

The Sermon on the Mount

Salt and Light (Matthew 5:13-16)

INTRODUCTION:

- I. For the past few weeks we've been focusing our attention on the opening remarks of Jesus in what is commonly known as The Sermon on the Mount.
 - A. Although some parts of this teaching are recorded in Mark and Luke, our focus will be on the sermon recorded in the gospel of **Matthew – in chapters 5 through 7**.
 1. In three brief chapters Jesus provides an encapsulated version of the gospel of the kingdom.
 - a. The principles taught by our Lord here will be further augmented in the writings and teachings of the apostles found in the remainder of the New Testament.
 - b. Therefore, in a sense, the teachings of Jesus HERE are a preview of the standards of righteousness the Lord will require of those who would be His disciples and citizens in the kingdom of heaven.
 2. And to make the message even more understandable, Jesus began the sermon by listing all the CHARACTER TRAITS that the

citizens of the His kingdom must possess, as well as the BENEFITS associated with those character traits.

a. These were found in THE BEATITUDES – the blessedness or happiness many times over of those who are true followers of Jesus Christ.

3. But now, as we move to another section of The Sermon on the Mount, the Lord focuses our attention on how we are to MANIFEST these character traits, and the benefit they provide to OTHERS around us.

II. You and I as Christians do not live in a world of isolation – we were never meant to seclude ourselves away in some monastery or convent, or live in some community of believers isolated from society.

A. The whole concept of monasticism and isolation – where we withdraw completely from social contact to draw closer to God – is contrary to Scripture.

1. While it's true that we need SOME time alone with the Lord, this was never meant to be a lifestyle that characterized the disciples of Jesus Christ.

a. While they were not to be OF the world, they WERE to be IN the world.

2. In His prayer to the Father on the night of His betrayal, Jesus prayed this about His disciples.
 - a. **John 17:14-19** – *I have given them Your word; and the world has hated them because they are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. 15 I do not pray that You should take them out of the world, but that You should keep them from the evil one. 16 They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. 17 Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth. 18 As You sent Me into the world, I also have sent them into the world.*
 - b. The truth of the gospel of Jesus Christ needed to be proclaimed to a world lost in sin.
 - c. Therefore, Jesus sent His disciples INTO the world, just as HE had been sent INTO the world.
3. Following His resurrection from the dead, and just before His ascension into heaven, Jesus gave His disciples what we call The Great Commission.
 - a. **Matthew 28:19** – *"Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations..."*
 - b. **Mark 16:15** – *"Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature."*

- c. **Luke 24:46-47** – *"Thus it is written, and thus it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead the third day, 47 and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem."*
- d. **Acts 1:8** – *"But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth."*

4. The apostle Peter ALSO conveyed this same idea in his letter the first century Christians.

- a. **1 Peter 2:9-10** – *But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light...*

B. However, to be most effective in our efforts to influence the world around us, we must be keenly aware of the fact that the world is watching us.

1. The way we conduct our lives before others as Christians is of utmost importance.

- a. Many people of the world look for opportunities to condemn and criticize faithful Christians as being spiritual egotists –

saying we consider ourselves to be ABOVE everyone else, and ABOVE doing wrong of any kind.

b. Of course, that's simply not true of those who are POOR IN SPIRIT and who MOURN over the sins in their lives.

c. We are more keenly aware of our weaknesses than ANYONE.

2. However, that is no excuse for not CONSTANTLY being on guard to make sure we avoid falling into sin – and when we DO sin, to IMMEDIATELY repent of that sin and confess it to the Father in heaven.

3. This is why the apostle Peter in that same passage went on to say:

a. **1 Peter 2:11-12** – *Beloved, I beg you as sojourners and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul, 12 having your conduct honorable among the Gentiles, that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may, by your good works which they observe, glorify God in the day of visitation.*

III. In The Sermon on the Mount, Jesus was the FIRST to introduce the need for His disciples to live their lives in such a way that their GOOD WORKS and their GODLY CHARACTER will ultimately glorify God in heaven.

A. He did this by the use of two metaphors – comparing His disciples to SALT and a LAMP.

1. **Matthew 5:13-16** – *"You are the salt of the earth; but if the salt loses its flavor, how shall it be seasoned? It is then good for nothing but to be thrown out and trampled underfoot by men. 14 You are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden. 15 Nor do they light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house. 16 Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven."*
2. Therefore, in the lesson this morning, we're going to take a closer look at these four verses and see what we can learn from Jesus' use of SALT and a LAMP to describe the attributes of those who would be citizens of the kingdom of heaven.

BODY:

- I. In using SALT and a LAMP to describe the manner in which His disciples would impact the world around them, Jesus used two things with which the Jewish people – and all people of that day – were most familiar.

- A. SALT in the days of Jesus was a highly valued ingredient, and was used in far more ways, and was far more symbolic, that we might imagine.
1. Salt was NOT ONLY used for SEASONING FOOD to give it taste, it was ALSO used as a means of PREVENTING DECAY.
 - a. Meats and fish rubbed in salt were preserved much longer – especially in an era when refrigeration wasn't even dreamed of.
 2. But salt had OTHER USES.
 - a. It was used in offerings and sacrifices under the Law of Moses (especially grain offerings) where the grain offering was to be seasoned with salt.
 - b. The reason for this is because salt also symbolized the covenant of God with His people – specifically referred to as a *"salt of the covenant"* – which signified Jehovah's imperishable incorruptible love for His people.
 - c. **Leviticus 2:13** – *"And every offering of your grain offering you shall season with salt; you shall not allow the salt of the covenant of your God to be lacking from your grain offering. With all your offerings you shall offer salt."*
 3. Salt was also an ANTISEPTIC.

- a. Newborn babies were customarily washed in salt water as a means of reducing the possibility infection.
 - b. Infants would also be rubbed with salt to make their skin dense and firm – which was good for infants raised in nomadic cultures where they were always exposed to the elements.
4. Salt also symbolized a number of other things.
- a. Salt implies stability, fidelity and purity.
 - b. Salt was also a symbol of hospitality – in Islamic cultures allowing even your worst enemy to enter your tent and sharing salt with him meant you were obligated to protect him as long as he remained.
- B. LAMPS of various kinds were as common in ancient households as light bulbs are to us today.
1. The earliest forms of oil-burning lamps were bowls with vertical sides filled with olive oil, and where one area was pinched to hold a lighted wick.
 - a. Later forms of lamps had small spouts where wicks were placed, and some were even designed to have multiple wicks.
 2. Not only were lamps used to provide light to those in darkened room, they were used in various ceremonial ways.

- a. Oil-burning lamps were used by bridesmaids who provided light for the bride and groom to the wedding ceremony – like in the Parable of the Wise and Foolish Virgins.
 - b. A lamp stand holding seven lamps was made of pure gold and was used to provide light for the HOLY PLACE in the Tabernacle, and later in the Temple.
3. And like salt, LAMPS and the LIGHT they provide also served to symbolize a number of things.
- a. The lamp symbolized GOD'S GUIDANCE: **2 Samuel 22:29** – David said, *"For You are my lamp, O LORD; the LORD shall enlighten my darkness."*
 - b. More specifically, it symbolized the WORD OF GOD – The LAW: **Psalms 119:105** – *"Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path."*
 - c. And in a more practical sense, the lamp symbolized the TEACHING AND INFLUENCE of those who PROCLAIMED THE GOSPEL – such as John the Baptist: **John 5:35** – Jesus said of John, *"He was the burning and shining lamp, and you were willing for a time to rejoice in his light."*

II. But what did Jesus mean when He declared "you are the SALT OF THE EARTH," and "you are THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD?"

A. Let's first begin by trying to understand what Jesus was NOT saying here.

1. He is NOT saying that His disciples, along with all the other good, moral people of the world, are the salt of the earth and the light of the world.
 - a. He is NOT saying that His disciples are AMONG those whose lives can be characterized as the salt of the earth and the light of the world.
2. What Jesus IS SAYING is that YOU and YOU ALONE – NO ONE ELSE – just YOU as HIS DISCIPLES are the salt of the earth and the light of the world.
 - a. In other words, we are the ONLY salt and the ONLY light this world has – it has none other.
 - b. If this world is going to be seasoned with salt in a metaphorical sense, and if the darkness of this world is going to be dispelled by light in a metaphorical sense, WE ARE THAT SALT and WE ARE THAT LIGHT.
 - c. The SALT and LIGHT will come from NO OTHER SOURCE.
We're it!

3. Understanding that, should IMMEDIATELY cause us to realize the SERIOUSNESS of our mission as disciples of Jesus Christ.
 - a. No one else is able to do what we are able to do.
 - b. And the Lord has placed in our hands the SOLE responsibility of being salt to the earth and light to the world.
- III. So let's begin with salt. What DID Jesus mean when he said "*you are the salt of the earth*"? (**Matthew 5:13a**)
- A. Salt has several characteristics that exemplify what it truly means to be a disciple of Jesus Christ.
 1. We've already seen that salt symbolized a number of things, including stability, fidelity, purity and hospitality.
 2. But as we've also seen salt was used in several unique ways especially in the ancient world, including as an antiseptic, as a preservative, and most importantly as seasoning for food.
 - a. In the context of **Matthew 5:13** it seems ALL of these ideas are being expressed.
 - b. **Matthew 5:13b** – Jesus goes on to say, "*...but if the salt loses its flavor, how shall it be seasoned? It is then good for nothing but to be thrown out and trampled underfoot by men.*"
 3. Salt that has lost its FLAVOR has lost all its properties.

- a. Not only has the salt lost its ability to season food, it is no longer able to keep back decay as a preservative, nor is it able to be effective as an antiseptic.
 - b. It is simply good for nothing.
- B. Through the use of a metaphor, Jesus illustrates the relationship that you and I as citizens of the kingdom have with the world around us – namely to use our godly example in positive ways to influence the lives of others around us.
- 1. The apostle Paul urged men like Timothy and Titus to set the standard of godly influence before others.
 - a. **1 Timothy 4:12** – *Let no one despise your youth, but be an example to the believers in word, in conduct, in love, in spirit, in faith, in purity.*
 - b. **Titus 2:7-8** – *...in all things showing yourself to be a pattern of good works; in doctrine showing integrity, reverence, incorruptibility, & sound speech that cannot be condemned, that one who is an opponent may be ashamed, having nothing evil to say of you.*
- C. But as citizens of the kingdom we also use our godly influence to keep back complete moral and ethical decay.

1. It has always been true that even a few "righteous" people can prevent the wrath of God from being poured out on those who are wicked and disobedient.
2. In **Genesis 18:20-32**, when the Lord was about to destroy the wicked cities of Sodom and Gomorrah, Abraham pleaded with God to spare the cities if only a few righteous souls could be found there.
 - a. Abraham bargained with God to spare the cities if only 50 righteous could be found, and the Lord agreed.
 - b. But knowing that there may not be even 50, Abraham bargained again for God to spare the cities if only 40 righteous souls could be found, and the Lord agreed again.
 - c. But Abraham wasn't sure 40 could be found, so he bargained for 30, and then 20 and finally 10 – if only 10 righteous souls could be found, would the Lord spare the cities, and the Lord agreed.
 - d. However, in cities whose population probably numbered into the tens of thousands, and perhaps even a hundred thousand or more, not even 10 righteous souls could be found to spare God's wrath.

3. In Jeremiah chapter 5, the Lord says essentially the same thing to the prophet Jeremiah as He said to Abraham centuries earlier.
 - a. **Jeremiah 5:1** – "Run to and fro through the streets of Jerusalem; see now and know; and seek in her open places if you can find a man, if there is anyone who executes judgment, who seeks the truth, and I will pardon her."
 - b. The Lord would have been happy to find ANYONE among the citizens of Jerusalem who executes righteous judgment and seeks truth.
 - c. Just "A MAN," said the Lord, "ANYONE" – which is a figure of speech meaning that virtually everyone had turned from the Lord.
 - d. But the Lord would have been willing to spare the city from the terrible fate that awaited her if even a FEW righteous remained.
- D. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus warned that we can lose our ability to influence the lives of others around us – we can lose our FLAVOR (our SALTINESS)!
 1. But, how can salt lose its salty flavor?
 - a. Albert Barnes in his commentary on Matthew speaks of the chemical composition of salt – sodium chloride. But salts in

ancient times were often impure and mixed with other matter or chemicals that would cause the salt to lose its salty flavor.

What that happened, it couldn't be salty again, and was therefore good for nothing except to be cast out on streets or paths so that it would do no further harm.

- b. The similarity between salt and the character of a true disciple of Christ is clearly seen.
 - c. If we become polluted with the things of the world around us, we will lose our ability to be a positive influence for good, and will be unable to lead others to Jesus Christ.
 - d. **Proverbs 25:26** – Solomon said, *"A righteous man who falters before the wicked is like a murky spring and a polluted well."*
2. In the same manner we can lose our FLAVOR – our positive godly influence – when we allow impurities into our lives.
- a. **1 Corinthians 15:33** -- *Do not be deceived: "Evil company corrupts good habits."*
 - b. **2 Corinthians 6:14-18** – *Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers. For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness? 15 And what accord has Christ with Belial? Or what part has a believer with an unbeliever? 16 And what agreement has*

the temple of God with idols? For you are the temple of the living God. As God has said: "I will dwell in them and walk among them. I will be their God, and they shall be My people." 17 Therefore "Come out from among them and be separate, says the Lord. Do not touch what is unclean, and I will receive you." 18 "I will be a Father to you, and you shall be My sons and daughters, says the LORD Almighty."

3. Therefore, we need to keep ourselves from sin, and no one said it any clearer than the apostle Paul.
 - a. **Ephesians 5:3-7** – *But fornication and all uncleanness or covetousness, let it not even be named among you, as is fitting for saints; 4 neither filthiness, nor foolish talking, nor coarse jesting, which are not fitting, but rather giving of thanks. 5 For this you know, that no fornicator, unclean person, nor covetous man, who is an idolater, has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God. 6 Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience. 7 Therefore do not be partakers with them.*
- E. Jesus went on to warn in the Sermon on the Mount that when salt loses its saltiness due to contamination by other elements, it is good for

nothing and is either thrown out on the roads or paths – and in some instances, this worthless salt was mixed with dung to hasten its decomposition.

1. Once we've lost our ability to be a seasoning influence in the world around us, what good are we?
 - a. We no longer serve any useful purpose for the Lord – we can't preserve the society in which we live, and we certainly can't keep back moral and ethical decay.
 - b. So what good are we?
 - c. How can the Lord use worthless salt?
2. Sadly, He can't – and all that remains is for us to suffer the same fate that all worthless salt suffers: we will simply be thrown out!
3. Is Jesus teaching the possibility of us LOSING our SALVATION? ABSOLUTELY!!
4. He certainly taught this possibility in other places:
 - a. In the Parable of the Wheat and Tares, Jesus concluded:
Matthew 13:41-43 – *The Son of Man will send out His angels, and they will gather out of His kingdom all things that offend, and those who practice lawlessness, 42 and will cast them into the furnace of fire. There will be wailing and gnashing of teeth. 43 Then the righteous will shine forth as the sun in the*

kingdom of their Father. He who has ears to hear, let him hear!

IV. Finally, Jesus said in the Sermon on the Mount that we are not JUST the salt of the earth, He also said, "you are the LIGHT OF THE WORLD."

A. Jesus made it clear that our influence is meant to be SEEN – openly DISPLAYED in a very CONSPICUOUS manner – to the world around us.

1. **Matthew 5:14-16** – *"You are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden. 15 Nor do they light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house."*
2. Jesus is NOT simply saying we are to be LIKE a light.
 - a. He's saying we ARE the light of the world. The ONLY light the world has.
3. Nor is Jesus simply saying we are to be an OCCASIONAL light – like a light that can be turned on and turned off whenever we desire.
 - a. We are to be a CONSTANT source of light – like a city set on a hill. You don't turn out the lights of a city whenever you feel like it.

- B. Jesus is talking about us being a CONSTANT, CONSPICUOUS, EVER-PRESENT source of light to the world around us.
1. The apostle Paul said essentially the same thing:
 - a. **Philippians 2:14-16** – *Do all things without complaining and disputing, 15 that you may become blameless and harmless, children of God without fault in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world, 16 holding fast the word of life...*
 - b. **Ephesians 5:8-14** – *For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light 9(for the fruit of the Spirit is in all goodness, righteousness, and truth), 10 finding out what is acceptable to the Lord. 11 And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather expose them. 12 For it is shameful even to speak of those things which are done by them in secret. 13 But all things that are exposed are made manifest by the light, for whatever makes manifest is light. 14 Therefore He says: "Awake, you who sleep, arise from the dead, and Christ will give you light."*
- C. So what does all this mean? It simply means that as citizens of the kingdom you and I have a two-fold responsibility as "THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD."

1. WE must be SEEN – VISIBLY, CONSPICUOUSLY, and OPENLY DISPLAYING the character of Jesus Christ in lives.
 - a. The statement of Jesus in **Matthew 5:16** – *Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven* – is NOT a SUGGESTION, it's a COMMAND!
 - b. If we expect to be a disciple of Jesus Christ, we need to be letting our light (the light of Jesus Christ in each and every one of us) so shine that people all around us will SEE our good works (our godly living) and be positively influenced to glorify our Father in heaven, rather than blaspheme the name of Jehovah God by our hypocrisy and ungodly living.
2. And, we must RADIATE that light.
 - a. We are to be like a CITY SET ON A HILL, and like a LAMP on a LAMPSTAND – radiating the life of Christ through our own godly conduct and example.
 - b. To be ANYTHING less is to FAIL to live up to the Lord's expectations of each and every one of us.
3. Does all this mean we are to act as though we are PERFECT and WITHOUT SIN?
 - a. Absolutely NOT.

4. It simply means that the people of the world are going to see one of two things:
 - a. They will either see our LIGHT (the godly character of Jesus Christ in our life), or...
 - b. They will see our DARKNESS (the sins and other shameful conduct we try to keep hidden from our brothers and sisters in Christ).
5. But let's not deceive ourselves – the world WILL SEE one or the other, and SO will the Lord.

CONCLUSION:

- I. I want each of us to pause for a moment and reflect on our own lives – not the lives of others, but on our OWN lives.
 - A. And as we reflect on our OWN lives as Christians, let me ask you a few questions.
 1. First, how would you describe your influence?
 - a. Are you a positive influence in the lives of others – starting with your own family?
 - b. Do they see in you a solid, uncompromising, faithful follower of Jesus Christ?

- c. Is your influence leading them TO Christ or AWAY FROM Christ?
 2. Second, are you the light of the world?
 - a. Are you SHOWING and OPENLY DISPLAYING the character of Jesus Christ in your life?
 - b. Are you able to RADIATE a godly influence?
- B. Jesus intends for us to have the kind of example that will GLORIFY the One Who is described as "YOUR FATHER WHO IS IN HEAVEN!"
 1. This expression should remind us that God is both LOVING (because He is our "Father") and MAJESTIC (because He is "in heaven").
 2. But at the same time, we need to remember that God is also HOLY, and RIGHTEOUS – and that He cannot have fellowship with that which is UNHOLY and UNRIGHTEOUS.
- C. Jesus died on the cross to make UNHOLY and UNRIGHTEOUS people like you and me HOLY and RIGHTEOUS through HIS grace and mercy, and NOT through our own goodness.
 1. If you have never come to Jesus Christ in complete faith and obedience, being baptized for the remission of your sins, and being added by the Lord to the redeemed, then you remain UNHOLY and

UNRIGHTEOUS, and could never be the salt of the earth or the light of the world.

2. Or, if you have drifted away from the Lord – having ONCE been made HOLY and RIGHTEOUS by the blood of Jesus Christ – and are now trying to conceal sin in your life, then you cannot be the salt of the earth or the light of the world.
- D. It actually comes down to this:
1. We will either become the salt of the earth and the light of the world, or we will contribute to the world's decay and darkness.
 2. Which will it be?

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