



good shepherd
presbyterian church

Salt and Light

Matthew 5:13-16

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Today we are wrapping up our series in Matthew 5 on the Beatitudes. Technically this passage is the *next* passage after the Beatitudes, but it shares the theme of “blessed to be a blessing” in a broader way, so it seems like a perfect way to conclude.

Having gone through all the specific blessings of the Beatitudes, Jesus now tells his followers to go be a blessing. He uses several images or metaphors to do that: salt, light, and a city. I want to look at each one with you briefly, then consider how we will continue living out lives of blessing to others.

Salt

The first image Jesus uses is salt; he says:

You are the salt of the earth; but if the salt has become tasteless, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled under foot by men. (v. 13)

There is interesting irony to this saying, because salt doesn't lose its flavor, does it? Salt is salt. If you have something that is no longer salty, it's not salt anymore! It is in the very nature of salt to taste salty – that's what salt is! Jesus' point is not to be missed here – a Christian does ministry. A Christian serves and loves others and blesses the lives of those around. A closed-up, non-serving, non-loving, inward-

focused, follower of Christ is not following Christ! It is not only the definition of Christian, but the purpose of belonging to God in Christ that we are filled with and overflowing with the presence and power of the Holy Spirit.

It is perhaps unfortunate that the word “Christian” doesn’t seem to carry the purpose and action God intends. Of course salt doesn’t either – it seems pretty inert. But there is no doubt about its properties, about saltiness! And we do actually use it as a verb: we ‘salt’ our food. If we miss the active part of being a Christian, we’ve missed God’s purpose for having us in the world! Perhaps we should get more in the practice of thinking of ourselves as “followers of Christ” – that doesn’t miss the point that we are in motion!

Light

Jesus offers a second image: his followers are “the light of the world.” Wait, isn’t Jesus the light of the world? Yes, it says that in the first chapter of John! But we are also the light of the world because Jesus is the Light of the world and he lives in us! Even in our day of electric lights we can understand what he says next. Light doesn’t do anyone any good if it is hidden away. In those days, lights were from oil and you got the most light if you put it up high in the room. In fact I remember losing power a month or two ago and it was night-time. We lit some candles and turned on some lights and we put them up high on shelves for that very purpose.

We can imagine a whole range of application. When we hide away our witness to Christ, when we fail to bless others, we are not effectively lighting the world around us for him. Even peeking out timidly isn’t fully effective – for full illumination, we need to hold Christ high!

This image is not unlike the salt image. There is really only one place for a light to be if it's going to be a light – that's up high on a lampstand. So we are to shine brightly out in the open with the light and hope and blessing of Jesus Christ.

A City on a Hill

There is one more reference tucked into that part about the lights. That is the part about a city on a hill not being hidden. In ancient times, most cities were built on a hill for defensive purposes. This meant that they were easy to spot, particularly at night when the lights were burning. Jerusalem was a perfect example of this. Not only is it still on top of a hill, it is even surrounded on two sides by a deep valley. Such a city cannot be hidden!

So are we to be when we come together as the people of God. Not only are each of us to be salty and bright with the light of Christ, but when we gather, we should be like a city high on a hill.

This gives new context to our long-running conversations about being a good-neighbor church in our near neighborhood. Whether or not the people around us attend or join our church, the one thing Jesus would not have us be is “hidden.” Because of our love, compassion, outreach, and obedience to Jesus Christ, every household within a mile or two of here should know that is Good Shepherd church – they are really committed to loving God and loving others.

Lest that statement be confused with visions of making a name for ourselves, let me remind you of what Jesus said:

Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works and glorify your Father who is in heaven.

We are who we are out of obedience and out of a desire to point to God the Father through Jesus Christ the Son.

The Blessing Challenge Continues!

So this will be the last week I make a specific blessing challenge, but I hope it's clear that the blessing challenge is something that should continue in the lives of all followers of Christ. We have been blessed by God, not so we can tuck the salt or light in a drawer, not to be used. We have been blessed by God to salt and shine the world in a way that points people to God through Jesus Christ.

I challenge you to pray tonight that God would give you a good opportunity to practice being 'salt' or 'light' this week, and that in doing so God would begin forming the sharing of blessing into a habit, a practice of your faith. Amen.