



Salt and Light that **Point to God**

Matthew 5:13-20

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In Matthew 5:1-12 Jesus describes the inner character of His followers ... how they are directed and shaped by Christ. How they begin to take on His character, His humility, His servant's heart and how they are blessed as they depend on God. And this faith, this trust, this dependence on God in the heart of His followers, flows out into the world.

"You are the salt of the earth ... the light of the world." We've heard those words many times before. We're familiar with the language. But to these first disciples, hearing it for the first time, would have been a shock to them. *They* are the salt of the earth, the light of the world? WOW! Who would have seen that in himself? They believed and followed. But, the salt of the earth? The light of the world?

"You are the salt of the earth. Your trust in Me, your following Me will be felt by the world. It will make a difference in the world. People will take note. Their lives will be affected. Some will hate you because of Me. Some will persecute you because of Me. Others will see God through you and will be changed forever, unto eternal life."

Salt makes a difference, doesn't it? You notice salt. "Hay, there's not enough salt in here. Please pass the salt." "Wow, that's pretty salty. Who put all that salt in here?" "That's way too salty!" If you want food to last, what do you do with it? Put it in the refrigerator. Put it in the freezer. In days gone by, you would salt it - really, really well. Salt makes a difference. You notice salt.

A business owner employed a number of Christians in his company and watched them like a hawk. He said, "You know, I was naturally drawn to God by observing Christian workers who were conscientious and kind and thorough on the job. But I'll tell you what really impressed me. One day a guy asked if he could see me after work. I agreed to meet with him, but later in the day I started to worry that this young religious zealot might be coming to try to convert me, too."

"I was surprised when he came in my office with his head hanging low and said to me, 'Sir, I'll only take a few minutes, but I'm here to ask your forgiveness. Over the years I've worked for you I've done what a lot of other employees do, like borrowing a few company products here and there. And I've taken some extra supplies; I've abused telephone privileges; and I've cheated the time clock now and then."

"But I became a Christian a few months ago. I want to make amends to you and the company for the wrongs I've done. So could we figure out a way to do that? If you have to fire me for what I've done, I'll understand. I deserve it. Or, if you want to dock my pay, dock it whatever figure you think is appropriate. If you want to give me some extra work to do on my own time, that would be okay, too, I just want to make things right with God and between us."

As a follower of Jesus, you are the salt of the world. You make a difference in your world. How can you not? If you made no difference in your world, you wouldn't be what? You wouldn't be a follower of Jesus. You can't help but make a difference. That's what salt does. That's what followers of Jesus do. They can't not make a difference. Why? Because they have the flavor of Jesus. When people get a taste of you, they get a taste of Jesus. Not a perfect taste, but a taste none the less.

It doesn't mean you're perfect. Far from it. But it does mean you're repentant. You readily admit your short fallings, your sin. It's not the ones the world thinks enlightened or wise that Jesus calls His salt and light. Not those of lofty speech and wisdom, as the Apostle Paul said. But those who are simply followers of Jesus. Far from perfect. Sinners themselves. Yet, forgiven by One who gave His life for them. *(from James Douthwaite)*

When you draw attention to yourself, instead of to Jesus, when you draw attention to *your* doing instead of *His* doing crucified (and risen for sinners) you're not *being* the salt of the earth that you *are*. (Cwiria) *"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 set 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."

You are the light of the world. Light shining in the darkness. You are light, not like the sun or a star, but like what? Like the moon. How? You're a reflected light. The light doesn't originate with you. You, in yourself, are not the light of the world. But you reflect the One who is the Light of the world.

You don't hide light. You don't light a lamp and then put a basket over it. Why not? You put it up on a stand for one reason. So it can be *seen*. You can't hide a city on a hill. Our faith is known only to God, but our works can be seen by others. *"Let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven."*

Notice who gets the glory here. Not you, but the Father. And Father presupposes Son. Your light is not you shining, but Christ who is your light. Let your light shine before others. Let your Jesus shine before others so that others might give glory to God for what He has done in providing a Savior.

What are these good works that shine forth from us to the world around us? They're spelled out in God's Law, which is an expression of His will. The good works which flow from faith have to do with loving God and loving our neighbor. As one person put it, "Works are the breath of faith, faith's exhalation in the direction of the neighbor. We love because we are loved in God's beloved Son. We forgive because we have been forgiven in Christ. We have mercy because Christ first had mercy upon us, laying down His life as a sacrifice for our Sin. When we don't love, when faith doesn't breathe, when we fail to do the mercy that our neighbor needs, we are putting a basket over the light of Christ, hiding what Christ has done and is doing in and through us." *(above paragraphs from William Cwirla)*

So Jesus says, *"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. For 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."*

What has Jesus done? He's fulfilled the Law and the Prophets. (Luke 24:27) Which is to say, all the demands of the Law placed upon you, He fulfilled. All the promises of God given to you, He fulfilled. All the life of God provided for you. All the righteousness of Christ credited to you. For it's on the cross where Jesus said what? It is finished. It is accomplished. It is fulfilled (John 19:30).

As Romans 8 puts it, *"There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death. For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do. By sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit."*

And in this freedom we do not set aside the commandments of God, and we don't just do them, like homework. We *live* them. For as Christ fulfilled them in *His* life, so He fulfills them - by His Spirit - in *our* lives. That in His love and forgiveness, you be extra-ordinary husbands and wives, sons and daughters, brothers and sisters; you be remarkable neighbors and workers; you be servant friends and citizens. For that is what you are. You are a child of God. You'll fail at that, of course. Miserably, at times. Daily. You will succumb to the temptation to not BE who you ARE. You're sinful nature will get the better of you. *(from Douthwaite)*

The work and mission of Jesus is not to get rid of the Old Testament with God's commandments and requirements. The very opposite is true. Jesus came "not to get rid of it but it, but to full fill it." He came to do what no other could - love God with all your heart and all your soul and all your strength and all your mind.

"Therefore, 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." To relax the Law, to ease the burden of the Law, may seem like a "Gospel" thing to do. It eases the pressure on a guilty conscience. It sounds so Gospel to say "Who cares about sin since we are under grace and not under law?"

The Corinthian congregation seemed so enlightened, so radically "gospel oriented" in their tolerance of just about anything, including a man having an affair with his step-mother. They could boast "all things are lawful to me" and "food for the stomach and the stomach for food" and what does it matter because I'm forgiven anyway.

Jesus warns that whoever relaxes the commandments and their demands, and thus, teaches others to do so, will be called least in the kingdom. Jesus didn't relax the commandments, He amplified them. The Law said, "Do not kill," and Jesus said, "Don't even hate." The Law said, "Do not commit adultery," and Jesus said, "Don't even think about it." The Law said, "Love your neighbor," and Jesus said, "Love your enemy." The Pharisees taught, "Try hard and God will reward you," and Jesus said, "Be perfect as your Father in heaven is perfect."

Unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and the Pharisees (and they were doing remarkably well for sinners), you cannot enter the kingdom of heaven.

To diminish the Law, to lighten the load of the commandments, is to diminish the work of Christ who came to fulfill the Law with His obedience. It's to say, "Jesus didn't have to do that. God didn't really mean that. He's our permissive parent in heaven who takes us out for ice cream after threatening to ground us for a year."

When we write off the commandments, we are, in effect, writing off the work of Jesus. If you make the commandments light enough, if you wipe them out iota by dot, sooner or later you won't need Jesus at all. Why do you need a Savior if you have no sin? Why do you need a Redeemer if the Law doesn't mean what it says?

That's the great lie of "antinomianism", doing away with God's Law. It sounds so loving, so enlightened, so gospel. "God accepts everyone, come as you are, forget the commandments, that was then, this is now. God is love." No! God justifies sinners by the perfect life and blood of His Son Jesus, fulfilling the Law for those who don't and can't.

No, the Law remains. And it does what it's intended to do. Every iota and dot of it will kill you. That's what it's supposed to do. The Law says, "Be holy as the Lord your God is holy." And in Jesus, you are holy, in His holiness. Perfect, in His perfection. *"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."* (from Cwirla)

Me? The salt of the earth? And yet, Jesus says it is so. How can that be? How is that possible? God, in His wisdom and in His grace, doesn't allow us to see who we really are. He hides His work from us. He does a marvelous work in us, bringing us to repentance, forgiving us our sins, changing our heart. And He doesn't allow us to see it, for if we saw what He was doing in us, we would be tempted to do what? Take the credit for it. We would take pride in it. "Hay, I am the salt of the earth. I'm really something. I really make a difference for God in the world. He's really using me. WOW! Too bad others aren't more like *me*. By God's grace, hopefully they'll get there some day."

Then the righteous will answer him, saying, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you drink? And when did we see you a stranger and welcome you, or naked and clothe you? And when did we see you sick or in prison and visit you?' And the King will answer them, 'Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me.' (Mt 25)

God uses His Law, His perfect standard of righteousness, a reflection of who He is, of His will - to show us how *weak* we really are, how *unspiritual* we are by nature - that we might hunger and thirst for Jesus and His righteousness, and then He fills us, with Himself, the fulfillment of the Law. God works in us to weaken *us* so that *He* would be our strength. *That they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.*

In being the salt of the earth, God wants you to be yourself, not somebody else. Not someone you're not. Be who He has made you (and is making you), weaknesses and all. Did you know that you are the saltiest, the best witness, when you are being yourself, when you are genuine, when people see what you're really like, weaknesses and all - like the employee who wanted to make amends to his employer?

Who can relate to someone who's always strong and has no weaknesses? No one. Those kind of people intimidate me too much. I can *look up* to them, but I can't *relate* to them. They live in a different universe from the rest of us. And if you try to be someone you're not, if you try to be *stronger* than you really are, people won't be able to *relate* to you and they won't be able to relate to *God*. The non-Christian thinks what? "If Christians are always so strong and holy, what hope is there for me? What would God want to do with someone as weak and as unholy as me? What chance do I have of ever relating to God!"

God, through His Law, is showing us our weaknesses, our failings, our lack of love for him, our failure to trust him, our utter sinfulness ... so that we finally turn to Him with nothing to offer. And we *become* the salt of the earth, the light of the world. We become what we can never, ever make ourselves - something of the greatest value there ever was - poor, meek, mourning, hungry, thirsty, merciful, pure of heart, weak, flavorful to the lost, preservation of the presence of Jesus in our world, impacting the world in a way that would never be possible on our own. Jesus makes you salt ... Jesus makes you light ... so that others may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven. Salt and light that point people to God.