

Salt & Light pointing to God

Matthew 5:13-20

Pastor Jim Rademaker

... and for those dwelling in the region and shadow of death, on them a light has dawned." ... And leaving Nazareth he went and lived in Capernaum by the sea ... And he said to them, "Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men." And he went throughout all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom and healing every disease and every affliction among the people. ... And great crowds followed him (Matthew 4)

... Seeing the crowds, he went up on the mountain, and when he sat down, his disciples came to him. And he opened his mouth and taught them, saying: "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. ... "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied. ... "Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. (Matthew 5)

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."

Before refrigeration, salt was used as a preservative. It killed the bacteria and kept the food from going bad. In much the same way, salt is an antiseptic. It hurts like crazy to put salt on an open wound, but it kills the germs. In ancient days, salt was used as currency, a form of exchange. It's the root of our word, "salary". It's what we mean when we say *a man is worth his salt*. A little salt brings out the flavor and makes otherwise bland food savory and delicious.

To His followers, Jesus said, "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 notice. 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."

A business owner employed a number of Christians in his company. 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 was surprised when he came in my office with his head hanging low and said to me, 'Sir, 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. 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."

If you're a follower of Jesus, you're the salt of the world. You make a difference in your world. How can you not? If you don't make a difference, if you don't stand out in your world, you're not what? You're not a follower of Jesus. Believers 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're flavored with Jesus. They have the flavor of Jesus. If you're a follower 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.

And knowing you're not perfect, you readily admit your short falls; your sin. You're poor in spirit; repentant. Notice, it's not those the world considers enlightened or wise that Jesus calls salt and light. Not those smooth of speech or considered by many to be wise, as the Apostle Paul says. But those who are simple followers of Jesus. Sinners themselves. Yet, forgiven by One who gave His life for them. (from James Douthwaite)

When you draw attention to yourself, when you draw attention to *your* doing instead of *His* doing, instead of to Jesus, you're not *being* the salt of the earth that you *are*. (Cwirla) And losing the flavoring of Jesus, what good are we? *"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 like a star, but like what? Like the moon. 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!

What's the one thing you don't do with light? You don't hide it. What's the point? What a waste! 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 that it can be *seen*. The point of light is to be seen, not hidden. You can't hide a city on a hill. Our faith is known only to God, but our works, our light, can be seen by others. *"Let your light **shine** before others, so that they may see your good works (the fruits of our faith) and give glory to your Father who is in heaven."*

Notice who gets the attention; who gets the credit. Not you, but your Father in heaven. Your light isn't *you* shining, but Jesus shining through you. Let your Light, let Jesus, *shine* through you; be reflected through you, for others to see. Let them see Jesus in you, that they might turn to God and rejoice in what He's done in providing a Savior for them!

What are these good works that shine forth from us to the world around us? They're spelled out in God's word; in God's Law, which is an expression of His will. The good works which flow from faith have to do with what? 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, why? Because we are loved, in God's beloved Son. We forgive, why? Because we've been forgiven in Christ. We show mercy, why? Because Christ has shown mercy to 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 what? *"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) He's given them their full meaning. What does it mean to have no other gods beside the Lord? Look to Jesus. Only in Him will you ever see that. What does it mean to keep the sabbath day holy? Look to Jesus. Only in Him will you ever see that. What does it mean to honor your father and mother? Look to Jesus. Only in Him will you ever see that. What does it mean to not covet what your neighbor has? Look to Jesus. Only in Him will you ever see that. What does it mean to love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your mind, with all your strength, and to love your neighbor as yourself? Look to Jesus. Only in Him will you ever see that.

Which is to say, all the *demands* of the Law placed upon you, He fulfilled. All the *promises* God made in the Old Testament are fulfilled, how? In Jesus. **Romans 8:1** *There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. ... 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 ... in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us"* For it's on the cross where Jesus said what? It is finished. It is accomplished. It is fulfilled (John 19:30).

Jesus came, not to get rid of the Old Testament, with God's commandments and requirements, but to give it its full meaning; to fill it up.

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. "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 good thing to do. It eases the pressure on a guilty conscience. It sounds so Gospel-like 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 thus, teaches others to do so, will be called least in the kingdom. Jesus never relaxes the commandments. Instead, what does he do? He amplifies them. The Law says, "Do not murder," and Jesus says, "Don't even hate." The Law says, "Do not commit adultery," and Jesus says, "Don't even think about it." The Law says, "Love your neighbor," and Jesus says, "Love your enemy." The Pharisees taught, "Try hard and God will reward you," and Jesus says, "Be perfect as your Father in heaven is perfect." (from Cwirla)

Unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and the Pharisees, you cannot enter the kingdom of heaven.

When we write off the commandments, when we make them light enough, if we wipe them out little by little, sooner or later we won't need Jesus at all. Why do you need a Savior if you have no sin?

No, the Law, every iota and dot of it, remains. And it does, what it's intended to do. God uses His Law, His perfect standard of righteousness, a reflection of who He is - to show us how *weak* we really are, to show us how *unspiritual* we are, to show us how hopeless our efforts are to avoid hell and make it to heaven - that we might hunger and thirst for Jesus and His righteousness. And then, He fills us, with Himself, the fulfillment of the Law.

In the beatitudes, Jesus describes the inner character of His followers. How they are directed and shaped by Christ. How, through faith in Him, 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 - like it did for that employee, who after becoming a follower of Jesus, confesses his sin to his employer and is willing to do whatever it took to make things right with God and with his boss.

"You are the salt of the earth You are the light of the world ... let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.