

The King's Speech: Bright and Salty

Matthew 5:13-16

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[Pray]

Last week we began a series through the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew chapters 5 through 7 – if you have a Bible please open there now. If you didn't bring your own you will find one in the pew in front of you.

We started by looking at how, while there were huge crowds of people listening in, the power packed words Jesus speaks in these chapters are primarily aimed at teaching His disciples what it means to follow Him – and so they are words that are really relevant to most of us.

The King's Speech starts with the Beatitudes; 9 sayings that do three things: describe, prescribe and empower Christian life. They describe what a disciple of Jesus looks like, they prescribe what a disciple of Jesus should look like and they empower a disciple of Jesus to be a disciple of Jesus.

Today our text begins in Matthew 5 verse 13 where we are going to continue looking at what disciples of Christ look like.

And one thing we see in this text, like in most of Jesus' teaching, is that the Christian life holds two things together that appear to be contradictory. And that is that a Christian is both "No different from anyone else" and "Totally different from everyone else."¹ And without understanding how these two realities can be simultaneously true it is really hard to understand what Jesus is saying in a text like the one we are going to look at.

Here's what I mean. We know that Christians are no different from anyone else because this is what the Gospel tells us. The Gospel says Christians are sinners saved by grace. That means the best of our good actions do nothing towards getting us saved – we don't earn God's acceptance. We aren't people who got our act together and then came to Jesus; God's grace extended to us, He called us to Himself while we were sinners like everyone else and we got saved – that's grace. That's why Paul says

It is by grace you have been saved, through faith - and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God (Ephesians 2:8)

Now God changes us when He saves us. He doesn't leave us where we are. And that is a really good thing. But we can't forget where we started. And so when we share our faith we don't do it by saying "hey pagans, come be more enlightened like us Christians." Instead we proclaim the Gospel from the common ground of being sinners just like them – we share Christ from the position of being poor in spirit like we talked about last week.

¹ This paradox is adapted from Pastor Bob Thune of Coram Deo Church.

Once a non-Christian friend of mine asked me if I had a problem with gay people. He knows I'm a Christian. He knows I believe the Bible, and he knows the Bible does not approve of homosexual actions. So he asked this question, really to pick a fight with me, expecting me to take some kind of righteous high road and come down on homosexuals.

But my response was: Look, the Bible tells us that we are all sinners. And when it comes to going to heaven or hell there is no hierarchy in sin such that some sins send us to hell and others don't. The Bible says:

For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God... [and] the wages of sin is death. (Romans 3:23; 6:23)

All sin separates us from God. So "yes" homosexual action is sin, but so is gossiping, telling white lies, cheating on your taxes and for that matter looking at heterosexual pornography or any sexual actions outside of marriage. In fact – and this is key – before we come to Christ, even helping an elderly person cross the street or giving money to charity might as well be sin because it is done by someone living in rebellion to God and won't get you to heaven.

So Christians are exactly the same as everyone else because we are all sinners in need of God's forgiveness and not deserving it.

But Christians are also totally different from everyone else. And this is ultimately because God is totally different from everything else. Theologians call this total difference "holiness" and it just means that God is unlike everything and everyone else in the universe. Everything else is created – He alone is uncreated. Everything else is temporal – He alone is eternal. Everything else has a finite amount of energy – He alone is all-powerful and on and on the list goes on – God is nothing like anything else.

And the Bible tells us that this God who is unlike anything else lives within those who receive His grace and submit their lives to Him. 1st Corinthians tells us:

Don't you realize that all of you together are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God lives in you? (1 Corinthians 3:16 NLT)

Now he is talking about people who have submitted their lives to Christ. But as this God who is totally unlike anything else begins to live within us He changes us to look like Him. And looking like God makes us totally different from everyone else.

That might mean you didn't get excited about the same things you used to get excited about. When you are at the water cooler at work and people start joking about how drunk they got on the weekend or how they "got lucky" you start to find you can't join in because you don't find that kind of conversation funny anymore – Jesus is doing something in your heart.

Or when the guy in front of you doesn't see that the light has turned green and just sits there, and then doesn't shoulder check and cuts you off; instead of jumping to anger you find yourself drawn towards a different response. You aren't like you used to be.

Now Jesus doesn't change our actions – we still have free will. But as He gets into our lives He changes our desires so that we start wanting to change our actions. And the result is Christians are totally different from everyone else because Jesus is alive within us.

Ok, let's see how this unpacks. Look with me at Matthew 5: 13 and 14.

[Read Matthew 5:13 and 14]

The thesis I want to prove to you today from this text is that: **Our God given identity comes with a God commissioned responsibility to glorify God.**

So first we are going to look at **Our God given identity** that Jesus presents here. And it comes through the first words of verse 13 and 14.

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The first thing Jesus says to His disciples – like Peter, James and John – as well as disciples like us is “You are the salt of the earth; you are the light of the world.”

Very briefly, in the first century salt had a couple different uses. Primarily it was used as a meat preservative. Meat goes bad really quickly in hot places and so people in first century Israel would rub salt into it to stop it from going bad. We don't do this today because we have these real cool things called refrigerators.

Secondarily salt was used to season food making it taste better – just like it does today.

And likewise light served the same function that it does today, and that is it takes away darkness.

And this is what Jesus' first century disciples would have thought of when they heard Him say “you are the salt of the earth; you are the light of the world.” But the question is “what does that mean? And I think there are two main things Jesus is getting at here.

First, if Jesus' disciples are the preserving and enhancing and darkness removing force in the world then that means the world is a decaying and tasteless and dark place.

So Jesus is saying His disciples have a purpose in the world. Just like salt is for food – to preserve it and flavor it – and light is for darkness – to take it away – so Jesus’ disciples are for the world. We will come back to that.

The second thing we need to see here is that Jesus doesn’t say “try to be the salt of the earth” or “you should be the salt of the earth” or worse yet “if you want to be my disciples be salt in the earth.”

Instead Jesus says “You **are** the salt of the earth; you **are** the light of the world.” Jesus’ words are first a statement of fact, not a command. And in the Greek this is emphasized.

Now get your mind around this. Jesus is speaking these words to Peter, James and John as well as other people like us who had pledged their lives to following Him. But we know ourselves and we know a lot of the time we aren’t that great at following Jesus.

And frankly neither were Jesus’ original disciples. A few chapters later we see the great disciple Peter denying he even knows who Jesus is. And even before that James and John are going to get in a fight over which one of them is going to be the greatest in Jesus’ kingdom.

And yet Jesus says “You – My disciples – **are** the salt of the earth, you **are** the light of the world”. Jesus can say this to people like Peter and us because Jesus’ statement of fact is a statement of God given identity.

Here is where we come back to the beatitudes we looked at last week. There we saw a three step cycle where first grace was extended and received by undeserving sinners. Then these grace purified sinners gave away what they’d received to undeserving and sometimes ungrateful people who sometimes even persecuted them for it. And this suffering led them back to their knees where they began.

And this is step one – God makes us salt and light, He doesn’t ask us to become salt and light, He does this within us. If you are a disciple of Jesus this is your reality – this is your identity. So what identity do we get by being the salt and light of the world?

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The identity Jesus gives us here is an identity He earned for Himself. Jesus says:

I am the light of the world. Whoever follows Me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life. (John 8:12)

And then Paul says:

[Jesus] gave Himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for Himself a people that are His very own, eager to do what is good.
(Titus 2:14)

In other words Jesus came to preserve something that was decaying and enhance something that was previously tasteless by making it eager to do good.

Jesus says when I move in to your heart I make you salt and light in the world because I am the salt of the earth and I am the light of the world. Our identity is tied to the God that is living within us!

Today people's identities are usually wrapped up with what they do: I'm a doctor, I'm a mechanic, I'm a pastor. And when we do good in our job then our culture sees us as useful and we see ourselves as important. On the flip side when we do bad or lose our job we also lose our identity.

But Jesus says your identity as My disciple is not tied to what you do either in the world or for Me. Your identity is tied to the fact that I am the almighty, immortal, all knowing God of the universe, and I love you, and I live within you and have made you My child – that's who we are! And that's why you are valuable.

And that's where our thesis starts this morning - **Our God given identity.**

But that's not the end of the discussion because the identity God has given us isn't for us to enjoy, it is for us to use. **Our God given identity comes with a God commissioned responsibility...**

Let's read verses 13-15

[Read Matthew 5:13-15]

While the emphasis here is identity, Jesus adds two common sense implications and a divine commission to the picture He paints.

The first common sense implication has to do with salt. If salt loses its saltiness it is useless.

Now there are two possible ways salt can lose its saltiness, now we could get lost in the details here and miss Jesus' point so we are going to keep this brief.

Some have hypothesized that since most of the salt of Jesus' day was collected from the Dead Sea – which is right in the middle of Israel – and there are lots of impurities in the Dead Sea, the salt they collected could become less salty with age until it no longer worked as a preservative or a flavor enhancer – it's possible.

But the second and more probable way for salt to lose its saltiness is if it isn't used at all. If you don't rub the salt into the meat or sprinkle it on your food then no matter how much salt you have it isn't serving its function of being salty.

Either way Jesus' point is the same. Salt is for food. Salt that isn't used for food, or isn't good enough to be used in food is useless. Jesus says salt like that should be thrown out and trampled – and He isn't talking about using it to remove ice on the sidewalks, he is talking about it being good for nothing.

That's the first implication of His picture.

The second common sense implication is that light hidden under a bowl is likewise useless. Light is for removing darkness; but under a bowl it doesn't do that.

Now Jesus isn't giving a cooking infomercial or an advertisement for halogen, Jesus is talking about disciples. And the point here is the identity He has given us by being in us, isn't for us to enjoy. Everyone who bares the name of Christ has been commissioned with a responsibility – our identity gives us a job.

Just like salt is for food and light is for darkness so Jesus' disciples are for the world. Friends, if you are a disciple of Jesus you have a God commissioned responsibility to be for the world.

So what does that mean?

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That means Christianity must not be something we do on Sundays. It can't even be something that gets fired up Sundays and leads to a great devotional life Monday to Saturday but nothing more. Being a disciple of Jesus means being a preserving, enhancing and darkness-removing force in the world we live in – that is our job and if we aren't doing that then Jesus says we are good for nothing.

And this is the first warning in the King's Speech: Jesus says if the people I have made salt and light aren't being bright and salty then they are going to be thrown out and trampled.

So the question is: do your actions make you bright and salty in the world you live in?

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If you are convicted this morning that your identity as salt and light hasn't crossed over into action then I urge you to humble your heart before God and ask for help to be what He has made you to be.

God doesn't want His salt to be trampled; He has something else in mind for us. But it requires repentance. Romans tells us:

Don't you see how wonderfully kind, tolerant, and patient God is with you? Does this mean nothing to you? Can't you see that His kindness is intended to turn you from your sin? (Romans 2:4 NLT)

That's written to Christians. So there is a brazen warning attached to the responsibility in Jesus' words.

But His words don't end with a warning because Jesus' commands always come with a commission.

Our God given identity comes with a God commissioned responsibility...

Before Paul met Jesus his name was Saul and he persecuted Christians. Acts 9 tells us:

Meanwhile, Saul was still breathing out murderous threats against the Lord's disciples. He went to the high priest and asked him for letters to the synagogues in Damascus, so that if he found any there who belonged to the Way, whether men or women, he might take them as prisoners to Jerusalem. (Acts 9:1-2)

A commission is an endorsement that gives authority to act in someone else's name. Saul's commission came from the high priest. And the letter he got empowered him to imprison people.

In a similar way the responsibility of our Christ given identity comes with a commission rather than simply a command. And what I mean by that is that Jesus puts His authority and power behind what He commands us to do.

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Last week we described this by saying the grace of the Gospel starts with God. God came to earth in the person of Jesus, He died to make a way for sinners like us to re-enter a relationship with the Father, and He did this all before we did anything.

And this gift transforms us, it purifies us, it changes us and it empowers us to look like Jesus and do what He commands.

This is the cycle of sanctification – the cycle of looking more and more like Jesus. Jesus tells us that we **are** the salt; we **are** the light in a world that is desperately decaying and dark, because Jesus is salt and light and He lives within us.

But it isn't enough for us just to be salt in a salt shaker or light under a bowl, we have to be salt in meat and light on a stand. Jesus has saved us to do a job.

And when we are salty and bright we prove that in fact The Salt and The Light lives within us.

And this leads us to the last part of our thesis: **Our God given identity comes with a God commissioned responsibility to glorify God.**

Look at verse 16

[Read Matthew 5:16]

Jesus finishes this section with a specific command built on everything He as already said: Let your light shine. You are light because I live within you. Let Me shine out of you. Let Me...

Isn't it interesting that even with the God given identity that has been placed within us, and the God commissioned and empowered responsibility we've been given, He still leaves us with the free will to live it out or not?

Friends, be bright and salty like you were made to be. Live it out. Live it out. That's Jesus' empowered command.

...

The last point I want to leave you with today is that the identity we've been given and the job we've been empowered to do line up with the ultimate purpose for why we were created, and that is to glorify God.

Verse 16 ends by saying when people see you being actively bright and salty they are going to end up glorifying God. The bright and salty deeds we do will result in God's glory being expanded in Prince George.

Now we've talked about this before, but just in case the idea of God creating us for the purpose of bringing Himself glory sounds strange let me give you two verses from among many that point us to this. 2 Corinthians tells us:

And He [Christ] died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for Him (2 Corinthians 5:15)

When we live for ourselves we are king in our lives. But Christ died so that we could make Him king in our lives. It's about Him and His glory.

And Ephesians tells us:

He [the Father] predestined us for adoption to sonship through Jesus Christ, in accordance with His pleasure and will – to the praise of His glorious grace (Ephesians 1:5-6)

From before time God's plan to save us lined up with His pleasure and His will to the praise of His glory and grace.

If you've been saved it's because God wants to bring Himself glory through your life. That is your purpose. And it is when we are fulfilling our purpose by doing the job we have been built to do with the power of the identity we've been granted, that we are most happy and most fulfilled.

Our God given identity comes with a God commissioned responsibility to glorify God.

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Would you please bow your heads with me? I want to conclude with two questions for two types of people who are here today.

First, if you are a disciple of Jesus but recognize that your salt has been full of impurity or is simply sitting nicely in the salt shaker, and your light is lit but hidden under a bowl, then with our heads bowed I want to give you a chance to repent. And I'm going to ask you to indicate this by raising your hand. And by doing this you are saying

"Jesus I know I am salt and light because You are the Salt and the Light of the world and You live within me. But I recognize I haven't been acting my identity out the way I should be. I'm not really bright and salty. Please empower me afresh today to obey in this way.

Is there anyone else here who recognizes this is them and they want to repent and be empowered afresh today?

My second question is this – with your heads still bowed – has your life been filled with Christ's saltiness and light at all? Have you been saved? If the answer is no or you're not sure but you want Jesus' power to move in you and take you out of the darkness and decay of the world you've been living in and make you into His salt and light then I'm going to ask you to put your hand up and I'll pray a prayer that you can pray along with to begin your journey.

Is there anyone here who isn't sure they've been saved or knows for sure that they have never received Christ's forgiveness and make Him Lord in their life but wants to do that now? Would you raise your hand?

Would you pray with me?