

“Your Identity Contains Salt And Light”

Isaiah 58:1-9a

Psalm 112:1-9

1 Corinthians 2:1-12

Matthew 5:13-20

The kingdom of heaven is a way of being which proclaims hope. Hope is the expectation that God will do what God has promised.

Yes, the kingdom of heaven is now coming about on earth as it is in heaven. But living the Christian life or living the kingdom of heaven is a way of being which proclaims hope. Paul confirms this when he writes in 1 Corinthians 2:2, “For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and him crucified.” Being formed by Jesus and taking on his identity demonstrates the kingdom of heaven coming near through our way of being, in our words and deeds, because they show forth the salt and light of Jesus to others.

Isaiah 58:1-9a, Psalm 112:1-9, 1 Corinthians 2:1-12, and Matthew 5:13-20 articulate how the kingdom of heaven is a way of being which proclaims hope. This way of being is developed by living the disciplines of prayer, worship, the good life, humility, and the identity in Christ.

Isaiah 58:1-9a lifts up two of the five disciplines of living the kingdom of heaven as a way of being which proclaims hope. These disciplines are prayer and worship. The prophet Isaiah in 58:6-9a writes,

Is not this the fast that I choose: to loose the bonds of injustice, to undo the thongs of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free, and to break every yoke? Is it not to share your bread with the hungry, and bring the homeless poor into your house; when you see the naked, to cover them, and not to hide yourself from your own kin? Then your light shall break forth like the dawn, and your healing shall spring up quickly; your vindicator shall go before you, the glory of the Lord shall be your rear guard. Then you shall call, and the Lord will answer; you shall cry for help, and he will say, Here I am.

In this text, prayer is an act of crying out to God for help, which requires the inward journey of self-awareness. The outcome is repentance. Worship is the journey outward. Once encountered by God, worshippers engage those outside the walls of worship with practices that mend the hurting, loose the bonds of injustice, undo the thongs of the yoke, let the oppressed go free, and break every yoke.

Psalm 112:1-9 lifts up one of the five disciplines of living the kingdom of heaven as a way of being which proclaims hope. This discipline is the good life. The psalmist in Psalm 112:5 writes, “It is well with those who deal generously and lend, who conduct their affairs with justice.” The good life is one that is lived generously and justly. The good life testifies to others about God through the power of the Holy Spirit not the power of wise and persuasive words. This means the fruit of the Spirit is evidence of God’s activity in us. The good life shines light into the darkness

1 Corinthians 2:1-12 lifts up one of the five disciplines of living the kingdom of heaven as a way of being which proclaims hope. This discipline is humility. Paul in 1 Corinthians 2:3-5 writes,

I did not come proclaiming the mystery of God to you in lofty words or wisdom. For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and him crucified. And I came to you in weakness and in fear and in much trembling. My speech and my proclamation were not with plausible words of wisdom, but with a demonstration of the Spirit and of power, so that your faith might rest not on human wisdom but on the power of God.

Humility is the manner in which one’s life points others to Jesus not oneself. Humility leads individuals and the church to submit their words to the Word (written and living) which then nurtures the hearer by the Spirit instead of manipulation, calculation, and measurement.

The text in Matthew 5:13-20 lifts up one of the five disciplines of living the kingdom of heaven as a way of being which proclaims hope. This discipline is the identity in Christ. Jesus in Matthew 5:13-14 says, “You are the salt of the earth; but if salt has lost its taste, how can its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything....You are the light of the world. A city built on a hill cannot be hid. No one after lighting a lamp puts it under a bushel basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all in the house.” Living the identity in Christ makes the visible works of the kingdom of heaven an opportunity for others to praise and glorify God. Salt and light penetrate one’s identity in Christ. Salt and like make a tangible difference in people’s lives.¹

Living the kingdom of heaven as a way of being which proclaims hope demands we take seriously the testimony of our lives, brought about by the disciplines of prayer, worship, the good life, humility, and the identity in Christ. Tony Campolo tells this story about the difference between title and testimony: Each year on the Sunday between Christmas and New Year’s Day, Dr. Campbell, the pastor of Mt. Carmel Baptist Church in Philadelphia, asks the young people who are students at colleges and universities to give reports of how their educational experiences have been going. After they’ve shared, Dr. Campbell says...

Children, you’re going to die! You may not think you’re going to die. But you’re going to die. One of these days, they’re going to take you out to the cemetery, drop you in a hole, throw some dirt on your face, and go back to the church and eat potato salad. When you were born, you alone were crying and everybody else was happy. The important question I want to ask is this: When you die are you alone going to be happy, leaving everybody else crying? The answer depends on whether you live to get titles, or you live to get testimonies. When they lay you in

¹In the five paragraphs above of textual analysis, I have benefited from the thinking of Patricia K. Tull, Ken Evers-Hood, Eric Todd Myers, Charles L. Aaron Jr., Scott McKnight, Christopher T. Holmes, and Zaida Maldonado Perez in *Connections, Year A, Volume 1* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2019), 225-227, 228-229, 230-232, 233-235, 235-237, 238-240 and 240-241.

the grave are people going to stand around reciting the fancy titles you earned, or are they going to stand around giving testimonies of the good things you did for them? Will they list your degrees and awards, or will they tell about what a blessing you were to them? Will you leave behind just a newspaper column telling people how important you were, or will you leave crying people who give testimonies of how they've lost the best friend they ever had? There's nothing wrong with titles. Titles are good things to have. But if it ever comes down to a choice between a title or a testimony-go for the testimony. Pharaoh may have had the title...But Moses had the testimony. Nebuchadnezzar may have had the title...But Daniel had the testimony...Queen Jezebel may have had the title...But Elijah had the testimony...Pilate may have had the title...But my Jesus had the testimony.²

Living a testimony is salt and light in the world: salt preserves and adds flavor to the kingdom of heaven. And the light of Christ shows the way for others to experience the kingdom of heaven. Timothy Keller writes this about living a testimony of salt and light to the world in and through your identity in Christ,

Walking with God, who always sees us and loves us, brings a new integrity and sense of self. We cannot and do not simply blend into each setting, saying the things we need to say to get the most benefit out of the situation. We are not merely a set of dramatic roles, changing every time we play to a new set of spectators, because God is our primary audience every moment. So who am I? If I am a Christian, I am who I am before God. Those things God affirms are the true me; those things he prohibits are the intrusions of the foreign matter of sin and not part of the person I was made to be, and the Spirit is bringing about.³

Demonstrate the kingdom of heaven in your words and deeds by practicing the disciplines of prayer, worship, the good life, humility, and the identity in Christ. You are the salt of the earth and the light of the world. Amen.

*This sermon was preached (for the In-Person and Livestream congregations)
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²Tony Campolo, *Who Switched the Price Tags?* (Waco, Texas: WORD Books, 1986), 58-59.

³Timothy Keller, *Making Sense of God* (New York, New York: Viking, 2016), 141.