



Matthew: The King and His Kingdom

Series: The Manifesto of the King, Part 9: Salt and Light

Matthew 5:13-16

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Introduction and Transition Last week, as we finished up the beatitudes, we came to the realization that the life of the true disciple is thoroughly different from the life of an unbeliever. By God's matchless grace, we have been bought with a price, "not with perishable things such as silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot." (1 Peter 1:18b-19, ESV) God has "delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son." (Colossians 1:13, ESV) We have been born into the family of God and we "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." (1 Peter 2:9, ESV) The grace of God that saves us is the same grace that transforms our character and our living so that in our words, in our thoughts, in our emotions, in our actions, in every aspect of our lives, we testify to the greatness of God, to the glory of His Christ, and to the power of the gospel of the cross to save sinners from the penalty and power of sin.

This section that we are looking at today is all about the witness of the kingdom in a world that is dark and decaying in sin. From this point on, Jesus is going to flesh out for us what it looks like to live as a believer in this world, as a kingdom citizen on this earth. We have already seen that Jesus has told us that faithful living as His disciple will result in persecution – we saw that last week. The response of the world, as a whole, to obedient discipleship will be persecution. That is what we can expect from the world - that is the effect of the world on His disciples. But now, in this text that we are looking at this morning, Jesus is going to tell us the effect that disciples are to have on the world; how we as the followers of Christ, leave His stamp on the world and engage the world for good and I am thankful that He does. We need to hear these words and here's why. Human nature is such that in the face of persecution for our faith in Christ, the natural response would be one of two things: isolationism or compromise. If the world hates us, it would stand to reason that the best thing that we could do is to wall ourselves off from the world – not literally but practically – to arrange our lives in such a way as

to have minimal exposure to unbelievers, to retreat into our own private and exclusive Christian community and wait til Jesus comes and let the world go to hell.

Or if the world hates us for what we are and what we do and what we believe, let's compromise. Let's give in and stop being so dogmatic, or distinctive, or different. Instead, let's tone our devotion to Christ down a little bit. Isolationism or compromise – those are the natural responses to persecution for being a disciple of Christ, but Jesus illustrates for us the supernatural response and He will do it with two metaphors – salt and light. Jesus begins by saying to us:

1) You (and you alone) are the salt of the earth (v. 13)

The Value of Salt...Now we might not immediately grasp this like the disciples would, but we need to see the what Jesus is affirming here is the vital worth of His disciples to this world. Salt, in Jesus' day, was a very valuable commodity. The ancient Greeks thought that salt was of divine origin. For the Roman, next to the sun, nothing was more valuable than salt. In fact, Roman soldiers often received their pay in salt, hence the old phrase "not worth his salt." The English word salary literally means salt money. Salt was used in the ANE as a mark of friendship. If you did not salt a meal, it was a sign that you did not think too highly of the person with whom you were eating. If you shared salt together, it was a mutual promise to look after one another. Covenants were often ratified with salt. God speaks of a covenant of salt that He made with the Levites in Num 18:19, and with David and his house in 2 Chronicles 13:5. Moreover, all of the sacrificial offerings of Israel were offered with salt pointing to the covenant between God and His people. Salt was valuable and necessary seasoning and a physical necessity. Salt was considered fundamental to life. There was even an old rabbinical saying, "the world cannot survive without salt."

When Jesus calls his disciples salt, Christ was declaring the worth of His disciples to this world and to the purposes of God in this world. When Jesus speaks of His disciples, when he speaks of us, He is using the word salt as a symbol of character, of spiritual and moral fiber according to the standards of the Word of God. Saltiness in the believer's life speaks of Christlikeness in thought, will and deed. Salty Christians have Word-filled, Spirit-driven, worshipful lives – lives that manifest the reality of a person faith and trust. That kind of life is of exceeding great worth in the earth and for the kingdom of God. How are we to be salt in this world?

Salt as a preservative...Salt was used in the ancient world as a preservative to preserve food. Refrigerators and freezers did not exist. The chief way to preserve meat or fish was by rubbing it down with salt or soaking it in a saline solution. Primarily what Jesus is saying, as He compares His disciples to salt, is that apart from the influence of his disciples, the world becomes ever more rotten. Jesus was under no misconceptions regarding the character of the world apart from Him. He was not taken in by humanistic beliefs that man, on his own, apart from the grace of God, has any power to make the world a better place or to change the world for good. Natural man can't fix his world because natural man is the problem. Ever since the rebellion of man in the garden of Eden, man has pursued sin. So great was man's desire for sin that it consumed him: (Genesis 6:5, ESV) So great was man's decay and wickedness that God brought a flood that wiped the earth clean. Given a fresh start, man immediately pursued sin again. Our sin-filled world is advancing toward greater and greater moral and spiritual decay. Christians whose lives are characterized by the realities of the beatitudes have the effect of delaying and retarding the moral and spiritual decay and putrefaction of society. Salty Christians will retard decay simply because their lives are a reproach to the sin of those who are around them. Salty Christians are not condemning or self-righteous but their lives make ungodliness and sin just seem inappropriate. The presence of salty Christians in business, in education, on sports teams, in the military, on the job site is vitally important. Salty believers have a preserving effect on society. According to Jesus, the disciple is clearly to influence His society wherever and however the principles of the gospel can be applied in the political, economic, social and moral issues of our day. Our Christian lives must be salty.

Our calling as the salt of the earth is not to withdraw into a commune or hole up in a monastery somewhere and wait for the end to come. It is not to stay in the salt shaker and avoid contact with the outside world. As the salt of the earth, we have a responsibility to engage this world that we live in as an agent of change, to retard its spoiling. The only way for us to affect our culture is to be faithful to the truth that is revealed in Jesus, to distinctively and unashamedly point to the worth of Christ and the transforming power of His gospel. Beloved, let's be honest with this: like salt is rubbed into meat to prevent its spoiling, are we being rubbed into the world? Are you? Are we salt in the society that we live in, into the workplace that God has placed us in, in our family, on our teams, in our schools? Do you stand, by God's grace, against the prevailing trends of fallen human wisdom? Are you faithful to stand for righteousness, for holiness, for goodness? Do you stand against the progression of sin? Do you, by your words and deeds, introduce the reality of Christ and His gospel into the situations of your life where you are? John Stott pointedly asks this question, "And when society does go bad, we Christians

tend to throw up our hands in pious horror and reproach the non-Christian world; but should we not rather reproach ourselves? One can hardly blame unsalted meat for going bad. It cannot do anything else. The real question to ask is: where is the salt?" We are the salt of the earth. Salt is a preservative.

Salt as a seasoning...Salt is also used as a seasoning, right. We should add divine flavor to this world. There is brand of Christianity going around that I have no desire to be a part of, that wishy-washy, drab, dull, bland, boring brand of Christianity that is all long faces and hollow eyes. Nor do I desire to be a part of the kind of Christianity that is hype and blather. No, the kind of divine seasoning that Christians are to be to this world is that which is rooted in the gospel. Following Christ is the source of deepest, truest joy. Following Christ is not dull nor is it some ecstatic and over-emotional experience. It is deepest joy and peace, strength and certainty, satisfaction and security and stability. With the Psalmist we can say and declare and live these truths: (Psa 4:7; 46:1–3; 18:1–3)

In a world that does not know God, we are the flavor of God. As we live as the company of the forgiven and redeemed, lives characterized by joy and peace, strength and certainty, satisfaction, security and stability, we testify to the power of God's grace and His transforming and saving power. That leads to the last thing about salt...

Salt as a thirst-inducer...Does that describe you beloved? Salt makes people thirsty, in this case, for the water that gives life. In other words, by our lives, our actions, and our attitudes, do we make people thirsty for Jesus Christ? John MacArthur says concerning the power of a holy life: Making salvation attractive is a high calling, but we will fail in that endeavor unless we can demonstrate that we have indeed been delivered from sin. Rebuke of sin in others without an accompanying lifestyle of righteousness is the greatest hypocrisy. But lives characterized by purity, power, and joy reflect the order, beauty, and power of a saving God. When we make salvation beautiful, we make God attractive. To convince a man God can save I need to show him a man He saved. To convince a man that God can give hope I need to show him a man with hope. To convince a man that God can give peace, joy, and love, I need to show him a man with peace, joy, and love. To convince a man that God can give complete, total, and utter satisfaction, I need to show him a satisfied man. When the world sees people who are holy, righteous, peaceful, joyful, and fulfilled, they see the evidence of God's transforming power. And they will be attracted by it. Now, not everyone, obviously.

Not everyone will be attracted to your saltiness, but those who are being drawn by the Father will be. Paul wrote of the effect of a faithful Christian witness in 2 Corinthians 2:14-16, (2 Corinthians 2:14–16, ESV) By God’s grace and only by God’s grace, we are, as the children of God because He has made us the salt of the earth. We are the salt of the earth and Jesus is the water of life. Jesus promised: (John 7:37–38, ESV) It is our great calling to make people thirsty for Christ. We must be salty Christians.

Unsalty salt...We are the salt of the earth and we do retard the decay of our society, reveal the flavor of life in Christ, and make people thirsty for Jesus, but only as we remain salty. Jesus said: 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. What is Jesus saying? If salt loses its saltiness, then it loses its reason for existence. Now truly, pure salt cannot lose its saltiness, but it can be adulterated, contaminated, polluted and salt in Jesus’ day many times was. It was not like the salt we buy at the grocery store. They got salt from evaporated seawater from the Dead Sea and from digging it out of banks of dirt and it was never completely pure. Occasionally what they wasn’t very salty at all. Instead of being salty, it was tasteless or yucky. When that happened they would throw it out the door to harden the pathway that led to their front porch or pour it into the potholes on the road. What Jesus says in these verses is that if His followers are going to have a gospel effect in the world we live in, we have to be the real thing. Our lives can’t be a mixture of all kinds of impurity. We have to be uncompromised, pure, and authentic. How do we lose our taste? Worldliness. How do I say that? Well the word translated “lost its taste” carries the idea of ‘to play the fool’ or ‘to become foolish’. Now what is the description of a fool in Scripture? The Scripture says that the fool has said in his heart that there is no God. That is the essence of worldliness. It is to live our lives as if God does not exist, to live without regard for God, excluding His plans and His purposes, his principles and promises. It is living as if God does not exist. Unsalty salt is worthless and so the point that Jesus is making is simply this: if you find you saltiness being adulterated, if you find your life becoming bland and tasteless...repent! Cry out to God to purify and cleanse you from the attitudes and values of the world. Saltiness only comes through fellowship with Christ—through a Word-filled, Spirit-filled life, by fellowship with the Savior. We are the salt of the earth. Second, Jesus says:

2) You (and you alone) are the light of the world. (v. 14-16)

Christians are the light of the world, a world that by comparison, is covered in thick darkness. The world is in darkness where spiritual things are concerned and the tragedy of that situation is that men have loved the darkness rather than the light. The spiritual darkness that envelops mankind is thorough and complete. His entire way of thinking, of perceiving, is warped by the spiritual darkness of human sin. Think about the darkness, beloved.

The foolishness of evolution, the relativism of the age, the fallacies of secular psychology and so-called human wisdom, the hopes that education will transform the hearts of men, and wealth redistribution is the answer to poverty, the buffet spiritual pluralism that says Hindu = Buddhist = Moonie = New Ager = Jehovah's Witness = Astrologist = Mormon = Christian, because, after all, "we are all going the same place." It is all darkness, spiritual darkness brought on by human sin. Blind shots in the dark. How are we the light of the world? We need to remember that

Our light is a reflection of the true light who is Christ...We are not the light of the world on our own or by ourselves. The true light of the world is Jesus Christ. He said: (John 8:12, ESV) To be free from the darkness and to walk in the light of life is to know one person, it is to know Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the Light of the World. He came as the Light that pierced the darkness, that exposed the cause of darkness and to make a new and living way to God by the blood of His cross. He has brought us out of the darkness of sin and into the light of life in Him and now we are to shine for His sake in this darkened world. We are to reflect His radiance in this world. As Paul wrote: "for at one time you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light" (Ephesians 5:8, ESV) We have been made light in Christ. Just as the moon reflects the light, the glory of the sun, in the middle of the night so do we shine with the light of the Son in the midst of this present darkness. And, as Jesus wants us to see,

Light is meant to be seen...Salt is meant to be salty and light is meant to be seen. Jesus talks about two kinds of light – the light of a city and the light from a lamp. In our electrical age where we can have light at the flick of a switch, where we have street lamps and the ambient light that comes with shops and stores and a downtown, we don't readily grasp the weight of the illustration that Jesus uses regarding a city set on a hill.

In the pre-industrial day of Christ, the darkness was oppressive. The blackness of the night in the desert or outside of city walls was so thick that on an overcast night or when there was a new moon, you couldn't see your hand three inches in front of your face. But if there was a city up on a hill nearby, say fifty or 100 miles away, the light from the city would bounce off the clouds or shine into the darkness and shine. Many times cities were placed in strategic and noticeable locations like that so that travelers could easily see them.

Then Jesus uses the picture of a lamp in the home. In Christ's day, apart from the light glowing from an oil lamp, the only option is darkness. No-one would hide a lamp under a basket but instead they put it on a stand that stands prominently in the house so that the light can reach to its maximum distance and greatest radius, so it could light the greatest area. A lamp was not lit and placed under a basket so that no one could profit from its light. Neither have you been lighted by the gospel of Jesus Christ so that you can hide your Christianity. You are to see your occupation as a lamp lighting the way to Christ wherever the Lord has placed you.

Like the city on the hill you are placed to draw attention to Christ. Like the lamp in the house, you are engaged in the work of illuminating the truth of the gospel of shining a light on Christ through your life and lips. We are not the light of the church, but the light of the world and we must carry the light of Christ to every corner of our culture. Not only do we need vocational pastors and missionaries, we need Christian teachers, Christian lawyers, Christian thinkers, Christian businessmen and women, Christian engineers, Christian bankers, Christian hairstylists, Christian truck drivers, Christian retirees, Christian factory workers, Christian philosophers, Christian counselors, Christian scientists, Christian doctors and nurses, Christian coaches. Our light, the light of Christ shining in and through us, will pierce the darkness with the light of gospel truth and with the light of the glory of Christ. That is God's plan, his means for advancing the gospel in this earth. We must kick off the baskets of fear, of apathy, of silence, of inconsistency and burn with the brightness of Christ. How do we do it? How do we

Shine brightly for the sake of God's glory and the sake of people's souls...Jesus tells us: 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 do we let our light shine before others? Not through protests, boycotts, or petitions against sin in society, not by slicker marketing or compromising the gospel, not by bumper stickers and billboards, not by becoming like the world, not even by mastering a better gospel presentation. The way we let our light shine before others is by our good works.

In Greek there are two words for good. There is the word *agathos* which simply defines a thing as good in quality; and then there is the word that is used here, *kalos*, which means that a thing is not only good, but that it is also winsome, beautiful, attractive, lovely, helpful, honest, and useful. The good deeds of the Christian must be not only good; they must be also attractive. What are these good works that Jesus is talking about? It is your integrity before God and men; your faithfulness to God, to your wife, to your husband, to your family, to your church; your love to God and to your neighbor; your self-sacrifice for the good of others without the need for applause, your perseverance in the face of trial for the sake of Christ, your zeal and passion for Christ; works of love and charity to others; works of kindness and service; works of humility and gentleness; works of caring for those in need. Jesus is teaching His disciples that they will be like light—they will “shine before men,” meaning that they will be proclaimers and teachers of truth both with their lips and their lives, with their words and their works. They will live what they preach, and we will preach faithfully Christ and His gospel, so that spiritual light will shine on the hearts and minds of sinners and they will give glory to God in heaven.

Dr Alexander MacLaren said “Candles are not lit to be looked at, but that something else might be seen.” Good works must be done in such a way that men ultimately come to know that our light is Jesus Christ, that the means of our good works is not us, but God’s grace in Jesus Christ within us. It is the light of this transformed life that God uses as the means by which He draws, not all but some, to worship and praise and glorify God the Father who is in heaven.

Bright lights...The picture of the lamp that Jesus uses here is most beneficial to helping us understand. The lamp was like a gravy boat filled with oil with a wick floating in it. In order for it to shine brightly, the tub needed to be filled with oil, and the wick needed to be trimmed of all of the burnt edges. Likewise if we want to shine brightly, we must be filled with oil. That oil is a picture of the Holy Spirit, of the life of Christ in us, which is continually being replenished by His Word read and received, by prayer, through fellowship, personal and corporate worship, through meditation on the word of God, through being with God. Be filled with the oil of God’s Spirit and truth. Psalm 34:5 tells us, “Those who look to him are radiant, and their faces shall never be ashamed.” (Psalm 34:5, ESV)

Second, we need to trim our wicks. Just as the wick had to be trimmed, cut back, or it would smoke and the light would grow dimmer and dimmer, we must be careful to trim from our lives the things that hinder our walk with the Lord. That requires confession of sin and repentance, putting to death the old patterns of sin through the power of the Holy Spirit. But it must be done so we can shine for His glory. I want to close this morning with

3) Three essential convictions for being salt and light.

You and I are called to make a difference in the world. This applies to every Christian at all times and in all places. We are called to make a difference not in a flashy and showy way, but in a faithful way, by being salt and light. And in order to do that, there are three essential convictions that we must have.

First, we must be convinced that the display of glory of God is the most important thing in the universe. Scripture tells us it is. (1 Timothy 1:17; Romans 11:36, ESV) If we are going to be salt and light, we must be convinced that God's glory is most worth living for, more than anything else. Unless we have that conviction, the declaration from Jesus that we are salt and light will not grip us like it should. We are on this earth as a display of the greatness of God and His glory. So that is where we must begin—do you have the conviction that there is nothing more significant for you to accomplish in this life than to live in such a way as to point to the glory of God in Christ?

Second, you must be convinced that His glory is clearly and eternally displayed in the salvation of sinners. Isn't that what we see in the first chapter of the book of Ephesians. As Paul describes the salvation of sinners, there is a continuing refrain regarding the glory of God. Paul writes how God chose us and predestined us and redeemed and forgave us and adopted us and sealed us unto salvation to the praise of His glory or to the praise of His glorious grace. Jude, in speaking of the salvation and preservation of sinners says: (Jude 24–25, ESV) The salvation of sinners demonstrates the glory of God in a way that nothing else could.

Third, you must be convinced that you have an essential role in bringing sinners to salvation. You are, as Jesus said, the salt of the earth, the light of this world. You are salt and light everywhere you are. Ultimately, salvation is of the Lord, but God is a God who uses means to accomplish the salvation of His people. And one of the chief means that He uses is faithful

witnesses in word and in deed in this world. God's witnesses in this earth are is children. There are hosts of professing Christians in this world who are not living as salt and light. What we need are Christians who will live as salt and light, who will love Jesus Christ and live the gospel unambiguously before the world. Are you salty salt? Are you shining light in this world?

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