

SERMON ON THE MOUNT

a 10 minute daily devotional | week 1

thursday | prayer

Take 10 minutes to pray that God will help you be salt and light. Here's a prayer to get you started: "Please purify me, Lord, mold me, fill me with Yourself, use me. Banish all the forces of evil from me, destroy them, vanquish them, so that I can be healthy and do good deeds."

friday | application

| Have a spiritual conversation. Better yet, have a spiritual conversation with a non-believer.

saturday | journaling

Spend 10 minutes recording your thoughts/feelings from your week immersed in Matthew 5:13-16.

"You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled underfoot. You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven."

Matthew 5:13-16

monday | devotional

For two years I ran a homeless ministry. This week a man I knew from that ministry died. His name was Mike and he never liked me.

I never had a negative interaction with Mike. The only times I talked to him I was I serving him food or giving him clothes. Mike didn't dislike me because of anything I had done to him personally (I don't think); Mike disliked me because I was a Christian and he assumed I was a hypocrite.

Mike's attitude towards me was indicative of how many of my homeless friends thought about Christians. They were leery of us. Sadly, this seems to be true of many, not just people without homes. Some of these negative connotations are unwarranted, but some are earned because we haven't taken Jesus' words in Matthew 5:13-16 seriously.

Salt and light are two items that would be hard to live without. As modern Americans we take both for granted, but their importance is far reaching. We use salt for flavor, to preserve (check the nutrition facts on a frozen food box), and in some places, to help ice on the roads melt faster. Life would cease to exist without sunlight. But consider how different our lives would be without light bulbs. We wouldn't be able to drive at night, our streets would feel less safe, and most businesses would shut down after dusk. Salt and light greatly benefit us.

Jesus' point is simple: Christians are to be a positive force in the world. Understanding this truth is easy, living it out is hard.

John R.W. Stott makes a distinction in Jesus' metaphor. He says that salt refers to moral preservation and light refers to the good works of a Christian. In other words, we are to live morally exemplary lives (avoid sin and increase virtue) and be agents of positive action.

American culture has moved away from Christian morality. This is sad and scary. It also begs the question, why? As Christians we believe in the existence of evil. Satan exists. "The world" is a term used throughout the New Testament to describe the underlying nature of a fallen creation that is fundamentally against God, and thus, Christianity. Obviously the existence of evil plays a major role in the deterioration of American morality, but perhaps something else is at play. Perhaps American morality has been spoiled because Christians have not helped preserve it.

41% of Christians now believe that morality is relative to the individual. Entire denominations are giving up a biblical, godly morality. And Christians who hold to a Christian morality seem to be cowering away from interacting with a changing country.

Stott says:

"Christian salt has no business to remain snugly in elegant little ecclesiastical salt cellars; our place is to be rubbed into the secular community, as salt is rubbed into meat, to stop it going bad. 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...where is the salt?"

Jesus says something similar in our passage about being light, doing good works: "A town built on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven." Too much of modern American Christianity has become about avoiding bad - avoiding sin. We are called to more than this; we are called to do God-glorifying works.

In the book Church History in Plain Language, author Bruce Shelley explains reasons for the incredible post-apostolic early growth of Christianity despite culture's negative bias against it. He says, "The practical expression of Christian love was probably among the most powerful causes of Christian success...Christian love found expression in the care of the poor, of widows and orphans, in visits to brethren in prisons, or to those committed to a living death in the mines, and in acts of compassion during a famine, earthquake, or war." This is light.

As stated above, Christians are to live morally exemplary lives and be agents of positive action. This is what Jesus is calling us to, and this calling is a lens through which we must analyze our lives.

Perhaps if we will live as salt and light we will see incredible growth of Christianity again. Perhaps if we live morally exemplary lives and become agents of positive actions, people like Mike will start to think good things about Christians.

Reflect on this: How must my life change if I am going to be salt and light to the world?

tuesday | commentary

Below are seven snippets of commentary. After you've read these comments write a short statement explaining how it helps you better understand Matthew 5:13-16.

Stuart Weber, "The entire sermon, including the Beatitudes before and the many teachings after, shows us how to live as "salt and light" in the world as representatives of another kingdom."

"Salt was one of the earliest of all preservatives and was a valued commodity in the ancient world."

"Salt was used as a figure of speech in the ancient world of sparkling conversation, speech dotted with witty or clever remarks."

"Don't miss a the key principle in Jesus' metaphors of salt and light. Citizens of the Kingdom of Heaven impact society because they are different (not weird or bizarre but distinct) from the Kingdom of this World."

The Greek word for "loses its saltiness" is *moraino* which can mean "to become foolish."

Albert Barnes, "In eastern countries, however, the salt used was impure, or mingled with vegetable or earthy substances, so that it might lose the whole of its saltiness, and a considerable quantity of earthy matter remain. This was good for nothing, except that it was used to place in paths, or walks, as we use gravel."

World is often used in the New Testament to describe the self-centered, godless value system and morals of fallen mankind.

wednesday | questions

1. What can you do to increase your saltiness (see commentary)? What is to be gained from being more salty?
2. What is one thing you are doing to be more of a positive influence in the world?
3. What fears do you have about being more obvious in following Jesus? Is there anyone who inspires you to overcome those fears?
4. Share one thought from this passage that you find most meaningful and why.