

**Intro:** Our ability to imagine and create are traits which demonstrate God's desire and design for mankind to be made in His image (**Genesis 1:27** So God created man in his own image...). We witness God's imagination and creativity every day we open our eyes. Only God's imagination and creativity could envision and implement the salvation of man by way of the cross. However, it was more than God's imagination that bridged the gap between man and Himself. He also designed, engineered, and implemented this great task. Therefore, this study now moves on from imagination to reality. You will be challenged to implement what you have been imagining.

**Living Proof** (sermon based study from 9.20.09)

❖ **Opening Bridge Question: As asked in this week's message, what person(s) has had the most influence on you in your life? Discuss how and why.**

 **Read Mt. 5:13-16**

The passage preceding the above text on salt and light are called the beatitudes. They describe the character of a Christian. Perhaps, because of their humble, submissive nature, one could conclude they have little influence on their society. However, Jesus shatters that notion. Oddly enough, these peaceful, quiet, humble citizens of heaven are to have a worldwide impact.

Jesus illustrates this Christian influence with two items found in every home in Palestine: salt & light. Both metaphors assume that there is a significant difference between kingdom people and citizens of this world. Both metaphors also state that this distinction can be adulterated or hidden. If this happens, the Christian loses his influence as well as his value in the world.

It may also be observed that both salt and light, although necessary, can have a stinging effect. It is no small wonder that Christians who take seriously their obligation to live out this sermon experience persecution.<sup>1</sup>

### ***SALT***

Salt has a number of uses. Some of the most prominent are: (1) It preserves, (2) It flavors, (3) It creates thirst. Although the latter two have obvious application value, Jesus probably speaks primarily of the first. In a culture that had no refrigeration, salt was critical to preserving food (and food preserved in salt hardly needs further seasoned with salt). Likewise, Christians are primarily responsible for preserving morality, justice, and social conscience. God has also instituted the state and the home for these purposes, but without the strength of the church even these lack salt and light. Historically, the church can be credited for many of the advances in science, medicine, prison reform, orphanages, abolition of slavery and child labor, education and literacy. The kingdom of God has, indeed, flavored this world in significant ways.

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<sup>1</sup> M. Moore, Life of Christ, vol. 1 p.184

The problem is when salt loses its flavor. Technically, salt (i.e., sodium chloride) cannot lose its saltiness. It's an extremely resilient chemical. The word Jesus uses would be more literally translated, "is defiled." Although salt cannot lose its saltiness, it can be adulterated with other substances. For instance, it was likely that around the Dead Sea, the natural salt in the water dried on the ground along with other chemicals and white dust. The mixture could be scraped up and pawned off as salt. Though it contained an element of salt, it was so polluted that it lost its preserving ability. If you bought a batch of this "salt" you could do nothing with it but pitch it. The analogy to the Christian is obvious. When one becomes mixed with the world, he loses his preserving influence in the society.<sup>2</sup>

❖ Bible Application Questions

- **In becoming salt and light for God's Kingdom, how does the fact that it can sometimes sting affect you? Does it make you leery? What can we do to overcome our fears?**
- **Jesus was known for fellowshiping with "sinners" (Lk 15:1). How are we to balance reaching the lost without becoming "mixed with the world" and losing our saltiness?**

**LIGHT**

Even dim light in a dark place is easy to spot. What fool would want to hide it? Yet many Christians studiously avoid being recognized. They fear that darkness will overcome the light. But that is impossible. Since Jesus is the light (John 8:12, 9:5) and we are in him, we can shine like the stars (Phil 2:15). As he was a light to the nations, so too the church continues bearing his light (Isaiah 9:2; 49:6; Luke 2:32; Acts 13:47; 26:23). Therefore, each Christian is called to move into the world and live in such a distinctly different way that the unredeemed person can catch a glimpse of God.<sup>3</sup>

- **Read some of the following scriptures on how we are to shine our light** (you don't have to do them all) **and while you read the concluding story consider how these are to be lived out.**
  - Luke 6:31-35; Acts 20:35; Romans 12:20-21; Galatians 6:9-10; Ephesians 2:10; 2 Thessalonians 3:13; I Timothy 6:17-19; Titus 2:11-14; Hebrews 10:24; I Peter 3:13

**Concluding story:** It's wasn't about the Donkey i<sup>2</sup>

Riding a donkey, Jesus entered Jerusalem on Palm Sunday. The crowds cheered and shouted praises to him. They lopped off palm fronds and laid them on the ground for the donkey to walk on. When they ran out of palm branches, they gladly laid their own cloaks on the ground and, walking ahead of Jesus and the donkey, shouted, "Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. Hosanna in the highest!" (Matthew 21:9) For a moment the donkey perhaps thought it was all about him. After all, he was doing all the work that morning. But it wasn't about him. It had nothing to do with him. He was simply carrying the Message. The externally focused church is a good donkey that takes Jesus into places where he hasn't always been welcome. The serving church is just the donkey. It's still all about Jesus.<sup>4</sup>

**Challenge Questions:** What are you willing to do to become *Living Proof*? Are you willing to be a donkey? Will you help Connexion/your Xgroup become an **i<sup>2</sup>** ?

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<sup>2</sup> M. Moore, Life of Christ, vol. 1 p.185

<sup>3</sup> ibid

<sup>4</sup> Rusaw & Swanson, Externally Focused Church, p.30