

Be Salt and Light

In eight short beatitudes Jesus described the character of a true disciple. A true disciple was a spiritually poor and mourning man before God. He longed to be like God and he would suffer for it. Jesus wanted the transfixed crowd on the hillside to know the inner characteristics of a disciple and the cost. But Jesus was not finished. He moved on to describe the responsibility of a true disciple to his world. Jesus did not encourage the disciples to withdraw from the world and hide in Christian social groups or self seclusion. This was the great error of Monasticism. It encouraged Christians to hide from the world in order to seek perfection or a higher level of religious experience through self denial, poverty, celibacy, and obedience. Jesus did not encourage the disciples to withdraw from the world.

You are the salt of the earth; but if the salt has become tasteless, how will it be made salty again? It is good for nothing anymore, except to be thrown out and trampled under foot by men. You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do men light a lamp, and put it under the peck-measure, but on the lamp stand; and it gives light to all who are in the house. 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. (NASB) Matthew 5:13-16

Salt of the earth. In Jesus' day salt was obtained from various places including the Dead Sea. It was not pure salt since it was a mixture of other natural chemicals. Modern salt is a combination of salt plus other chemicals. Salt was used in Jesus' day to preserve food, flavor food, and help seal a dirt roof against the rain, for example. It was common in ancient times for salt to be piled in the streets when it was no longer useful. It is interesting to know that salt was used in ovens to cause the fire to burn hotter. Even today, salt is sometimes used to fuel the fire until a chemical reaction occurs that makes the salt useless. Pliny the Elder said,

The salt from the Dead Sea can lose its savory quality and become dull.

Was Jesus referring to food salt or oven salt or something else? We do not know. But it is clear the crowd knew about the useless "salt" in the streets.

The Greek word Jesus uses for "tasteless" is *moraino*. It is

a curious word meaning "foolish, to play the fool, insipid, dull, flat or deficient. In Rabbinic literature salt is associated with wisdom. Did Jesus have a second meaning to His statement? Was He implying that a foolish disciple has no impact on his world? While the statement is true, we do not know His intent. What is clear is that a salt-less disciple according to Jesus is good for nothing. Jesus did not stop there. He did not JUST say that a salt-less disciple was "good for nothing." He said a salt-less disciple was "good for nothing, except to be thrown out and trampled under foot." That describes how useless a tasteless disciple really is. Disciple, be salty!

Light of the world. How can disciples know they are tasteless? Jesus answers the question with the next story. He starts by telling them they are the "light of the world." They are like a city on top of a hill and like a lamp on a lampstand. Jesus is referring to common everyday things.

In Jesus day, there was a city called Safed in the northwest of Galilee. It was "a city set on a hill" and could have been in view while Jesus was teaching. The Talmud tells us

that it was a signal station used to announce a new moon. Fire signals were used hill after hill to signal the coming of the new moon. This city could not be hidden since its purpose was to be seen everywhere.

The lamp Jesus mentions was a small lamp designed to be put on a lampstand to provide light in a room. What makes this illustration very meaningful is that the typical Jewish home was a one room building, and when the lamp was set on the lampstand, it would give light to everyone in the home.

But Jesus did not say they were a small lamp in a room. He did not say they were a light on a hill to be seen throughout Israel. Jesus said His disciples were the light of the world. The Bible tells us that God is light (1 John 1:5) and Christians are sons of light (Ephesians 5:8-13; John 12:35-36) because we have believed in Jesus Christ. They are no longer children of darkness (John 8:12-13). If you are a Christian, are you a monastic hiding your light?

Be Salt and light. Jesus said each disciple is salt and light. Salt was a warning against being good for nothing and light was used to show us how to be good for something. What do you think it means to be good for something? What does it mean to be salt and light? You might be surprised. Jesus answered this question when He 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. (NASB) Matt. 5:16

Jesus wants others to see your good works! Jesus used the Greek word, EMPROSTHEN, which means to be “in front of.” He wants the light of His disciples to be in front - right in the face of others - in the direct view of their eyes. What does Jesus want them to see?

Ephesians 5:9 tells us! Ephesians refers to it as the fruit of the light. The fruit of the light is three things: goodness, righteousness and truth. The Holy Spirit says,

... is pleasing to the Lord” (NASB) Eph. 5:8

Christians Are “Light”	Passage
Jesus “Light shines in darkness” “I am the light of the world” “I came as light into the world”	John 1:9 John 8:12; 9:5 John 12:46
Disciples “Sons of light” “Has the light of life” “Lights in the world” “Guides to the blind” “Put on armor of light” “Walk in light” “Not understood by darkness”	John 12:35-36 John 8:12 Philippians 2:15 Romans 2:19 Romans 2:19 1 John 1:5-7 John 1:5-7

“And do not participate in the unfruitful deeds of darkness, but instead even expose them; for it is disgraceful even to speak of the things which are done by them in secret. (NASB) Ephesians 5:11-12

Conclusion. Have you ever wished to please the Lord? Then be

a light to the world. Be a godly example of goodness, righteousness and hold to Biblical truth. Did you notice that righteousness includes avoiding “things which are done by them in secret?” He did not just say do not watch these things, do not say these things, do not do these things. He said do not even talk about them! What about Biblical truth? Jesus is going to talk about that next . . .

How is your light shining? The keeper of a lighthouse at Calais was boasting of the brightness of his lantern from the lighthouse which could be seen ten leagues at sea. A visitor said to him, “What if one of the lights would go out?” - “Never, - impossible!” He cried, horrified at the thought.

“Sir,” he said, pointing to the ocean, “yonder, where nothing can be seen, there are ships going by to all parts of the world. If tonight one of the my burners went out, within six months would come a letter, perhaps from India, perhaps from America, perhaps from some place I have never even heard of saying on such a night, at such an hour, the light of Calais burned dim, the watchman neglected his post, and vessels were in danger. Ah, sir! Sometimes in the dark nights in stormy weather, I look out at sea, and feel as if the eyes of the whole world were looking at my light. Go out? - burn dim? - NEVER!”