



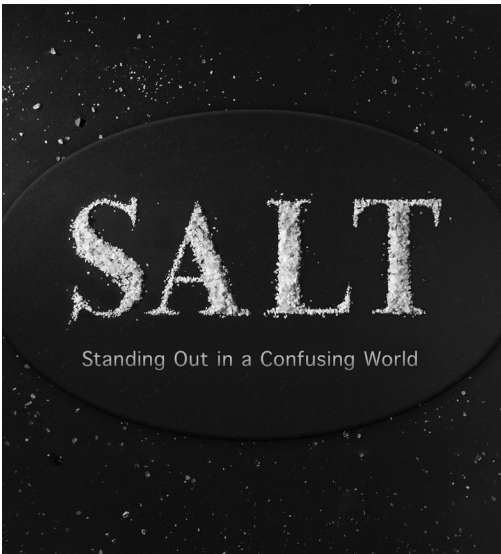
SALT

Standing Out in a Confusing World

Sermon Growth Guide

August 25, 2024

Surprise the Poor



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Salt - Surprise the Poor

Matthew 6:1-8

Key Verse: Matthew 6:4b

“Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.”

Big Idea: God is our audience of one.

Foundations

“Who is your audience?” This question is asked of authors, politicians, Tik Tok artists, social media influencers, and even churches. Who are we trying to reach with what we do and say? It’s one of the questions of the age. This is exactly the question Jesus is asking us in this passage. Today we tend to think of “hypocrites” as people who say one thing and do another. But the Greek word “hypokrites” primarily refers to an actor on the stage. This is clearly what Jesus had in mind. Is our audience other people? Are we trying to win applause, build up our reputation with others by what we do? Who is our audience? For Jesus the answer is clear. On the pathway to true life, God is our audience of one. When we want God to be our audience, we do things that are truly good instead of just putting on a show. When only God sees us helping those in need, God is glorified, those in need are dignified, and our help bears real fruit. When only God sees us pray, we don’t try to manipulate God with lots of words. Instead we open the deepest, most secret parts of ourselves to God, who teaches us to pray in accordance with his will. Only then do our prayers have real meaning. In a world where social media is king, and everything we do is on display all the time, it’s tempting just to put on a show in order to get likes and boost our image. But as followers of Jesus we must always remember: God is our audience of one.

Understanding God’s Word

Together, read Matthew 6:1-8. Do you think Jesus’ words apply to us in our time and place? What is the equivalent of “sounding trumpets” or “praying on the street corners” and babbling empty words today? God cares about our hearts. What is the difference in our motivations if we are performing for people instead of pleasing God who sees everything, even what is done in the secret places of our hearts?

Applying God’s Word

Who is your audience? Who do you hope sees what you do and say? Take your time and try to answer prayerfully and honestly. If God is your audience of one, how would that change the way you do things and what you say? Would there be anything you wouldn’t do or say?

Witnessing God’s Word

The Sermon on the Mount contains a paradox - something which seems to contradict itself, but is actually true. In the same passage, Jesus says, “...let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.” (Matthew 5:16) God wants everyone to know Him. He wants to give everyone freedom and eternal life in Christ. How can we remember that God is our audience of one, and yet glorify God in front of others by what we do?

Do you like surprises? There is long-standing legend about a former Pastor here named Jim Singleton who used to hide in closets and around corners and jump out to scare staff. He was nearly punched a few times. Finally, John Goodale had enough. He hid in his office one morning and jumped out at him. He was so scared he fell and tore his rotator cuff! He winged him. Caring Ministries Pastor. Not all surprises work out, but, as we close this short series, I want to talk to you today about a surprise. We are called to Surprise the Poor.

Many people think church is a false front. "It can't really be about God and spirituality and all that. It must be a façade. It is really about politics, or it is really about money. They just drizzle this Jesus glaze over it and some spiritual sprinkles, but if you hang around long enough, the money and politics will show through." That's what people think. Which is why I am loath to talk politics (and sometimes money) because I don't want to feed that impression. But when the world believes those things about the church, do you know what will surprise them? Jesus teaches us in the Sermon on the Mount that we will stand out, we will be Salt: Standing Out in a Confusing World. Do you know what stands out? When a church like ours demonstrates an ability to truly bring good news to the poor.

When Jesus began His ministry in a synagogue in Nazareth, He opened the scroll and read from Isaiah: "The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor." (Luke 4:18-19) Later on, when John the Baptist was imprisoned by Herod, John's disciples went to ask if Jesus really was the Messiah. What did Jesus answer? "So he replied to the messengers, 'Go back and report to John what you have seen and heard: The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those

who have leprosy are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is proclaimed to the poor.'" (Luke 7:22) Did you notice? The first thing Jesus read to define His ministry, and the last thing Jesus told these guys to report back was good news for the poor. I mean, blind people gaining sight, lame people walking, sick people healed, deaf people hearing, dead people raised, and it is just as much a miracle that the poor hear good news. Why? The poor don't get good news. They just don't, until Jesus comes along. That probably needs its own sermon, but let's move on. Surprise the poor with good news.

Jesus does not want us focused on outward appearances. He cares more about the direction of your heart than the performances of your behavior. If you read the full chapter, it goes through the three primary virtues of the contemporary pious person in Jesus' time: almsgiving, prayer and fasting. In all three, Jesus says, in short, don't do it for the show; do it for real. Let's handle prayer first. "And when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full." (Matthew 6:5) This does not mean you can avoid public prayer. Sorry. You still have to say the blessing! You should learn to pray publicly. But where is your heart? Are you praying to be seen doing it, to be noticed as spiritually superior? That's a nice feeling. That's your reward, says Jesus. Pray in private, even when in public. Know what I mean? Pray to God. Let it be genuine. A "hypocrite" was an actor who wore different masks on stage to play different characters. Jesus uses it to mean a faker, a showboat. Don't be a faker. Of course, there is an old joke. A man invited his neighbor to church. The neighbor replied, "I'd never go. That place is full of hypocrites." The man replied, "No, it's not full. There is still room for one more." We are all hypocrites to some degree; we all put on a front, our best selves, our filtered versions, while inside we strain to live up to it. Jesus wants us to find more



peace than that, more integrity. Don't be a faker doing it all for show, not with prayer, not with fasting (which you can read about on your own) and not with almsgiving.

Almsgiving is different from tithing. Two great church words, right? Tithing is the commitment to regularly set aside a portion of your resources for the work of the Lord, it comes from the word "tenth" meaning give to God the first tenth of your income. A pastor in Seattle went viral with a meme about tithing. I don't know everything about this pastor, Russell Johnson, but this is worthy of quote. He said, "I tithe because (1) it provides for God's house; (2) it tells God I trust Him; (3) it creates margin in my life for God to fill; (4) it reminds me that I am not my source; (5) it connects my money to a kingdom purpose; (6) it gives my job eternal significance; (7) it transforms my money into a seed; (8) it breaks greed and self-reliance off of my heart; (9) it lets everything else in my life know that God is first. Tithing is not an act of generosity; it is an act of obedience." I agree with every word of that! That's tithing; a regular pattern of devotion to the Lord.

Almsgiving is different. This is giving in response to a particular need, usually directed toward the poor, and that's what Jesus is taking up here. There was a need to add more beds to Springs Rescue Mission a few years ago. We rallied with other churches and collected and made a difference. We want to raise the low life expectancy in the Southeast part of our own city; we rallied and raised money for a hydroponic garden as part of a Christian community development effort, Solid Rock. Talk about surprise. Who guessed we'd be doing that this year? We want to save lives of children displaced by war in Sudan; we rallied and sent funds to our partners in Cairo to establish a feeding program at the Displaced Sudanese Children's School. See, that's almsgiving. What's the surprise in it?

Jesus said it matters to God. Jesus said God the Father takes notice. But how you do it is as important as that you do it. "Be careful not to practice your righteousness in front of others to be seen by them. If you do, you will have no reward from your Father in heaven." (Matthew 6:1) Reward. That's a dangerous word in this discussion. Someone could use that word to take advantage of the Christian giver. "Give here and the reward is coming." No. The whole point is that the reward is not in this world. If you want return on investment, go use what God gave you to make something valuable. That's not this. This is about what you give. If you give to be patted on the back by others, to be applauded by this world, that's your reward. Fine. But there is another dimension Jesus is opening up. Reward from your Father in heaven. You can—privately, between you and Jesus—you can know that your meager resources have been transformed into something eternal. That's reward.

So, don't be a faker. Don't be a showoff. "So when you give to the needy, do not announce it with trumpets, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and on the streets, to be honored by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full." (Matthew 6:2) Isn't that funny to imagine? Get the trumpets ready! I'm about to drop off some mac and cheese at Crossfire! Nobody literally did that. Jesus is making an illustration here. Nobody literally used trumpets. But in our hearts, we do. "See me! See how generous I am! Watch this!" Have you ever dropped money in a tip jar, but the person looked away right when you did it? That happened to me. I felt led by the Spirit to bless this person. I dropped five bucks in. I wanted him to see it. He looked away right when I dropped it. I thought about pulling it out and doing it again. "But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your giving may be in secret. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you." (Matthew 6:3-4)



Surprise your own left hand.

Surprise the poor. You know, in a world that thinks Christians are only out for their own interests, it is a real shocker, a real surprise when we get involved. And we do. Almsgiving is not about dropping a five-dollar bill in a hat on the street, you know? That—you can do that if you feel the Spirit leading you—but that is usually not the best way to help. That usually only extends the pain and suffering. What surprises the poor the most is when you take time to actually care. When you return again next week to make a meal and serve it at Catholic Charities Marian House down the street here (we serve every Tuesday), or when the team at Springs Rescue is supported; a place where people learn names and stories, process trauma, slow down the train of disasters enough to see and hear people and bring the possibility of true life transformation. I was with the staff at Springs Rescue Mission for chapel this week. They have had some hard times lately, but they keep at it, and lives are transformed there. Not with a one-time splash of cash; with sacrifice and commitment to truly love the poor in Jesus' name. One guy on staff, Robert, was homeless, addicted, on the edge. One of our choir members walked with him for years and helped him get into the Rescue Mission and followed up with continuing support. He's now one of their key staff members. Loves Jesus. Serves with his gifts to change the lives of others. Surprise. What fun! These Kingdom surprises! Maybe it's time to get involved in something like that. Jump in on a Light and Life for the City Excursion [website screenshot] this fall. See what Jesus is doing.

So, the surprise is that we, as Christians, get involved. We give in ways that make a difference. We make a responsible, lasting difference in peoples' lives by giving through our wise and equipped partners in ministry. Christians are statistically three times more generous than those outside the church. Surprise. God

cares about the heart not the face, the inner life not the resume. Jesus calls us to do good things in the secret places where no one sees. It is easy to give to the poor in order to gain a reputation or be rewarded by accolades. It is harder to do it in secret where only you and the Lord know. The most generous acts I have seen here in the 8.5 years I've been your pastor have been in secret. It is easy to show off our religiosity as a show of virtue, but harder to pray in private. As the salty followers of Jesus, I hope the contrast between our lives and the lives of those around us serves to surprise Colorado Springs with the good news of Jesus. Let the difference be a joyful surprise.

We are salt. Going back to where Jim Edwards started at the beginning of the month, we are salt. Jesus didn't say "be salt," He said, "you are salt." Now don't lose your saltiness. How can we stand out? Because Jesus stood out for us. How can we return grace for anger, non-retaliatory love? Because Jesus loved us when we were His enemies. How can we be faithful in heart and watch our lust? Because Jesus is faithful to us when we cheat on Him. How can we surprise the poor? I have not made anything of the notion of "spiritual poverty." I think we need to take this literally first. The world is surprised when we are responsibly, lovingly engaged with generosity in places of need. But, yes, we are all poor in some way. How can we be generous and surprise the poor with blessing? Because Jesus, well, "For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich." (2 Corinthians 8:9) "Jesus paid it all; all to Him I owe; sin had left a crimson stain, He washed it white as snow." Stay salt.

