

Teachings of Jesus

Salt and Light

Matthew 5:13-16

Introduction

The teaching of Jesus in Matthew Chapter 5 is called the "Sermon on the Mount" because he gave it to a large group of people from the top of a hill near the Sea of Galilee. The theme of Jesus' teaching is the kingdom of heaven. The king of the kingdom is Jesus. He invites those listening to him to become loyal subjects in God's kingdom.

In his introduction he tells the people that living under God's rule is radically different than living as subjects under the religious and secular power kingdoms of this world. Instruction concerning His kingdom begins with blessing. In the beatitudes he says that those who follow Him will ultimately inherit the kind of true happiness and peace God intended us to have. In verses 13-16 of Chapter 5 he turns their attention to the kind of impact that the citizens of His kingdom can have on the world. Let's read verses 13 through 16: (Read)

Jesus describes his followers as salt and light. He suggests that we possess the spiritual resources the rest of human society needs. We have these resources because we believe in God as the source of spiritual life. Jesus said in Jn. 8:12, "I am the Light of the world; he who follows Me will not walk in the darkness, but will have the Light of life."

We are the light of the world because the grace and love of Jesus shines through us. There are many people in this world who do not have the salt and light needed to survive in the kingdom of heaven. Sadly, in spite of all human greatness, people who don't know God and believe in Jesus live in spiritual darkness. People who live in spiritual darkness are like meat that has no taste and doesn't keep.

The only way to become a citizen of heaven is to follow God's king. The kingdom of heaven is a spiritual kingdom. When you embrace Jesus as the king of your life you partake of His spiritual life.

Jesus also calls his followers to reach out to those who are living in spiritual darkness. His plan involves sending his followers out into a tasteless and darkened world to provide the salt and light that will

season their life and bring them to Christ. In John 17:15-17, Jesus calls this being "in" the world but not "of" it.

We have been called to participation, not isolation. We are to maintain regular contact with people who don't know Christ. Just as salt is used to season meat and light is used to dispel darkness, we are to bring spiritual light and a great tasting message to all people.

The followers of Jesus, however, are to be different from the world. You can't win people to Christ by looking and acting like the world. We are to be distinct from people who don't know Christ. Salt can't help meat by becoming unsalty; light can't help darkness by covering itself. We cannot help people of the world unless we are different from them and offer them something better than they have. God already knows how sinful the world is! He is most concerned with whether or not his citizens are being what they are supposed to be.

In his book, *The Message of the Sermon on the Mount*, John Stott writes, "When society does go bad, we Christians tend to throw up our hands in pious horror and reproach the non-Christian world; but should we not reproach ourselves? One can hardly blame unsalted meat for going bad. It cannot do anything else. The real question to ask is: where is the salt?"

Christians should live in such a way that people are attracted to our message rather than repelled by it. Your life should confirm Christ, not deny Him. Your character and lifestyle should reflect that of Christ's. If you take the time to get involved with people and show them the life of Christ, you will find many people who will be open to the message of Christ that you share in your own personal story.

I. Season Your World!

Salt in the ancient world had two main uses: seasoning and preservation. Meat without salt is bland and decays rapidly.

Salt loses its saltiness by being diluted or contaminated. In the Palestinian homes of Jesus day, the baking oven was located outdoors. An oven was stone, with a floor of tiles. Under the tiles was a layer of salt, to retain the heat from the fire. This layer would eventually lose its savoring properties and no longer do its job. So the tiles would be taken up, and the old salt removed. Then a new layer would be poured in and the tiles replaced.

Living your life apart from a vital connection to God is ultimately tasteless. Even the good gifts and blessings that come from God ultimately lose their flavor when we substitute them for a meaningful relationship with God. Jesus calls his followers to add flavor to this life. It makes you wonder why some believers are so dull and boring when we are supposed to be God's agents of love in the world.

In Mark 9:50 Jesus says, "Salt is good; but if the salt becomes unsalty, with what will you make it salty *again*? Have salt in yourselves, and be at peace with one another." Jesus uses this same language about unsalty salt--and links being salty with being at peace with one another. Peace means more than the absence of conflict. It means the presence of closeness and harmony. Being salty requires having close relationships with other Christians.

John 13:34-35; "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. "By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another."

John 17:21,23 that they may all be one; even as You, Father, *are* in Me and I in You, that they also may be in Us, so that the world may believe that You sent Me. "The glory which You have given Me I have given to them, that they may be one, just as We are one; I in them and You in Me, that they may be perfected in unity, so that the world may know that You sent Me, and loved them, even as You have loved Me.

There needs to be a connection between Christians and people in the world being drawn to God. Why? Because everyone wants to have healthy close relationships. Those who don't, but see others who do, become open and curious about how they can have one.

Luke 14:33-35. "So then, none of you can be My disciple who does not give up all his own possessions. Therefore, salt is good; but if even salt has become tasteless, with what will it be seasoned? "It is useless either for the soil or for the manure pile; it is thrown out. He who has ears to hear, let him hear.

Jesus uses the same language again--this time linking it to radical and costly commitment. Everything you possess--not just your money and material possessions, but also your time, your talents, your relationships, your plans, etc.--should voluntarily be given to Him.

There are church people who obviously live for materialism just like everyone else. But when people see that your commitment to Christ actually changes you in these areas, they will take Him more seriously because they see you have found a cause worth living for. It is our commitment to Christ that helps us to love and accept non-Christians.

Colossians 4:5-6: ⁵Conduct yourselves with wisdom toward outsiders, making the most of the opportunity. ⁶Let your speech always be with grace, *as though* seasoned with salt, so that you will know how you should respond to each person.

Paul uses this same image of salt as seasoning once again. This time he refers to the way we speak to people who don't really know Christ. You may disagree with a person's lifestyle, but you still must demonstrate an attitude of grace and love towards them. We have to recognize that every person is precious in God's eyes, and that He loves them and is prepared to accept them as they are if they will only come to him through Christ. It is this kind of genuine concern that opens doors to sharing the good news with people.

Jesus was great at this. No one was more righteous than he was, no one lamented the destructive effects of sin more than he did, no one was more straightforward that God wants to change our moral lives--but his love for them came across so clearly that he became known as "the friend of sinners." They were attracted to him as strongly as they were repelled by the Pharisees, who had lost their saltiness.

II. Light up Your World.

When you are in total darkness, you get lost and can really get hurt. That's how it is living without God--you don't really know how to live or relate well with others. You get confused, lost, and damaged. What you need is light. And believers are like light. We show people how to live life in such a way that keeps them from spiritual damage.

Paul writes to the Ephesians in Chapter 5:3,4,8-11. But immorality or any impurity or greed must not even be named among you, as is proper among saints; and *there must be no* filthiness and silly talk, or coarse jesting, which are not fitting, but rather giving of thanks. For you were formerly darkness, but now you are Light in the Lord; walk as children of Light (for the fruit of the Light *consists* in all goodness and righteousness and truth), trying to learn what is pleasing to the

Lord. Do not participate in the unfruitful deeds of darkness, but instead expose them;

One of the best ways to "expose" the unfruitful deeds of darkness, is to show them how fruitful it is to walk in the light of Christ. The world's way of life fills a person with a sense of emptiness. In contrast, God's way is to place a high value on people and not use them or take advantage of them. Those who walk in the light see things more clearly and reject materialistic greed. Citizens of Christ's kingdom practice generosity. We learn to live below our means so we can help meet the needs of others.

In Titus 3:1,2 Paul tells us to be good citizens and neighbors. ¹Remind them to be subject to rulers, to authorities, to be obedient, to be ready for every good deed, ²to malign no one, to be peaceable, gentle, showing every consideration for all men. Are you respectful and cooperative to those in authority over you? Are you a friendly and helpful neighbor? Are you hard-working, respectful, and honest?

Paul writes in Titus 2:9,10: ⁹Urge bondslaves to be subject to their own masters in everything, to be well-pleasing, not argumentative, not pilfering, but showing all good faith so that they will adorn the doctrine of God our Savior in every respect. Does your boss wish he/she had more employees like you? Do you treat the people where you work with dignity and fairness?

Paul tells the Ephesians (6:5-9) Servants, be obedient to them that are your masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in singleness of your heart, as unto Christ; Not with eyeservice, as menpleasers; but as the servants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart; With good will doing service, as to the Lord, and not to men: Knowing that whatsoever good thing any man doeth, the same shall he receive of the Lord, whether he be bond or free. And, ye masters, do the same things unto them, forbearing threatening: knowing that your Master also is in heaven; neither is there respect of persons with him. This same kind of love and respect is supposed to carry over into your family life.

Peter says that your commitment to Christ will even cause you to want to invest in your non-Christian spouse and children in 1 Pet. 3:1,2,7: In the same way, you wives, be submissive to your own husbands so that even if any *of them* are disobedient to the word, they may be won without a word by the behavior of their wives, as they observe your chaste and respectful behavior. You husbands in the same way, live

with *your wives* in an understanding way, and show her honor as a fellow heir of the grace of life, so that your prayers will not be hindered.

III. Make a Difference in Your World.

Salt knows how to keep its cool. It melts at 800 degrees centigrade and vaporized at 1440 degrees centigrade. On the other hand, it has a lower freezing point than water and is used to melt snow and ice. As Christians, we must fit into a diverse society and exercise our faith for the sake of Christ's kingdom.

Light dispels darkness. Statistics show that crime is lower in well-lit areas. The bible says in John 3:19 that men love darkness rather than light because their deeds are evil. Light also performs a function that salt does not. Light reveals! Light illuminates the road ahead and shows us which way to go to avoid disaster.

Morally and spiritually people today are driving down the highway of life without their headlights on and sooner or later disaster will occur. The only thing preventing this world from self-destructing is the light provided by the body of Christ. As salt and light we are to penetrate the world to prevent it from complete decay.

Jesus warning to us is: Don't let your salt lose its savor and don't let your light go out.

Conclusion

The issue is not perfection, but direction. Most of us come to Christ largely through the influence of Christians who were salt and light to us. When you begin to taste and see that the Lord is good your whole life begins to take on new meaning and purpose! You begin to see and invest in the eternal life prepared for the citizens of Christ's kingdom.