

Teachings of Jesus

Salt and Light

Matthew 5:13-16

Introduction

The teachings of Jesus in Matthew Chapters 5, 6, and 7 are 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 become loyal subjects of the kingdom. Jesus tells the people that living under God's rule is radically different than living as subjects under the religious and secular power structures of this world.

He begins with blessing. In the Beatitudes, Jesus says we can have the true happiness God wants us to have. Then, in verses 13-16, Jesus focuses their attention on the impact that kingdom citizens can have on the world. Read verses 13 through 16, "You are the salt of the earth; but if the salt loses its flavor, how shall it be seasoned? It is then good for nothing but to be thrown out and trampled underfoot by men. You are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do they light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a lampstand, and it gives light to all *who are* in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven. (Matthew 5:13-16 NKJV)

When Jesus describes us as salt and light, He is saying that we possess the essential spiritual resources that the rest of the world needs. We have these resources because we belong to Jesus, who is the only source of spiritual life. In John 8:12, Jesus says, "I am the light of the world. He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness, but have the light of life." (John 8:12 NKJV)

Jesus is the light of the world, and He shines through us. Those without Christ do not have the salt and light needed to survive in the kingdom of heaven. Jesus teaches that despite any human greatness, people who don't know God are spiritually dead. He says that people who live in spiritual darkness are like a steak without seasoning, which has spoiled.

The kingdom of heaven is a spiritual kingdom. You become spiritually alive when you embrace Jesus as the King and Lord of your life. When Jesus calls his followers salt and light, He reveals his plan for reaching those living in spiritual darkness. He plans to send his followers into this tasteless and darkened world to provide the salt and light that will attract people to Christ.

In His prayer of John 17, Jesus calls this being "in" the world but not "of" it. "I do not pray that You should take them out of the world, but that You should keep them from the evil one. They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth." (John 17:15-17 NKJV)

We have been called to participation, not isolation. Christians must maintain regular contact with people who don't know Christ. Just as salt seasons meat and a flashlight dispels the darkness, Christ shines His spiritual light and great-tasting message through us to non-Christians.

But the followers of Jesus are to be different from the world. You don't win people to Christ by looking and acting like the world. We are to be different from people who don't know Christ. Salt can't help meat by becoming unsalty; light can't help darkness if it is covered up. To help our world, we must be different and offer them something better. God already knows how sinful the world is! God concerns himself 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?"

What does it mean to be salt and light? Is it proclamation or demonstration? Well, of course, it involves talking with people about Christ. Sharing your faith, the good news of God's grace, and how Jesus has changed your life is an important part of your witness. Every believer should invite others to receive Christ and follow Him.

But that isn't what Jesus means when he says we should be salt and light. Jesus wants us to live in such a way that people are attracted to our message, not repelled by it. Your life should confirm Christ, not deny Him. Jesus is teaching about character and lifestyle! Only a few people are dynamic speakers or have charismatic personalities. The good news is Jesus doesn't require that to have an effective spiritual impact on someone.

If you just take the time to share your faith and tell them about God's love and grace, you may find many people who will be open to the message of Christ that you share in your own personal story.

I. You are the Salt of the Earth when you Exhibit a Flavorful Life.

Salt in the ancient world had two primary uses: seasoning and preservation. Meat without salt is bland in taste and prone to rapid decay? Jesus draws our attention to salt as a seasoning. Salt loses its saltiness by being diluted or contaminated.

One writer says, "In the Palestinian homes in Jesus' day, the baking oven was 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 savor 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."

Life apart from a vital connection to God is ultimately tasteless. Even God's good gifts lose their flavor if you put them before God in your life.

Jesus calls us to live a flavorful life. Why are some believers so dull and boring? Have they lost their flavor? Jesus calls us to be God's agents of love and grace in the world. In Mark 9:50, Jesus says, "Salt *is* good, but if the salt loses its flavor, how will you season it? Have salt in yourselves, and have peace with one another." (Mark 9:50 NKJV)

Jesus 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 involves having close relationships with other Christians. Jesus tells the disciples in John 13:34, "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all will know that you are My disciples if you have love for one another." (John 13:34-35 NKJV)

In John 7:21, Jesus prays for the disciples "that they all may be one, as You, Father, *are* in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me. And the glory which You gave Me I have given them, that they may be one just as We are one:" (John 17:21-22 NKJV)

Everyone wants to have healthy, close relationships. Those who see others who do, become open and curious about how they can have one. So what about you? Are you connected to other believers in fellowship and study beyond the Sunday morning worship? Are you working on building some close friendships?

To be an effective Christian requires a radical commitment to Christ. Jesus says in Luke 14:33, " So likewise, whoever of you does not forsake all that he has cannot be My disciple." (Luke 14:33 NKJV)

Is Jesus saying you must give up your possessions, move into a commune, and take a vow of poverty? Of course not. What He means is something far more radical. He means everything you possess: your money and material possessions, your time, talent, relationships, plans - everything! - you voluntarily dedicate it all to God. God becomes the owner, and you become the steward.

We all know church people who live for materialism just like everyone else. But when your commitment to Christ genuinely changes in these areas, people will take Jesus more seriously because they see you have found a cause worth living for. In Colossians 4, Paul says, "Walk in wisdom toward those *who are* outside, redeeming the time. Let your speech always *be* with grace, seasoned with salt, that you may know how you ought to answer each one." (Colossians 4:5-6 NKJV)

While we may disagree with a person's lifestyle, we must still communicate grace towards them. We recognize that they are precious in God's eyes, that He loves them, and that He will accept them if they come to him through Christ. This kind of

genuine concern opens doors to sharing the good news with people. Jesus was great at this.

No one was more righteous than Jesus was. No one lamented the destructive effects of sin more than Jesus did. No one was more straightforward than Jesus that God wants to change our moral lives. But God's love for them came across so clearly that Jesus became known as "the friend of sinners."

II. You are the Light of the World when you Exhibit a Morally Illuminating Life.

Have you ever gone into a dark room and tried to move around before your eyes adjusted? What happens? You bump into things and can wind up hurting yourself! When you are in total darkness, you get lost and damaged. 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 and Peter describe how to do this. Paul writes to the Ephesians in Chapter 5, "But fornication and all uncleanness or covetousness, let it not even be named among you, as is fitting for saints; neither filthiness, nor foolish talking, nor coarse jesting, which are not fitting, but rather giving of thanks. (Ephesians 5:3-4 NKJV)

"For you were once darkness, but now *you are* light in the Lord. Walk as children of light (for the fruit of the Spirit *is* in all goodness, righteousness, and truth), finding out what is acceptable to the Lord. And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather expose *them*." (Ephesians 5:8-11 NKJV)

When Paul says we should "expose" the unfruitful deeds of darkness, he means we should expose them by positive contrast to the emptiness of the world's way of life. He points out two ways we can do this: First, we are to place a high value on people without using or taking advantage of them. And secondly, we are to reject materialistic greed by practicing generosity and living below our means so we can help meet the needs of others. 1 Peter 2:12 says, "Having your conduct honorable among the Gentiles, that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may, by *your* good works which they observe, glorify God in the day of visitation." (1 Peter 2:12 NKJV)

In Titus 3, Paul tells us to be good citizens and neighbors. He says, "Remind them to be subject to rulers and authorities, to obey, to be ready for every good work, to speak evil of no one, to be peaceable, gentle, showing all humility to all men." (Titus 3:1-2 NKJV)

Are you respectful and cooperative to those in authority over you? Or do you mock them and make their jobs difficult? Are you a friendly and helpful neighbor? Do you even know who your neighbors are? What about on the job? Are you hard-

working, respectful, and honest, or are you known as a time waster, a contentious troublemaker, or a goof-off? Does your boss wish they had more employees like you? Do you treat the people where you work with dignity and fairness?

Peter says that your commitment to Christ will cause you to invest just as much time and energy in your spouse and children.

III. You are Salt and Light when you Make an Impact on your World.

Salt knows how to keep its cool. It melts at 800 degrees centigrade and vaporizes at 1440 degrees centigrade. On the other hand, it has a lower freezing point than water and is used to melt snow and ice. We are called to fit into a widely divergent society and exercise our influence for the sake of Christ's kingdom.

Light also performs a needed function. We know 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. But light also performs a function that salt does not. Light reveals! Have you ever tried to drive at night without your headlights on? Morally and spiritually, people today are driving down the highway of life without their headlights, 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 and destruction. Christ warns us, "Don't let your salt lose its savor or your light go out."

Conclusion

The issue is not perfection but direction. I wonder how many of you came to Christ mainly through the influence of Christians who were salt and light to you. If you taste the flavor and see the light, you've got to come to the Source! And the source is Jesus!