



+ **YOU**

Summer 2024
Promises We Can Count On

Sermon Title: How Stands the City?

To be used with Session 4: God's Promise to Make a Holy Nation

Scripture: Matthew 5:13-16; 1 Peter 2:9

Connection with Bible Study: To complement the Bible study “God’s Promise to make a holy nation” this sermon will help listeners understand that the same promise God made to Abraham in the Old Testament is made to us in the New Testament. Through Christ, we “are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his possession, so that you may proclaim the praises of the one who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light” (1 Pet.2:9).

This doesn’t mean that America is a “Christian nation.” Rather, American Christians who are committed to living out the commandments of Jesus can and will have a transforming effect on our country. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus taught us how we are to live as that holy nation. In His metaphors of salt, light, and a city on a hill, we learn what it means to preserve and transform our world.

Introduction:

On the night before the 1980 presidential election, candidate Ronald Reagan gave a stirring speech in which he called America a “shining city on a hill.” He was quoting a 17th century pilgrim named John Winthrop, who said: “The eyes of all people are upon us, so that if we shall deal falsely with our God in this work we have undertaken and so cause him to withdraw his present help from us, we shall be made a story and a byword through the world.”¹

Reagan may or may not have known that the image of a city on a hill wasn’t original with John Winthrop. Two thousand years ago, Jesus stood on an actual hill, surrounded by His disciples, and told them they were to be salt, light, and—wait for it—a city on a hill.

We need to keep in mind that Jesus wasn’t addressing members of Congress or a campaign rally. When Jesus used these metaphors, He wasn’t talking about a country. He was talking to His followers, telling them what they should be.

1. We are salt, so we season and preserve (Matt. 5:13).

¹ Reagan, Ronald. Election Eve Address 'A Vision for America'

<https://www.reaganlibrary.gov/archives/speech/election-eve-address-vision-america>

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Everyone knows about salt's ability to make food taste better. Without salt, food is bland. Salt brings out the flavor. Christians are to have that same effect on our world. We have every reason to be the most joyful people on the planet. As 1 Peter 2:9 says, we have been called out of darkness into marvelous light in order to proclaim the goodness of God! Nothing can season our bland world better than the presence of Jesus.

Salt also has cleansing and preserving properties. In Jesus's day, there was no refrigeration, so people relied on salt to keep meat from going bad. This is also a responsibility Christians have to our culture. If we live by Christian values and follow the teachings and commandments of Jesus, we can have a preserving effect on a world that is swiftly going bad.

2. We are light, so we illuminate and guide (Matt. 5:14).

Jesus told His disciples that they were to be the light of the world. We often take for granted how much we need light. Just ask anyone that has stepped on a Lego[®] brick on the middle of the night. Life on earth literally could not be sustained without light.

When Peter applied Moses words about Israel being a chosen race, a royal priesthood, and a holy nation to Christians (1 Peter 2:9), he added a phrase we don't find in Exodus 19: We have been called out of darkness into His *marvelous* light. Not feeble, flickering, sputtering, dim light. Marvelous light! We get to share God's blazing, warm, inviting, marvelous light with the world.

In the gospel of John, Jesus made several statements beginning with the phrase I AM. I am the bread of life, I am the Good Shepherd, and so on. In John 8:12, Jesus said "I am the light of the world." So, it is interesting that in Matthew 5:14 he said to His disciples, "You are the light of the world." This is the only one of the I AM statements He shares with us. He has given us His light in order to guide people to Him.

3. We are a city on a hill, so we are visible and obvious (Matt. 5 14-16).

Jesus's third metaphor for His disciples was that we are to be a city on a hill that *cannot* be hidden. Not *should* not. *Cannot*. When we are living lives of authentic Christian character, allowing the light of Christ to be reflected in us and expressed through us, people are going to notice. Jesus said that when we light a lamp, we don't put it under a basket. We put it up on a lampstand, and it gives light to everyone. It will be visible and obvious to everyone, and people who are stumbling in the dark will be drawn to it.

That's our job as Christians. In John 12:32, Jesus said, "If I am lifted up, I will draw all people to myself." Sometimes we get nervous about evangelism. We wonder if we know what to say or if we are equipped to answer questions. But when we are a city on a hill, shining our light as Jesus commanded, Jesus will do the drawing. All we have to do is shine.

Conclusion: At the beginning of this message, I talked about Ronald Reagan’s speech the night before the presidential election of 1980, and how he compared America to a city on a hill. As everyone knows, Reagan went on to win that election and the one after it, serving two terms as the President of the United States. In January of 1989, the night before the inauguration of his successor, Reagan again addressed the nation, and again he referred to the “city on a hill” image. Only on this occasion, he asked a poignant question: “How stands the city on this winter night?”

Beloved, the church, not the country, is to be the city on a hill. When Jesus said “You are a city on a hill,” the *you* was plural. So the question comes back to us. Are we exalting Jesus? Are we reflecting His character? Are we seasoning and preserving our society? How stands the city?

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