



Matthew 5:13-16

Salt is More Precious than Gold

13 " You are the salt of the earth; but if the salt loses its flavor, how shall it be seasoned? It is then good for nothing but to be thrown out and trampled underfoot by men.

14 "You are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden.

15 "Nor do they light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house.

16 "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven.

Of what value are the followers of Jesus to the world? Well if you ask the world, not much. Paul said in 1 Cor. 4:13 that the world regarded he and his fellow Christians as the dregs and scum of the world. Literally the *offscourings*, περικαθάρματα - the stuff you would scrape off the bottom of your sandal after walking around on ancient roads all day. The Apostle John warned, ***1 John 3:13 Do not marvel, my brethren, if the world hates you.***

To this day, that's how believers are treated in much of the world. In Pakistan they are kept at the very lowest level of society, and just this week, after a barber in Lahore claimed that a Christian had made a derogatory comment about Muhammad an entire Christian town, over 100 houses, was burned to the ground by an angry mob. But that's the world.

Thankfully that's not how God views believers though, to Him they are his Segullah, His special treasure, the apple of his eye, his Bride, his beloved. His elect people. The same Apostle who warned that the world hates the elect of God, also spoke of the amazing love of God in 1 John 4:9 ***"In this the love of God was manifested toward us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him. In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins."***

Now here in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus, the Son of God is talking to His disciples, the very people whom He is going to lay down His life for. He's talking about their nature and now he's talking about their function in the word. But it's interesting isn't it that when it comes to describing them Jesus doesn't say, "you are the diamonds of the world" or "you are the gold of the world." Some rare and

expensive treasure. Instead he compares them to two things, that we generally regard as pretty commonplace and uninteresting: *Salt and Light*.

Why Salt and Light? I remember as a child learning about the history of the kingdoms of Western Africa and their trade, the Niger river was the major conduit for that trade, and the two most important items that were traded were Gold from Ghana in the south and Salt from the Sahara in the north. But what I remember not being able to figure out was why the rate of exchange **was one ounce of gold for one ounce of salt**. It didn't seem to make sense. Salt is this stuff you keep on the table and sprinkle on your food and use for cooking, gold on the other hand is something you lock away in bank vaults. So I remember asking the teacher about it and she said, ***“you can live without Gold, but you can't live without salt. It's necessary to keep you alive, and in countries with a lot of Gold, but hardly any salt, they are going to be eager to make that trade.”***

We don't think about it, but salt is more precious, more necessary than Gold. Jesus doesn't compare his disciples to something pretty but unnecessary, He compares them to two absolutely essential things: Salt and Light. Without them you don't have life. Salt is a necessary nutrient, without it, our food is also pretty tasteless. I love boiled eggs for instance, but the idea of eating one without salt is highly unappealing. I'm not alone in that opinion for instance, Job 6:6 for example asks (assuming the answer is no): **“Can flavorless food be eaten without salt? Or is there any taste in the white of an egg?”** But Salt had an even more important function than a seasoning, it was also used as a preservative.

In the ancient world they did not have refrigeration, and things like meat and fish went bad very quickly, but salt could be used to stop that from happening. Christ's original audience would have caught that immediately. His ministry will mostly take place around the Sea of Galilee, and while some of the fish caught there were eaten fresh by those living around the lake, the majority of the fish that were sold were salted to preserve them.

Two metaphors are used over and over again in the bible for describing the condition of fallen men, ***dead in their sins and trespasses*** and ***living in darkness***. It's no coincidence then that Jesus specifically says to believers you are in the world to change that. The which is dead rots, it putrefies, you are here to stop that, to arrest the spread of rottenness and also to be lights in the midst of darkness. By your righteous lives we are supposed to stop the world from going rancid. You are supposed to be different. And if you lose that difference, if you become like the world, you become worthless. You are like tasteless salt, something that may still look like the mineral, but doesn't add flavor to food and doesn't preserve anything. Jesus says that's something you throw out. So far from trying to be as much like the world as possible, we should be striving for Christlikeness and the qualities that Jesus has already said will mark out his followers as blessed.

JC Ryle - “Surely, if words mean anything, we are meant to learn from these two figures, that there must be something marked, distinct, and peculiar about our character, if we are true Christians. It

will never do to idle through life, thinking and living like others, if we mean to be owned by Christ as His people. Have we grace? Then it must be seen. Have we the Spirit? Then there must be fruit. Have we any saving religion? Then there must be a difference of habits, tastes, and turn of mind, between us and those who think only of the world. It is perfectly clear that true Christianity is something more than being baptized and going to church. "Salt" and "light" evidently imply peculiarity both of heart and life, of faith and practice. We must dare to be singular and unlike the world, if we mean to be saved."

It is also Jesus' intention that you not hide the light that Christ gives to His followers. He is like the Sun, we are like the Moon. Were it not for the Sun, the Moon would be nothing but dull grey rock. It is the fact that it reflects the light of the Sun that makes it shine, and allows it to light up the night.

Oh how deep would be the darkness where it not for the Light of Christ! One thing that has struck me is that when you travel to places where there isn't much Christian witness, how perceptible the darkness is. I don't mean physical darkness, but spiritual darkness. Many of the Christian men and women returning from Afghanistan, for instance, have reported on it. Jesus is the Light of the World, and without Him and His Gospel, there is only darkness and death. I'm often struck by the fact that Hell is described by Jesus as the place of "outer darkness" absolutely without light. There is fire there, but it does not provide any illumination. And there is no substitute for the light of Christ.

Atheists tell us all the time that we can substitute "Science" for the light of Christ, but without Christ there is no real basis for science and what results from scientific study with Christ is not light. Churchill understood that, that's one of the reasons he called the struggle against Nazism not as a battle between nations, but as a battle which pitted Christian civilization against darkness. He warned:

"if we fail, then the whole world, including the United States, including all that we have known and cared for, will sink into the abyss of a new Dark Age made more sinister, and perhaps more protracted, by the lights of perverted science."

Without Christianity, science makes the world darker. In fact there is perhaps no more corrupting or terrifying force in the modern world than atheistic materialistic science utterly devoid of any of the light and salt of Christ. Victor Frankl, a famous psychologist and holocaust survivor grasped that.

He wrote *"If we present man with a concept of man which is not true, we may well corrupt him. When we present him as an automaton of reflexes, as a mind machine, as a bundle of instincts, as a pawn of drive and reactions, as a mere product of heredity and environment, we feed the nihilism to which modern man is, in any case, prone. I became acquainted with the last stage of corruption in my second concentration camp, Auschwitz. The gas chambers of Auschwitz were the ultimate consequence of the theory that man is nothing but the product of heredity and environment—or, as the Nazis liked to say, 'of blood and soil.' I am absolutely convinced that the gas chambers of*

Auschwitz, Treblinka, and Maidanek were ultimately prepared not in some ministry or other in Berlin, but rather at the desks and in lecture halls of nihilistic scientists and philosophers”

I must tell you, it is for that reason that while I am concerned by the purging of Christianity from having any role in government, I am even more concerned by its purging from this nations academies and scientific institutions.

Remember then your preservative function, as you live and work in this world, remember that it is your influence that makes all the difference. I remember when I worked in the world how reluctant people were to swear around me, they would swear and the apologize, they wouldn't tell dirty jokes around me. They'd take a lewd conversation elsewhere. That's a good thing. We shouldn't be ashamed of it.

One of the sad things amongst believers is their tendency now to try to pal around with the world and convince them its ok to swear and be lewd. We even have preachers who use profanity in their sermons, and make the bible smutty.

Have we forgotten that Paul said, “Let no corrupt word proceed out of your mouth, but what is good for necessary edification, that it may impart grace to the hearers.” (Eph. 4:29)

Remember then, brothers and sisters, the words of Eph. 5:8 For you were once **darkness**, but now *you are* light in the Lord. Walk as children of light

Remember how vital you are in this world, without salt and light all human life would end and without believers how will the light of Christ bring eternal life to a lost and dying world? God could use angels to spread the light of the gospel, but he doesn't he uses you! Are you spreading that light? Or are you putting a bushel basket over it?

DO not forget that Matthew 5:16 is a command "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven. Obviously you can do that by preaching the gospel, but also in the way you live your lives.

It was the intention of the Pilgrims not to separate themselves from the Mother Country forever, but to go someplace where their light could shine and they could be an example of godliness to others to bring about reformation at home. John Winthrop particularly understood that it would be the manifestation of Christian love one to another amongst them that would be the most persuasive force to those who were watching. So he preached to them in his A Model of Christian Charity

“For this end, we must be knit together, in this work, as one man. We must entertain each other in brotherly affection. We must be willing to abridge ourselves of our superfluties, for the supply of others' necessities. We must uphold a familiar commerce together in all meekness, gentleness, patience

and liberality. We must delight in each other; make others' conditions our own; rejoice together, mourn together, labor and suffer together, always having before our eyes our commission and community in the work, as members of the same body. So shall we keep the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace. The Lord will be our God, and delight to dwell among us, as His own people, and will command a blessing upon us in all our ways, so that we shall see much more of His wisdom, power, goodness and truth, than formerly we have been acquainted with. We shall find that the God of Israel is among us, when ten of us shall be able to resist a thousand of our enemies; when He shall make us a praise and glory that men shall say of succeeding plantations, "may the Lord make it like that of New England." For we must consider that we shall be as a city upon a hill. The eyes of all people are upon us. So that if we shall deal falsely with our God in this work we have undertaken, and so cause Him to withdraw His present help from us, we shall be made a story and a by-word through the world."

How can we do that? ["The next consideration is how this love comes to be wrought. Adam in his first estate was a perfect model of mankind in all their generations, and in him this love was perfected in regard of the habit. But Adam, himself rent from his Creator, rent all his posterity also one from another; whence it comes that every man is born with this principle in him to love and seek himself only, and thus a man continueth till Christ comes and takes possession of the soul and infuseth another principle, love to God and our brother, and this latter having continual supply from Christ, as the head and root by which he is united, gets predominant in the soul"]