

**PP**Indispensable: just five weeks before the outbreak of World War II the British received an amazing gift from Polish Military Intelligence. The gift was a reconstruction of the German enigma machine and techniques for decrypting ciphers produced on it. This gift made possible the beginning of Ultra, the British work breaking high level encrypted enemy radio and teleprinter communications. Winston Churchill proclaimed, “It was thanks to Ultra that we won the war.” Dwight D Eisenhower at the end of the war described Ultra as having been “decisive to Allied victory in World War II”. The official historian of British intelligence in World War II declared that Ultra shorten the war by not less than two years and probably by four years; moreover in the absence of Ultra, it is uncertain how the war would’ve ended.

Indispensable. British pastor and theologian John Stott says something that stops us dead in our tracks when we are complaining about the direction of our society. Stott speaking to an American audience **PP** said, **You know what your own country is like. I'm a visitor, and I wouldn't presume to speak about America. But I know what Great Britain is like. I know something about the growing dishonesty, corruption, immorality, violence, pornography, the diminishing respect for human life, and the increase in abortion. Whose fault is it? Let me put it like this: if the house is dark at night, there is no sense in blaming the house. That's what happens when the sun goes down. The question to ask is, "Where is the light?" If meat goes bad, there is no sense in blaming the meat. That is what happens when the bacteria are allowed to breed unchecked. The question to ask is, "Where is the salt?" If society becomes corrupt like a dark night or stinking fish, there's no sense in blaming society. That's what happens when fallen human society is left to itself and human evil is unrestrained and unchecked. The question to ask is "Where is the church?"**

**PP** Where is the church? Why would John Stott turn the focus on the church rather than blaming society? It goes back to that word: indispensable. God is in the house... Matthew 5.13–16, <sup>13</sup> “*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.*” <sup>14</sup> “*You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden.*” <sup>15</sup> “*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.*” <sup>16</sup> “*In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good works and praise your Father in heaven.*” Indispensable. You are the salt of the earth. You are the light of the world. But the English translation misses from the Greek is that the you is emphatic. Literally Jesus says, “You, you are the salt of the earth. You, you are the light of the world.” Jesus says to his listeners that they are vitally important to the world, as salt was vitally necessary for everyday life. He tells them that they are the light of the world. They now are the light shining hope into the world. They are the salt and the light without which the earth cannot survive and without them it remains in darkness. Indispensable.

**PP**Jesus says that if global warming is going to take place, not the heating up of the earth, but the warming of neighborhoods, communities, cities, nations, of all the earth that his church is central, critical, indispensable to that warming. It is a warming that speaks of salt and light, but salt and light are just another way speaking of doing good works, the kind of good works that warm neighborhoods and cities and cause those in those neighborhoods and cities to praise God. Think about this: as the church was established in the early Roman Empire we begin to see how Paul grabbed hold of this idea from Jesus and insisted that those in the church be people of good works in their community. In the books that Paul wrote latest, books that are often called the Pastoral Epistles, we hear the call over and over again to do

good works. Take a moment and listen to the words of Paul and let them splash over your soul as a people called to make this world a warmer place. **PP**

- *...women should adorn themselves...with what is proper for women who profess godliness—with **good works**. 1 Timothy 2.9–10*
- *<sup>9</sup> Let a widow be enrolled if she is not less than sixty years of age, having been the wife of one husband, <sup>10</sup> and having a reputation for **good works**: if she has brought up children, has shown hospitality, has washed the feet of the saints, has cared for the afflicted, and has devoted herself to every **good work**. 1 Timothy 5*
- *<sup>24</sup> The sins of some men are conspicuous, going before them to judgment, but the sins of others appear later. <sup>25</sup> So also **good works** are conspicuous, and even those that are not cannot remain hidden. 1 Timothy 5*
- *<sup>17</sup> As for the rich in this present age, charge them not to be haughty, nor to set their hopes on the uncertainty of riches, but on God, who richly provides us with everything to enjoy. <sup>18</sup> They are to do good, to be rich in **good works**, to be generous and ready to share... 1 Timothy 6*
- *<sup>7</sup> Show yourself in all respects to be a model of **good works**, and in your teaching show integrity, dignity, <sup>8</sup> and sound speech that cannot be condemned, so that an opponent may be put to shame, having nothing evil to say about us. Titus 2*
- *...our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, <sup>14</sup> who gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for **good works**. Titus 2*
- *<sup>8</sup> The saying is trustworthy, and I want you to insist on these things, so that those who have believed in God may be careful to devote themselves to **good works**. These things are excellent and profitable for people. Titus 3*
- *<sup>14</sup> And let our people learn to devote themselves to **good works**, so as to help cases of urgent need, and not be unfruitful. Titus 3*

**PP**We are to be a people who devote themselves to good works. A question for us this morning: what would happen to our perception of ourselves, to our perception of us as a church if we stop calling ourselves Christians and started saying we are a people who are the salt of the earth and the light of the world, who have been redeemed to be zealous for good works? As you went through your day-to-day stuff would it change you to say, “I am God’s salt and light, I am to be zealous for good works?” How would it change us as a community of faith to hold that we are salt and light, a community that is to be zealous for good works? This latter question is as important as the former since when Jesus says you use addressing his disciples together and not just individual persons. We are to be a community that is shaped and molded so that we are zealous for good works.

**PPT**These good works are to bring praise to God. Which bring something the mind: our works have the ability not only to bring praise to God they also have the ability to rob God of praise. This is what Paul says about what happened to the nation of Israel. Their actions rather than bringing God honor and glory and praise, caused the nations to blaspheme God. We read in Romans 2. <sup>22</sup> *You who say that one must not commit adultery, do you commit adultery? You who abhor idols, do you rob temples?* <sup>23</sup> *You who boast in the law dishonor God by breaking the law.* <sup>24</sup> *For, as it is written, “The name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you.”* Paul’s overall point in Romans 2 is that the people of Israel did not live up to

their calling, their calling to be a light to the nations, to show the nations the way to God, and to God's heart where one does justice loves mercy and walk humbly with God, this nation that was supposed to be part of God's solution instead became part of the problem. When they became part of the problem God's name was blasphemed among the nations because of them.

When Jesus talks about salt losing saltiness or light being hidden he is talking about people who proclaim to be his followers who is doing good deeds do bad deeds and so take away God's honor, dignity, reputation, and status. Bad deeds as we see in Romans 2 are the things we do that are not in line with our calling; not in line with being part of God's solution for his cold and broken world. So thinking back to last week when we talked about being people of humility, gentleness, patience, being those who bear with each other in love we would say the cultivation of these virtues is a salt and light kind of thing, on the other hand, being people pride, cantankerousness, impatience, and an unwillingness to put up with minor annoyances reflects not only salt losing saltiness but a lifestyle that takes away God's honor, dignity, reputation, and status. Or again, we know that one of the important parts of what God considers good and necessary in this cold and broken world is what he tells us in Micah 6.8, *"He has told you what is good and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, to love mercy, and walk humbly with your God."* Our calling is connected with justice, mercy, and a humble walk. Such things warm this broken world. When we fail to live them it reflects not only salt losing saltiness of a lifestyle that takes away God's honor, dignity, reputation, and status. We know too that the very center of God solution for this cold and broken world is for people to find forgiveness through Jesus Christ, to learn to walk in his ways, and to be part of his kingdom. Through believing in Jesus Christ people are invited into the kingdom work of being God's co-creators, his stewards, those who work with God to renew his creation. When we fail to speak this good word, to invite people to believe in Jesus Christ and enter his kingdom we are living a lifestyle that takes away God's honor, dignity, reputation, and status. When we wonder if something is a good deed or a bad deed, whether as individuals or as a body of Christ, one of the central questions we have to ask ourselves is, "Is this in line with my calling to be part of God's solution for this cold and broken world?"

**PP**We are to be a community that is shaped and molded so that we are zealous for good works, good works are to bring praise to God. What if we stop calling ourselves Christians and start calling themselves people of salt and light who are zealous for good works to bring praise to God? One of the things that most likely will happen is the realization is that if our good works are going to be seen that they bring praise to God we have to be involved in the life of our community. When Jesus talks about the lamp that's in the house that spreads light those who were listening knew that when you lit the lamp in the house it was placed on or hung from a stand so as to provide maximum benefit from the light. In the past some Christians have believed that they could stand apart from their community and yet be effective light. It was enough that the neighbors saw them leave for church on Sunday morning, not swear when they were working on a project in the garage, or any number of other things. These folks believe that they are providing example for the neighbors even though they would have no interaction with them. But the call of Christ the salt and light, the picture of a lamp providing maximum benefit calls us not to let our light shine from a distance but to let our light shine where there can be maximum benefit, and where people see it in such a way that they don't praise us but they praise God.

**PP**We are to be a community that is shaped and molded so that we are zealous for good works, good works are to bring praise to God. What if we stop calling ourselves Christians and start calling themselves people of salt and light who are zealous for good works to bring praise to God? One of the things that most likely will happen is the realization is that if our good works are going to be seen that they bring praise to God we have to be involved in the life of our community. Think about what would happen if thousands of followers of Christ in this community would become involved in the life of the community. How would that change our neighborhoods? How would it change your neighborhood? Think about this for a moment. How many of us reflect the importance of being salt and light in our neighborhoods? How many of us imagine, for instance, that being part of the local neighborhood association is actually connected to our being people of God's kingdom? We might think it's nice to be part of the neighborhood association, something we do apart from being salt and light, but to see it is integrated into our being kingdom people, and thinking about things in our neighborhood Association from a kingdom perspective that significantly different. When we become part of the neighborhood association as salt and light we come in as those whose central concern is to do good. Here's the deal--good in our neighborhoods is closely connected with helping people flourish. How do we build our neighborhood so that our children can flourish here? How do we build our neighborhood so that people of diverse backgrounds can flourish t how to rebuild our neighborhood so that strangers can easily be welcomed? How many of us imagine having good relationships with our neighbors so that we know them, they know us, we watch out for one another, when our neighbors on vacation we watch over their home and they return the favor, how many of us imagine that building that kind of neighborhood also builds a place of hospitality to strangers and so brings greater warmth. Eric Jacobson in his book "Sidewalks in the Kingdom" points out that when we are confident in our neighborhood, we know each other then when the stranger walks down the sidewalk we feel free to welcome them, to speak to them, to be hospitable because we know our neighbors are watching out for us. How do we build our neighborhood so the neighborhood next ours can flourish? For this is not just about my neighborhood is about those neighborhoods and indeed the city that holds each one of those neighborhoods.

**PP**The city that holds each one of those neighborhoods—a friend of mine who studies and writes about cities said this in an article, **Our cities are storehouses of our deep passions because they give us a small picture of our shared life together. Cities don't have the grand politics of war and peace, the high-rolling international trade treaties, or the silver-tongued, sharply dressed diplomats, but they express stories about common life that big-time national and international politics don't tell. I once had a pastor say to me, "Show me your bedroom, and I'll show you who you are." Similarly, I suggest, take me to your cities, your local places where you live out your everyday life, and I'll show you who you are.** An interesting thought, "take me to your cities, your local places where you about your everyday life, and also you who you are." What if my friend came to you and asked you to do just that, to take them with you the local places where you about your everyday life, what would he be able to tell you about who you are? Would he find somebody who is connected to their community, connected in their community, would he find someone who lives on the outskirts of their community, who would even know what local places to take him to, what would he find?

Why does it matter? Isn't it enough to just be part of our neighborhood, to make sure that that our little spot is flourishing, that we do good there? It's a start to be sure, but the reality is for our neighborhoods to flourish our cities need to flourish. Flourishing cities are the cornerstone of flourishing neighborhoods. And as researchers are discovering flourishing downtowns are hugely important to flourishing cities. As strange as it may sound one of the goods that we can do is to support downtown areas. Think about this in just one area, the things that we buy. Our personal economic decisions can be used impact our communities in positive ways. Just as we seek to vote for the best people so we might want to purchase things in a way that will strengthen our city and make it more interesting and enriching place in which to live. To do this, we simply need to widen our perspective on our economic decisions,. Our tendency is to think very narrowly in economic decisions. We compare prices, we get the same product for even slightly lower price somewhere else we will do so. We need to learn to take one more step and say what else is being impacted by the purchase of this product? Knowing, for instance, that the maintaining of the downtown area makes for healthy city.

**PP**All of this seems very strange to us. As Eric Jacobson says when he talks about something called new urbanism—a movement that seeks to build healthy neighborhoods and healthy cities—... **to most Christians, the idea of urban planning seems as relevant to faith as a current additions to the American kennel associations list of approved dog breeds—interesting to some, but certainly not vital faith.** Not vital unless you begin to ask what it means to be known and to live as salt and light, as those who do good deeds that bring praise to your father in heaven. Then questions about the neighborhood you are a part of the city you live in and how to bring flourishing to both becomes vital.

**PP**Vital for you and for the community of faith. For Jesus's words were aimed not just at each one of us, but all of us together as a community. Which brings to mind the words I heard a while back that go like this, "Great churches build great cities". We do good not only on our own but together.

**PP**Indispensable. God's people are the indispensable salt and light that our world desperately needs, our cities and neighborhoods need. What would happen this week if you would wake up each morning labeling yourself not with the title Christian but with salt and light called to do good to bring praise to God? How much warmer would our world be?