

As we continue our study of Jesus' first sermon, the Sermon on the Mount, you might remember that last week we talked about the Beatitudes, that those were blessings which carried us from our conversion to our discipleship under Christ.

But that wasn't enough. Jesus kept preaching. After the somber news in the last Beatitude that his disciples might be persecuted, he explained what our calling looks like using two metaphors: Salt and Light. This week we're going to talk about what that means and what it has to do with our walk with God and with one another.

OPENING PRAYER

MATTHEW 5:13-20

Jesus preached, "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. ¹⁴You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden.¹⁵ 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. ¹⁶In 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. ¹⁷Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. ¹⁸For truly, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law until all is accomplished. ¹⁹Therefore whoever relaxes one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever does them and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. ²⁰For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.

Jesus' language was often poetic. He used metaphors and other devices to make his message memorable; it's usually visual and it's always packed with meaning.

Jesus said, **Matthew 5:13, “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.”**

Because this passage follows the Beatitudes, which is about being made into disciples, being “**the salt of the earth**” is a metaphor about discipleship. But how much ink has been spilled by preachers who have tried to make this and the parallel passage about how we are the “**light of the world**” about salvation!

They claim, “If you’re not salt and light, God will throw you out and you’ll be trampled under people’s feet!” But that’s not right, for if we are salt and light, we are already Christians!

Thus when Jesus said that when salt has lost its “**saltiness**” it is “**thrown out**,” he wasn’t talking about being condemned to hell. Rather, he was talking about being of no use as his representatives in this world, which is more like his analogy about how we may arrive in heaven only to see our work on earth burned up like straw.

Let’s think about it like this: We were put on this planet to give non-Christians a foretaste of the life to come through our own lives, adding flavor, adding salt to the world (without being “salty,” I might add!).

This could be something as simple as being hopeful. People who are salt and light are not easily rattled by their ups and downs; they’re not stressed out all the time. Can we do that, be hopeful?

Being salt and light might be as easy as being kind. People who are salt and light do not react when others are mean-spirited to them; when people are disrespectful to them, salt and light people love them anyway. Can we do that, be kind?

Being salt and light might be as easy as being peaceable. For example, salt and light people don’t become bent-out-of-shape when they don’t get their own way. Can we do that, be peaceable?

People struggle to make sense of their lives without God. But when we are salt and light we give them something to believe in, a sign that there is still hope, that there is still kindness in this world. That's what it means to be **"salt"** and **"light."**

On the other hand, a Christian can lose his saltiness. When we yell and scream, lie, lust, and brag; when we complain, gossip, steal, and cheat, in other words, when we do what the world does as a matter of course, the world will disregard us and we will be **"trampled under people's feet."**

Jesus said, **Matthew 5:14-16, "You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden.¹⁵ 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. ¹⁶In 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."**

The Bible is bookended with light. In the first couple of verses of Genesis we read, **"God said, 'Let there be light.' And it was so" (Genesis 1:3).** And in the last book of the Bible, The Revelation, the light of God obliterates all traces of darkness. We read, **"And night shall be no more; they need no light of lamp or sun, for the Lord God will be their light" (Revelation 22:5).**

Nearly 200 times **"light"** is used in the Bible to teach us about God and about our lives in him. And it is used to illustrate the drama and wonder of the Christian faith. St. Paul wrote, **2 Corinthians 4:6, "For God, who said, 'Let light shine out of darkness,' has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ."**

When Jesus said, **"You are the light of the world,"** he was talking about how our sins were revealed by God's light, that our hearts were then purified by this same light through repentance and absolution, and now we are witnesses to this light, which shines down on all people in **"the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ."** We have become like our Lord, so he says, **"let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven" (Matthew 5:16).**

Go public, let your faith be real for others as you live your life in this world. That's our Lord's message to you and me.

Jesus preached, **Matthew 5:17-20**, “Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. ¹⁸For truly, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law until all is accomplished. ¹⁹Therefore whoever relaxes one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever does them and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. ²⁰For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.”

Without Jesus’ intervention on Calvary, we would have been lost forever in the darkness. But he fulfilled the Law of God in his own life, and then he died on the Cross to cover over our sins. On the third day he rose from the grave, ushering us into eternal life. And he sent down on us the Holy Spirit that we might be “**salt**” and “**light**” in this world until he comes again. The Lord has made “**righteousness**” a natural fruit of our union with him.

Friends in Christ, this week let us add flavor to our saltiness and let us energize our lamps by studying God’s Word, receiving the Lord’s Supper with thankfulness, and worshipping Jesus with all our heart. Let us participate in Christian fellowship, let us serve one another, and let us be thankful for everything.

This week may you be inspired to add a little flavor to the world around you, to be a light-giver amidst the shadows in which you live.

And this week may you have the opportunity to share this message with another person who really needs to hear it, in the name of Jesus. Amen.