treated. I spoke about how after the roads are salted it makes a big difference for drivers. And if anyone here today has done that, please know that that work is appreciated.

***Interestingly though, this appreciation for salt and it’s help in dangerous conditions leads to our next essential of the Christians faith, which is that the church is called to be God’s salt and light in this world.***

Do you know you are called to be salt? Do you know that you are called to be light? Our world is in dire condition. Things are dangerous. People all around us are spinning out because of the lies that they believe. And the church is God’s plan to help people navigate life and arrive home with God safe and sound.

Friends, being salt and light comes from knowing and loving Jesus Christ. He is the true light of the world. He is the embodiment of salt. And through a personal relationship with Him as believers and as a community of believers, the church is called to shine brightly and to offer help to those around us.

This concept of the church and its importance all starts with Jesus. I invite you now to turn in your Bibles to Matthew 16. We will be hearing from verses 13-25. And to set the context a bit, in this passage we find Jesus taking His disciples on a field trip, if you will. How many of you like field trips? Maybe you remember field trips that you have been on as a participant or a chaperone. Field trips are typically fun occasions to see new places and learn new things.

Here though, this field trip that Jesus takes His disciples on was very different from that. It’s not a real fun trip, I’m sure. It wasn’t to a zoo or to a botanical garden. Instead, Jesus led His followers to Caesarea Philippi. This city was originally called Panias. It was named after this pagan god Pan. In 2 BC, one of Herod the Great’s sons, Philip, renamed the city Caesarea, in honor of Caesar Augustus. And eventually the city became known as Caesarea Philippi, after Philip.

But this city was not the most godly of places. In fact, it was a very pagan city. People were still working Pan there. And if that wasn’t bad enough, there were some very vile practices that took place there. And sadly, as people worshiped demonic idols, practices like child sacrifice was common there.

So why would Jesus choose to take a field trip there? Simply put, it was a place that needed a lot of salt and light. No place on earth was too far gone that the gospel could not save.

And it was here that Jesus chose to clearly reveal His identity to the apostles.

Let us hear Matthew’s account of this powerful scene. Again, it is Matthew 16:13-25.

**13When Jesus came to the region of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, “Who do people say the Son of Man is?”**

**14They replied, “Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, Jeremiah or one of the prophets.”**

**15“But what about you?” he asked. “Who do you say I am?”**

**16Simon Peter answered, “You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.”**

**17Jesus replied, “Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by flesh and blood, but by my Father in heaven. 18And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it. 19I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.” 20Then he ordered his disciples not to tell anyone that he was the Messiah.**

**21From that time on Jesus began to explain to his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things at the hands of the elders, the chief priests and the teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life.**

**22Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. “Never, Lord!” he said. “This shall never happen to you!”**

**23Jesus turned and said to Peter, “Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; you do not have in mind the concerns of God, but merely human concerns.”**

**24Then Jesus said to his disciples, “Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. 25For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will find it.”**

What an amazing scene! So many things that we can talk about.

At this point in Jesus’ ministry, He was known far and wide. Everyone was amazed at His power and authority. But people had all different opinions on who exactly He was.

And Jesus first asks a general question to His disciples – who do people say that I am?

As you may guess, answers were all over the board. People had many different opinions about Jesus.

But then, Jesus cuts to the chase and says, “but what about you? Who do you say that I am?”

And Simon comes through with this amazing confession, **“You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.”**

Jesus commends Simon and calls him blessed. He tells him that this truth was revealed to him by Jesus’ Father in heaven.

Then Jesus says something very profound. He says, “**And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it. 19I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.”**

Jesus is saying that on the rock of Peter’s confession Jesus will build His church.

The word church literally means called out ones. Jesus was saying that he was calling people out of the world to be His people. But this new church, this community of called out ones was not called to isolate themselves from the world, but rather to be salt and light in it.

Jesus says, “**I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it**.”

Do you remember where Jesus chose to do all this? Caesarea Philippi. In Caesarea Philippi there was actually a place called “the gates of Hades” or “the gates of Hell.” It was this cave that had a large cavern in it. And it was there that many of these vile practices, including child sacrifices, took place. It was about as dark and dangerous a place as one could go. But Jesus chose to go there to reveal His identity and Messiah and His mission of bringing God’s light and truth to the most evil of places.

Jesus is saying that the church that He will build will not be overcome by the gates of Hell. The church, with Jesus at the Head, would be victorious in overcoming the darkness and evil of the world because of Christ’s continued presence with them.

And with His presence comes His authority. Jesus also stated, “**I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.”**

Jesus is essentially saying that those who follow Him and are part of His church, He gives them spiritual authority to be His ambassadors on earth. The things that the church says and does will impact those around them. But the church must live out its calling to be salt and light.

Would this be easy? No. The disciples themselves would all be persecuted for being salt and light. Millions of Christians over the centuries have also been persecuted greatly for seeking to be salt and light in the world.

In this passage, Jesus tells his apostles that in order to follow Him they must deny themselves and take up their cross. In other words, they needed to be willing to suffer for being salt and light.

Friends, Jesus has been advancing His church for nearly 2,000 years. Even though darkness and sin abound, the Kingdom of God continues to advance and expend. Jesus is continuing to build His church. His Spirit is at work and leading the church as it yields to Him.

**So friends, if we fast forward to today, what is the main thing for us to remember? And I believe that it is this – as God’s church, our mission is to be intentional as salt and light.**

While God’s Kingdom continues to advance today, there is still much darkness. There is still the wide road that leads to destruction. There are still many people spinning out left and right and in need of God’s mercy and grace offered in and through Jesus Christ.

And here’s the humbling truth. You are God’s plan. Your life lived for Jesus and in community with others living for Jesus is how salt and light is most effective.

We cannot guarantee how people will respond. People have free will. They can choose to still deny the light and elect to walk in darkness. People have the option to reject the path that is spiritually safe by means of the salt of the gospel and can drive on dangerous roads at their own peril.

But as long as we are here on earth, we are called to be salt and light. Jesus did not choose to immediately take us away to heaven the moment that we believed in Him. No. Instead He choose to reach out to the world through us as His ambassadors.

I recently read a great article by a pastor and writer named N.T. Wright. And in this article, he made a really profound statement. He stated, ***“The whole world has become the Holy Land, claimed through the gospel of Jesus the Messiah on behalf of the creator God.***” This would include Caesarea Philippi, of course. But also, Dillsburg and Pennsylvania and every town in the U.S. and throughout the world. Jesus is building His Church everywhere and the gates of hell will not prevail against it.

\*\*The final question for today is how is the church to be salt and light in this world? What does it mean when it comes to our everyday life?

In our passage today, Jesus said, **“Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. 25For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will find it.”**

What did this mean for the disciples? It meant that for them to be the church that Jesus had in mind, they must choose to not live for themselves at the center of their lives, but instead chose to live for Jesus, even to the point of suffering for doing so.

For us to live as salt and light, we need to be yielded to the Holy Spirit. He wants to use all of us as instruments of salt in this world. And He does this in different ways, so we need to keep in step with the Spirit. We need to be intentional in being in God’s written word.

God calls us to be filled with His love and speak truth in love to others.

Despite the darkness and deterioration of this world, Jesus is still building His church and His church continues to advance. Lives continue to be transformed by His power.

Will it be easy to be light and salt? It will take boldness and courage. It will involve denying ourselves. It will involve being willing to suffer for Jesus in some way.

But friends, this is the path to abundant live. The Kingdom of God is filled with paradoxes. Jesus said, **For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will find it.**

We have a choice every day to live with Christ at the center or ourselves. As we choose Christ and continue to choose Christ, we will carry His light and be the salt that this world needs. This is so important that I would even call it an essential of the Christian faith. What a privilege it is to be ambassadors of our King – Jesus Christ. With the help of His Spirit, let us seek to shine brightly and take the healing and persevering presence of Christ with us everywhere we go.

May we pray, **“Lord, continue to build Your church through me, through us. We want others to know You in the same ways that we know You. Help us to be Your vessels and ambassadors in all the ways You call us to be. May we be yielded to Your Spirit’s leading as You continue to build Your church. We pray this in Jesus’ matchless Name, Amen.”**

Resources: [www.biblegateway.com](http://www.biblegateway.com)

<https://bible-history.com/biblestudy/ancient-caesarea-philippi>

<https://ntwrightpage.com/2016/04/05/creation-and-covenant/>