

WHAT IT MEANS TO BE THE SALT OF THE EARTH?

MATTHEW 5: 13-16

I INTRODUCTION:

(IT'S NOT ABOUT ME; IT'S ABOUT THE LORD!)

Vic and I were having lunch at the Reno ANS meeting in June and I related a story to him that was very fresh in my mind. He liked the story and wanted me to retell it at our Prayer Breakfast here in Anaheim as a “salt and light” example. I was somewhat reluctant, because I didn’t tell him the story to make me look good, but rather to show how our Lord can use even me if I am only willing to submit to His will. Vic thought it was a story worth sharing. I agreed, but only because this story is about God at work in me, and not me at work in the world!

II WHAT DO YOU WANT ME TO DO TODAY, LORD?

(ASKING GOD FOR DIRECTIONS CAN BE DANGEROUS. HE MAY SEND YOU WHERE YOU LEAST EXPECT)

Earlier this year, I was on my way to work. It was a beautiful Tuesday in March. We were “invited” to attend a mandatory All Managers meeting for the Savannah River Site’s Managing and Operating Contractor. The meeting was being held offsite at the University of South Carolina-Aiken’s Etherredge center. I always use the time in transit going to and from work to talk to our Lord. It is a time when I can discuss with Him what is on my mind. Sometimes I even listen! I’m working on that. This time I knew that I would have plenty of time after the meeting on my way to my office to talk about my usual concerns regarding my expanded family. So I immediately jumped into what was really on my mind.

“Lord, I am not sure why you have me still working here. I am close to retirement, and often don’t appear to be achieving much, but if this is where you want me, please, please show me what you want me to do today. Here I am Lord, I’m your servant, what would have me do today?”

I have been trying to live in the present. Too often I spend so much time planning for the future, or reminiscing about the past, that I forget to live in the here and now. When I am off shopping, I am a man on a mission; I have tunnel vision. I am determined to accomplish my goal. Unfortunately, too often, I don’t see the people walking by me, so

I miss the opportunities to interact in the here and now. In recent years I have been asking the Lord to use me moment by moment.

The day before at my staff meeting with my managers, I had advised them that, although senior management ask for questions at these Expanded Management Meetings but, from what I had seen, all they really want are easy questions that they can hit out of the ball park, so I wouldn't bother asking them any difficult questions. You're certainly entitled to ask any questions, but I wouldn't do it.

I had been rather disappointed with my company's leadership: they have had a propensity to shoot the messenger, rather than fix the problem.

III THE LORD SHOWS ME WHAT I AM TO DO

(DON'T ASK THE LORD FOR DIRECTIONS UNLESS YOU ARE WILLING TO ACT ON THEM!)

I arrived at the USC-Aiken Etherredge Center and went into the theatre. The auditorium was almost full, and all of the back-row-Baptists were early and had filled those seats, so I took a seat near the front!

I gazed around and saw the usual cast of characters sitting on stools on the stage: there was our company president, a talented, articulate and well-meaning man. Beside him were his two executive vice presidents: one was my boss's boss, the SRNL lab director: he and I seldom see eye to eye on almost any issue. The other executive vice president, a pit bull from the naval ship yards, has a reputation of destroying people publicly. He is not the kind of person you would want to cross. All of our senior vice presidents were off the stage, but seated in the first row, ready to rescue the top management if needed. But, I noticed that there was someone else sitting on a stool on the stage. I suddenly realized, to my surprise, it was the Savannah River Site DOE Manager.

I groaned silently, because I immediately knew what God wanted me to do today. What He had set me up to do was going to be absolutely awful, and there was no escape: none. I could not run; I could not hide. God had laid the path before me so clearly He may as well have given me a script. My heart fell, I knew I was ruined.

You see, I mentioned that this meeting was being held on a lovely Tuesday in March. It wasn't just any day, it was 5 weeks before the National Day of Prayer and we had

just been told, a week or two earlier, that SRS would not be sponsoring the National Day of Prayer. We had always sponsored the National Day of Prayer. Yes, in recent years it had become difficult, but we ALWAYS sponsored the National Day of Prayer. Last year, the SRS DOE Chief Council (another word for lawyer) had told us we could not pray out loud and we could not read from the Bible. Last year I was so incensed when I heard about this arbitrary ruling that I contacted my senator's legal counsel in Washington DC and relayed my concerns. Whether or not it was because of that or just coincidence, I don't know, but the very next day, the SRS DOE Legal Counsel changed her mind and told us we could pray out loud. She did not mention use of the Bible. So, we prayed out loud and quoted scripture during our prayers. I took that as a victory for God.

However, this year was different. It appeared to have turned into an all-out war: the National Day of Prayer was not designated as an SRS site sponsored event. Therefore, we could not use the site email, telephones, computers, printers, copiers, etc. to organize the event. We could not post notices on doors, windows, corridors, walls, DOE official notice boards, but only a very discrete use of general interest notice boards. We could not occupy cafeterias, or work areas, but we could use a conference room or use a location away from everyone else. We could congregate in our own time (lunch time), which we always had done. Christians onsite were very upset, particularly since the site takes great pains to support the DOE GLOBE (gay, lesbian or bisexual employees) events.

So here I was, sitting near the front of a great auditorium filled with all the movers and shakers in my company, and it was blatantly clear what the Lord wanted me to do. It would do absolutely no good directing a question on this matter to one of our company leaders. It was not a contractor issue. It was a DOE issue, and here was the top man at SRS DOE sitting on a stool ready to talk and field questions. The SRNS president and executive vice-presidents all gave speeches, followed by the DOE manager. Then, with all of them onstage, they asked for questions.

I knew that what I was going to ask would be a bomb-shell and I did not want to hijack the entire Q&A period, so I waited until I thought all the questions had been asked. Our company president asked for any last questions. I raised my hand and waved it

furiously. The president said, “Well this guy definitely seems to have a question, so we’ll take this as the last one.”

IV NOWHERE TO RUN TO; NOWHERE TO HIDE!

(WELL, HERE WE GO LORD; IT IS ALL IN YOUR HANDS NOW!)

Now, I usually get very nervous asking questions in this kind of forum, so I had been formulating the exact words I wanted to say and had written them on the program. I decided that it would be wise to stay on the high road and not antagonize him by mentioning the whole GLOBE issue. This was my question:

My name is Robert Addis and I have the privilege of serving in the Savannah River National Lab, in the Defense Programs Technology mission, in support of Tritium. I have had the honor of working at SRS for almost 30 years. During that time I have never been ashamed to ask the question I am now forced to ask. My question is for Dr. Moody.

Dr. Moody, The presidentially initiated National Day of Prayer will be coming up soon. Can you explain why SRS DOE has seen fit to refuse the National Day of Prayer as a “site sanctioned event”, AND, as such your lawyer refuses to allow anyone onsite to employ a modest use of email, notice boards, telephones, Xerox machines, printers and computers to organize across this 300 square mile site.

Do you really think that our nation and site do not need prayer?

Is DOE so opposed to, and disconnected with, the values of many of our employees at the site?

The room was so quiet you could have heard a pin drop. Everyone was peering around, watching to see what would happen. One of our executive vice presidents, the one I already described as a naval ship yard pit bull, stood up, looked daggers at me as I stood waiting for a response. He turned, faced the DOE manager and said, “I can take this one for you, if you like,” or words to that effect.

I knew there and then that I was about to get thoroughly roasted and torn apart publicly. I was rapidly thinking how I could interject that the question was not suited for the contractor. It would only be appropriate for the DOE manager to respond.

Fortunately, I did not need to say anything, because the DOE manager said, “No, I have this.” He very slowly got off his stool and faced me. He thought for a minute or so, it seemed like an eternity, and again, you could have heard a pin drop in that auditorium. What was he going to say?

V THE LORD OPENS A DOOR FOR HIS POWERFUL SERVANT TO SPEAK PUBLICLY!
(SOME SERVANTS OPEN THE DOOR FOR OTHERS TO PASS THROUGH)

He then proceeded to describe how he had just finished reading a book called “The Harbinger” by Johnathan Cahn. He told us that, although the book is written in the format of a novel, it is based on a short passage from the book of Isaiah (9:10). In The Harbinger, the author equates the Assyrian attack on Israel in the 8th century BC, and their responses to that attack, to the attacks on America on 9/11 and our response to that attack. Israel would not acknowledge that the Assyrian attack was a punishment from God. After the attack, Israel was defiant, proud and unrepentant. The book details the events leading up to the attacks of 9/11 on America and our subsequent responses to those attacks. The book describes the similarities between 8th century Israel and 21st century America.

The DOE manager then proceeded to explain how he was deeply disturbed about the direction our nation was taking and believed that this book portrayed an accurate comparison of America with Israel at that time. As a Christian, he feared for the consequences of the actions our country was taking. He articulated his personal position and faith eloquently and then, facing the whole audience, he said, “I don’t know what you will be doing on the National Day of Prayer, but I offer an invitation to as many as want to come, to join me in my office. I will close the door and pray.” He particularly invited me to join him.

I thanked him and he turned the floor over to our company president, who then dismissed us.

The DOE Manager is a fine Christian man and spoke his position beautifully.

Over the course of the next couple of months, people I knew, and many I did not know, emailed me, phoned me, or told me personally how pleased they were that I spoke up on this issue as it concerned them greatly. They also shared how pleased they were

with the DOE manager's response. Clearly, this decision was not his, but rather, the directions DOE was given came from the highest levels of the Administration.

VI WE THE PEOPLE OWN THE NATIONAL DAY OF PRAYER!
(PERSECUTION MAKES OUR FAITH STRONG)

As I thought about these events and prayed to my Lord, I realized that we had been given a gift. As long as the National Day of Prayer was a site sponsored event, the DOE could always dictate how it should be run. However, if it was an employee run event, and I mean the general employees, not directed by management, then it was the people's event. As long as we did not use DOE computers, printers etc., and as long as we were not offensive or in your face about it, this was our opportunity to pray as a site to our Lord. What an opportunity!

I shared with people what I believe the Lord was revealing to me, namely, that our faith and the church itself have always prospered under persecution. It is the easy, good life that kills our witness. It is opposition and oppression that fires us up and gets us moving. Do you know that I have heard that the church in China, during its darkest periods of oppression, would pray that the American and other Western churches would be persecuted so that our church would grow deeply, become powerful and not remain weak?

We did not need e-mails. We did not need the site phones. We used word of mouth and communicated after hours.

On the National Day of Prayer, I asked to be one of the first people to pray in the SRNL area because we were meeting from 12:00 -1230 and the DOE manager was planning to meet for prayer in the Administration area of the site (B Area) from 1230 – 1:00. It would take me 15 minutes to drive to his office and I wanted to take him up on his offer. We met in front of the badging building, near the flag pole, and sang hymns, prayed and read scripture out loud. Then I excused myself to join the DOE manager as SRNL continued to pray. When I arrived, two others were waiting outside the DOE Manager's office: a friend of mine and his boss.

At the end of our time, the DOE manager said he wanted to see this happen next year also, but he wanted to fill the conference room in his building, not just his office.

VII THE REST OF THE STORY

(RECONNECTING WITH A BURGER – HOW AMERICAN CAN WE GET!)

To conclude, let me tell you “the rest of the story.” At the last ANS meeting in Reno, an hour or so before the Nuclear Christian Fellowship evening meeting, I decided to go into the hotel basement to get a hamburger and take it to my room. I did not want to go to a main restaurant or café in the hotel because I thought I might get caught up in a group of friends and colleagues and not make it to the Fellowship meeting. So I ordered my burger and was sitting at the counter waiting to take my order to my room. I looked over my shoulder and noticed that just a couple of seats along the counter, dressed very casually in shorts and a T shirt, was the very same DOE manager. We struck up a conversation. We ate our simple dinner there at the counter together. We had a wonderful conversation. I invited him to our Fellowship meeting, but he had been up late the night before travelling and needed to go to sleep as he had busy sessions in the morning.

I had no intention of asking any questions at that SRS M&O Contractor Expanded Managers meeting. In fact, just the day before I had cautioned my own managers about asking difficult questions, but the Lord had a plan. When I asked Him how He wanted me to serve Him that day, He made the path forward all too clear. It was not an easy path. He wanted me to make myself very vulnerable and ask the most difficult question of the meeting, but that then gave a fellow believer the opportunity to speak out in witness of our Lord.

We all must play our role on the stage of life. As Jesus says in the Gospel of Matthew 5:13-16: ***“You are the salt of the earth. But what good is salt if it has lost its flavor? Can you make it salty again? It will be thrown out and trampled underfoot as worthless. You are the light of the world—like a city on a hilltop that cannot be hidden. ¹⁵ No one lights a lamp and then puts it under a basket. Instead, a lamp is placed on a stand, where it gives light to everyone in the house. ¹⁶ In the same way, let your good deeds shine out for all to see, so that everyone will praise your heavenly Father.” NLT***

We are to be the salt and light of the world. Each of us, day by day, moment by moment, is expected to be salt and light to the world around us.