

Let me tell you what I want to do this morning, because it's a little bit different than what I usually do and honestly a little bit outside of my comfort zone. But we're just going to do it. For the last two weeks, we've been walking through Matthew 5:13-16, which is very popular, "You are the salt of the earth...You are the light of the world" text. And what we've done that last couple of weeks is just kind of exegetically walked through those verses. We've just kind of said, "This is what salt is...this is what light is...this is what it means to not hide...this is what it means..." We just kind of walked through the text. Now, what I want to do now is, instead of exegetically going through the text, I want to show you how we do this at the Village and what our hopes are at the Village concerning salt and light. The truth is we are a very, very simple place with very few programs and just a few hopeful ideas that we're hoping that the Holy Spirit will work in and do and move. And so, I just want to read a little bit of the text and talk about how we're trying to do that here at the Village. Then I want to read a little bit about light, and I want to talk about how we're trying to do that and what our hope is for that at the Village. And then we'll call it a day.

So let's look. Matthew 5, we'll pick it up in verse 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." So what we said was that salt is depth basically. Salt is a transformed life, a life that's been transformed by the gospel so that belief and transformation line up. And this text is saying is that, where there is belief but no transformation, it's worthless. So then, if you can ascribe all that is correct theologically and all that is correct morally but have not been transformed by that belief in your life, then it's worthless. Then it doesn't mean anything. And then the text goes, "You become a joke to the world around you." And so, I think you've seen this as we've watched churches die at an unbelievable rate while others grow massive at an unbelievable rate and the Christian community seems to lose its influence in society or definitely its respect as a moral compass. Because what's happened is we've said, "This is true and this is right," but in our churches, there's no difference in debt rates, there's no difference in divorce rates, there's no difference in how we give to the poor. Alright, so we are ascribing what is correct and virtuous, but we're not doing it, so that in the end, we're a joke. We're a joke on "South Park." That's what we are. That's what happens. And that's what this text is saying. And so we said that salt was being transformed by the gospel, being transformed by it, not believing it, not being able to ascribe what's correct but being transformed by it.

So how are we trying to do that here? How are we trying to put you in situations where you can be transformed by the gospel? We only do five things, that's all. The first one is home groups. Now, we said last week that if all you do is mechanically do programs, then in the end, all we're doing is that envelope that we had when we were growing up as kids in the church. If you remember, there was an envelope in the back of the pew and you would pull it out and it would ask you, "Did you read your Bible today?: As far as you know. Did you pray?: Yes. Are you here?: Yeah, I put my name on it." And what I said is that programs in any church, ours included, are simply the new envelope. And so what ends up happening to us in terms of mechanical growth is we say, "The Bible says deep, authentic community. We do that via home group, so I went to home group...done." And in the end though, you going to home group on Thursday night or Wednesday night or Tuesday night isn't the end goal. But rather, the goal is that in that setting and in that place, you might find a safe place to be honest about where you are, honest about what your fears are, honest about what your doubts are, honest about what your struggles are, honest about what your secret addictions are and find a place of community and find a place of accountability and find a place that boils out of that one night a week into everyday life.

So our hope is not that you go to group, but rather that you do life with a group of men and women who are pursuing holiness like you, so that a man or woman can come into group and say, "My marriage is on the rocks," and our answer is not simply, "We'll pray for you, buddy. Good luck," or "Have you read 'The Language of Love' by Gary Smalley? I think it would help you. I think it would help your marriage. Read that, and get back to me. I'm a physical touch guy myself." It's always in dudes' top two. In the end, what our hope is is that because we're doing life deeply together, we would be moved with compassion over the sorrow and pain of someone doing life in our little group, and then what occurs next morning is a phone call that goes out and says, "Come have dinner at our house tonight. Come have dinner at our house, and let's pray." And then on Saturday, there's another phone call that goes out, "Come go to dinner with us, and then we'll go to church." Then on Monday, there's a letter that goes out, just a hand written letter of encouragement, "We're praying. Anything we can do to help..." Then we do life deeply together. Do you know how counter cultural that is? Seriously, is there any other place in our culture where the question, "How are you doing?" is legit? I mean, where else does that question legitimately get asked? Most people ask that question, and they're not really looking for an answer. Have you ever had that happen to you? "How are you doing?" "I'm doing miserable." "Whoa, whoa, whoa. That's not what I meant, bro. That was just polite greeting." Yeah, I mean nobody cares. Do you know how counter cultural it is to love someone in such a way that your home is open and your time is open and your resources are open and your lives are open to walk deeply? I mean, do you know how different that is than how the majority of the world lives, specifically the majority of our society that has massive back porches and non-existent front porches? We have huge backyards, but a blade of grass out front. So this is our hope. Our hope isn't group. Are you serious? Our hope is not that you join a group, but rather that we want to try to create atmospheres where you might have the best shot at that, where you take the risk to be known and to know others and do life deeply, holding each other accountable, teaching, walking, those kind of things. So we do groups because we're hoping it will create depth. Does it always? Oh, no, no, no, no. Is it our best shot? Yeah. So that's the first thing we do, group.

The second thing we do is recovery. I am a strong believer that everyone here should go through the steps. I just am. All it is is discipleship on steroids. That's all it is...now, not literally. Some of you twenty year olds are like, "Oh, I'm in." Not literally, I just think everyone should go through the steps, because everyone has short circuits. It's called iniquity; everyone has it. And we're all products of a fallen world where there's been damage and there's been hits and there's been scars and most of us are acting and reacting out of ways we have no idea what the source is. Most of us are confused by our own way of doing things. And if you're in here today and are like, "Not me," then I would say your issue is secret pride, so secret that you don't even know it. So we do recovery, Grace Abounds, Recovery at the Village here on Thursday night. We do recovery, because it's just a "no holds barred," discipleship on steroids, let's look at the root issues of idolatry and pride in your life, let's confess them, get accountability for them and move on. In fact, I'll go so far as to say this: I think all of our groups should look like our recovery groups. So we do recovery here.

The third thing would be simply what I call events. I'll give you an example. We do Saturday seminars here. A couple of months ago, we did "Bible Study 101," which was not how to study the Bible but how to read it daily. Next month, we're doing "Bible Study 201," which will be a Saturday morning. I'll take the first hour and fifteen minutes and teach how you should study a book of the Bible, Geoff Ashley will come up afterwards and teach how you study a topic in the Scriptures, and we'll do a Saturday morning seminar. On Friday night, we're going to show the film, Celine's going to get up and talk about forgiveness. Just events, we do little events like that. In September, there's a Saturday seminar on a Christian worldview or how you see Christianly all things. We've got another film on theology scheduled for later in the year. These are just little events we do. We do financial counseling to get you out of debt. These are just little events that we do.

Two more things: sermons. We preach a particular way here. Whether I do it or we bring someone else in to do it, we like exegetical teaching. And what that means is we want line by line, verse by verse teaching. That's what we want. I

like to teach through books of the Bible. Recently I read a guy who said preaching through books of the Bible is lazy, and I took that to mean he didn't know how to do it. But I don't know how to do what he does, so we're even. In the end, I like preaching through books of the Bible because it forces the issue and makes me preach about things I would never wake up on Saturday morning going, "I should preach about that." So starting in September, we'll begin the book of Luke. We'll probably be in it well over a year. We'll just line by line the book of Luke, and it's going to shrink the church, because there's some crazy stuff in there. I'm already going, "Man, I'm just showing the video that weekend, shooting it on Tuesday and not going." It should be great. So we want to unapologetically preach the Scriptures. That's what we want to do. We don't want to apologize for it. We don't want to water it down. We just want to preach and say that's what it is. Let the Holy Spirit move." It's what we want to do.

Let me say a word about this. I'll just be real honest with you, and I know this might be a little offensive. Every Christmas and every summer, and I know what's happening, we start getting pounded with e-mails on events for children. "Why are we not doing Awanas? Why are we not doing this? Why are we not doing that?" And all of them quote the same story in a different context. Here's the story: "We were at a family reunion, and cousin Sally could say all the books of the Bible. And my little Betty couldn't. What are we teaching our kids?" Alright, I want to address it. For whatever reason, over the last fifteen years, the Lord's never let me start anything, I've always been part of a transition. So, I've always come into pre-existing things and have been like a philosophical/theological change agent. Great time. And when you do that, you really hear crazy, crazy things. Like a lady cornered me one time and said, "I just cannot live in a world where my kids don't know the hymns." And thought I was like on a hidden camera show or something, so I was looking around, "You almost got me, Bleecker...Oh wait. You're serious?" I love the hymns. I love them. We sang "Old Rugged Cross" this morning. In fact, in this service when we're locked in for time, there was actually another song we ended up cutting, because he cut "Old Rugged Cross" last night and I said, "Don't cut 'Old Rugged Cross.' Cut this one. Put that one in there. I just love that old song." "It Is Well With My Soul," I don't know if there's ever been a greater song written. I love the hymns, but in the end, I don't care if my kids know them at all if they're passionately and deeply in love with Christ. I could care less what song they're singing. That's the hill we want to die on? So I say all that to day this: the Next Gen department here works hard on two things. Number one is teaching the glory and and majesty and might of God to our children, and the second is trying to involve you in that process. There is no text in our sacred literature that says it is the church's job to impart the might of Christ to your children. That's yours. And all empirical data says that when the church tries and the parents aren't in it, it does not work. And if you're interested, e-mail [pastor@thevillagechurch.net](mailto:pastor@thevillagechurch.net) and I will send you the empirical data of how many, the percentages of students who grow up in the church, graduate and walk away from the church for decades. So what we've done historically hasn't worked. Now don't get me wrong. I want my daughter and son to know where Obediah is, but in the end, if they have hearts that have been captivated by Christ, Obediah will come. Like right now, over there, they're singing and they're hearing a seven week message on the gospel of Christ. And last week, they taught the gospel of Christ in creation, the gospel, the good news in creation, "Now you can see the splendor and majesty and redemptive message in creation." And when you picked up your kid, you got a sheet of paper that said, "Here are questions to ask your kid. Here are projects to do with your kid. If you have time, take them to the planetarium. If you don't look up some things on the web, the stars, solar systems, pictures. Take them to the arboretum. Ask them these questions. If not, find a garden locally. Walk them through there. Ask them questions. Lead them." Because that give you the opportunity. We're just giving you tools. Because it's your job. We're not going to get judged on it, you are. I am not going to have to stand in front of God and give an account for the impartation of the glory of God to your children. You will, not me. Not Anne, not Mal, not any of that staff, you will. Do you know that even our preschool does it? I have a two year old who I don't even think can even answer some of the questions I'm supposed to ask him. "So what did Ruth do?" "Cracker!" "Here's a cracker, alright." This is what we're doing. We're trying to empower you as parents to be involved deeply in the spiritual formation of your children, because honestly it's a loss if we teach them about the splendors of Christ and you seem uninterested. Come on, man. You get them all day, every day; we get them for 45 minutes a week. If you're banking on us, you're in trouble.

That's all we do. There's nothing else that the Village Church does. There's no massive discipleship program. And let me tell you something. All of that, everything I just named is on you. You can do every one of those things and get absolutely nothing out of it. You can mechanically join a home group, check it off your list; go through the twelve steps, check it off your list; ask the questions to your kid, check it off your list; come to film and theology, maybe bring your own popcorn with some caramel sauce on the top, check it off your list. You can do all those things and check them off, but if you're not going to invest, you're not going to risk, you're not take it seriously, you're not going to meditate, think, wrestle or be obedient, then you'll just get more information to be arrogant about.

Look at the next part of the text. "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. You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden." Let me tell you what we do for light. There's one primary push out on light. Here's what it is. It's monumentally easy, and it doesn't cost anything. Here's the best way for light to shine out of a church. You transformed by the gospel. You transformed by the gospel, working in every domain of society. You being transformed by the gospel and being a businessman in the economic domain of our society. You being transformed by the gospel and working in the education domain of our society. You being transformed by the gospel, working in the political domain of our society. You being transformed by the gospel of Christ, in agriculture. You transformed by the gospel, working in the arts. That's the best way for light to shine out of here. You being transformed. Not only working in every domain, but living in every neighborhood. Not only you working in every domain and living in every neighborhood, but then on top of that, understanding and grasping and believing all that you have and all that you are has been given to you by God, for God. And then we'll take it a step further. You being impacted and transformed by the gospel of Christ, being obedient to the Holy Spirit's leading on your life. Do you know how many things go on around here that are not sanctioned by us in any way? There are groups of men who do neighborhood Bible studies. They just do Bible studies. They just invite their whole neighborhoods. There's a guy who right now is teaching through the book of John with his neighborhood on Friday night, and then they play Texas Hold 'Em afterwards. There's a few men and women in here that I know who lead Bible studies at their work place one lunch a week. "Hey, come on in. I'm just going to walk through the gospel of John or the gospel of Luke or we're going to read the book of James. If you guys want to talk about it, come on in." Do you know that there's a group here that goes to Zambia every year? Another group goes to the Congo. Another group still, goes to Romania. Another group goes to Kenya. There's a group of businessmen who feed homeless people downtown on Tuesday. You know what that is? That's transformed lives heading out. Can you imagine in a massive scale if we all went out? Here's the thinking that's so frustrating about programing. "The church needs to do something about that." You're the church! It sounds like the Holy Spirit told you. I hate to be the guy that brings that up to you. So that's primary.

Now, we've created three paths to help you see some things, but they're just paths. They're not sacred. I'll tell you what they are. In our local area, this year we'll spend close to \$240,000 not including a salaried position here at the church on local needs. Whether that be Transform, which was our effort to reach out to poor communities and poor schools in the area. Whether that be adult care ministries, apartment ministries, those kind of thing. I'll give you a great thing you can be involved in right now. As you walk out the doors today, there will be these brown paper sacks sitting on the table right as you walk out. And on the outside taped to that bag is a school supply list. And our hope is to get hundreds of backpacks and stuff them full of school supplies. And we're going down in the inner-city and we're going to be working with Cornerstone Baptist Church, because we always want to empower the church in the local area. We don't want to walk into a community and emasculate it. Instead, you want to build it up. So you find the local church, and your pour into them. And we're going to let them hand out those backpacks to everybody in that community. Let's do it. Come in, it's #2 pencils and some markers. Grab a sack on your way out.

Church planting. This year we'll spend close to \$75,000. We financially support a church in urban Philadelphia. In fact, I was on the phone with Eric Mason, the pastor of that church, trying to get him down here to preach. And then his worship leader, named Deuce, will lead worship for us that weekend. And it should be fun. We sponsor four churches in the Dallas area, two of them in an inner-city area. One of them, that money goes to a staff position at their church. And in the other one, we fund an after school program for troubled teens. That's where that money goes. And you might be thinking, "Well, we're understaffed and we're kind of strapped for resources ourselves, why are we giving away hundreds of thousands of dollars and even giving thousands of thousands of dollars to local churches, churches that are actually in our area? Because this thing is way bigger than us. And if all we see is us, we're going to get bored really quick. I want this number, specifically this church planting number and church support number to go up by hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of thousands of dollars. Here's why. Do you know that in a hundred years from now, the Village Church will not be vital, it will not be fast growing, it probably will not exist. Historically, any church that grows exponentially under one leader usually doesn't survive the third generation. Which means they get a second pastor after the one long-term guy goes away, he either retires or dies, and the second guy does okay. By the third guy, it falls apart, always. We don't know of one church that has actually survived that cycle, which means uh oh. So instead of sowing all our energy and effort into us, why don't we sow it into the kingdom of God that's eternal? I'd plant a church in our parking lot if I could. In the next few years, I guarantee you we will financially fund and start a church in our immediate area. I guarantee you we will.

Internationally, this year we'll spend \$290,000 not including a salaried position on projects world wide. Whether that's orphanages, whether that's construction, whether that's pastoral training. Some of that's in closed countries, some of it's in open countries, but we'll spend close to \$300,000 on projects. There's an additional \$250,000 raised by the Village Church to support our missionaries, to provide them housing and insurance and the kind of things they need in the countries that they are in. So that's about half a million dollars on that, not to mention that over the last four to five years, I think we've adopted around 700 compassion kids. So right around 700 kids, specifically in Guatemala, that get education, clothes and food because of the Village Church. And the other thing I would tell you is that there are dozens and dozens and dozens of trips there every year. Because the vow I made to you my first year here is that we would never spend money where you couldn't go smell, touch and taste. And that's true to this day. Everywhere we have put money, you can hop on a plane and go check it out. If you want to go see and meet your compassion kid, look on the schedule, let's go.

So that's it. The Village Church, done. That's who we are. That's what we're trying to do. And my hope is that you go on a short-term trip, although short-term trips are great. I'm hoping that on that short-term trip, something impacts your soul so that you see the whole world differently and you'll come back and live differently here or you'll just pack up all your stuff and move to a different country. My hope is that when you go downtown and begin to work in the inner-city and begin to work with the poor and needy of the world, you'd be unbelievably convicted with how you spend and how you live. I mean honestly in suburbia, most of our frustrations are not really frustrations we want to voice to the Lord. "I want hardwood floors this year...My car is a piece of junk. I mean, it's an '05. I don't know how I do it either." Right? So our hope is that when you walk these paths, you'll be transformed and live differently. Not that these paths are in any way sacred. They're not. They're just paths that we hope that as you walk on, you're transformed in.

So this is who we are. We've got a lot of enemies, primarily ourselves. I would say the second thing is our culture, our own society that would say at every turn, every commercial, everything you see, that it's about you and what you've earned. We've got to fight that. And I would even say we've got to fight even our own Evangelical culture that would say the church is a place for healthy people and people who have it all together. When that wasn't even the disciples Jesus chose. He was like, "Shy, bashful, quiet kid; the moron, Peter, come on;..." What? All of a sudden we've got to be perfect to walk in here? And then, like I said, the very air we breathe is a little bit poisonous. I love technology. Honestly, I don't

think there's a greater thing invented than TiVo. I know some of you are like, "What about the iPhone?" The iPhone cannot record "Man. vs. Wild." TiVo can. But let me tell you what technology does. Technology distracts us from what really matters. That's all it does. I'm grateful for it, and I love it. But in the end, you had better use with care.

The other big enemy that we have is we've grown too quickly. I mean, how do you do deep, authentic community, accountability, life and all of those things when you're growing by hundreds of people a month? I don't know. It's this real double edged sword. On one hand, there's a group of people who are like, "No, we just need to shut down the group. We don't need any space. Let's just lock it and go deeper." And then you've got other people who are like, "No, swing it open as wide as we can." And I honestly think both sides are a little bit loony. I think it's probably right here in the middle somewhere. So is the Albertson's going to help? Yeah. It will let us do a few less services for six or seven months or so. It will enable us to build some things out that we couldn't do here, a place to go and get prayed for after a service, a little bit more seamless process for dropping off your children and picking them up, those kind of things. It definitely will help with those things. Is it going to make everything easy and be the answer forever? Uh, no. No it's not. The return of Christ, that's the answer forever. Until then, we work like Arminians and sleep like Calvinists.

So, if you're a guest, that's who we are. If you've been here awhile, it's a reminder of what we're trying to do. "You are the salt of the earth, but if salt loses its saltiness, it's worthless. You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor would anyone light a lamp and put it under a bowl. So I think this is going to take a while, and I think it's going to be filled with joy and sorrow, but it should be fun. I'm in. Let's pray. "Father, these things feel impossible to me. They really do. Like, community happening at that level, it just feels impossible to me, as fragmented as our lives are, as compartmentalized as we've been trained to be and as guarded as we've learned to be. Community at that level and transformation, I see little pieces of it, but it as a whole feels impossible. And so, I thank You for the constant encouragement in Scripture that You're in the business of the impossible. I pray that, by Your Holy Spirit's power, You would create community here in an unbelievably deep level and that we would live and see others as more important than ourselves and all of our resources as gifts from You, for the kingdom. And I pray for obedience to what we know rather than knowing more. And I pray for transformed lives. I submit the Albertson's to you. I think You're in it and You're leading us that way, but I pray once again for these men and women, that they submit that to You and confess that we want You, not a new building. So lead and guide, help and provide. It's for Your beautiful name. Amen."