



Matthew 5:13-16 - Salt and Light - The Impact of Living for Christ **By Pastor Mike Clark 11/03/24**

Matthew 5:13-16 - 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. ¹⁴“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.

As we continue in our study of the book of Matthew and the sermon on the mount, we come to Jesus’ admonition for us to be salt and light.

The great blessings emphasized in verses 3-12 lead to the great responsibilities of verses 13-16.

This is a passage that deals with influence and the power of influence.

Most of us know about influence. There have been studies that have been done about influence, word-of-mouth influence, product endorsements.

In fact, the whole enterprise of social media was largely built on the idea of influence.

It’s the idea that you are most likely to buy products or services if it’s being recommended by someone that you know, someone within your network, rather than some distant spokesperson or even celebrity.

Influence is import. It’s important in the product realm, it’s important in the marketing realm, and it’s all the more important in the spiritual realm or we might even say the moral realm.

The impact that you have on those around you is unquestionable. And that’s what Jesus is talking about in our passage this morning.

He’s doing it with the imagery of salt and light. What he’s talking about is the influence you have on society, particularly by living a life and believing in things which are distinct that set you apart.

And you can see this in the parallel statements he makes in verses 13 and 14.

He says you are the salt of the earth, and you are the light of the world.



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In both of those statements earth and world refer to the same thing. It's the system or the practices or the standards that are associated with secular society around you.

All that goes on around us, that operates apart from the demands and the requirements and acknowledgment of God.

All of its ideologies, all of its principles, all of its assumptions, all of its beliefs, all of its opinions that you encounter every day, all of them formulated essentially with no consideration for God, no consideration for his word.

That is the world. It encompasses not only all of its thoughts but all of its behavior and actions and movements and attitudes, all that flows out of its beliefs and ideologies.

This is the world that Jesus has in mind. This is the earth that he is speaking of.

And it's not the physical world or universe, which we are told was created by God and it was declared to be good on the day in which he created it.

It is still telling of the glory and the wonders of God, speaking forth day after day and night into night the Psalmist says, about his majesty.

It's still something that we gaze at and observe and we see the majesty of God, we wonder at his creation.

And it's not even the physical people that God has created to be objects of love and compassion for us.

This world and this earth that he's talking about is the system of ideas, all that is formulated outside of God's decrees, outside of God's revelation, everything that drives people and systems of the world.

Paul calls it the world over which Satan is the god of this world as he calls him in 2 Corinthians 4.

It's everything that Satan is governing. And its within that realm that you and I enter every day, it's within that realm that you and I are called by this passage and others to have a distinct influence.

Now to understand that, we need to understand the images that Jesus is using here, salt and light.



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Because each one of them gives us particular insights into the kind of influence that Jesus wants us to have, and specifically how we're to do that.

First of all, by living lives that purify society around us and second of all by pointing people to Christ.

Point 1 – As salt, we are to be holy

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.”*

Salt has always been valuable in human society. The Romans held that, except for the sun, nothing was more valuable than salt.

Romans soldiers were often paid in salt which is where we get the expression “not worth his salt.”

In many ancient societies salt was used as a mark of friendship.

Salt was also used in the ancient near east to bind a covenant.

2 Chronicles 13:5 - *Ought you not to know that the Lord God of Israel gave the kingship over Israel forever to David and his sons by a covenant of salt?*

Leviticus 2:13 - *You shall season all your grain offerings with salt. You shall not let the salt of the covenant with your God be missing from your grain offering; with all your offerings you shall offer salt.*

Jesus is talking about the purifying effect, a life that purifies society when he says that you are the salt of the earth.

Just like in our own times, in ancient times, salt was used for a number of different purposes.

Most people recognize that the primary two functions of salt both in the modern and ancient world was first of all for seasoning and second of all for preserving.

And while both of those have been proposed, I think it's very obvious that Jesus in this analogy is talking about salt as a preservative, primarily because of the parallel with light.



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The way in which we're salt in the earth is parallel to the way in which we're light in the world.

Both of them have to do with remediating some destructive or corrosive or dangerous effects that are taking place around us in the world and in society.

In other words, when Jesus uses this analogy he's not simply saying that we need to add flavor to the world around us.

We're not all about spicing up life. That may happen but it may not happen, but that's not the main point.

He's talking about salt in its preventative and preservative effects.

People in the ancient world didn't have freezers or refrigerators and so they needed salt because food would spoil quickly, especially meats.

But they could cure their meat as well as their other food and prevent the spoilage. Salt naturally kills bacteria that causes spoilage.

And so, in the same way Jesus is telling us as Christians that we are to have a preserving, a purifying effect on the people, on the society, on the systems around us, a correcting effect, a safe-guarding effect on the ethical and moral decay that is all around us.

In other words, we are to preserve society from sliding further and further into corruption.

Now all of that assumes a major point, a major idea and that is the fact that society is corrupt, it's on a decaying trajectory, that it's sliding.

Left to its own, just like a natural piece of meat on the sidewalk, it will decay. It will grow putrid apart from the influence of believers.

And this isn't hidden, it's found all over the Scripture. Jesus himself talks about it.

John 7:7 – The world cannot hate you, but it hates me because I testify about it that its works are evil.

The apostle John says –



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1 John 2:16-17 - ¹⁶ For all that is in the world—the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride of life—is not from the Father but is from the world. ¹⁷ And the world is passing away along with its desires, but whoever does the will of God abides forever.

So he's categorical. Everything that doesn't come from the Father, every bit of it is passing away, it's decaying, it's being brought to destruction. This is the biblical worldview, this is the truth about society around us.

John 3:19 - And this is the judgment: the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil.

Paul in Colossians talks about how we were before becoming Christians.

Colossians 1:21 – And you, who once were alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds.

This is why James says in –

James 4:4 - You adulterous people! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.

So, you have this way of thinking that is presented in the scripture, you have this biblical view of society and life that you and I are called on to understand that we are presented with over and over as a metric by which we can understand the world that we live in.....

.....A way in which we can discern everything going on around us and all of this because as Jesus tells us in John 16, all of it arises out of one basic reason, the world doesn't know God, it doesn't know Christ.

This is the fundamental reason for its corruption. And because of that reason, they will continue to slide into further and further corruption, further and further dismay....

.....until they reach the point where they receive the Lord and say you're Jesus Christ or they reach the judgment.

The whole system, every thought, every argument, every ideology that hasn't been taken captive in obedience to Christ as Paul says in 2 Corinthians 10, every one of them, all of them are corrupt.



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Now you may not like to think about the world that way. You might think well that's an overly pessimistic way of looking at the world.

I tend to be a glass half full kind of person. I'm optimistic. I'm enthusiastic about this or that, I'm encouraged by this development.

I'm encouraged by that leader, I like this particular group or whatever it might be, you may not like to think of the world this way.

It might sound too bleak or too depressing for you, but until you accept this view of the world as described in scripture, you will never be able to be salt.

You can't do it because friendship with the world is enmity with God.

Fundamental to what Jesus is saying here is the acceptance that everything that arises from the world does not arise from the Father.

And therefore, everything that arises in the world is corruption.

When Jesus says you are the salt of the earth, He's not saying that you're just one of several preservatives that God has sprinkled throughout the world and throughout the earth that he's constantly using to preserve the earth.

He uses the definite article which is somewhat more emphatic in the Greek language than it is in the English.

You are THE salt, you're not one of many you are THE salt.

In fact, even the "you" here is in the emphatic position, you as believers, you are THE salt, you are THE preservative.

And the "you" in both verses is also plural. It's His whole body, the church, that is called to be the world's salt and light.

Each grain of salt has its limited influence but it's only as the church collectively is scattered in the world that change will come.

You are the force that God has established in the world. There are no others, it's you and you alone.

God didn't send multiple options. He hasn't appointed other means, he has appointed his believers.



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Not as believers plus schools and hospitals and charities and other organizations, he appointed you as THE salt as THE preservative.

You may not like that, you may not like it that the world would see that, you may not like it when you enter into a room and enter into conversation that the people immediately change their behavior.

You may not like it when you enter into a group of people, they drop their filthy language or they start apologizing if they let a curse word slip.

You may not like it, it may make you feel awkward when people look at you as different, you may want to do everything that you can to shed that kind of persona, but you have to understand - That is the role that God has prescribed for you.

You are supposed to be a preservative. He's called you to be different. He's called you to be salt and to stem the tide of corruption around you. That's the purpose for which God has appointed you and left you in this world.

Because salt stings when placed in a wound, some commentators believe that Jesus meant to illustrate just the opposite characteristic to that of flavor.

Christians are to sting the world, prick its conscience, and make it uncomfortable in the preaching of God's gospel.

The church can't stand for the Lord if it doesn't stand for His Word, and when it stands for His Word its witness will often sting.

Salt also creates thirst. God intends for His people to so live and testify before the world that others will be made more aware of the spiritual dehydration.

Of course, all of this assumes that you haven't lost your saltiness.

As he says here, you are the salt of the earth, but if salt has lost its taste, and the word taste isn't in the Greek text.

The word is morino from which we get moron and basically means something devoid or devoid of meaning, devoid of a state.

It's not any specific reference to taste. What he's saying is that salt can become devoid or deficient or barren of its inherent qualities.



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Now you may ask how does that happen? I thought that salt was a stable compound. Some of you may remember when you learned in chemistry that sodium chloride is a stable compound, it's not prone to change.

And so, sodium chloride will never lose its saltiness, whether it's the salty taste or it's preservative effects, it'll always have its inherent qualities.

Which is of course true, but in the ancient world people didn't have the complex processes of refining salt the way that we do today.

The best they could do was to simply chisel salt out of salt mines or hill sides and to sift it down as fine as they could get, but it was always inevitably mixed with other minerals and deposits and silt.

And so, their sodium chloride was mixed with all this other stuff.

It was adulterated with all this other stuff that might've looked like salt, they would've picked out everything that was obviously not some sort of white substance, but there were still embedded in their salt, all kinds of other filaments.

And among all those particles and all the dust and all the silt and all that stuff, sodium chloride was actually a most soluble substance.

And so consequently, it could be, in many cases, washed away. It could even be evaporated with moisture into the air, so that the only thing left was some sort of useless residue.

Which Jesus says in verse 13 becomes good for nothing and is to be thrown out and trampled under the feet of men.

So, in the ancient world salt could lose its saltiness, at least what they visualized and saw as salt. It could lose its saltiness because it becomes adulterated, washed out, watered down, evaporated.

It can lose its saltiness because all of these other deposits and silt that's around it basically delude it.

And so, what you have, what to some people might appear to be a preservative agent, has no real effects that you can use or that you try to cure it with.

There's no real qualities, they're void, vacant of any kind of preserving effect.



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And Jesus is warning you about that. Beware lest your salt loses its saltiness, lest your central elements that you have from God that are intended to fight against the corruption of the world.....

..... beware lest you become so mixed with the elements and the particles and the deposits of the world that are around you, that might appear to other people, maybe even to yourself, they might appear to have some sort of preserving effect, but they're not, because they're not the true salt that comes from God.

We can't be an influence for purity in the world if we have compromised our own purity. We can't sting the world's conscience if we continually go against our own.

It can be easy to be repackaged, rebundled with worldly values, with worldly ideas, with worldly perspectives.

Jesus says you need to be aware of this because he knew the temptation would come.

He knew it would come for his followers. He knew it would come for you, the temptation to position yourself within the world, where you embrace its ideals, its values, whatever it considers to be virtuous, whatever it considers to be precious.

That you embrace all of that, that you conform to all of that, that you listen to all of that.

It's not hard to figure out what those ideals and values and perspectives are.

Just open up the newspaper or go on the web or read the social media feeds or watch TV.

You can easily find out what the world cherishes, what it values.

You mix those things into your life and you might be sure to get the approval of the world, but you'll have no effect on its corruption, nothing to stop its decay.

Because whether you want to admit it or not, no matter how virtuous it sounds, the world is decaying.

No matter how erudite its professors are, no matter how sophisticated its books sound, no matter how glossy its magazines are, no matter how well choreographed are its musicals, no matter how picturesque are its movies, it's all a facade. Behind it is corruption.



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And so Jesus is warning us. You need to make sure that you stay salty.

Not in a modern sense. We use the word salty to talk about people who are grumpy or angry or upset or callous or whatever it might be.

What Jesus means is you need to make sure that you remain distinct in your Christian character and your Christian ideals.

The foundation of your biblical worldview, your sense of God's providence, your trust in his goodness and righteousness and justice, your sense of God's truth above all other truth - you need to cling to those things.

Or more immediately, your commitment to the kind of lifestyle he's already described in the Beatitudes.....

..... instead of being self-confident, you're poor in spirit, instead of rejoicing in sin, you mourn, instead of being self-centered, you're meek, instead of being morally self-satisfied, you hunger and thirst for righteousness.

Instead of being indifferent, you're merciful, instead of being dishonest, you're pure in heart, instead of being divisive, you're peacemakers, instead of being pleasure seekers, you're persecuted.

You are distinct from the world, from its ideals, from its behavior.

Now Jesus drives this home with a second image in verse 14, you're also the light of the world.

And while the image of salt emphasizes the purifying effect on society, this image emphasizes a life that points people to God.

Point 2 - As light, we "shine" to display transformed lives that produce good works for Jesus' praise.

Matthew 5:14-16 - ¹⁴ "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.

So here Jesus is making another simple statement about our impact on the world and society and is parallel to what he just said about being salt of the earth, but with a different image and a different emphasis.



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The image of light, which in many cases light refers to truth, but in this situation, we see very clearly down in verse 16, he's referring to your works. He says the people would see your good works.

So when he speaks here about light, he has in mind the shining of your conduct and your behavior and how visible it is to the world.

And once again just as salt assumes the corruption of society around you, this assumes the darkness of the world around you.

It assumes a particular view of the world that is darkened not only in its behavior but darkened in its mind.

The world is darkened both inside and outside.

Ephesians 4:17-18 - ¹⁷ Now this I say and testify in the Lord, that you must no longer walk as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their minds. ¹⁸ They are darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, due to their hardness of heart.

Paul says the natural man is darkened in his mind and heart and callous against God, and that leads externally to dark and sinful behavior.

John 3:19-20 - ¹⁹ And this is the judgment: the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil. ²⁰ For everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his works should be exposed.

The world doesn't want to be exposed. It wants the darkness to carry out its evil deeds, to pursue its selfish goals, to indulge its flesh.

Again, this is not the view that the world has of itself. It's not the view that you even perhaps want to adopt, you might be fascinated with the world.

You might be fascinated with the world, with its leaders, with its voices, with its ideals, with its books.

But the Bible declares that it's darkness.

Philippians 2:14-15 - ¹⁴ Do all things without grumbling or disputing, ¹⁵ that you may be blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world.



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That view of the world, that it's twisted and crooked is not particular to Paul's century. It isn't something that happened just because of Roman domination.

All the way back in the book of Genesis chapter 6 we're told that God looks on the world that he had made, and the thoughts and intents of men were constantly on evil.

Genesis 6:5 - The Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.

And none of that is affected by the passage of time, it isn't improved with the development of democracy or the improvements in education.

The world might celebrate its enlightenment and it may believe it's made all these advances in knowledge.

It might trumpet its achievements and mechanics and discoveries in science and technology.

But for all of those advances, in all of those hard sciences, the world has simply expanded its reach of misery and greed and hatred and strife.

As it increases in knowledge, it increases in its destructive power. It hasn't improved on its society at all. As knowledge increases morals degenerate.

Technology advances, but it only increases the spread of immorality. Science makes discoveries, but the world in turn uses it to twist and even destroy God's creation.

The world can't help itself. It's corrupted from the inside out and so it grows.

2 Timothy 3:13 - While evil people and impostors will go on from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived.

Paul says evil grows worse and worse because it has no inherent capacity for good.

Everything that's in the world, as John says, is not from the Father.

Advances in technology have not restrained corruption, but has expanded it.

It's made corruption more available to a wider range of people, at a greater exposure in their age, in a shorter amount of time than ever in history.



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That's not the world's view of itself. The world's view of itself is that it's enlightened.

The world's view of itself is that it's headed towards progress, that it has some utopia just over the horizon, that they have the answers, that they're the ones whose eyes have been opened. They're the ones who are awakened.

But God gives a different verdict.

And so again if you do not accept this biblical worldview, you are incapable of shining the light.

If you don't accept this biblical worldview, you are incapable of fulfilling what Jesus says here.

Luke 11:35 – ³⁵ Therefore be careful lest the light in you be darkness.

1 John 1:5-6 - ⁵ This is the message we have heard from him and proclaim to you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all. ⁶ If we say we have fellowship with him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth.

It's such a sad thing to see a Christian go on a crusade to publish abroad everything that they've learned not from God, but from the world.

That everything they think that they're doing that is virtuous has no foundation in the scripture, but is actually something from the world.

Be careful lest you embrace all the darkness that is around you and you begin to imitate all the patterns and the behaviors and the attitudes of the world.

You begin to reflect all of that, you think that you're shining a light - Be careful he says, lest the light in you is actually darkness.

To shine as lights the first thing you have to do is rid yourself of the darkness.

To shine as lights the first thing you have to do is you have to embrace the source of light.

If you embrace the darkness, you have nothing to shine. The world can do that well enough on its own.



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You have nothing to enlighten the world. You have nothing to offer if you're just simply absorbing and reproducing and regurgitating what the world is already feeding itself.

Again, this is critical. Just like salt is fundamentally different from the bacteria and the corruption and even the host that it's put into in order to cure, light is fundamentally different than darkness.

And you cannot enlighten a room with more darkness. You can only enlighten a room if you bring in something totally different. You bring in the light and the light comes from Christ.

So instead of buying into the world's view of itself, you and I, Jesus says, are to shine distinctly.

In fact, once again here, he uses the definite article and the emphatic you. You are THE light, you are THE light of the world.

Jesus says to his disciples in the book of John -

John 9:5 - ⁵As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world."

But now he has departed and left that task to his people. You are THE light in the midst of all this darkness, you and you alone, and there is no other.

One commentator writes that Jesus' emphasis on his disciple's unique ability to purify the world suggests that they do so by means other than mere moral protest, political involvement, or social activism.

Any person of faith can engage in those activities. If these were the strategies to transform society that Jesus had in mind, then he could not have said that his disciples were THE one and only salt of the earth and light of the world.

The only way you can be light, the only way you can be salt is to offer what you and you alone as a follower of Christ have to give.

Your role is different, your message is different, your lifestyle, your interaction, your speech, your conduct, it ought to be different.

1 John 1:7 - But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin.



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God's people are to proclaim God's light in a world engulfed in darkness just as Jesus came to shine upon those who sit in darkness and the shadow of death.

You're the light of the world Jesus said. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. That's a statement of fact.

In the ancient world cities were visible from miles away day or night. They were normally positioned on high ground or on a hill in order to give it security against invasion.

But even at night, even in the age before electricity, they were visible.

Most of the buildings in the ancient near east were built out of limestone rock or covered in limestone plaster.

In the near east you see the sort of the brightness of all the buildings in the hills so that even primitive torches and candle lights that alumine their cities at night would reflect off the limestone and create a glow for miles.

So, Jesus is pointing out when your light shines, it's going to be noticeable, it's going to be visible. It's going to stand out. It's going to be identifiable.

It's going to be recognized by everyone around you as different. Different from what they're seeing everywhere else, maybe different from what they're hearing everywhere else, it's going to be recognizable.

And he adds in verse 15 that people do not put light on a lamp and put it under a basket but on a stand and it gives light to all in the house. That's the purpose of the light.

The reason God has placed you here or left you here is so that your light, your life could shine and point people uniquely to him.

It makes absolutely no sense to have a light and hide it and put it under a basket.

But sometimes we hide our light. We hide our light because of fear of offending others or indifference or lack of love for others.

But Jesus is saying don't pretend to be something that you're not.



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If you're a believer, don't pretend to be a part of the world. If you're light, don't pretend to be darkness. Don't hide your light. Shine as light. This is God's design for you.

As he says in verse 16 let your light shine before others.

And He doesn't ask you to light your light, he's already done that. He didn't ask you to create the light, he's already done that.

John 1:9 - The true light, which gives light to everyone, was coming into the world.

He's the one who has regenerated your heart and filled your mind with truth. He's the one who has put the Holy Spirit within you. He's made you a new creature, the Lord has already done all of that.

All you do now is let your light shine. You let it shine within your household. You let it shine within your workplace, within your school, within your community, whatever it might be, you let it shine.

Even if the darkness flees away, even if that means your friends and associates shun you, because they probably will.

It's ironic that Jesus says they'll see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.

He says that back in verse 10 when he talked about persecution. He already talked about how the world is going to persecute you.

So, the very ones who have persecuted you may be the very ones who in the end glorify God because of your good deeds.

There will be persecution, you may be tempted to hide your light under a basket. You may be tempted to dilute your salt so it doesn't burn so bad.

You might be tempted to take a position in the world, in fact many Christians assume that's actually the way to draw people to God, to meet the world on their terms, embrace their agenda, carry their banner, take on their markings.

But Jesus says just the opposite. Shine as lights that they may see your good works and glorify your Father.



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This is the supreme calling of the Christian life. Everything we do is to cause others to give praise to the God who is the source of all that is good.

Woodrow Wilson told the story of being in a barbershop one time. "I was in a very common place. I was sitting in a barber chair when I became aware that a powerful personality had entered the room. A man had come quietly in upon the same errand as myself, to have his hair cut, and sat in the chair next to me. Every word the man uttered showed a personal interest in the man who was serving him. And before I got through with what was being done for me, I was aware that I had attended an evangelistic service, because Mr. D.L. Moody was in that chair. I purposely lingered in the room after he had left and noted the singular effect that his visit had brought upon the barber shop. They talked in undertones. They didn't know his name, but they knew that something had elevated their thoughts. And I felt that I left that place as I should have left the place of worship."

This is the pathway God calls us to. Peter says -

1 Peter 2:9 - But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.

He called us out of darkness into his marvelous light and he can call you if you don't know Christ as Lord and Savior yet.

He can transform you and make you a new creature for his glory for your blessing and an instrument to his praise if you will but cry out to him in repentance and faith alone in Jesus and his finished work on the cross.

PRAYER -