

The Best Way to Witness Is for the Church to Be the Church

Matthew 5:13–17

Time really flies, doesn't it? It's already the second Sunday of February. Let me ask you the same question again: Are you keeping the promise we made at the start of the year—to pray every day for the person you hope to share the gospel with? If you haven't been able to do that, please don't give up. Just start again today. One prayer. One name. One day at a time.

Since the beginning of 2026, I have been sharing messages about evangelism. In the first week of January, I mentioned that we need to rebuild our "evangelism muscles," which we lost during the era of Christendom. Secondly, I shared that evangelism is a confident invitation to "come and see." Thirdly, evangelism isn't something we manufacture. God is already at work. We're joining that work—filling our "jars" through prayer, service, and small acts of obedience. Do you remember all of that? It's okay if you don't. We'll keep returning to it. And as I announced, we'll have an evangelism seminar on February 28–March 1st. I really hope you can come.

Now, some of you might be thinking: "Pastor, you keep telling us to evangelize... but how exactly do we do it?" That question reminds me of a memory from college. One day, my roommate was filling up a notebook—page after page. I asked, "What are you doing?" He said, "My pastor told me to come up with 100 ways to evangelize." He was brainstorming everything: walking a dog to meet people, handing out small gifts, coffee evangelism, writing letters—so many ideas. Then he put down his pen and said, "Man... just thinking about this is already exhausting." He was right. Because if evangelism is only about doing, it becomes a heavy burden. But at the deepest level, evangelism isn't mainly about what we do. It's about who we are.

You Are the Salt and Light

In today's scripture, Jesus says: "You are the salt of the earth." "You are the light of the world." Notice what Jesus does not say. Jesus does not say, "Try hard to become salt." Jesus does not say, "Work harder so you can be light." Jesus says: "You are." This is not first a command. It's a declaration. Salt and light—that's our identity. And evangelism begins right there: living into who we already are.

In the ancient world, salt was used mainly as a preservative. It kept food from rotting. So, what is required for salt to do its job? It must be different. If you are curing meat, the salt must be different from the meat it preserves. If salt becomes identical to what it's supposed to preserve, it loses its purpose. That's the point. When the church tries too hard to blend in—when we become indistinguishable from the surrounding culture—we lose our power to witness.

The church is meant to be a counter-cultural community. Not isolated from the world, but distinct within it. We live in this world, yes. But we follow the order of the Kingdom of God—God's reign where people become kin, where strangers become family—rather than the logic of fear and division.

When the Church Lost Its Distinctiveness

Last November, I went on a Civil Rights Pilgrimage—visiting places that hold the history of the Civil Rights Movement. The site that left the deepest impression on me was the Legacy Museum in Montgomery. It tells the brutal story of enslavement—people kidnapped from their

homes and shipped across the Atlantic ocean like cargo. And it also shows the resilience of Black communities who refused to surrender their humanity.

[Slide] One exhibit especially stayed with me: the Soil Collection. Jars of soil gathered from the actual places where people were lynched. Even after emancipation, oppression continued—sometimes in the most horrific ways. People were falsely accused, denied due process, beaten by mobs, and killed.

[Slide] What shocked me even more was learning how often these acts were treated like public entertainment. People gathered. People posed for photos. People smiled. And because so much of this happened in the “Bible Belt,” it’s very possible that some who participated were also people who sat in pews and worshiped on Sundays. That is what happens when the church loses its distinctiveness. That is what happens when salt loses its taste.

When the Church Chose to Be the Church

But we have also seen the other side. We’ve seen what happens when the church truly becomes salt and light. Think about the 1955 Montgomery Bus Boycott. It began with Rosa Parks’ quiet, courageous refusal. And it lasted nearly a year. How could people survive that long without buses—especially those who didn’t own cars?

The churches stepped up. During the boycott, Dexter Avenue Baptist Church and many other Black churches organized a massive “Carpool System.” The church became the carpool hub; it became the strategic headquarters; it became the “spiritual gas station” where exhausted souls could find the strength to keep going. The Montgomery Bus Boycott didn’t succeed because of a political strategy. It succeeded because the church chose to be the church.

Then in 1968, during the Memphis sanitation strike, Black workers were treated as disposable—some even killed on the job without their families receiving fair compensation. They gathered at a church called Clayborn Temple. This is the church Martin Luther King Jr. visited just one day before his assassination.

[Slide] Those famous signs—“I AM A MAN”—were printed in the basement of that church. When the world said, “You are nothing,” the church said, “No. You bear the holy image of God.” When the world treats people like tools, the church preserves human dignity. That is salt. That is light. Those churches didn’t just give speeches about justice. By being the church, they shone the light of the Kin-dom of God.

What About Right Now?

Today we live in a world with a surplus of fear and hatred—and a deficit of hope and love. And when fear is overflowing, people start looking for someone to blame. Someone to hate. A hundred years ago, that target was Black communities. In 2026, in the reality of America today, those arrows of hatred are often aimed at immigrants and minorities.

You’ve likely felt a heavy heart watching the news lately. We saw a naturalized citizen taken from his home in the dead of winter, wearing nothing but his underwear, without a warrant. The image of a terrified five-year-old child still haunts us. Through ruthless and inhumane crackdowns, the dignity of our neighbors is being trampled like salt on the road. We’ve even witnessed citizens who resisted this treatment being killed by state power.

But exclusion isn’t always a battering ram at the door; sometimes, it is the silent stroke of a pen in a sterile office. We must name what is happening right now. On March 1, 2026, updated SBA loan rules will make lawful permanent residents—green card holders—ineligible for major SBA-backed loans that help small businesses get started and survive.

History is echoing. Decades ago, 'redlining' marked Black neighborhoods as 'hazardous' to starve them of capital. Today, a new map is being drawn. The government is once again telling banks that a specific group of neighbors—people working and paying taxes beside us—are 'too risky' for the American Dream. This is a digital redlining, and it doesn't just hurt the economy; it erodes the very soul of our community.

In times like these, what does it mean for the church to be "salt that has lost its taste"? It means staying silent while the world attacks the vulnerable. Or worse, it means quietly joining the ranks of hatred—just like those religious people who smiled for photos at lynchings.

But Jesus has already declared over us: "You are the salt of the earth." Salt must stop the rot. When fear spreads like a virus, the church becomes the preservative that stops it—through courage, compassion, and steady love. Just as that church in Memphis printed "I AM A MAN," the church today must communicate a different message to anxious neighbors. "You are welcome here." "You are safe here." When the world turns immigrants into paperwork—"legal" or "illegal"—and treats them as less than human, the church answers, "No human being is 'illegal. Every person is God's child.'" This is evangelism: being the salt of the earth and the light of the world.

As Professor Bryan Stone writes in *Evangelism After Christendom*: "The church does not need to have a strategy for evangelism; the church is the strategy." In other words: The best way to witness is for the church to be the church.

You Are the Salt of the Earth

When I first read this passage, I'll be honest—I felt burdened. I felt discouraged, because I didn't feel like I was living as salt or shining as light. Seeing how many people have lost interest in the church, and feeling as though we lack the power to change the world, I began to feel quite useless. And when you already feel small, these words can feel heavy.

But as I sat quietly and meditated on the Word, I realized what the Lord was truly saying: "You are salt. You matter. You are essential to this world." To those of us who feel discouraged, thinking no one notices us, the Lord leans in and encourages us: "You are light. You are not invisible. You cannot be hidden."

Evangelism is not a technique. It's not a tool to drag one more person into church. Evangelism is about recovering this incredible identity. We are a community of love—salt that preserves, light that guides, a people who cannot be hidden.

So today, I invite you to set down the heavy burden of "doing evangelism." And instead, take up the holy calling of being salt and light. As we live this identity—imperfectly, but faithfully—others will see our good deeds and give glory to God. May God bless you this week to live as salt and light, right where you are. Amen.