

Salt of the Earth; Light of the World

Matthew 5:13-16

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Last week, we started into Jesus' Sermon on the Mount. We discovered the Beatitudes which describe the lives of kingdom disciples. We learned that a kingdom of heaven disciple is poor in spirit; mourns over their own sinfulness, is humble; hungry and thirsty for righteousness; is merciful; pure in heart; peacemaking and persecuted for righteousness' sake. We also learned that we cannot produce these qualities in our own lives by trying really hard. They are more like evidence that the Spirit is at work in our lives. So we can pray that God would grow these in our lives. Our part also includes changed minds and compliant hearts. We repent or change our minds by the power of the Spirit to value what Jesus' values; not what the Tony Stark character values. We comply with the Spirit's work in our lives.

But the Sermon on the Mount does not end with Beatitudes. They weren't given just so we can become good people or so the Holy Spirit can suit and shape us to live in the kingdom of heaven. **Jesus expects His disciples to impact the world for the kingdom of heaven.** Kingdom disciples don't just grow for themselves but for the benefit of others. Jesus makes this clear in the next paragraph of this message.

It's Matthew 5:13-16.

Matthew 5:13-16 (ESV)

Jesus said – “You are the salt of the earth, but if salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything except to be thrown out and trampled under people's feet. You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.”

Jesus lists 2 ways He expects His disciples to impact their world for the kingdom. **Jesus expects His disciples to be salt of the earth.** But what does it mean for a person to be salt of the earth. Salt in Jesus' time had multiple uses. It was added to sacrifices, connected to purity, symbolic of loyalty and seasoned food. It was also associated with wisdom and used to preserve food. We really don't know if Jesus had a specific use of salt in mind when he made this declaration. But one thing was sure – salt was very useful. It brought some benefit to those who possessed it. So I think we can interpret “salt of the earth” to mean **“To bring some benefit to the people around you.”**

We've just seen an example of this in the White Cross video. When people gather together to roll up bandages for medical facilities half way around the world, they bring benefit to those places and people. When we donate food to the

food bank, we bring benefit to those who receive that food. When you show genuine kindness and concern for your neighbor, you act as salt of the earth for you are bringing some benefit to that neighbor. The person who has their mind changed by the Spirit and complies with the Spirit's work will bring some blessing to others.

Some of the beatitudes directly impact others. Blessed are the meek – humility blesses others in that they don't have to deal with disruption that pride and arrogance bring. Mercy automatically benefits others with forgiveness or compassion. Peacemaking blesses others by helping to reconcile disputes. Every Christian is called to be salt of the earth in their world.

The second way Jesus expects His disciples to impact the world for the kingdom is as light. **Jesus expects His disciples to be the light of the world.** What does that mean? To understand this, we have to think about the way light functioned in the typical Palestinian home of Jesus' time. Most people lived in one room houses. The same room functioned as the dining room, bedroom and kitchen. When the sun went down about 6 in the evening, everything went dark. So they would light one lamp. It was a partially closed reservoir made of clay, kind of like a tea pot. It had a hole in the top to pour oil in and a spout on one end into which they put the wick of flax or cotton. It was fairly small and gave off modest light. So to give maximum illumination they had to set it in the center of the room on a lamp stand. When a lamp was placed there, it could give light to everyone in the house.

In the same way, Jesus' kingdom disciples are called to be the light of the world. **We positively influence the sin-darkened world by bringing light into it.** We carry the light of the Gospel of the kingdom and we ourselves are that light. The Spirit's work in our lives produces kingdom light in us that affects every part of our being. So when the Gospel is brought to a people that have never heard it, the person proclaiming it brings light into that darkness. When you share the hope you have because of Christ with someone who doesn't know Christ, you bring light to their darkness. Jesus calls every Christian to be salt of the earth and light to the world.

But what if we're not? What if we choose to just opt out of that part of the job description for the Christian? Is that ok? Are the salt and light optional components of Christianity reserved for spiritual keepers? The rest of us can just go along living our lives as closet Christians?

Let's look at what Jesus says about those who aren't impacting the world for the kingdom? "Oh well, as long as you think a little about being salt and light, that's good enough." No. "But if salt has lost its taste, how shall it be

restored? It is no longer good for anything except to be thrown out and trampled under people's feet." **If you're not salt, it's good for nothing in the kingdom.** Those of you who are chemistry majors recognize pure salt technically can't lose its saltiness. It could be that Jesus referred to that which came out of the Dead Sea. It was actually a corrupted salt that would not maintain any taste. But it could also be that Jesus is saying that true salt doesn't lose its saltiness. So if you're not salt, you never were salt. If there's no salt of the earth benefit for others in your life, then it's questionable whether you're a disciple.

What if you just kind of hide your light? Is that okay with Jesus? "A city on a hill can't be hidden. Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket." **If you hide your light, it's as useless as invisible light.** You can't hide cities on hills. You can see them and their light from all around. No 1st century Palestinian family would light their lamp and then hide it under a basket. That would totally defeat the purpose of using up the oil. You light the lamp to spread the light. So if we are kingdom disciples, we will naturally let our light shine and bring the light to others. We can't help it. That's just who we are. Jesus says, "Let your light shine before others so they may see your good work and glorify your Father who is in heaven." So this is not just a matter of talk but of action; wrapping bandages; showing compassion and mercy; peacemaking; intervening on behalf of someone who is vulnerable; gently and respectfully explaining the hope that we have in us. Salt of the Earth. Light of the World.

Let's see and hear about some more examples of ways in which the body of SVBC is going out to be salt and light in our world.

- White Cross DVD – Cameroon Greetings
- White Cross Presentation – Certificate – Keep going in this ministry.
- Honduras – Pastor Justin

So these are just 2 examples of how the people of this body are being salt of the earth and light of the world. A true disciple impacts others which bring glory to the Father.

Now some of you might have great difficulty hearing this right now because you can't imagine yourself being salt and light considering your current state. You have been beat up by life. Your family or marriage or work or something else is in a mess. You're just trying to survive. The call to impact others can discourage push you further because it

reminds you of another area in which you're failing or lacking. You need healing. Or you might want to do this but you don't know how. You need training. Or you're going through something really hard and you just need support.

This is where the church comes in. What role does the church play to help us impact the world for the kingdom?

The church is our haven, our hospital and our training center. We come together to be a people where we can find refuge, healing and training. The church is on mission when it supports, guides and prepares us for life. But life is mostly played out beyond these walls. We go out to a world of people who are dying without the message of the gospel. So both are important, growing as a disciple - disciple making. We've tried to capture this in our discipleship focus. Each one of us is called to grow as disciples of Jesus Christ. But a growing disciple becomes a disciple maker of Jesus Christ. So grow as a disciple and be a disciple maker. So definitely come to and enjoy this community as a refuge, as a hospital, as a training center.

The final question I want to leave with you today is **"How can I be salt and light to the people around me?"**

Some of you may be called to physically go into missions somewhere else. Some of you empower missionaries through your encouragement, prayer and finances. But all of us can be salt and light to the people around us in our lives. It doesn't always require sharing the Gospel with the world. One way we salt the earth is by growing as kingdom disciples. Then we see the Beatitudes manifested in our lives, to the benefit of others.

This can happen in some of the little things of life. Michael Wilkins writes:

"Everyday people are so affected by sin that they are less than what God has created them to be. They lie when they don't want to, they cheat just to try and get ahead, they hurt most the ones they most love. Many people we encounter don't really want to be like that, but they have no cure for the sin that has distorted who they are as created in the image of God".

We must show by our lives that we are different. Otherwise we hide our light from the world. How do we show we're different?

This can show up sometimes in little things, such as remembering to say "thank you" and to call your mom on Mother's Day. These things may not seem very important when compared with the major problems facing our culture. Yet they may be the best place to begin; they may be the only honest place to begin. If a person can't remember to say

thank you to a cleaner. How much are we really thinking about others? If we are rude to our families it doesn't matter how much we talk about love.

Likewise, Jesus teaches us that we witness to the reality of the presence of the kingdom of God in little kindnesses. Disciples who are poor in spirit will mourn over rudeness and abuse, and we will be gentle, pursuing righteousness, practicing mercy, and being peacemakers, even if it brings us grief. In so living, we will be revealed as sons and daughters of God, the true salt of the earth and the glowing light of the world.

As we come to the Lord's Table now, will you come to the Lord with where you are? Will you receive from Him what He has for you – forgiveness; grace; encouragement; power; conviction? Will you also use this time to ask Jesus "have I been salt and light for you Lord? I confess when I haven't. Show me some way I can in the next week.