

John Shelby: Salt & Light

☒ Anyone out there heard of John Shelby? Anyone? Anyone?

Perhaps a few folks in Baltimore or Los Angeles might be able to raise their hand, but truthfully, the average American has no idea who I'm talking about.

So here's a quick rundown: John Shelby has spent the past 32 years in Major League Baseball; first as a World Championship player with the Orioles (1983) and Dodgers (1988) and now as a bench coach for multiple teams (currently Baltimore).

I've interviewed probably 200 or so athletes over the past 18 years; many more famous than Shelby who was an occasional All-Star and solid player in his own right. But in my two encounters with Shelby, he's always left a profound impact on me.

The most recent conversation was during spring training back in April. Talking to him reminded me of these four simple, but profound words often found in the Proverbs: "Trust in the Lord."

That phrase has been a constant throughout Shelby's baseball life. In those 32 years, he has never enjoyed the benefit of a long-term contract; only once has he been signed for longer than one season.

"If that's not faith and if that's not trust, I don't know what trust is," he joked. "I honestly believe that God created us for a purpose. I haven't always been where I would want to be, but I know I'm where He wants me to be. That's where I find my contentment and that's where I find my peace. When I

pray in the winter and I don't have a contract, I believe the Lord will put my name on somebody's heart. I know He has a place for me so I just trust and wait on Him."

Shelby first received Christ while playing AA baseball in Charlotte, NC through the ministry of Baseball Chapel. At that time, very few athletes and coaches professed a faith in Jesus. And even though it has become more acceptable to be a Christian in the clubhouse, Shelby says the majority of the people in most locker rooms are still not believers.

That's why his favorite New Testament verse-found in Matthew 5:13-16-is so vital to what he believes is the ultimate calling on his life-to be salt and light to anyone with whom he comes into a friendship or working relationship.

"Salt preserves and it aids in healing," Shelby explained. "Light exposes the darkness and it represents what's good and true and reliable. Those two words are so powerful. Then the scripture tells us that we're supposed to let our light shine so that God can be glorified. But if you're supposed to be a Christian and you can't represent yourself as salt and light, then basically the Scripture says you're useless. I want to be useful for God. If the things that you say and do comes from your heart, that's when your witness is effective"

Shelby's explanation of that verse is one of best descriptions of the "salt and light" concept that I've ever heard. I told him, "You could be a preacher."

He replied, "I am."

I thought he was making a reference to his life being a light to those in the clubhouse. He meant the comment in the most literal sense. Shelby shares pastoral responsibilities at a

church in Lexington, Ky. I'd like to hear him preach sometime.

Good to know that some of the people we prop up as role models of the faith actually have something important and valuable to say from time to time.

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