

27-06-99 PM - You Can Make a Difference

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 27 June 1999

Preacher: Warwick Grant

[0 : 0 0] Well, a number of you know that one of my hobbies is astronomy, and I'm not going to bore you with it if you're not interested in astronomy, but I will say that one of the things that amateur and professional astronomers complain about in our world is a thing called light pollution.

And it seems we have so much artificial lighting all over the place, mainly in the cities, that it means it's only the really bright stars that we can see.

There's lots of very faint stars we just can't see anymore from the city. And if you really want to experience a truly dark sky without any light pollution, you need to go into the bush.

But often you have to go to very remote parts of Australia where there isn't any lights, artificial lights at all. And in places like this, it really is hard to even see your hand in front of your face.

There's no light anywhere apart from perhaps the stars and the moon. The darkness is pretty much complete. And yet the presence of just one tiny light, maybe just a match you might strike as you're lighting your campfire, even that smallest little flame can dispel this enormous darkness.

[1 : 1 1] Some of you may remember, if you were at our 11pm Christmas service, it's a couple of years ago now, we had a drama.

And at one point in this drama, all the lights in both ends of the church were put out, every single light. And even the security lights were extinguished. So the whole place was in complete darkness. And then at one point in the drama, a solitary candle was put on the communion table and it was lit. And this one little flame lit up the whole sanctuary area here just behind me.

This one tiny flame dispelled what was an enormous darkness. Well, we live in a very dark world.

Okay, there are lots of good stuff that's going on in our world, but there's plenty of darkness as well. To be honest, our world is up the creek. It's an appalling state of decay and deterioration. It's a dark world.

[2 : 1 9] Think about it. Think about our news services. They constantly remind us of all sorts of problems in the environment. Pollution. We hear of corrupt governments around the world, some of which make the press.

There are wars and other conflicts going on even as we speak. And not just in Kosovo and Yugoslavia. There are other places we just don't hear about. We even hear of cheating in sport, of greed, selfishness, while others live in poverty, even without their most basic needs being met. Well, that's a nice cheery start to a sermon, isn't it? But these facts could drive you to despair. I wonder if they even drive some people to consider taking their lives to suicide, especially young people.

I heard of some graffiti recently which went like this. We demand a reason to live. Things are pretty despairing.

They're pretty desperate. It's a pretty bleak picture. Well, as Christians, what should our response be to all this despair in our world? As followers of Jesus Christ, what should we do?

[3 : 3 8] How should we respond? Should we just say, oh, look, it's just all too hard. Just give up. And let's just crawl into a hole somewhere. Or can we make a difference to this bleak world that we live in?

Well, in tonight's Bible reading, Jesus uses two metaphors to remind us that ultimately Christian people are the world's only hope.

The two metaphors are salt and light. Jesus says that you are the salt of the earth and he also describes you as the light of the world.

What he's basically saying is that the world's situation is bleak and its only hope is to be found in him as he works in the followers of himself in the world.

That might sound arrogant to say that Christians are the world's only hope. Yet I believe that is true. Let's look at this reading in greater detail. It's from Matthew chapter 5 and you can find that on page 786 of the Black Bibles in front of you.

[4 : 51] Chapter 5 and it's verses 13 to 16. Well, in talking about Christian people being light and salt in the world, Jesus is actually saying, yes, well, there is a difference between those who don't follow me and those who do.

It reminded me of God's words to us in John's first letter, chapter 5, verses 11 and 12. This is what John wrote.

And this is the testimony. God gave us eternal life and this life is in his Son. Whoever has the Son has life. Whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life.

Christians and non-Christians are different. We're meant to be distinctively different from those who do not follow Jesus if we call ourselves a Christian.

Look, let's think about salt for a minute. We've all got it in our kitchens. What are some uses of salt? Well, it could be used as a preservative.

[6 : 04] When it's rubbed into meat, it can aid in its preservation. Before we had refrigerators, this was the only way, really, that meat could be preserved.

But salt can be used for stacks of other things. It can be used in healing. I presume it acts as a kind of an antiseptic, killing harmful bacteria that would inhibit the healing of a wound. And, of course, we also put it on food to improve the taste.

In each of these examples, salt is used to improve the situation. In the case of food, it preserves where otherwise there would be decay. In the case of injuries, it assists in the healing of a wound. In the case of food that might otherwise be bland, it improves its taste. Without God working in our world, most particularly through his Christian people, our world would continue in the decay that it's got, like rotten fish or meat just going off.

Jesus is saying, yes, as you let God work in you, we can make a difference. Let's continue to read verse 13.

[7 : 17] You are the salt of the earth, but if salt has lost its taste, how can its saltiness be restored? It's no longer good for anything, but is thrown out and trampled underfoot.

Well, strictly speaking, salt is a compound called sodium chloride. It's a chemical compound, and so it really can't lose its taste. Sodium chloride is sodium chloride.

So what does Jesus mean when it says it loses its saltiness? Did Jesus know what he was talking about? Well, we make a mistake if we get hung up in issues of chemistry here.

Salt can lose its taste if it has many impurities mixed in with it. The sodium chloride compound, if it's isolated and refined, would have its saltiness again if it was purified.

But it's unlikely that that sort of process would have been around in Jesus' earthly time. So impure salt that could be found perhaps in the Dead Sea or an area like that is declared by Jesus to be utterly useless.

[8 : 27] Reading the second part of that verse again, it is no longer good for anything, but is thrown out and trampled underfoot. Let me ask those of you here who are Christians.

How salty are you? Have you lost your salty taste? Have you become so much like the world around you that people can't tell the difference between you and people who aren't Christians?

I know I've said this from here once before, but I remember a time in my early years as a Christian, in my early 20s, when I was really quite confused about Christian behaviour.

How do you behave as a Christian? I'd met some other young people who confessed to being young Christians, but their lifestyle just didn't match up with what they professed. They frequently swore, they didn't mind being drunk, and they were drunk regularly, and a couple even admitted to me that they slept around.

And frankly, I found it hard to believe that they were devoted followers of Jesus. We are the salt of the earth. Well, if we are, let's be the salt of the earth.

[9 : 48] Sometimes that will mean doing radical things, perhaps going out of our way to help someone when it's not very convenient, or talking to a friend about our faith when normally we'd be scared to, or challenging our friends about their behaviour if they're behaving in a way that could hurt themselves and other people.

Jesus didn't call us to be the sugar or the honey or the maple syrup of the world, just pouring sweet, yummy flavours everywhere. Not challenging anyone about anything.

We are called to be salt in our world. And as Christians, that may mean being a challenging person, challenging our friends in a way that might sting, like putting some salt into a wound that ultimately would help it in the healing process.

But isn't that great? Isn't it great that we can actually make a difference? we can exert our influence and God working through us in our world for the better to help the world get to know Jesus better. We can make a difference as we try to be salt in our world. What about the other metaphor, the one of light?

[11 : 11] If you haven't seen one of these, this is a torch and when you press the button on the top, isn't that great? That's fantastic, isn't it? Thank you. I've been practising that all afternoon.

Well, in John 8, verse 12, Jesus said, I am the light of the world. And for the Christian person, Peter, in his first letter in the Bible, describes God as him who called you out of darkness into his marvellous light.

But now Jesus, in Matthew 5, verse 14, says that you are the light of the world, referring to those who follow him. Light's a wonderful thing.

As I mentioned before, a tiny amount of light will shatter the deepest darkness. And no matter how dark the situation is we find ourselves in or how appalling a state we find our world in, we can bring God's light to that situation.

We are the channels that reflect God's light to a dark world. Well, when we leave church tonight, we might look up in the sky and we'll see the moon and you'll see some stars and even a couple of planets.

[12 : 32] I think Mars and Venus are up at the moment. But the moon and the planets in particular don't generate their own light. They reflect the light of our sun.

If somehow our sun was extinguished, we would no longer see the planets. We'd no longer see the moon. They only shine by reflected light, the light of the sun that they reflect down to us.

And we reflect God's light to a dark world. Or so we should. Jesus goes on to say in the second part of verse 14, 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.

Well, you might say that you have a personal faith, a personal relationship, with Jesus. He died on the cross for you to take the punishment for your sins. You've asked him into your life to take your punishment, to forgive you, to give you the gift of eternal life.

[13 : 50] That's fantastic. You have a relationship with Jesus, a personal relationship. But I certainly hope you don't have a private relationship. Our faith isn't meant to be private.

That is kept between ourselves and God. The Christian faith was never described as being a private thing. Jesus says in verse 14, a city built on a hill cannot be hid.

You can go anywhere to the western side of Melbourne if it's an elevated place and within reason you can see the bright red light of Westfield Shopping Town and at night you just can't miss it.

And that's, we're meant to be like that. That's the only time I'm ever going to say we're meant to be like Doncaster Shopping Town. Okay. But that bright red light if you go to the Rialto observation deck or even you're approaching Melbourne in an aircraft you look out the window I often, not that I often fly but whenever I do I look out the window and I can distinctly always see that Doncaster Shopping Town sign.

You can't obscure it. It's so high. It's so prominent. As Jesus said a city built on a hill cannot be hid. We are to be like that as we live out our faith.

[15 : 08] Could people say about you or about me you just can't miss the fact that that guy Warwick's a Christian. It's just so obvious. Now I don't mean that you go around speaking without sensitivity or the only thing you ever talk about is your relationship with Jesus.

I'm not saying that at all. But are we really a loving, godly witness for Christ? And yet we don't shine this light for our own glory do we?

As Jesus says in verse 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 in heaven.

The glory must always go to God as people see our good works the things we do they will be pointed towards the ultimate source of our light that is our God and his son Jesus Christ.

Well you might be sitting there thinking well yeah yeah yeah here goes Warwick again I've heard all this and I know all this stuff I've heard it all before. Well that's great I'm glad you've heard it before. Are you actually doing anything about it?

[16 : 24] Are you? Are you? You can know a lot of things about your faith. You can play Bible trivia and win every time but do you apply it in your lives?

Are you being salt and light in the world really? Or are you just merging into the background with everyone else? have you recently taken a Christian stand when you've witnessed ungodly behaviour?

Have you refrained from laughing at a dirty joke? Have you made yourself available to someone who's perhaps lonely in the workplace or at school sat down and had lunch with them?

Have you been generous with your time, your abilities, your money for God or for others? Let's just spend 60 seconds right now and I'm going to do this too, thinking about how we can be better salt and light in our world.

Think about your own life, your own world, where you spend different times each week. How can we be better salt and light for God in our world? Let's do that now. Go!

[17 : 49] Go! Go! Go! Go! Go! Go! Go! Go!

Go! Go! Go! Go! Go! Go! Thank you.

Thank you.

Decrease in child labour, establishment of orphanages. In all these areas, Christian people, followers of Jesus, have been at the forefront. Being salt in a situation and light in the darkness. Well, there's lots of ways that we can make a difference for God as well. You could learn to share your faith with your friends or, as I say, sit with a lonely person at lunchtime.

[19 : 30] Visit an elderly resident in your street. Write to a newspaper about an issue that concerns you, where you feel things aren't going the way that God would be pleased with. Seek to be a regular, committed member of your church and youth group, as we seek to know more of God and learn to follow him better.

We could try and resist the temptation to fight in our families, but resolve our differences in a godly way. For us to honour each other more. Children, their parents and parents, their children. Just to name a few. Of course, we're not going to change the world just ourselves in our own strength. But God can, as he works through us. We do really look forward to that day when Jesus returns, as he promises he will, to rid the world of sin and rid the world of suffering and establish his kingdom of righteousness forever.

We look forward to that day and pray with the writer of Revelation in the Bible. Come, Lord Jesus. But while we wait for his return, let us be the salt of the earth and the light of the world.

Amen.