

CHRISTIANS, SALT AND LIGHT

Matthew 5:13-16

Intro: The four Gospels focus upon the life of our Lord Jesus Christ during the time that He was on earth. All four do not give us a complete biography, but they give us the essential truths concerning Christ from His birth until age 12, and then we know nothing about His life from that point until He began his public ministry at age 30. It is agreed by most Bible teachers that His public ministry was very short, probably a little over three years. Most of you know this from your own reading in the Bible.

One of the main ministries of the Lord Jesus Christ while He was here on the earth was His teaching. Sometimes His teaching was just a sentence or two, sometimes just a word or two. At other times His teaching was more extensive, like the message we have been considering here in the Gospel of Matthew, beginning with chapter 5. One thing that is generally agreed upon about His teaching, was that He was a Master Teacher. People followed Him by the hundreds, and often by the thousands, to hear Him teach. For example, at the end of Matthew 13 where the Lord had taught several parables, we learn that the people were astonished at His teaching, and that they wondered where He had gotten such wisdom. On another occasion some said, “Never man spake as this man” (John 7:46). This was when Jewish officers had been sent to arrest the Lord, and they came back without Him. The teaching of our Lord was clearly a threat to the Jewish teachers. He spoke with authority. Look at the two verses which come at the conclusion of the Lord’s Sermon on the Mount, Matthew 7:28-29.

The Lord’s teaching combined simplicity, so that even children could understand Him, and yet such great depth that He confounded the wisest of men who heard him teach.

Our text for tonight is a good illustration of the teaching of the Lord. As far as we have gone in this sermon, a child could understand what He was saying, even though they could be helped by having someone tell them, what does it mean to be “poor in spirit,” and so on.

But when we finish the Beatitudes, and come to our text for tonight, He said to His disciples, “Ye are . . . salt,” and “ye are . . . light.” Children don’t have to be very old before they learn what salt is, and what light is.

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Here the Lord was using them as figures of speech to explain the place that His disciples were to have in the world.

But before we get into that, let us notice the place that our text for tonight has in our Lord's message so far.

As we have seen, the Lord was speaking directly to His disciples. So we can say, as I have said repeatedly as we have gone through the Beatitudes, that the Lord was not speaking to everybody. He was speaking to His disciples. Therefore, in studying the Beatitudes we can say that just as the Lord was using the Beatitudes to describe what kind of people the disciples should be, so they describe the kind of people we should be as His people today. The Beatitudes also describe some of the outstanding characteristics of our Lord. And we are to be like Him.

Now when He had finished the Beatitudes, the Lord continued speaking to His disciples, saying to them the words that we find in verses 13 through 16. Basically the Lord told them that they were salt and light. Now there were times when the Lord told His disciples what they were to do. But here the Lord was telling them more about *what they were* as a result of what they were to be as He had explained in the verses which give us the Beatitudes. The Lord did not begin by telling them that they were salt and light, but He began by telling them what they were to be which would make them salt and light.

I want all of us to see the connection between the first twelve verses of Matthew 5, and the next four verses which follow. And it is this: You and I are not going to be "salt" and "light" in this world if we are not displaying in our lives that we are poor in spirit, that we mourn over sin, that we are meek, and so on down the line. This is what makes us different, and that is the point that the Lord was making. We are not going to make a difference in this world by being like the world, but we are going to make a difference in the world by being like the Lord Jesus.

Notice how the Lord expressed each of these terms. "Ye are the salt of the earth," and "ye are the light of the world."

One thing that becoming a Christian does for all of us, is to make us see the difference between what we are now and the earth upon which we live, and the world of which we used to be a part.

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More than that, becoming a Christian makes us wish that everybody else would know what we know since we have been saved. We have been made to see not only the emptiness of the world, but also the hopelessness of the world, and we would like to do something about reaching our friends who are in the world and who have not yet learned how defiled and full of sin this world is. We used to be “of the world,” that is, a part of all of its Godlessness and sin. We are still “in the world,” but no longer “of” it.

The Bible has a lot to say those of us who know the Lord and our relationship with the world. We can't avoid the world because this is where we live. But we are no longer to live like people live in the world. We are not to desire what they desire. We are not to think like they do. We are not to be pleasure-loving like the people of the world are. Let me give you two familiar passages of Scripture which speak of the world, one written by the Apostle Paul, and the other written by the Apostle John, and let me encourage you to spend some time thinking about them and how they relate to your life.

The first is Romans 12:1-2. (Read or quote them slowly and thoughtfully.) If you haven't memorized these verses, do it this week. If you have memorized them, say them over and over to yourself as though the Apostle had written them just for you.

The second is 1 John 2:15-17. (Do the same with these verses.)

The Apostle Paul wrote his epistle about thirty years after the Lord died, and the Apostle John wrote his epistle at least thirty years after that, but their message is the same.

But we do have a responsibility toward the world. I have often said that after the Lord saves us, we are as prepared for heaven as we will ever be. However, He leaves us here for two reasons:

- 1) For us to grow in our knowledge of the Lord, and in our fellowship with Him.
- 2) To bear witness to a lost world, becoming as the Lord expressed it to His disciples who used to be fishermen – to be fishers of men.

Now we are “salt” and “light.”

Different expositors have put several different interpretations to this

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passage, but it seems to me that the Lord had one thing in particular in mind, and that is brought out by His emphasis on the “savor” of the salt. One very important use of salt is that it improves the taste of the food that we eat. Now if your doctor has told you to leave the salt shaker alone, or don’t even put it on your table, you know what it is that salt improves the taste of your food. It is probably impossible for us to avoid salt altogether. I saw a man eating not too long ago, and he salted all of his food until it was white. Now that would eventually get him into trouble.

Perhaps it will help us to understand what the Lord had in mind if I remind you of a verse or two which speaks of eating. For example, the Psalmist wrote in Psalm 34:8, “O taste and see that the Lord is good: blessed is the man that trusteth in Him.” Or what about Jeremiah said in Jeremiah 15:16,

16 Thy words were found, and I did eat them; and thy word was unto me the joy and rejoicing of mine heart: for I am called by thy name, O Lord God of hosts.

The writer of the epistle to the Hebrews spoke of those who “have tasted the good Word of God” (Heb. 6:5).

People who don’t know the Lord, don’t like to read the Bible because, as they might say, “It doesn’t taste very good.”

Do you remember how your folks tried to get you to eat food that you didn’t particularly like? But after you eat it a time or two, you began to like it. Jeremiah said that eating the Word was “the joy and rejoicing of his heart.”

Now how are we going to get people to read the Bible so that they will be saved by believing what they read. That is where you and I come in. If the characteristics that we learned of in the Beatitudes, are evident in our lives, that is what the Spirit of God uses many times to “eat” the Word because they can see the results in our lives, and the Spirit of God shows them that they can be like that if they will just believe the Word.

But now there is one more point. What if the salt has lost its taste, so that it no longer gives makes the food taste good? Which is just the same as saying, What if we get out of fellowship with the Lord so that people can’t see in us what the Lord does for those who trust Him. What can you say if the salt loses its saltiness? Then the salt is good for nothing but to be cast out and to be trodden under the feet of men. A disobedient

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Christian is not going to get people to taste and see how good the Lord is, so that they will be saved.

I hope you see the point that the Lord was making here. It is possible for the Lord to save people without any real contact with a Christian, but the Lord was saying here that the normal way that people are saved, is through the testimony of some Christian who is really walking with the Lord.

Now the Lord emphasized this same point by saying, “Ye are the light of the world.” And so this means that, if you and I don’t get it the first time, hopefully we will get it the second time.

The Lord Jesus said of Himself, “I am the Light of the world.” (John 8:12). In John 9:5 our Lord added these words, “As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world.” But this raises the question, What about the time that He goes back to heaven, and is no longer “the light of the world”? That is when it becomes very important to know that the Lord said, “Ye are the light of the world.”

When are we the light of the world according to Matthew 5? We are the light of the world when people can see by the character of our lives, the character of the Lord Who has saved us. We are the light of the world when people can see the Beatitudes in us, when they see evidence in our lives that Christ lives in us, and we are becoming like Him.

We live in a world of darkness, the darkness of sin, and the darkness of death. And God has made us like a city set on a hill which cannot be hidden. Wherever there is light it is there so that it can be seen, and it exposes everything around it. The light dispels the darkness, but the light is there because otherwise there would be complete darkness.

Neither do we light a lamp and put it under a big basket of some kind. But we put it on a lamp stand so that it can give light to all that are in the house. A light is made to be seen and to give light. We as believers are on display before a world of darkness.

So what is the exhortation for us. You can see it in verse 16 of Matthew 5. (Read it.) It is a command. We must not conceal that fact that we know the Lord, but we are to let it shine. The light will shine because that is the nature of light. But what does it reveal? Our “good works.” What

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are our good works? Basically they are the Beatitudes, the evidence of our being transformed into the likeness of our Lord Jesus Christ. The way we live is evidence of whom we are, and to find out who we are, people are to see the evidence in our lives that show that we are light.

The Apostle Paul speaks of us as the light in Ephesians 5:8-14:

8 For ye were sometimes darkness, but now are ye light in the Lord: walk as children of light:

9 (For the fruit of the Spirit is in all goodness and righteousness and truth;)

10 Proving what is acceptable unto the Lord.

11 And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them.

12 For it is a shame even to speak of those things which are done of them in secret.

13 But all things that are reprov'd are made manifest by the light: for whatsoever doth make manifest is light.

14 Wherefore he saith, Awake thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light.

Concl: All of this means that our life is where the light is. Verbal testimony is important, but it is only effective when it is backed up by our lives.

In both “ye are the salt of the earth,” and “ye are the light of the world,” the ye’s are emphatic. The Lord was seeking to impress upon the minds of His disciples that it is our lives which act as salt upon the Word of God, and it is our lives where people are going to see the light. Our words will be effective only as they are backed up by godly lives. And there is nothing that can compare with using the Word to cause people to see their need. Then the Spirit uses the Word to grant them faith and to draw them to Christ.

These four verses are very, very important in our desire to see people saved. God uses His people who are salt and light in reaching others with the Gospel.