

## Salt and Light – Matthew 5:13-16

Did you know Jesus is coming again? And every day that passes we know we are a little closer to that day. And it seems that almost on a daily basis we see things happening that look like the signs Jesus told us to look for as warnings that his coming will be soon! I don't know about you – but that gets me excited to know Jesus could be coming soon! COVID-19 may have caused a great deal of anxiety and frustration and change in our daily lives but it also showed us how quickly things can change in our world. It shows what pestilence of Biblical proportions could look like; it shows us how simple it would be to control buying and selling and do away with cash; it has shown us how easily people panic and look for someone to lead them out of crisis – anyone will do! Yes, even an anti-Christ...

This morning I want you to think with me for a moment: “What would happen if all the Christians were taken out of this world?” We know that some day Jesus will return and take us to our heavenly home he has prepared for us, and there we will be with him forever. So what will earth be like when all the believers are taken out of it?

If I can use Jesus' symbols, what will it be like when the salt and light is removed from society?

In Matthew 5:13-16 we see Jesus refer to his followers, Christians, as salt and light. Note what is said: You are the salt of the earth and You are the light of the world. Please note what Jesus is not saying. He is not saying you must try harder to be light in this dark place, or you must put more effort into being salty. You see, Jesus makes us salt and light. This is one way to describe the new life that is ours in Christ. He made us the salt and light when we repented of our sin, and came to him for salvation. So clearly Jesus is talking to believers when he says you are the salt of the earth and you are the light of the world.

What wonderful symbols for the Christian life.

Pure salt is usually brilliant white. The ancients believed it stood for purity. That certainly describes the Christian life – it should be one of purity. And purity is not something we have produced. No, it is the work of Jesus in our lives.

For instance, 1 John 1:9 says, “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins, and purify us from all unrighteousness.”

The light has always pointed us to God, from the burning bush of Moses to the pillar of fire leading the Israelites, there was no doubt God was on the scene. Again, in 1 John we read this:

“This is the message we have heard from him and declare to you: God is light; in him there is no darkness at all. If we claim to have fellowship with him and yet walk in darkness we lie and do not live in the truth. But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin.”

It is clear that Jesus is talking to Christians, to those who walk in the light, those who are made pure by faith in the saving work of Christ our Lord.

But I want us to look again at the text, because these verses are actually a warning. If we are light and salt in this world, our presence here must make a difference. If Jesus came this week and took all Christians out of this world then the world should know almost immediately. We cannot hide the fact that we are salt and light. We must stand out so that people will see the difference in us and give glory to our Father in Heaven. (v. 16)

In this passage we have two strange pictures, scenes so unlikely as to almost be laughable. There is a picture of salt losing its saltiness. What is salt if it does not have its flavour? Jesus says it is good for nothing without its distinct flavour, and would be only good to line your driveway. It would be like sand or dirt. That's it.

And the other picture is of someone taking a lamp and sticking it under your mixing bowl. That is crazy – why would you cover up a lamp? Its purpose is to give light so you can see where you are going, safely navigate your way around the house, or even around the village if you carry it with you outside. But to light a lamp and stick it under a bowl is just crazy. And that is the message Jesus wants to give to us today. To try and hide the fact that we are his, that we are Christians is just as foolish. We should stand out like a city at night that displays the lamps of the homes in each house. A city on a hill filled with lamps in each home will not be hidden from view...

When Lise and I lived in Southern Alberta, we would have to drive into Calgary for meetings, dates or shopping. As we approached the city from the south we would come to a place on the road where the lights of the city were seen spread out before us. It was one of Lise' favourite sights – the lights of the city. We were still miles from Calgary, but it could not be hidden.

Jesus says that we as Christians should be the same way. We do not have to say a great deal, for our lives will speak volumes – how we deal with stress, money, sex, leisure, injustice. How we live should reflect the character of Christ in our community.

This week Lise and I stumbled on a movie on Netflix called "Freshman Year." It tells the story of CJ, a young man who grew up in a preacher's home and heads off to a secular college. CJ is a good kid, clean cut, neat, polite and conscientious. In his class the professor asks how the world came about, and without hesitation CJ says "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth." That got him trouble with the professor who insisted on an evolutionary worldview. But the students noticed he was different – especially one girl. As CJ moved into his dorm room, his roommate was all excited about the party life on campus. CJ instead pulled out his Bible and said he would do his devotions. His new roommate said it was going to be a long semester!

Well CJ starts to get influenced by the campus life. First he is talked into going to a party to secure his place on the basketball team. He soon discovers he does not fit there. But when he makes the team and the captain of the team offers him alcohol, CJ gives in and starts drinking.

This leads to more bad choices and CJ sleeps with his girlfriend. She becomes pregnant. CJ had been light and salt on that campus, but he had lost the light, he had lost his saltiness.

CJ learned the hard way: be diligent, be careful, “be alert for your enemy the devil prowls like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour.” CJ also learned that God can still rescue his children from the mouth of the lion! God can restore the light and the saltiness to those who repent and come to him for forgiveness. This is the good news of grace...

But Jesus here puts the warning out to those who would be his disciples: you ARE the Salt of the earth, you ARE the light of the world. That is, you are if you truly are my disciple...

So this morning let’s look briefly at what are the characteristics of salt and light, and what that means for us.

Salt:

- Salt is valuable. I know that today we can buy salt fairly cheap, but in Jesus’ day it was valuable. In fact, it was often used to pay soldiers the wages they were owed. That is how we got the expression, “He is worth his salt.” It was used to barter to get the other things you needed: meat, vegetables, bread, clothes, shoes, etc.

When Jesus says you are salt, he is saying you are valuable. In Jeremiah 31:3 we read these words from God:

<sup>3</sup>The Lord appeared to us in the past, saying:

“I have loved you with an everlasting love;  
I have drawn you with unfailing kindness.

How do we know God loves us? John 3:16 reminds us that

God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.

If you ever feel worthless, unimportant, forgotten, you need simply look to the cross of Calvary to know how important you are to God, how valuable you are to Him. He would give His Son to die in your place so you could live free of sin by simply repenting and putting your faith in Jesus.

- Salt is used to preserve food. In Jesus’ day when there were no refrigerators or freezers, meat could be cured with salt so that it would last longer. Fish was often preserved this way. Salt could also be used with some vegetables to keep them from going bad.

And so the Christian life should help preserve God’s standards in the world today, following what is right and wrong, not according to what is politically correct, or what is popular, but what is recorded in God’s Word, the Bible. We are not always popular for our stands, for our morality, but we cannot compromise with the world. We must obey God rather than man.

I cannot help but see Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego standing tall when all of Babylon was down on their faces before the statue of the king. They would not bow to an idol, and so they alone were left standing that day. May we have the same courage to stand tall and not bow to any idol today. What kind of idols are there now? How about popularity, wealth, fame, power, possessions, self indulgence, and on we could go...

But the best thing about salt is that it lends flavour to things. I cannot imagine French fries without salt – or even popcorn for that matter. And what of mashed potatoes, or cooked vegetables, or even that pot roast? You get it – salt adds flavour. Shouldn't the presence of Christians in our community make a positive difference? This is why we formed the Dream Team – we wanted to be sure we were looking at our community through the eyes of Christ seeing what we could do to bring His love and grace to our community.

And one of the greatest things we can do is live in such a way that others will be thirsty for the Living Water, who is Jesus. May they see our good deeds and give glory to our Father in heaven. I have heard testimonies again and again that go something like this: I was not interested in religion, or God, but I saw something in this Christian I worked with, or lived by, or went to school with and I wanted what they had. That is salt at its best – our lives making others thirsty for Jesus.

Two brothers had a great way to make money each summer at the lake. The first brother would go and visit the fishermen lined on the pier. As he chatted, he offered them some of the salted peanuts he was eating. After they had eaten most of his peanuts, his brother would come along and offer to sell the thirsty fishermen some pop – at highly inflated rates. One brother made them thirsty the other provided a solution. Our lives should make people thirsty for more and then we can point them to Jesus – the solution to their need.

Isn't that also the purpose of light – to show people the way? If we are to be light in this world, we need to be able to point people to Jesus. Jesus alone is "the Way, the Truth and the Life. No one comes to the Father except through him." (John 14:6) This will always be our message to a lost world, stumbling in the dark.

Jesus once told his disciples, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life." (John 8:12) John 1:9 tells us Jesus was the one true light. If we are lights, it is because he lives in us. Maybe it would be better that we say we are lamps – and he is the light within us. We do not cause the light – it is from his presence within us. And as William Barclay correctly observes,

"Christianity should not be visible only within the church. A Christianity whose effects stop at the church door is not much use to anyone. It should be even more visible in the ordinary activities of the world." (DSB, p. 123)

So if we are the salt of the earth, and the light of the world, and Jesus came tonight and took us to heaven, would the world miss us? It should... at least according to Jesus....