

“Salt and Light”
September 11, 2022
Matthew 5:1-16

I. Introduction

Up to this point, Matthew hasn't recorded many of Jesus' words and teachings in his Gospel. But after writing in [Matthew 4:23](#) that “Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom, and healing every disease and sickness among the sick,” he recorded in the next 3 chapters one of Jesus' teachings—the Sermon on the Mount. Volumes have been written about this sermon or even just the first 10 verses. Some commentators feel that these 3 chapters are a summary of a longer sermon; others feel that this record is a summary of several sermons; still others feel that this is the complete sermon as Jesus gave it. Regardless of its history, the Sermon on the Mount has affected the lives of many people. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., who was an American Baptist pastor, based his political and personal philosophies on the teachings found in the Sermon on the Mount.

Jim Hansen, who will be here the next two Sundays while Linda and I are away hiking. has been working through the Beatitudes in his past visits. If I understand it correctly, next Sunday he is going to finish his study of the Beatitudes. So, I'm going to skip the first 12 verses of this chapter, the Beatitudes, and consider being “Salt and Light.”

II. Matthew's Introduction

In his introduction in verses 1 and 2, Matthew wrote that what Jesus said was heard by everyone. But primarily, Jesus taught His disciples about the attitudes that should be in their hearts. These high standards are for all believers—not just a select few. For the others who gathered around but belonged to the crowd—those who weren't disciples—Jesus was going to show them the hopelessness of their religious views. There is no way that anyone in their own strength would be able maintain the standards that Jesus preached. Only when one allows Jesus to be his Lord and Savior and lives with the power of the Holy Spirit can these attributes be possible in a person's life. Paul called them the fruit of the Spirit—[turn to Galatians 5:22-26](#).

The disciples, as well as the crowd, came from a variety of religious backgrounds—today we might call it their religious worldviews. Some, like the Pharisees, believed that the right religion consisted in keeping the Mosaic Law and all the traditions passed down through the years. Like *traditionalists* today, they were focused only on the past. They said things like, “*We’ve always done it this way.*” Others, like the Sadducees, came from more liberal backgrounds and were ready to change Scripture and traditions to fit their own personal religious philosophies and changes in the culture. We would call them the *liberals*; today they like to call themselves “*progressive.*” Then there were those from the Essenes who, like the *fundamentalists or separatists* of today, felt that right religion meant being separate from the rest of society and its sinful influence. Finally, there were the Zealots—the *activists*—who thought that right religion was centered in radical political activism.

But none of these ways was Jesus’ way. They all focused on some external activity. Now after His year of inauguration, the King of kings needed to teach His disciples—all of His followers—about the kingdom of heaven and what was expected of its citizens—of Christians—then and now. True religion is not based on ritual or philosophy or location or activism. It is a right attitude towards God and towards other people. True religion is based on what’s in a person’s heart. 1 Samuel 16:7b says, “**The LORD does not look at the things man looks at. Man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart.**” Turn to Matt. 23:27-28. God looks at the heart—at a person’s motivations and desires—not what he shows to everyone on the outside.

As the disciples sat there listening to Jesus, perhaps they thought that being a Christian with the attitudes and actions He described was going to go against the culture too much and maybe these attitudes and actions should only be observed when they were with other Christians—people that would understand.

III. Jesus’ Challenge

Then Jesus dropped the bombshell, He said, “**You are the salt of the earth.**” His disciples, Christians, are to strive in the power of the Holy Spirit to live according to the Beatitudes not just with Christians **BUT** out there in the world. Jesus’ disciples are to function as salt and light in the world. As the Beatitudes are

practiced or lived 24/7, Jesus' disciples need to be visible to the entire world. The second word was "are." Jesus emphasized the fact that being a Christian means that we **are** God's salt and light. There is no choice in the matter. Our only choice is what kind of salt we are and what we do with the light.

A. Qualities of Salt In the ancient world, salt was highly valued. The Romans said, "*There is nothing more useful than sun and salt.*" Often Roman soldiers were paid in salt, and it was from that practice that we get the phrase "*not worth his salt.*" As Jesus talked about salt, several qualities of salt would come to the disciples' minds.

1. It is pure. First, salt was connected with purity. Salt is pure. Its whiteness makes the connection easy. The Romans said that salt was the purist of all things since it came from the purest of all things—the sun and the sea. Jesus was telling His disciples that they need to be pure.

One of the characteristics of the world in which we live is the lowering of standards—it is no different today than it was in Jesus' time. Standards of honesty, of hard work, of morality all tend to be lowered. Just look at the attitude towards those that "sleep around." Or look at those who would rather get paid a stimulus check or unemployment rather than working for a living. Or consider that over 80% of high school students and 70% of college students don't see anything wrong with cheating on tests. And we could all name many more examples of the lack or lowering of standards.

Jesus was telling those listening that His disciples are to demonstrate standards of strict honesty, purity in speech, and high moral standards. Just as salt is pure, Christian lives must be pure. As seekers of righteousness in thought and speech and actions, Christians must guard themselves so that as James says in [James 1:27](#) they keep themselves "**from being polluted by the world.**" [Leviticus 11:44](#) says, "**I am the LORD your God; consecrate yourselves and be holy, because I am holy.**"

2. It preservatives. Another quality of salt is its use as a preservative. Before refrigeration, salt was used to keep things from going bad; even treating meat to keep it from spoiling. Jesus' disciples are to be a preserving influence in the world. Christians are to retard moral and spiritual spoilage. As God's children and as temples of His Holy Spirit ([1 Cor. 3:16](#)), Christians represent God's presence on the earth. Christians

and their attitudes and actions are the salt that prevents the entire earth from degenerating even faster than it wants. A Christian's presence should affect conversations and the actions of others.

When Christians and their influence are taken out of the world at the Rapture, Paul wrote that Satan's power and wickedness will be released in ways never seen before—turn to 2 Thessalonians 2:7-10. Evil will be virtually uncontrolled and as is seen in [Revelation chapters 6-19](#) it will take less than 7 years before things sink down so far that God must put a stop to it.

3. It flavors. A 3rd quality of salt is that it gives flavor to things. As some of you can attest, food without any salt is rather tasteless. Christianity is to life what salt is to food. Someone has said, "*We Christians have no business being boring. Our function is to add flavor and excitement to the world.*"

In a worried world, the Christian should still be serene. In a depressed world, the Christian should be the one who is still full of the joy of life. Because you know Who is in charge and you know the "Rest of the Story," there should be a smile on your face and a bounce in your step and a joy in your heart that circumstances can't destroy.

4. It can become useless. There is a 4th quality of salt—Jesus said that salt can lose its saltiness. It can become useless; it can lose its ability to flavor things. Obviously, pure salt cannot become unsalty. But sometimes salt would be contaminated with other minerals or chemicals. This salt might look OK, but it couldn't preserve, and it has no flavor or worse yet, it might even have a repulsive taste. Such salt couldn't be used for anything. It couldn't even be spread over the ground—what little salt was present, along with the contaminants, would kill whatever was planted there. All one could do with useless salt was to throw it onto a path or road where it would eventually be ground into the dirt and disappear.

Just as the contaminated salt can't lose its salt content, Christians cannot lose their salvation. But a Christian can lose his ability to purify and preserve and flavor life. A Christian can lose his effectiveness for the kingdom of heaven when sin and worldliness contaminate his life. He is of no more use for the kingdom of heaven than contaminated salt is useful for the table. In [Luke 14:34](#) Jesus said, "**It is fit neither for the soil nor for the manure pile; it is thrown out.**"

B. Qualities of Light Jesus said that as well as being salt, Christians are to be “**the light of the world.**”

Salt works secretly and it works from within; light works openly and is from without. Salt works through our living; light works through what we teach and preach. There are several qualities of light.

1. It is visible. First, to be of any value, lights are to be seen—they are to be visible. No one purchases a light to hide it in a closet. Jesus said that Christians are meant to be seen. There is no such thing as a secret disciple. A person’s Christianity should be visible to everyone. [Daniel 12:3](#) says, “**Those who are wise will shine like the brightness of the heavens, and those who lead many to righteousness, like the stars for ever and ever.**” A Christian needs to be visible in the ordinary day-to-day things of life as well as in special places like in church. A Christian should be seen in how he treats a salesperson in a store, how he treats his employees or serves his employer, even how he plays a game or how he drives his car. A Christian should be seen in the language he uses—or doesn’t use—and the things he looks at on the internet. Jesus didn’t say, “You are the light of the church,” He said, “**You are the light of the world.**” Be visible.

2. It warns. Some lights are warning lights—like trouble lights on a car’s dash. They warn of a possible problem or an imminent situation—something that must be dealt with ASAP. In [John 8:12](#) Jesus said, “**I am the light of the world.**” Zechariah said in [Luke 1:79](#) that Jesus came “**to shine on those living in darkness and in the shadow of death.**” Jesus came to warn about God’s wrath and the only way to know God and have eternal life. When Jesus returned to heaven, He gave us the task to go and make more disciples. Like a lighthouse warning of hidden rocks which could destroy a ship, we must tell others—warn them—of what happens when one dies. We must tell them of the one way to heaven—Jesus Christ. ([Acts 4:12](#))

3. It guides. Lights can give warning and lights can also guide on the correct path—like the headlights on a car or a flashlight showing the way to walk in the dark. Christians need to make the way clear for others. They need to light the way. The 2nd part of the Great Commission says, “**teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.**” We need to guide others in their Christian walk both by what we say and by what we do. God’s light—the light we reflect—is to walk by and to live by. Turn to [Psalm 119:97-105](#). If we study and teach God’s Word, our path and the path for others will be clear.

4. The purpose of light Jesus finished by telling His disciples, “In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.” The purpose of letting our light shine as we do our good works is not to bring attention or praise to ourselves but to bring attention and praise to God so that others may see God and glorify our Father in heaven. Our good works are to magnify God’s grace and God’s power. As the Apostle Peter wrote in 1 Peter 2:12, “Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us.”

IV. Conclusion

The Beatitudes emphasized the change produced in the attitudes and actions of those who become Jesus’ disciples. But discipleship doesn’t stop there. Christians are to be salt and light in the world where people are dying without the good news of the Gospel. We must proclaim or speak the truth of the gospel for people to know it, but we must also live the truth of the gospel for people to see that it is real. In many cases, it is the way you go through your everyday life that will give you the opportunity to tell someone the Gospel. People can’t change until they have heard the message, but the old saying is still true, “*Actions speak louder than words.*” Turn to 1 Peter 3:15-16.

How about you, does your life show that you are different? Are you salt that is pure and preserving and full of flavor or are you impure and really don’t act like salt at all? How about your light? Are you rude and disrespectful towards others? Do you go along with the crowd in ridiculing someone or telling off-color jokes? Are you any different from the rest of the world? Do people know you are a Christian because the Beatitudes are seen in your life? Are you concerned that if Jesus isn’t a person’s Lord and Savior that they will spend eternity in hell? Are you salt and light in this dark lost world or are you useless salt and a dim light?