



Pastor John Underhill

Introduction

The first worship service at Valley Fourth Memorial was held on September 24th, 1972. Thirty three years ago. The doors of the church opened to receive 185 in Sunday School and 235 for the morning worship service.

This is a time of re-assessment for VFMC, who are we now? Why does this church exist? What is God's plan for the future? I don't have the answers to all those questions. But I think we can discern the outlines by looking back at the vision for evangelism that founded this church.

I. Why are we afraid of evangelism?

A. My experiences at SFCC

Let me give you a personal answer. When I was a student at Spokane Falls Community College, once every couple of weeks I'd meet a campus missionary and we'd prowl through the Student Union Building at SFCC, looking for someone who was quietly minding his/her own business, sitting alone. We'd walk up, introduce ourselves, and ask if we could take a brief survey about religious beliefs. Most folks said "No, I'm busy" and we'd go on our way. Sometimes people agreed, and we'd launch into a few questions about their church background and religious beliefs. It usually ended with a question such as, "Would you want to know for certain that you're going to heaven when you die?"

Every so often we'd find someone who was curious and we'd be able to present the gospel. I don't remember anyone ever putting their trust in Jesus as Savior.

B. What's wrong with that approach?

George Barna gave the "Millstone Award" to the "survey" approach to evangelism. How come? I was unintentionally taught that real evangelism was

1. Intrusive
2. Impersonal
3. High pressure (on the person doing evangelism, the person being evangelized)
4. High risk
5. Temporary
6. No fun at all!

We live in the middle of a culture that is cynical, wary when folks show up unannounced and want to have a religious discussion. Let me ask you a question—when you notice a couple of nicely dress young men on bikes in your neighborhood, do you instinctively think, “Oh great! I can’t wait tell they get to our house and we get to have a nice religious discussion!”

Some of you thrive on that. Most of you run from that!

As long as we make my SFCC experience our standard model of evangelism, we’re not going to have too many people lining up. Is there a better way? Let’s go back to the Bible!

Transition: Turn with me to Matthew 5:13-16. Let’s stand as we read God’s Word

"You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled by men.

[14] "You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. [15] Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. [16] In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven. Matthew 5:13-16 (NIV)

II. Overview of the passage

| Problem | Affirmation | Condition | Effect |
|--------------------------|---------------------------------|--|---|
| The world is decaying | You are the salt of the earth | The salt must retain its saltiness | Salt keeps something bad from happening |
| The world is in darkness | You are the light of the world. | The light must be allowed to shine without hindrance | Light enables something good to happen |

A. The Problem: decay and darkness

There’s a spark of the divine in man (the image of God), but we dare not fall into the trap of thinking that man is basically good. We watched on our TVs as men and women in New Orleans did heroic things, but we also watched as chaos and crime quickly enveloped an American city. We dare not fall into the false idea that people are basically good, the world is basically a good place. They aren’t. It isn’t. It may appear healthy for a while, or in certain places, but people are dead spiritually, separated from God.

There’s a problem—we are all born sinners. From birth we are selfish by nature, committed to getting our own way no matter what.

The world around us is rotting. Morally, the world around us is in darkness. Church bodies are debating not simply whether or not homosexuality is acceptable, but whether or not practicing homosexuals should be ordained as clergy.

From the book, "The Day America Told the Truth:"

Remember the original 10 commandments? Well only 13% of Americans say they still believe in all of them. Instead, these are some of today's commandments, including the percentage of Americans who follow them:

- I will steal from those who won't really miss it (74%);
- I will lie when it suits me (64%);
- I will waste the equivalent of a full day of work each week (50%);
- I will cheat on my spouse (53%);
- I will lie on my tax returns (30%); and
- I am willing to put my lover at risk of disease (31%). *The Day American Told the Truth*, p 25, 2000

Historian David F. Wells states in the article, "Our Dying Culture," "What is striking about our culture today is that corruption is not simply at the edges...but is spread like a dense fog throughout our society." In other words, not one of us is immune! That thought sobering me.

Wells continues, "Since 1960 population has increased by 41 percent while violent crime has risen 560 percent. The U.S. Department of Justice projects that eight out of ten people will be victims of violent crime at least once in their lives..."

"Just as telling, and perhaps of more interest, are those that measure more private matters such as our moral intentions, matters that may not always be matters of law...While the great majority of Americans believe that they actually keep the Ten Commandment, only 13 percent think that each of the commandments has moral validity."

Wells goes on to say, "As our social diversity has expanded, our national unity has been weakened and our consensus about what is right and wrong has crumbled..." John Israel, Denver Seminary, April, 1999

B. Jesus' Affirmation of our identity

We dare not fall into the error of thinking that because this world is rotting, we should withdraw. Get as far away as possible Retreat inside the walls of the church. Jesus said that we are the salt of the earth, we are the light of the world. Jesus' design was that we, as his followers, would contact and impact this fallen world of sinful men and women.

Notice, Jesus didn't give his disciples an option, "If you want to be the salt of the earth, great! Who's willing to sign up?"

"On the second Tuesday of the month you'll take a turn at being the salt of the earth." This wasn't optional, occasional, or only for committed Christians. The question is not whether or not you'll be salt, whether or not you'll be light. The only question is what kind of a job we're doing at being the salt and light.

C. A Condition for effectiveness

1. The salt must retain its saltiness

In Jesus' time two kinds of salt existed. One salt was relatively pure, but another was impure. The pure salt was made through the evaporation of clean sea water. But most of the salt in Palestine was taken from the Dead Sea, which was filled with white minerals that resembled salt. Farmers piled the impure salt behind their houses and used it for fertilizing their fields because a small amount of salt benefited some souls. But when the rains came and pounded on that mound of salt, often the true salt, the sodium chloride, would be washed away. A useless, white sandy substance was left. Farmers couldn't even throw it out on their fields because it had a hardening effect on the soil. Instead they would throw it out in front of the house when they wanted a hard path, and men would walk on it. (H. Robinson, *The Christian Salt and Light Company*, p. 101)

2. The light must not be blocked

What are the requirements for light to be effective? What is necessary?

Illustration: Light a candle up front with full house lights on. Then turn house lights off.

- a. **It has to be dark out.** The darker the night, the more brightly the light is seen. Often God places us in a dark environment, you may be the only Christian at your workplace. But darkness doesn't put out a light. No one has smothered a light by turning up the darkness.

Jesus didn't say that we are the **light of the church**. It's more comfortable being where there's plenty of light, but light is most needed where it is dark! Imagine everyone walking around with flashlights, shining them in each other's eyes. That doesn't do any good. We are the light of the world—we are most needed where it is dark!

- b. **The light has to be bright, conspicuous, and not blocked** by other objects (i.e., visible)

Background: Houses in Israel were not built with many windows—many times only one, about 18 inches across. The lamp was a bowl filled with oil. It usually was balanced on a lampstand—a tall pedestal that could easily be knocked over. It was somewhat difficult to re-light a lamp (they didn't have matches then) so when the people left the house, for safety's sake and convenience, they would often take the lamp down off the stand, put it on the floor, and put a two-gallon basket over the top to guard against a fire being started.

What are some of the baskets that we place over our lights?

Indifference (doesn't matter to us whether or not people are going to heaven or hell).

Inconsistency (I say that I'm a follower of Jesus Christ, but my life often betrays that what I say I believe doesn't affect how I live).

In the final analysis, I think that any sins we allow to go unchecked in our lives can function as baskets, blocking the light. We are so paralyzed, ashamed by them, that we don't/can't effectively let Christ's light shine through us.

What people don't do with lights, Jesus will not do with disciples. He will not light us, make us disciples, and then put us under a bushel basket. He has a place for you and me to shine and shine brightly. He has designed that our light will shine, people will see it, and God will be glorified (become bigger and bigger).

You can't miss this light (city set on a hill) As Christians we weren't called into God's secret service. If we live light-reflective lives, we will stand out! The implication is that the light is there, and will naturally shine, unless we do something to hinder it, cover it up.

Candlestick Christians look for and accept opportunities to let their light shine. **Bushel basket Christians** hide their light instead. Some of us today need to get out from under the bushel basket we've used for hiding, figure out what visible place God has for us, and figure out how to let our lights shine brightly.

D. The effect

- 1. Salt keeps something bad from happening (decay is hindered)**
- 2. Light enables something good to happen (people see their way and God is glorified)**

Conclusion: How do we let our light shine?

According to this passage, how do we as Christians allow our light to shine? I want you to look at the text here and think about this question. What things should we be doing?

[14] "You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. [15] Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. [16] In the same way, let your light shine before

men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven. Matthew 5:13-16 (NIV)

“See your good deeds and praise our Father in heaven.” The light Jesus wants us to shine out into the darkness of this world is doing good. Living in such a way that we touch people at their point of need in tangible, practical, effective ways.

Illustration of ladies in the church taking meals to a family and opening the door for further conversation about Christ. We win a hearing for the Gospel of Christ as we tangibly demonstrate His love through our good deeds.

Illustration of interview on NBC with two pastors from Houston, TX who are mobilizing their churches to feed and house the scores of thousands of refugees from Hurricane Katrina (Ed Young and Kirby John Caldwell). We, as Christ’s representatives, win a hearing for the Gospel as we tangibly demonstrate His love by our good works.

Illustration of Southern Baptist lady in Mississippi cooking for those who are homeless and displaced. We will only see our world respond to Christ as they see that we really believe what we claim to believe. How do they see and evaluate that? When we start living lives of doing good.

1. Doing good is a **command**, not an option.
2. Doing good is a **continuation** of Jesus’ ministry. Jesus said in John 8:12, “I am the light of the world. And in John 9:5 he said, “As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world.” So, when he turns to us as disciples and says, “You are the light of the world,” He’s looking forward to the time that He will not be here, but his disciples still will. That means that the sorts of things Jesus did then, He expects us to do now.
3. Doing good is **conspicuous**: You can’t miss this light (city set on a hill) As Christians we weren’t called into God’s secret service. If we live light-reflective lives, we will stand out!
4. Doing good is **contagious** (a few weeks ago I took one of my daughters and spent an hour handing out ice-cold water at a busy intersection on a hot afternoon. When we were done, she asked, “Dad, when can we do this again?”). The result is that there are more and more people on this earth who are glorifying and praising our Great God.

My goal is that we would develop the habit of sharing the love of God for this world through Jesus Christ in tangible, low-risk ways, trusting the Holy Spirit to bless our efforts and bring a harvest.

This Little Light of Mine, I’m Gonna Let It Shine

This little light of mine, I'm gonna let it shine
Let it shine, for the Lord, all the time.

Hide it under a bushel, NO! I'm gonna let it shine.
Hide it under a bushel, NO! I'm gonna let it shine.
Let it shine, for the Lord, all the time.

All around the neighborhood, I'm gonna let it shine
All around the neighborhood, I'm gonna let it shine
Let it shine, for the Lord, all the time.

Won't let Satan blow it out, I'm gonna let it shine
Won't let Satan blow it out, I'm gonna let it shine
Let it shine, for the Lord, all the time.

Let it shine till Jesus comes, I'm gonna let it shine.
Let it shine till Jesus comes, I'm gonna let it shine.
Let it shine, for the Lord, all the time.