

Two weekends ago we looked at the opening of the Sermon on the Mount- the Beatitudes. We prefaced it by remembering that Jesus withdrew before he began speaking, so he was speaking to and teaching the disciples that Matthew says “came to Him.”

This opening, the Beatitudes, shows us the character of the disciple.

Tonight I want to look at two well known but powerful illustrations Christ then gives.

Salt and light = These point to the **INFLUENCE** of the Disciple.

The author and theologian Richard Hays says - *“The community’s vocation to be salt and light for the world is to be fulfilled precisely as Jesus’ followers embody God’s alternative reality through the character qualities marked by the Beatitudes.”*

Matthew 5:13-16

“You are the salt of the earth. But what good is salt if it has lost its flavor? Can you make it salty again? It will be thrown out and trampled underfoot as worthless.

“You are the light of the world—like a city on a hilltop that cannot be hidden. No one lights a lamp and then puts it under a basket. Instead, a lamp is placed on a stand, where it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your good deeds shine out for all to see, so that everyone will praise your heavenly Father.”

The last time God had spoken to a crowd on a mountain in this way was at Sinai in Exodus.

Exodus - God saves his people and delivers them to himself at Sinai on the way to the Promised Land. The Promised Land is notably surrounded by the ancient powers in this period of history. Why?

So that other nations could look at how they lived, loved, raised children, took a Sabbath, etc. See its goodness. See its fruit. See its life. And be drawn in.

This was the **influence** God’s people were supposed to be.

Exodus 19:6 God says: ***“You will be my kingdom of priests, my holy nation.”***

A holy nation among pagan nations.

A kingdom of priests. What do priests do? Draw people & connect people to the presence of God

Israel fumbles this calling. Undeniably and in epic fashion.

But again Jesus, God, says to his followers in Matthew 5: be light. Specifically - be salt and light.

He doesn’t say – ***When I’m done with you...*** you’ll be the salt and light...

He says **YOU ARE** - it is **present tense**.

This is notable because at this point Jesus has been with many of them for a short matter of time. He doesn’t say you must become salt and light. He says **YOU ARE**.

Here He affirms his disciples and reveals to them their purpose.

Am I broken? Do I have a need for God? Absolutely. All have sinned and fallen short.

But when I come to God- do I have a purpose and calling from God? Yes.

Ephesians 2:10 calling with Ephesians 3:20 potential.

Jesus is saying you matter. You ARE salt. You ARE light. Present tense.
So what? What's so important about those two things?

The scholar Pliny the Elder, born in 23 AD into Roman culture, wrote an essay on salt that concluded: ***"nothing is more useful than sunlight and salt."***

What Jesus is saying is his disciples are important. Essential. To the world and to the kingdom.

Salary – comes from the Latin word *salarium* – The root word is "Sal" = salt.
Roman centurions were often paid in part with salt. Salt had value as currency in trade.
When someone is *"worth their salt"* = they have value.

Salt carried immense value, and uses...
On preservation. On heat. On flavor. On healing.
But the bottom line: **salt has an impact.**

What does this tell us, Christ's disciples?
You're called to have an impact.
You aren't just good. You are good **for** something.
You aren't just called to "be good" and behave and work on self-improvement.
You are called to be good **for** something.

Jesus also doesn't say:

You are the sugar of the earth.

- When salt hits a wound, it stings and hurts.
- Sin is an open festering wound. Jeremiah 6 calls it a mortal wound that religious leaders were offering superficial treatments for. They said there was peace with God when there was no peace.
- Christians should- in a healthy gracious way- irritate society.

Jesus also doesn't say:

"You" (singular) are the salt of the earth and light of the world.

- That "You" in you are - it's plural. This is a trap in the English translation of our Bibles.
- There are at least **4,720** verses with *you plural* translated as English "you" which could lead a reader to think it is directed the individual rather than the Church community
- You together are the salt of the earth. That's a weight off of our individual shoulders.

Yet Christ also notably doesn't say:

***"You are the salt of the Heavens
You are the light of the Church"***

Job 38:12-13 – God is responding to Job and his questions –

Since your days began, have you ever commanded the morning, And caused the dawn to know its place, So that light may take hold of the corners of the earth, And shake the wickedness out of it?

"The light of the world" carries a different connotation when we hear God speak of "light [taking] hold of the corners of the earth [to] shake the wickedness out of it!"

What comes first? *“The Dawn know[ing] it’s place”*
Do we know our place?

There are places on earth that go without dawn for long periods. The far north and south poles. **Admiral Robert Peary** once explored these regions and discovered the North Pole. He endured many hardships to do it. He said the greatest obstacle he had to overcome was the prolonged, enduring darkness. The absence of light took away his spirit and passion.

There are those around us that live in a spiritual darkness.
THAT is the proper place for the light of the world.

Too often we settle in as the light of the Church.
Spiritually we hold flashlights at high noon.
But if you remain apart from darkness you can’t scatter it.

“But we are called to be set apart!”
Set apart isn’t about your geographic position, it’s about your heart’s condition.
Difference doesn’t demand distance.

We so often confuse our call to be set apart and as a result forget our call to be sent.
Sent where?

Frontlines of ministry.

I’ve had people come to me that say “Put me to work.”
They’re eager to do work at the church, on the weekend. That’s great!

We should also be asking God to “put us to work.” To point us to our work Mon. through Fri. Because the Church work that counts the most is being a Christian wherever we are, all of the time. And much of this is accomplished in the ordinariness of our lives. The 9-5, Mon-Fri. We hear our call to be salt and light and picture dramatic preaching, filling stadiums, or mission trips across borders. And we end up missing our opportunity to be salt and light because it appears ordinary.

Sometimes being sent means being PRESENT.

Moment by moment, day to day, being a Christian wherever we are, all of the time.
The world we are called to is primarily made up of the faces we pass daily.

Donald McCullough wrote a book about practical advice as a response to rudeness and offensiveness running rampant in our culture. It was essentially a how to book on being a light. He talks about kneeling down to speak with children. Leaving a tip worth working for. Remembering to say thank you. *So practical.*

“These things may not seem very important when compared with the major problems facing our culture. Yet they may be the best place to begin; they may be the only honest place to begin. If a person can’t remember to say thank you to her housekeeper, it probably won’t matter much if she writes a major philosophical treatise on kindness. If a person is rude to his family, the angels probably won’t give a holy rip if he preaches soaring sermons on the nature of love.”

What sermon does your life preach?

Is there anything noticeable about your life?

In Roman culture Christians stood out amongst their peers like a bonfire in a black hole. Why? Because of their big tent revivals? Because of floods of healings and miracles?

The philosopher **Aristides** wrote in 125 AD of Christians that they were notable because:
“They walk in all humility and kindness...”

If you don't show by your life what you claim to believe, you're hiding your light from the world. Or: “you're salt that has lost its saltiness.”

He's saying that when a person is no longer the person they claim to be, then he is “good for nothing.”

There are two sides to the concept “**hypocrite**”

We often think of it as somebody who appears or claims to be better than they really are.

The other form of hypocrite that hurts the kingdom –

One who fails to appear as good as he really is, the good he proclaims to believe.

One who fails to do the good publicly they proclaim to believe privately.

Salt makes its presence known. Light stands out in darkness. Both have an impact.

We like to play the background. We don't want to stand out like a sore thumb.

One can be a hypocrite as one too ashamed of their convictions to make them known.

When Jesus says, “let your light shine,” he's saying don't hide your faith behind fear and timidity. Your faith should be deeply personal, but not private.

Jesus also doesn't say:

Let your light shine... so that they will hear all you have to say.

No.

So they may see your good works. People want to see it lived out.

There are two important sides to the coin, and they are this:

We need to speak the truth of the gospel for people to know it.

But we need to live the truth of the gospel for people to see it's real.

You've probably heard it said “you're the only Bible most people will ever read.”

I heard somebody say this week – “*you're the only Bible most people will ever read. They need a revised edition.*”

Not meaning we need to change the truth of the Bible.

But that we need to change our life to better reflect and illuminate the truth of the Bible.

What revisions does your life need?

Let your light shine!
And why? So people will see your good deeds and see you?

“so that everyone will praise your Heavenly Father”

Propaganda - *“I don’t need a spotlight I’m trying to be one that lights up the Kinged one.”*

We often use our “light” as a spotlight shined on convicts escaping prison. Busted!!
We expose darkness, but with the sole intention of pointing the finger, not extending a hand.
As this cycle gets repeated, the witness of our light becomes:
“go directly to hell, do not pass go...”

But if our spotlight is to shine on God at center stage.
That means we point the finger to His goodness. Not their guilt.
We absolutely and without compromise champion truth and God’s Word.
But it’s the Holy Spirit’s job is to convict. Not ours.
So often the church acts like its job is to convict and throw shame.
God doesn’t convict to bring shame.
God brings our sin and guilt to the surface to remove it, not point at it and shame us.
His wants to lead us to repentance, not languish in shame.

Repentance.

“to reconsider everything you know to be true”
It’s not giving God a portion of your life. It’s being consumed.

What burns bright is consumed.

But so often we come to God as consumers. This is a backwards approach.
Repentance is first and foremost about everything being consumed.

We’re called to be consumed.
We must echo John the Baptist’s key prayer: *I must decrease, He must increase.*
This was a call to be consumed!
Only then will we shine.

We don’t “bring” the light. We are the light. Because we are consumed.

Robert Louis Stevenson, the author of poetry and classic books like *Treasure Island*, spent his childhood in Edinburgh, Scotland, in the 19th century. He didn’t enjoy good health in life, and as a child spent a lot of time in his room. He would spend time looking out his window. As a boy, Robert was intrigued by the work of the old lamplighters who went about with a ladder and a torch, setting the street lights ablaze for the night. One evening, as young Robert stood watching with fascination, his nurse asked him, “Robert, what in the world are you looking at out there?” The child exclaimed, ***“Look at that man, he’s poking holes in the darkness!”***

In many ways throughout scripture, God calls his people to poke holes in the darkness.

Jesus redeemed his people in the Old Testament, gave them instructions in how to be the light, and then placed them in the Promised Land to be a light and punch holes in darkness.

Jesus came to his people under Roman occupation, gave them instructions in how to be the light, and then left them there to be a light and punch holes in darkness.

Jesus came to YOU, here in our culture, gives you instructions on how to be a light, and then calls you to punch holes in darkness.

Sometimes we can become discouraged when we look out into the “darkness” in our culture. But may we be reminded that while we may not be able to change the world in an instant, as the light of the world, we can put a “hole in the darkness.”

When we forgive those who hurt us... we put holes in darkness.

When we give generously to those in need, feed the hungry... we put holes in darkness

When we care for the orphaned and the widowed... we put holes in darkness

When we counter harsh words with kind words... we put holes in darkness.

When we honor our wives and husbands publicly... we put holes in darkness.

Why? So we can give glory to Jesus.

But if that list isn't the fruit...

If your light isn't shining...

What needs to be revised?

MSG version:

Here's another way to put it: You're here to be light, bringing out the God-colors in the world. God is not a secret to be kept. We're going public with this, as public as a city on a hill. If I make you light-bearers, you don't think I'm going to hide you under a bucket, do you? I'm putting you on a light stand. Now that I've put you there on a hilltop, on a light stand—shine!