

Introduction

The beatitudes at the outset of the Sermon on the Mount set forth the character of the citizens of the kingdom of God. Actively they are poor in spirit; they mourn over sin; they are meek; they hunger and thirst for righteousness; they are merciful and pure in heart; and they make peace. Passively, they are hated for their association with Christ Jesus and they are persecuted. But what are these citizens to do? What is their mission? Having spoken to the nature of who the kingdom citizens are, Jesus changes his speech. He transitions from speaking about who THEY are to directly addressing his disciples with the pronoun YOU. He actually began at the conclusion of the beatitudes. Blessed are YOU when others revile you and persecute you and say all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. So now, you who embody these kingdom characteristics, you who are persecuted for the sake of the king and the kingdom, here is what you are and what you are to do while you are in the world.

[Read Text and Pray]

So much is wrong with the world. But occasionally you hear it said even by the world that certain individuals are "salt of the earth" kind of people. Different folks have different ideas of what this means, but for most, I think, the phrase refers to a person of great worth. These are the persons who, though they may be overlooked, are ones that make the world a better place. Talk to different groups of people and you will hear various nominations for those who qualify as salt of the earth.

In Jesus' day there were also a number of ideas. I would think among the Jews the prevailing thought was probably that the scribes and the Pharisees were "salt of the earth." I am sure of one thing: the scribes and Pharisees thought of themselves that way. But here it is Jesus who declares who the salt of the earth kind of people are. Here are the people who make the world a better place. Here are the ones who make a difference.

And he says, "it is YOU." You who? Well it is the "YOU" he has just identified in the beatitudes. The salt of the earth are the citizens of heaven's kingdom. These are the ones who make earth a better place. These are the ones whose presence matters to the well being of the earth. But his point is greater than just that. In this next portion of Jesus' great sermon, in fact, we find a twofold identity, a twofold mission, and a singular goal. It is under these headings that I want us to digest this text this morning.

I. A Twofold Identity

Your identity is who you are. And who you are looks different in different settings. I am Ross Layne. I come with a catalog of varying experiences and in this particular body and the specific DNA that is mine. But who I am looks a certain way when I am at home with Melissa and Ariail, another way when I am at church, another way when I am out in the world driving my truck or buying groceries or even passing out tracts. Hopefully I manifest similar characteristics, but those characteristics function uniquely in the context in which I am operating.

Jesus has already identified the citizens of the kingdom in terms of their character itself and in terms of the response this character will elicit from the world. But now he is identifying the role of these kingdom citizens in the context of the world.

A. The first role to which he points is the role of salt. Of the earth . . . you are the salt. And there are two primary functions of salt that have been known through the ages. One is taste and the other is preservation.

Several times each summer the Layne family enjoys homemade ice cream. We have mostly made vanilla but have tried a few different flavors through the years. Just last year I discovered a recipe that has become my all time favorite. It is homemade butter pecan. And of course one of the key ingredients is pecans, buttered pecans. You roast the pecans in melted butter and stir them into the cream mixture and freeze it in the ice cream maker. But those buttered pecans would not be what they are without a critical ingredient—salt. You roast them in butter and salt. It is all about the taste. If ever you have to go on a salt-free diet, I feel bad for you.

What are french fries without salt? Or for that matter any kind of potatoes? Just about any dish whatsoever that is worth tasting has some salt. Salt makes things edible that you otherwise could not eat. And salt in the world makes it somewhat tolerable.

And not only is taste an issue, so is preservation. Salt brought into contact with food exerts a preserving influence. It extends the life of foods by absorbing moisture. The reduction of moisture inhibits the growth of harmful mold and bacteria. Kingdom citizens exert this kind of influence on the world. They exert a preserving influence by counteracting the growth of harmful ungodliness. In this way they counteract to some degree the distaste. The presence of unashamed Christians does have a mitigating effect on sinful behavior. Sometimes it is by a word that is spoken. Sometimes it is by political action that is taken. Sometimes it is by the power of the Holy Spirit who puts out an aroma of Christ through those he indwells.

B. The second role to which Jesus points is the role of Light. You are the light of the world. Clearly light acts in opposition to darkness. Darkness speaks of the willful ignorance and crooked and twisted deeds that arise out of a darkened understanding. Light shines to expose evil deeds. Light also illuminates the darkened mind to see the truth.

What God does when he saves a person is he delivers that person from the domain of darkness. The kingdom citizens are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession whom he has called OUT OF DARKNESS INTO his marvelous LIGHT (1 Peter 2:9-10). He has delivered them from the domain of darkness to qualify them to share in the inheritance of the saints in light (Colossians 1:13). Jesus is the light of the world, and his followers are light in the world to direct it to him. Paul says to the Philippians that they shine as lights in the world.

Darkness is a mask. Under the cloak of darkness, danger and defiance lurk without detection. Under the cloak of spiritual darkness, people convince themselves that their wickedness is not detected. And what is of the world is darkness. The direction in which the world is moving is into the darkness. Light exposes. Light reveals. Light uncovers. It allows people to see evil

deeds for what they are. This is the identity of kingdom citizens in the world. Their very presence counteracts the condition of the world. Kingdom citizens are not of the world, and, therefore, being in the world, they counteract the direction and influence of the world.

C. To summarize the identity of kingdom citizens in the world, you could say they are not of the world. They are distinct from the world. Every major characteristic of theirs is unlike the world. They are poor in spirit. They mourn over sin. They are meek. They hunger and thirst for righteousness. They are merciful and pure in heart. They are persecuted for doing what is right. And in all this they are happy.

Meanwhile the citizens of this world are proud. They believe in themselves. They love themselves. The greatest love of all is learning how to love yourself. They are not meek; they run you over if you are in their way. They hunger and thirst for more, more of the world and the things in the world, more applause, more stuff, more physical pleasure. The citizens of this world are bitter and unforgiving, hypocritical and unholy. They run from God. And they persecute the righteous. So by their very nature, imperfect as they are, citizens of the kingdom of heaven counteract the world. They bring the salt of the kingdom and the light of the kingdom to bear upon the world. This is their identity.

If you are a kingdom citizen, this is who you are in the world. You are not of the world but of the kingdom of heaven. Heaven is your home. And you are not like the world. Praise be to God you counteract the anti-God bent that consumes the world. This is your identity.

II. A Twofold Mission

Now given this twofold identity, there is a corresponding twofold mission. Do the work of salt and do the work of light.

A. What does salt do? It SEASONS and thereby brings an influence that counteracts spoilage. It acts in opposition to the evil decaying influences. How does it do that? Well, let's look at what Jesus says. "You are the salt of the earth, but 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 foot.” Jesus is saying the only thing that makes salt of value is having its taste. The value of salt is its bringing to bear its saltiness, its distinctive flavor, into the substance into which it is placed. If it loses its saltiness, it is no good. You might as well throw it out and walk on it.

What Jesus is saying to kingdom citizens in the world then is this. “Do not compromise. Do not be conformed. Maintain your kingdom distinction. If you lose your kingdom distinction, you are not worth anything.”

In Palestine salt was known to become infiltrated by contaminants that rendered it spoiled and useless. This was especially true around the Dead Sea. Gypsum and other minerals are known to contaminate the salt and render it no good. What do you do with salt that is no good? You can’t throw it on a garden or in the field because it would kill the plants. No, you throw it out on the path where it will gradually be ground into the dirt.

Salt makes its impact in the medium into which it is placed by being distinct from that medium. The two are not the same. Similarly, the world and the citizens of the kingdom of heaven are not the same, but if the kingdom citizens become like the world, they are of no use. In fact you have to be careful what you do with them. Put them in the wrong place and they will do away with what is living there.

Something dreadful is wrong with many churches in our day in our country. Everywhere I look I see churches TRYING to be like the world. They think the more like the world they are, the more likely they are to increase their attendance. And they are right. These churches are growing! The world will flock to churches who entertain them with what it likes. They minimize sin and holiness. They preach a soft gospel that finds almost everybody in heaven. These churches downplay doctrine. They are big on feelings. They feed the man-centered how-to-do-it-myself appetite with spiritual fast food sermons. They do their best to make sure people are uplifted when they leave because if they are not, they won’t be back. They avoid controversial issues because they cannot afford to lose their crowds. They cave to the culture. But churches like these using methods like these are NOT being salt. They have lost their saltiness. They have compromised their kingdom identity. Their center of focus is the world rather than Jesus.

Now it is easy to look out there at them and point a finger. But what I most want to accomplish in each of you this morning is to convince you that the church you need to be a part of is not the church whose greatest concern is entertaining you and not offending you. The church you need to be a part of is one which is a church of the kingdom of God that is in the world not a church of the world claiming to be in the kingdom of God.

I also want you to be sure that you know unequivocally that it is the aim of Grace Community Church to be a salty church. The very thing that makes us relevant to the world is that we are NOT LIKE the world. Our mission is to not be like the world. Our mission is to reach the world with the gospel that comes from heaven, a gospel that will transform you from being like the world to reflect Jesus himself. Some things you hear will not pick you up, they will hammer you because many things in the word speak directly to us to rebuke and correct and train. We are not about entertaining humans but glorifying God.

But the application here is not only to churches. It is also to individual disciples. Jesus is saying your lives are not to be contaminated with worldliness. Your lives must not be pressed into the mold the world presses upon you. Your family should know you are different. People in the world should see that you are different. It is a difference that makes a difference. If you claim to follow Christ yet look, act, and spend time like the world, then you have lost your saltiness.

B. As salt, we are to season. Secondly, as light, kingdom citizens are to SHINE. Jesus adds some rich commentary here.

A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. This would be obvious. No one would disagree. By day its buildings and by night its lights stand out and make it conspicuous.

Another obvious truth is that people don't light lamps to hide them. You do not turn lights on to keep people from seeing but to enable them to see. What is Jesus saying here? He is saying, Don't retreat. Don't hide. Don't go off to a monastery. You are light. Be who you are. Your mission in the world is to shine. So shine. Did God give his gospel so that we might keep

it secret? Repentance and forgiveness of sins must be proclaimed in the name of Jesus to all nations. Look, he is THE light of the world. We shine as our words and works put the focus on him.

III. A Singular Goal

That they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.

A. We are not to season and shine in order to receive the applause of the world. This is not practicing righteousness before men to get a pat on the back from them. But it is worshipful obedience to God. The motive for our seasoning and shining is that the world may see God's glory. Christians have been created in Christ Jesus for good works. They are the fruit of the Spirit of God at work in us and the glory goes to the Lord.

B. So Jesus is saying, "You citizens of the kingdom of heaven, as such, you are on a mission. Your mission is elicit glory unto God. You will do so by demonstrating in the darkness and decay of the world, the beauty of God reflected in you. It is so that through you being who you are you would draw sinners out of the darkness to join in magnifying the glory of God."

C. You no doubt have heard and even used the phrase "in the world but not of it." It communicates the idea that while we are in the world the main thing is that we are not to be like the world. On that understanding the Christian's main focus is on avoiding the contaminants of the world. While it is true that we should not be contaminated by the world, it is also true that the main reason we are here is to fulfill a greater mission than only that. It is to impact the decay and the darkness around us for the glory of God. Because we are salt, we are to season. Because we are light, we are to shine brightly before others. In other words it is because we are not of the world but of the kingdom of heaven that we are actually sent into the world. Christ's disciples are sent to season and sent to shine. We may rightly say, "NOT OF the world and therefore IN the world for the glory of God."

That's what Jesus said in prayer to the Father in John 17. He said, "They are not of the world even as I am not of the world." Then he said, "As you have sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world."

You know, Jesus did not come into the world simply to prove he could remain unspotted by it. However, it was necessary in order to accomplish what he did come for. His mission was to glorify God by giving eternal life to all whom the Father had given him. And so on his knees just before his betrayal and arrest, here is how Jesus prays: Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son that the Son may glorify you. ... I glorified you on earth having accomplished the work you gave me to do." He continued then basically to say, "I am coming out of the world but I am sending them in. Keep them from the evil one and set them apart in your word."

Conclusion

I marvel at the connection between Jesus' prayer at the end of his ministry and his sermon at the beginning. Jesus' people are like Jesus. They are Not of the world and therefore sent into the world in order to season and shine for the glory of God.

How is it with you in your life? If you are his, are you seasoning and shining? Are you shining at home, at work, in your neighborhood? Whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, are you being salty? Is the work of God evident in you? Are you on the mission for which he saved you? If the salt has lost its flavor, what good is it?

And those of you not belonging to Christ, would you be one who glorifies the Father in heaven today? Would you turn your back on the darkness and decay of this world today? Would you come out of the darkness into his marvelous light to proclaim how excellent he is who calls you? Would you repent of your sin and trust in Jesus Christ to receive forgiveness and life eternal? Join the band of those who are salt of the earth and light of the world.