

A Life That Shines

Matthew 5:13-16

Last week we began talking about the purpose of life and how most people, including Christians, gravitate toward finding purpose and meaning in doing whatever it is that makes them feel good – career, family, hobbies... and everything else in life can end up revolving around these things. They become our central focus. But for Christians, God has a different way of life. He has already given us a central purpose. We're here for a reason. He's given us a calling. He doesn't save us just so we pursue whatever makes us feel good in the remaining years we have on this earth. He saves us and gives us life to live out his purpose.

What is that purpose? We saw last week how when Jesus called his first disciples to follow him, he also called them to become fishers of men. Becoming a Christian meant joining Jesus in that mission. And he gave that same mission to all his disciples at the end of his earthly ministry, calling them to go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing and teaching them. So as part of Christ's church today, in the 21st century, that central purpose is still the same. We have all been called to follow Christ by joining in his purpose and mission – to live on mission. And this morning I want to look at what that looks like.

A couple years ago after the Good Friday service, I was eating refreshments and visiting with people around a table when a man approached and interrupted our conversation. He held up a blue card and a red card next to each other and proceeded to ask us rehearsed questions about those cards, which then led into questions about God, sin, and salvation. He eventually gave a short gospel presentation and proceeded to tell us how easy it was to share the gospel using that method and how many people he had talked with in the past couple of days. It was quite awkward and uncomfortable.

For most of us, when we hear that God wants us to become "fishers of men," or to "make disciples," we think about something like that – going out, maybe knocking on doors, and telling people about Jesus. We think about evangelism, awkward conversations, and uncomfortable situations. And most of us end up thinking, "That's not for me. Being a fisher of men might be for pastors and missionaries, but not for me."

But I don't think that's quite what Jesus had in mind. Yes, he does call some people to be evangelists, pastors, and missionaries and he gives them the gifts and motivation to do those things, but his call to become fishers of men and to make disciples is for all of us and is something we actually can do in his strength. So rather than dismiss his calling, I want us to grasp a better understanding of what it means.

Not long after Jesus called his first disciples and began his earthly ministry, he spoke to a crowd of people on a mountainside in Galilee to explain to them what life would look like for those who wanted to be his disciples. It's the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5-7, and part of it explains what I think it means to be a fisher of men.

Read Matthew 5:13.

You are the salt of the earth, but if salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything except to be thrown out and trampled under people's feet.

This is an analogy that I believe speaks about the importance of our purpose in this life. Salt had a very important purpose in Jesus' time – and still does today. In Jesus time it was used for seasoning, like we often use it, but it was also very important in preserving. We have freezers and refrigerators today, but in Jesus' day, they had salt. So people were very familiar with it and they knew how important its purpose was.

But Jesus poses the question: If salt loses its taste – or, if salt loses its saltiness, how shall it be restored? If salt isn't salty anymore, if it no longer fulfills its purpose, what good is it? And his answer is this: It is no longer good for anything except to be thrown out and trampled under people's feet – don't picture table salt, picture the salt you put on an icy sidewalk. If salt has lost its saltiness, it isn't fulfilling its purpose and it can be thrown out on the path to be walked on like ordinary gravel.

We are the salt of the earth, and I don't know how far Jesus wanted us to take this analogy – he might have had seasoning and preserving in mind – but he's at least saying this: That God has an important purpose for us while we are here on earth and if we're not fulfilling our purpose... what good is that? If we live our

lives focused primarily on our careers, families, hobbies, and whatever else we want to do – what good is that? We're no different than anyone else. We're no longer fulfilling God's purpose for our lives on earth. So I think Jesus is telling us that fulfilling our purpose as Christians is vitally important.

But what is that purpose? The analogy he used last week was fishers of men and he uses a different analogy in this sermon – one that I think helps us see more fully what he has in mind.

Read Matthew 5:14-16.

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. 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 explains God's purpose for our lives by comparing it to light – both a city on a hill at night, which is even more vivid today with the invention of electricity, and a household oil lamp that burns and gives light to everyone in the home – helping them see their way in the darkness. So in Jesus' mind, he pictures the world as being lost in darkness, and he pictures his people to be lights in that world, helping people to find their way to God. Seeing yourself as a fisher of men might not be helpful for you, but maybe this analogy is.

You have a God-given purpose and it's important that you live out that purpose. If you don't, you're like salt that has lost its flavor or an oil lamp that's put under a basket. The purpose of your life is to be a light to shine for others to see.

According to Jesus, you and I are the light of the world and that means that in order to fulfill our purpose we need to let our light shine among the people in our lives, so they can see and give glory to God. God wants us to live lives that shine for him. He doesn't want us to focus on living lives that just shine for our careers, or families, or hobbies. He wants us to live lives that shine and point people to him in the midst of our careers, families, and hobbies. That's our purpose.

A spotlight operator has an important job. At key times they shine the light on the actors and actresses to draw attention to them. But if they get distracted by other thing in the room or other people in the crowd and shine the spotlight on them,

they've totally missed their purpose. God wants us to use our spotlight to shine the light on him.

Now the next big question is: "What does that look like?" We all have the same purpose, but what that looks like is going to be different for all of us depending where God has placed you in life and who he has placed around you for you to influence. It's not about knocking on doors and going over a rehearsed gospel presentation or some other stereotype. The way you shine your light is going to be unique for whatever situation you're in. I think he makes that clear as you continue to look through the Sermon on the Mount. He brings up several examples of what people typically do in different situations and how people who follow him ought to let their light shine.

- In his first example, at verse 21, he points out that if you're in conflict with another person, rather than responding to them with anger, you are to go to them to seek reconciliation. That's how you let your light shine. That's how you fulfill your purpose in that situation. When you go to that person to try and seek reconciliation you are acting in a way much different than the world and helping them see God.
- In his second example (vs. 27ff) he points out that when everyone around you is indulging in lust, you are to refuse that and vigilantly strive for purity. By doing that you are letting your light shine. You're living your life differently for them to see.
- (Vs. 31ff) Rather than giving up and leaving your marriage when you're struggling and unhappy, fight to keep it if at all possible. Work out your differences and people will see.
- (Vs. 33ff) Rather than being like everyone else and making empty promises that you don't keep, you practice honesty. You keep your word and do what you say you're going to do.
- Rather than retaliating against people who mistreat you, which is the way of the world we live in, you show them kindness which makes people shake their heads in wonder.

These are just a few examples Jesus gave of what it might look like to let your light shine for God and carry out your purpose. God has placed you where you're at in life for a reason and that is to influence the people around you for his kingdom. That is to be your central purpose in life no matter what you're doing.

Don't live for the things in this world, live to let your light shine for the glory of God. Let that be central.

I have seen unique ways how people in this church have been doing that. Some of you have used the hobbies you enjoy to point people to God. Perry Anderson has a hobby of bowmaking and is using it to let his light shine. He has bowmaking classes in his garage where he builds relationships with people. He's put Christian symbols on the tools they use that has led to questions and conversations. He plays Christian radio in the background for people to listen to. He's even traveled to different bowmaking events and preached sermons there and started Bible studies. Amanda Fisk uses her hobby of crafting to do ministry, build relationships and connect with women at church. Greg Stokes learned how he could use scrapping to be a support to ministry and gets involved in volunteering in a number of ways. Other people use their hobbies of hunting and fishing to build relationships, mentor younger believers, and connect with people in order to encourage people in the faith or introduce them to Jesus.

I've talked with several of you who incorporate your faith into your work situations in different ways. Mark Robey works for Anderson Windows and has used that opportunity to build relationships with Muslim co-workers and talk to them about the Lord. Others have offered to pray for people at work when they hear them going through problems. Ed Chew has a small business making foot pedals for guitar players and he uses art and quotes in his designs to point people to truth. Some people from our church have started their own Christian businesses, by combining their skills and things they're interested in with and their faith and they don't do it just to have a successful business but to influence people with the gospel. Rod Elbaor formed a carpentry ministry where he builds houses for people in need, but also uses it as an opportunity to build relationship and teach people how to live by faith. Holly Hutchens started Karar Academy as a way to use her love for ballet and her love for God to disciple ballet students in the faith and teach them how to honor God through dance. Now her daughter Elizabeth has taken over and is doing the same thing.

I also want to talk a little bit about how many of you see your family as a way that you can let your light shine. It's awesome to hear about moms and dads who are teaching their kids about the Lord and praying with them and modeling what it means to be a Christian. Many of you are grandparents who have taken an active

role pointing your kids and grandkids to Jesus – some of you are raising your grandkids, others are making intentional efforts to influence them for Christ. I know of husbands and wives who are encouraging one another, praying together, having conversations about the Lord and making decisions about how to live together for the glory of Christ.

Many of you are involved in ministry in the church and letting your light shine in those ways. You're involved in Discovery Land where you teach children about the Lord. You're involved in Recharge where you build relationships and invest in the lives of teens. You're leading a small group and intentionally investing your life by encouraging people in the faith and helping them to reach others. There are so many ways that people are involved in ministry in which God can use them to let their light shine.

God's desire is that the focus of our lives is living in a way that shines for God. He puts us where we're at in our careers, jobs, families, schools, neighborhoods, and hobbies, not so that we'll focus on those things to find our purpose, but to fulfill our purpose through them. God's given you a ministry. It's a different way to look at the lives we've been given. God wants us to live on mission in whatever we do, to intentionally have an outward focus, to make connections with people and build relationships, to love the people around us and care about them, to let Christ's love for you flow out in love for them.

What is God's ministry for you? How can you use the situation you're in and the opportunities he's given you to let your light shine?