

# CITY CHURCH-EASTSIDE WEEKLY WORSHIP GUIDE

September 20, 2009



## Sermon on the Mount Salt and Light

*You are the salt of the earth, but if salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored?... You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden.*

Throughout the ages people have always had great expectations of God to the point that sometimes we forget his expectations of us. Last week as we launched into a new series, “The Sermon on the Mount”, we found ourselves in a quandary of expectations. At the time of Christ’s ministry the people of God had attempted to right the ship in various ways with the expectation that God would finally execute His righteous vindication. In their minds this mighty redemptive action would equate to God’s overthrowing the oppressive Gentile nations that had now plundered His people for many centuries. Thus, one could not help but hear the screeching of a record when Jesus began the Beatitudes with “blessed are the poor in spirit”. The people quickly began to learn (or just the opposite, failed to learn) that the power of God would not be

exhibited by the brute force of a messiah, but rather through his sacrifice and likewise the sacrifice of his people. What we began to learn last week about kingdom ethics, is that the way up is the way down. Sketching out kingdom life in verses 1-11, Jesus in verses 13-16 speaks of the resultant impact of such a lifestyle. The purpose of these images was summed up well in the sermon, “Salt’s primary use, in the ancient world, was to preserve meat from spoiling since they didn’t have refrigeration or freezers. And light’s purpose was to expose the world for what it was, driving out the darkness in the process. Do you see what Jesus is getting at? He is saying the world is not as it should be and left to its own devices, without preserving it from decay and then reversing its course of decay, the world would self-destruct.” Amongst other things the Enlightenment and subsequent revolutions exposed our finicky, broken nature. A brief glance at such history reveals that we are a people who toggle back and forth between optimism and pessimism. But what the

gospel of Christ offers is realism. The gospel first offers a realistic outlook on the human condition. We are a broken people which very naturally leads to the brokenness of urban life. Secondly, the gospel offers the answer to our corruption, Christ alone. The power of gospel transformation is not found in seeing ourselves as salt and light, but rather as the conduits of the salt and light of Christ. Finally, the gospel provides the only logical way to preserve our city from decay and bring light to dark places. Our day to day choices say much about our worldview. Centered upon Christ we have the ability to season the world and cultivate beauty. Failing to “be found in Christ” results in an urban consumerism, exploiting the city’s resources for our own gain. Throughout Scripture we see that cities are always of utmost importance to God. It is here, in the decay and darkness of graffiti and crime, that Christ desires to bring about renewal. This week may we be conduits for His salt and light transforming the world around us. *Amen*

# Sermon Application

The questions and thoughts below can be used for further reflection this week. Seek to use a journal or discuss with a friend. Most of all use this to consider how the gospel of Christ can be transforming. Enjoy!

## Application Questions: Matthew 5:13-16 *Intersect: Salt, Light, & the Parish*

1. How does your own story intersect the city? Why have you chosen to live here on the Eastside?
2. What does it mean to have a “theology of geography”? Do you find this to be ingrained in our wider culture? Why or why not?
3. What are the “salt” and “light” images really all about? How does the gospel of Christ empower a different kind of living here in the city? Share stories of how you seen this to be true.
4. How did the Enlightenment alter the relationship between faith and reason? How has it shaped our approach to Christianity today?
5. What do you find challenging about living in the city? How does the gospel of Christ empower you to live amidst the decay and darkness that sometimes characterizes urban life?
6. How does Christianity avoid the extremes of optimism and pessimism?
7. Why does Christianity make the most sense of the human condition and redeeming our city?
8. In the sermon Liz Martin was interviewed regarding salt and light. How did this help you think about being salt & light in your own sphere of influence? What are some goals you have in mind?

If you been around City Church-Eastside, even for a brief time, you’ve heard us use the term “parish ministry”. You might be asking yourself what is the parish model and specifically what does it have to do with peace? Many churches here in Atlanta have a admirable vision to reach the greater metro-area, but that is really not our aim. Parish model ministry is integral to our vision in that it focuses our ministry efforts based on the geography of the eleven historic neighborhoods here on the eastside. A parish focus has an acute impact sociologically, philosophically, and theologically.

We have all felt the sociological strain of living in one of the largest cities in North America. The underdevelopment of public transportation coupled with a lack of geographic boundaries for urban sprawl has created an unsustainable union. The mega-church, while advantageous in some ways, has encouraged a metro-wide focus which in turn causes people to often commute to church much in the same way as they commute to their workplace. Many who commute a great distance to a church often enjoy exuberant Sunday worship, but feel disconnected from community with one another and ministry in a local context. As sociological concerns such as community, the environment, and stewardship come into sharper focus a parish approach comes to the foreground.

As one looks around CCE, a parish approach significantly shapes our ministry philosophy. Our missional community groups are neighborhood oriented allowing people who live just blocks away from one another to grow and serve as residents of their own neighborhood. Our quarterly service projects focus on opportunities right here on the eastside. In summary the parish approach helps to create a greater space for people to live and love.

Finally, a parish approach is supported theologically. God calls us to seek the peace of the city (Jeremiah 29:7). With that in mind, we seek to be a local church that should we ever close our doors the community would mourn. Moreover, a parish mindset directs our questions about our community. Instead of asking “how can I use the city for my advantage” we ask “how can we serve the city for its benefit and the glory of God”. In this way we become a transformative influence as we work to build the kingdom of God on earth as it is in heaven

“The followers (of Jesus) are a visible community; their discipleship visible in action which lifts them out of the world—otherwise it would not be discipleship. And of course the following is as visible to the world as a light in the darkness or a mountain rising from a plain.”

John Stott  
*Christian Counter-Culture*

