

WALKING WITH JESUS - PART 3

Salt and Light

Dr. Derek Morris

Preaching passage:	Matthew 5:13-16
Subject:	Who are we as followers of Jesus and citizens of His kingdom
Complement:	salt and light to the world
Exegetical idea:	As followers of Jesus and citizens of His kingdom, we are salt and light to the world.
Homiletical idea:	Jesus wants to use you to make a difference in the world!
Purpose:	To remind my hearers that as followers of Jesus and citizens of His kingdom, we are salt and light to the world.

Introduction

“This is going to be an easy sermon to write!” I’m sure that some preachers have had that reaction as they came to the passage of Scripture that we are going to study today in the great Sermon on the Mount. Jesus uses two simple metaphors for His followers, those who are part of His kingdom: You are the salt of the earth, and you are the light of the world. Some of you have heard so many sermons based on Matthew 5:13-16 that you could preach the sermon yourself!

The sermon goes something like this: Salt seasons..we should season our community and make it a better place. Salt preserves food and prevents it from spoiling...we should preserve our world and prevent it from going rotten. And if you live in the frozen northlands, salt melts ice..we should be warm and friendly! And don’t forget that light dispels the darkness..so we should also dispel the darkness of error and evil. What an easy sermon to write! But there’s one big problem. We’ve heard it all before!

As I began my study of this next portion of Jesus’ great Sermon on the Mount this week, I remembered the words of Jesus recorded in Matthew 13:52: “Every teacher of the law who has been instructed about the kingdom of heaven is like the owner of a house who brings out of his

storeroom new treasures as well as old”? Matthew 13:52 NIV

So let’s take a fresh look at this portion of the great Sermon on the Mount. Let’s discover some new treasures as well as old! Studying this passage has changed my life this week, and I believe that we will learn some important lessons about walking with Jesus!

Jesus began His great sermon with a collection of sayings which many Christians have referred to as the Beatitudes. We studied those sayings of Jesus last week, and we concluded that the Beatitudes are not a list of obligations in order to earn salvation, they are not a list of required characteristics in order to become a follower of Jesus...rather this list of sayings at the beginning of the Sermon on the Mount is a cascade of blessings to remind us that when you are part of the kingdom of heaven, you are blessed! If you missed last week’s message you can watch it online at www.forestlakechurch.org.

Now let us read the words of Jesus that follow the Beatitudes. Take your copy of the Sermon on the Mount and let’s read together from Matthew 5:13. “.....”

When we first hear the words “you are the salt of the earth,” many of us immediately want to talk about what salt does. After all, one use for salt is alluded to in the second part of Matthew 5:13. Salt adds flavor! But before we jump to what salt does, I want us to focus on the value of salt, at least in the time of the people who were listening to these words of Jesus.

Salt was a precious commodity. Did you hear what I just said? Salt was a precious commodity. That’s hard for us to grasp, at least here in the United States of America. Yesterday, I went to the grocery store and bought a 11lb 10 oz box of salt for 51 cents. That’s cheap! About 32 cents per pound! And because salt is so inexpensive, at least here in the United States in the 21st century, we can easily miss the first important lesson that I believe Jesus wants

us to learn from this portion of His great Sermon on the Mount.

Salt is a precious commodity in the Roman Empire. Slaves were traded for salt. According to the Roman naturalist and historian Pliny the Elder, Roman soldiers were often paid with salt.. That's where the expression "being worth one's salt" comes from. The Latin word for salt, sal, is the basis for the English word salary! In the time of Jesus, in that cultural context, salt was precious! Someone has estimated that in the time of Jesus, this container of salt would be worth more than a day's salary, not 51 cents! Salt was a precious commodity!

(<http://www.tomorrowlands.org/misc/salt.html>)

So before we hurry past the first sentence in Matthew 5:13 and try to focus on what salt does, let this truth sink in. When Jesus says, You are the salt of the earth!, don't think 51 cents. Jesus is saying, "You are precious!" You are valuable. You are precious to me, and you are also precious to the world. Isn't that a beautiful insight? I admit that I never noticed that before in my hurried reading of the sermon on the mount. But I believe that it is true: You are precious, both to Jesus and to the world.

How do I know that? Listen to these words of the LORD, recorded by the prophet Isaiah in Isaiah 43:4. "Since you were precious in My sight, you have been honored and I have loved you." That was spoken by the LORD our God to His people in the 8th century BC. Are those words of the LORD still true today? Absolutely! The LORD God says to you today, "You are precious in My sight, and I love you!" Someone ought to say "Amen" out there! That's such good news! We can't just sit here like limp lettuce leaves! You are precious to the LORD and He loves you!

And Jesus, in this portion of the Sermon on the Mount, reminds us that we are precious,

we are valuable, not only to Him but also to the world. Don't miss that important lesson at the beginning of this familiar passage of Scripture.

Salt is not only precious, valuable, but salt is also useful! I came across a Roman proverb which may well have been common during the time of the earthly ministry of Jesus. Perhaps Jesus and His followers heard the Roman soldiers say, "Nil sole et sale utilius."

I hope that I pronounced that correctly! I missed out on Latin in high school! Did anyone here study Latin? Then you could translate this proverb for us! Nil sole et sale utilius. There is nothing more useful than the sun and salt. There is nothing more useful than the sun and salt.

When I first discovered this Roman proverb, I was startled. Because the two metaphors for His followers that Jesus uses in the section of the sermon on the mount are salt and light. There is nothing more useful than the sun (or we might say "light") and salt.

Salt isn't just precious, like an emerald or a pearl...something to look at and admire. Salt is also useful. So what are some of the uses for salt, and how does this metaphor of salt help us to understand what it means to walk with Jesus? Well, certainly, the most obvious uses for salt is alluded to in Matthew 5:13. Let's read the text together one more time. "....." Salt adds flavor. Some critics of Scripture are quick to point out an apparent error in the teaching of Jesus in the sentence that we just read. They say, "Salt, sodium chloride, never loses its flavor! That's a mistake!" And a person would be correct in asserting the pure sodium chloride never loses its flavor. But some of the salt that was available in Palestine was dug from the salt flats surrounding the Salt Sea, otherwise known as the Dead Sea. There were many other impurities mixed with the salt. This wasn't pure sodium chloride. And if this mixture was exposed to the

elements, rain would cause the salt to leach out, leaving only a pile of impurities that might look like salt, but actually the salt was nowhere to be found. That pile of impurities was worthless, at least for those who were looking for salt. It might as well be spread on the pathway and trampled under foot by passing travelers.

Certainly, it's true that Jesus wants His followers to be a seasoning influence in the world. It ought to make a difference on your street, on your cul-de-sac, in your apartment complex, that a follower of Jesus is living there. It ought to make a difference at your workplace that a follower of Jesus is there. Am I speaking the truth today? We're not talking here about working your way to heaven. We're talking about recognizing that you are precious and that Jesus wants to use you to make a difference in the world.

We are also very familiar with another use for salt: salt preserves. In a time when there was no refrigeration, salt was essential for the preservation of food. Salt preserves. The application is clear. The presence of followers of Jesus in the world is a preserving influence. I find the story of Sodom and Gomorrah to be a sad one. The real problem with the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah was not that there were wicked people there. There are wicked people everywhere! The real problem with the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah was the fact that the people of God were nowhere to be found. There was no preserving influence. Evil went unchecked...from bad to worse, until finally those cities were destroyed.

"You are the salt of the earth," Jesus says. Your presence in your community, at your workplace, in your circle of influence..hinders corruption and rotteness.

But I want to go beyond the idea of preservation today and emphasize that salt is essential for life! Salt not only adds flavor and preserves. Salt is essential for life! Now I must

admit that chemistry was not my best subject in high school. But I know that pure salt is sodium chloride. Isn't that correct? And without an adequate amount of sodium, your body can go into shock. Some of you already know where I'm going with this. My nurse practitioner wife tells me that there is a medical condition called hyponatremia. A medical dictionary defines hyponatremia as an abnormally low concentration of sodium in the blood. A common cause of hyponatremia is excessive sweating. This doesn't happen often, but it can happen if someone is running a marathon, or involved in extremely demanding physical activity. The more you sweat, the more sodium you lose. I'm told that you can sweat up to 3 quarts during each hour of strenuous exercise. And you need to replace that fluid. Not just water. You also need sodium and chloride, or your electrolytes will become depleted and you will be in danger of suffering from hyponatremia.

Let me share with you some of the symptoms of hyponatremia: fatigue, lightheadedness, weakness, cramping, nausea, dizziness, confusion, disorientation, seizures, coma, and, in the most severe cases, death. Now follow where I'm going with this. Jesus says to you and to me, "You are the salt of the earth. You are not only precious, but you are useful." The Romans were right: there is nothing more useful than salt! Salt not only adds flavor. Salt preserves. And salt is essential for life.

Your community needs you. Your workplace needs you. Your loved ones and friends who don't know Jesus need you. I don't say that to be arrogant. I say it because it's true. Salt is essential for life! Listen to what happens to a culture when the people of God are nowhere to be found: fatigue, lightheadedness, weakness, cramping, nausea, dizziness, confusion, disorientation, seizures, coma, and death.

As a follower of Jesus, as one who walks with Jesus, I need to recognize that I am not only precious, but I am useful. Jesus wants to use me to make a difference in the world. Jesus wants to use you to make a difference in the world! And that thought is further developed in Matthew 5:14-16. Let's read that portion of the sermon on the mount together:

“.....” We might paraphrase the Roman proverb and say, “There is nothing more useful than light and salt!” As a follower of Jesus, you are not only salt of the earth; you are the light of the world! Your presence, your witness, your testimony dispels the darkness!

But you say, “Wait a minute! I'm not the light of the world! Jesus declared that He is the Light of the world! You're correct in asserting that Jesus declared “I am the Light of the world!” But let's examine His words carefully, recorded in John 8:12. “I am the Light of the World,” Jesus says. “He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness but have the light of life.” Jesus is the Light of the world, but those of us who follow Jesus will not only not walk in darkness. What does the text say? We will have the light of life!

Jesus wants His light to shine through you! Jesus wants to bless the world through you. Jesus wants to dispel the darkness through you. Jesus wants to use you to make a difference in the world. Jesus is saying, “Don't hide the light that is within you under a basket!” Don't hinder what I want to do through you!” Notice, Jesus doesn't say, “Make your light shine!” What does Jesus say? “Let your light..shine!”

When you walk with Jesus, when you are part of His kingdom, His light is within you. He wants to shine out through you. Don't get in the way of what Jesus wants to do through you. And when people see that Jesus is doing through you, they will recognize that it's not you. What God is doing in you and through you is too amazing to be all your doing! Rather, people will see

what God is doing through you and they will glorify our Father in heaven!

And that is not just the experience of an individual, but the experience of a community of believers. In both Matthew 5:13 and Matthew 5:14, the “you” plural is used in the Greek text. Not just “you are the salt of the earth” and “you are the light of the world” (point at one person) but “you are the salt of the earth” and “you are the light of the world!” (point at everyone). Our life together as the people of God is to be salt and light to those around us. God wants to use us to make a difference in the world!

This past Sunday I received an e-mail from a follower of Jesus who is living out the truth of this passage in the sermon on the Mount. Her name is Gayle, and Gayle is letting Jesus use her to make a difference in the world. She is preserving life and dispelling the darkness!

Gayle was traveling home from Australia to Baltimore, Maryland. That’s a long trip! And just this past Sunday, she was on her last flight, from Dallas, Texas, to Baltimore, Maryland. The passengers had no indication that there was a problem with their plane until they had almost touched down on the runway in Baltimore, Maryland. Just before the plane was about to land, the pilot opened full throttle and the plane began to climb into the air again!

Has that ever happened to anyone here? It happened to me some years ago when our plane was about to land in Atlanta, Georgia. We found out later that a small plane in front of us had failed to clear the runway and at the last moment our pilot aborted the landing. Woah! I can still remember the strange feeling in my stomach. We were supposed to be going this way (open hand moving downward) not this way! (open hand moving upward and banking steeply).

For our flight, we simply circled around and came back in to land. But Gayle’s situation was more complicated. The pilot announced that their plane was having problems with the

landing gear. Gayle looked around and she could see the anxiety on the faces of the passengers. The flight was almost completely full, apart from an empty seat between her and a lady sitting two seats over from her.

Gayle started praying. She thought about the possibility of her death. But instead of being filled with fear, the peace of Jesus filled her heart. She had been listening to some of my wife's Scripture songs on her Ipod, and the words of one particular song came to Gayle's mind:

Listen:

Whenever I am afraid, I will trust in You.
In God (I will praise His word),
In God I have put my trust;
Whenever I am afraid, I will trust in You.
I will not fear
What can flesh do to me?

Through those words of Scripture, the Lord brought peace to Gayle's heart! Hallelujah!

About that time, the pilot tried a second landing, but pulled out of the approach even earlier than before. That's when Gayle noticed the lady sitting two seats over. Gayle found out later that the lady's name was Darlene. Darlene was wiping the tears from her face and shaking uncontrollably. Gayle thought of the Scripture songs and the peace that was in her heart. So she scooted over into the empty seat next to Darlene and asked Darlene if she would like to listen to the Scripture songs on her Ipod.

Darlene took hold of Gayle's hand and held on tight. But Gayle noticed that as Darlene listened to the Scripture song, her grip became less tense. As the plane made its third approach for landing, fire trucks and emergency ground crew were lined up on either side of the runway. During the final approach, Gayle new friend Darlene remained calm, listening to the Scripture

songs!

When the plane finally landed, many of the passengers began to applaud. All but Gayle and Darlene. Their heads were bowed in prayer. Perhaps you're wondering how I found out about this amazing story. It only happened last Sunday. Well, here's the rest of the story. Gayle went to my wife's Trilogy Scripture Songs website. She left her testimony there and ordered a copy of the Trilogy Scripture Songs CD that was on her Ipod with the following instructions: Please send this CD to Darlene with a short note: "From your friend on the airplane!"

That, my friends, is being salt and light! That is preserving life. That is allowing Jesus to shine through you. You are the salt of the earth. You are the light of the world. That will be manifested in different ways at different times. But this is true for all of us who follow Jesus: Jesus wants to use you to make a difference in the world!