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The Gospel According to Matthew

Be Who You Are – Salt and Light

April 22, 2018

Sermon Text: Matthew 5:13-16

Scripture Reading: John 12:27-50

Mat 5:13-16 "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. (14) "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. (16) 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.

The Lord Jesus here in this Sermon on the Mount is speaking to His disciples. He is teaching them about His kingdom, the kingdom of heaven. We see it and set our minds on it by faith. This is not science fiction, this good news about a new earth. In fact, Paul said that if it isn't true, then –

1Co 15:19 If in Christ we have hope in this life only, we are of all people most to be pitied.

And you recall that he went on to say:

1Co 15:35-36 But someone will ask, "How are the dead raised? With what kind of body do they come?" (36) You foolish person! What you sow does not come to life unless it dies.

Christ's kingdom is coming in its fullness and by faith in God's Word we can face death victoriously, realizing that when the believer's body is planted in the ground, a seed is planted. That seed, on resurrection day, will come to life – eternal life – in a new immortal body totally free of

any and all effects of sin and the curse, never to die again. Christian, your body has to go! A seed cannot come to new life unless it is first produced by death of its original form.

But what is the kingdom of heaven like now? In this present world? We have already heard Christ describe the citizens of the kingdom in the beatitudes, and here in verses 13-16 the Lord challenges us in regard to our time in this world. Why does He keep us here? Are we doing any good at all in a world that seems to go darker and darker? Well, here is His answer.

Listen again:

Mat 5:13-16 "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. (14) "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. (16) 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.

The Bible presents this fallen world as a place of corruption and darkness. By corruption it means moral corruption. Moral rottenness. Evil decay of all that

is good. It is a place of death and where there is death there is decay and darkness. God is light and life, but men in their sin reject Him, and thereby they plunge themselves into blindness to truth and the putrifaction of death.

(of organic or inorganic matter) in a state of decay; rotten or putrid. *'a corrupt and rotting corpse'*

For example:

Psa 53:3 They have all fallen away; together they have become corrupt; there is none who does good, not even one.

Act 13:34-35 And as for the fact that he raised him from the dead, no more to return to corruption, he has spoken in this way, "I will give you the holy and sure blessings of David.' (35) Therefore he says also in another psalm, "You will not let your Holy One see corruption.'

Rom 8:21 that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God.

You are the salt of the earth. Salt was the great antiseptic and preservative of the ancient world – it still is in some places. Salt was the remedy for decay and corruption. Salted fish doesn't rot.

Meat salted and made into jerky doesn't even need to be refrigerated.

Well, physical corruption and rotteness becomes the image of moral rotteness. A corrupt, rotten person stinks in God's nostrils.

Gen 6:11-12 Now the earth was corrupt in God's sight, and the earth was filled with violence. (12) And God saw the earth, and behold, it was corrupt, for all flesh had corrupted their way on the earth.

What Jesus is telling us as His people is this:

Your presence in this corrupt world restrains the corruption and rot. You are a moral antiseptic and preservative lest the world become totally corrupt as it did in Noah's day.

Similarly, Jesus says that we are light. YOU are the light of the world. Now, this is interesting because elsewhere Jesus says:

Joh 12:46 I have come into the world as light, so that whoever believes in me may not remain in darkness.

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But here Jesus says that WE are the light of the world. In other words, citizens of His kingdom, His elect, the church, *are Christ in this world*. We live out and preach the light of God's truth in a world that has been blinded to His truth by sin and the devil.

We do not often see and realize all of this, but nevertheless it is true. Christ's people in this world restrain evil. They dispel the darkness that sin uses to blind the lost.

Now, listen still once more to Jesus' words:

Mat 5:13-16 "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. (14) "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. (16) 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.

How are we salt and light? The last part of verse 16 answers that question: *by living as the people we are now in Christ. By being citizens of the kingdom of heaven. By being people who are described by the Beatitudes.*

Others take note. They see us and hear us. They recognize Christ is in us and glorify God. Even the unrepentant are forced to do so –

Act 4:13-14 Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were uneducated, common men, they were astonished. And they recognized that they had been with Jesus. (14) But seeing the man who was healed standing beside them, they had nothing to say in opposition.

Notice the emphasis that Jesus makes in warning us of two things:

- Salt becoming “unsalty”
- Light being hidden so that it does not illumine

Why the need for this warning? Well, because there is pressure on us to do these things – to go dark, to stop being the preservative against corruption. Jesus concluded the Beatitudes this way:

Mat 5:10-12 "Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. (11) "Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. (12) Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who

were before you.

People know. They recognize someone who is truly in Christ and living for Him. They may hate the light of His truth and they might resent their moral decay being interfered with, but they know.

Joh 3:19-21 And this is the judgment: the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil. (20) For everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his works should be exposed. (21) But whoever does what is true comes to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that his works have been carried out in God."

The Lord, in other words, functions *Himself* in this world as Light and Salt through His church. One of the forms of His judgments upon the wicked is to remove His people away from them, and there are places in this world where the light and salt of the gospel left.

Mat 10:11-15 And whatever town or village you enter, find out who is worthy in it and stay there until you depart. (12) As you enter the house, greet it. (13) And if the house is worthy, let your peace come upon it, but if it is not worthy, let your peace return to you. (14) And if anyone will

not receive you or listen to your words, shake off the dust from your feet when you leave that house or town. (15) Truly, I say to you, it will be more bearable on the day of judgment for the land of Sodom and Gomorrah than for that town.

What are some ways in which Christians hide the light of Christ and dilute the taste of salt? Certainly one of the most common temptations and pitfalls here is to become conformed to the world. Listen to the Lord's warning to Jeremiah:

Jer 1:17-19 But you, dress yourself for work; arise, and say to them everything that I command you. Do not be dismayed by them, lest I dismay you before them. (18) And I, behold, I make you this day a fortified city, an iron pillar, and bronze walls, against the whole land, against the kings of Judah, its officials, its priests, and the people of the land. (19) They will fight against you, but they shall not prevail against you, for I am with you, declares the LORD, to deliver you."

Jer 15:19-21 Therefore thus says the LORD: "If you return, I will restore you, and you shall stand before me. If you utter what is precious, and not what is worthless, you shall be as my mouth. **They shall turn to you, but you shall not turn to them.** (20) And I will make you to this people a

fortified wall of bronze; they will fight against you, but they shall not prevail over you, for I am with you to save you and deliver you, declares the LORD. (21) I will deliver you out of the hand of the wicked, and redeem you from the grasp of the ruthless."

Being salt and light is the mission of the church in this world, the very purpose for our creation:

Exo 19:6 and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. These are the words that you shall speak to the people of Israel."

1Pe 2:9 But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.

So when Jesus, in the Sermon on the Mount, told His disciples that they the salt of the earth and the light of the world, he was telling them that they were this chosen race, this royal priesthood, this holy nation belonging to the Lord whose *purpose is to proclaim the excellencies of God to the world*. He called them out of darkness, into light. Now let that light, let that new creation show!

Let me sum this all up by reading William Hendriksen's words on salt

and light. He does an excellent job. Listen to him-

“In the beatitudes the character and blessedness of the citizens of the kingdom were described. The final beatitude was transitional in character. It described the attitude of the world toward believers in the Lord Jesus Christ. The two emblems, salt and light, now introduced, describe the opposite, namely the influence of the kingdom upon the world, the response of Christ’s followers to those who persecute them.

By means of these two emblems or metaphors, the important truth is revealed that *those people whom the world – including the quasi-pious world of scribes and Pharisees – hates most are exactly the ones to whom it owes most.* The citizens of the kingdom, no matter how despised they are and how insignificant they may seem to be, *they alone*, not the scribes and Pharisees, are the salt of the earth and the light of the world.

Salt, then, has especially a negative function. It combats deterioration. Similarly Christians, by showing themselves to be Christians indeed, are constantly combating moral and spiritual decay. How often does it not happen that when a believer suddenly steps into a crowd of worldly individuals the off-color joke by which

someone was about to entertain his companions is held back, the profanity is left unspoken, the wicked plan remains unexecuted? To be sure, the world is wicked. Yet God alone knows how far more corrupt it would be without the restraining example, life, and prayers of the saints....Ever so many people who never read the Bible are constantly reading us!

Salt has a negative (restraining) function and acts secretly. Light, on the other hand, has a positive function and shines openly, publicly. Light in Scripture indicates the true knowledge of God, goodness, righteousness, and truthfulness, joy and gladness, true happiness. It symbolizes the best there is in learning, love, and laughter as contrasted with darkness, that is, the world there is in dullness, depravity, and despair.

The citizens of the kingdom not only have been blessed with these endowments but are also the means used by God to transmit them to the men who surround them. *The light-possessors become light-transmitters.*

Now, since it is the business of the church to shine for Jesus, it should not permit itself to be thrown off its course. It is not the task of the church to specialize in and deliver all kinds of pronouncements concerning economic, social, and political problems. As Dr.

Martyn Lloyd-Jones put it, “The great hope for society today is in an increasing number of individual Christians. Let the Church of God concentrate on that and not waste her time and energy on matters outside her province.”

That some of the believer’s good deeds are seen by men is unavoidable. Even unbelievers will at times hear the songs of praise sung by God’s children. Worldly people will take note of the quiet trust in God manifested by believers in times of trial and distress. They will at times express astonishment about the manner in which Christians will go out of their way, risking danger and even death, in order to extend help to the sick and dying....The end or purpose of seeing such good works, will be that men, influenced by God’s Spirit, will ascribe to God the reverence that is his due for having caused the light to shine forth from human lives.” [The Gospel of Matthew, Baker]