

Salt and Light

by Dick Woodward

Jesus teaches us to be the salt of the earth and the light of the world, and to let our light shine before men that they may see our good works and glorify our heavenly Father.

Duration: 20:39

Scripture: Matthew 5:3-16, Matthew 6:33

Topics: "Discipleship"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker focuses on Jesus' teachings in the Sermon on the Mount, specifically on the concept of being the salt of the earth and the light of the world. Jesus uses metaphors to illustrate the importance of disciples being a positive influence in the world. The speaker emphasizes that Jesus strategically places his disciples to be fruitful and make a difference. He also highlights the significance of disciples not hiding their light but letting it shine before others, so that their good works may glorify God. The sermon encourages believers to embrace their role as the light of the world and make a positive impact in society.

Transcript

There is a method we humans use to preserve food using salt. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus teaches us that we are the salt of the earth and the light of the world. That seems like a tremendous responsibility and our teacher will continue in our lesson today entitled Salt and Light and help us understand just what Jesus is teaching his disciples.

Now here is our teacher. 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. You are the light of the world.

A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden, 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. Let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven. I have read Matthew chapter 5 verses 13 through 16 and we are in a verse-by-verse study now of the Sermon on the Mount.

This passage of scripture I have read seems to turn a corner in the teaching of the Sermon on the Mount. We have seen in our previous studies that the eight Beatitudes with which the Sermon on the Mount begins, in the opinion of many scholars, are the Sermon. They are the teaching and all the rest, they say,

is application.

Having given us the eight Beatitudes, Jesus begins the application, really, at verse 11 when he uses the personal pronoun you so many times and says, Blessed are you, when people insult you and persecute you and falsely accuse you and accuse you of all kinds of evil because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you. Many feel that is where the application actually begins.

Another way of summarizing so far would be to say that in the eight Beatitudes Jesus challenged us to look inward and see if, by the grace of God, there is within us the character that is Christlike, which really is the thing that is going to make us part of his solution and part of his answer. And then when the application begins, it's as if Jesus were saying, now look around, look at your world, and look at the people in your world and appreciate the challenge involved when the kind of character that God, by his grace, is working in you impacts the culture and the world you live in. We studied the first part of this look around in our last study when we examined the words, you are the salt of the earth.

What did Jesus mean by that? We suggested several possibilities, but notice he did not say you have the salt for the earth. He said it was something you are. You are the salt of the earth.

And he also said that if you are not salt, then you're good for nothing. What an awesome challenge verse 13 is. Having considered what he meant by that first metaphor, you are the salt of the earth, now let us consider the next one, because he gives us four illustrations here.

Let us look at the second one, you are the light of the world. As Jesus turns to them in verse 14 and says to the disciples, you, and this is implied by the Greek word that is translated you, and you alone are the light of the world, then here again he is making a statement about the world, and he is making a statement about his disciple. The world is in darkness, he is saying, and you and you alone are the light that God the Father wants this world to have.

This is an awesome thing to say about the world and about his disciple. We have had periods in history that have been referred to as the age of enlightenment. Enlightenment is a word that has been used many times throughout history to represent the fact that there have been explosions of knowledge at certain times in the history of the world, and we certainly are in the midst of one now.

If you have studied these things, you know that there is more known today in the last 50 years, more has been discovered in the way of truth that have led people to call the time in which we are living now a knowledge explosion or an information explosion. Just think about the internet. In some ways you might call this age in which we are living an age of enlightenment, and yet for all the information that has been discovered and all the knowledge that has been acquired in the last half century, Jesus says the world is in spiritual darkness.

The world does not really know. Are we going to say that was only for his day 2,000 years ago? I hardly think so, because even though there is a lot of information and a lot of knowledge today, the great challenge is what will you do about what you know? The problem where darkness and light are concerned is not necessarily information. What Jesus meant by darkness is not an absence of information or knowledge.

It is an absence of light in terms of the truth that has to do with the application of all that information and all that knowledge. It seems that for all our knowledge today, we still do not know what to do about the great problems, the truly great problems that continue to confront the world. If we believe Jesus as he teaches here on the mountaintop, he is really saying, and I believe it is true today as it was 2,000 years ago, he is saying to his church, he is saying to his disciples, he is saying to his genuine disciples, his real disciples who really understand his teaching, the truth that he was and the truth that he taught, his values and his philosophy about this world and about life and about how life is to be lived.

If we understand only the teaching of the content of this sermon on the mount, then I believe we can see that the application is still true today. The disciple of Jesus, the true genuine disciple of Jesus, and he alone, is the light this world needs. The world is still in spiritual darkness and it is the true disciple of Jesus who has the light that this world desperately needs.

That is still true today. In connection with this concept of the disciple being light, it is good to notice the order in which Jesus used these two illustrations. First he says to the disciple, and I think it is all dependent upon the fact that the Beatitudes have been worked into the life of the disciple, that if these attitudes are in you, then you and you alone are the salt of the earth.

Perhaps this means the life-giving principle the world needs. Perhaps this means the force that is going to preserve the world from its spiritual and moral decay. But after saying you are the salt of the earth, then he says you are the light of the world.

Some scholars see a real significance in this order. If you are by the grace of God the salt of the earth, then it is possible that when people see that you are, and it is all by the grace of God, the salt of the earth, then just as Nicodemus came to Jesus, they will come to you at some point and they'll want to know why are you the way you are, and they'll want to hear your religious talk. Remember in John chapter 3 Nicodemus came to Jesus and he opened his interview with Jesus with the words, I have seen the works you do and so I have come to hear what you have to say.

We said when we studied the third chapter of John that it is still that way today, and I believe it is. If by the grace of God you are salt, and if that impresses people, the time will come when, like the Philippian jailer, they will want to know why we are the way we are. That is when we have the chance to share the light that has been given to us, the truth that we believe and apply, that God uses to make us the salt of the earth.

It seems to still be the order today as it was in the time of Jesus, and perhaps knowing that helps us understand why he put those two illustrations in this order. You might put it this way, if you are the salt of the earth by the grace of God, then you are also the light of the world, and the time will come when you have a chance to preach or teach or share how it is with you and why it is with you the way it is with you. We seem to think today that the order is reversed.

We seem to think that the world is going to be impressed with our preaching and our teaching and our theology and our doctrine, and then perhaps one day we will become what we are to become. I think that is reversing the order. The order is still this way.

First we must be, that is we must be the salt of the earth by the grace of God, and then the next thing is that we will have a chance to be the light of the world. Jesus gives two more illustrations in connection with this concept of our being the light of the world. A city that has been set or built or placed on a hill cannot be hidden.

If a city were built on the top of a mountain, there is no way that city could be hidden. It is said of Jesus in the Gospel of Mark that he could not be hidden. Sometimes he tried desperately to get away from the multitudes of people that were constantly thronging him, seeking him, actually trying to lay their hands on him.

In one place in the Gospel of Mark it says that he was nearly smothered by the multitudes of people who came to him because their need for him and what he was and what he had for them was so desperate. At times he tried to get away from them, but it says he could not be hidden. Mark chapter 1 verse 45.

I think he is saying to these disciples who came to this first Christian retreat because they wanted to be part of his solution and part of his answer. Now if these beautiful attitudes are in your life by the grace of God, and if by the grace of God you are the salt of the earth and the light of the world, then it will be impossible for you to hide it. If by the grace of God you are a real disciple of mine, and if you have my real values and you believe the truth that I came to show and tell, if by the grace of God you really believe the Gospel that I am committing to you, you will simply not be able to hide it.

Think about this for a minute. Suppose you are a disciple of Jesus and you go to work, and let's say that you are the only disciple of Jesus in the whole office, or perhaps in the whole factory, or in your neighborhood. Think of yourself being placed in a community and you are a disciple of Jesus.

How long do you think you are going to be able to conceal the fact that you are a disciple of Jesus? There were two men who worked together selling cars. They came to a breakfast that I had for businessmen, and when they arrived at this Bible breakfast they were each shocked to see the other one there. They exclaimed as they met each other at the breakfast, are you a Christian? Now these men worked together all day, sometimes for long hours.

They worked at least twelve hours a day, and much of that time they spent around with no customers, and nothing to do but talk with each other. And yet even though they had been doing so for a couple of years, neither one knew the other was a Christian. I think Jesus is suggesting here that if you really are a true follower of his, it will not be possible for you to conceal or hide it.

Suppose you waited on a bus with the Apostle Paul, or suppose you were sitting next to him on a train. How long do you think you would be seated next to the Apostle Paul before you knew he was a disciple of Jesus Christ? Jesus seems to be suggesting that here. If you are the real thing, if you are the salt of the earth, not the salt that is not salty, that is good for nothing, but real salt, if you are a salty disciple, then you are the light of the world.

And if you are by the grace of God the salt of the earth and the light of the world, you will be like a city on a hill that cannot be hidden. You will not be able to hide the fact that you are a disciple of Jesus Christ. How long would it take in our society today when some moral issue rises up involving right or wrong before the disciple of Jesus had to be Christ-like? I think that Jesus was predicting that it would not take very long.

In fact, I think he is saying it would be impossible for you to hide the fact that you are one of my disciples. Perhaps that is what he meant in that illustration in connection with being the light of the world. A city that has been set or built or strategically placed on a hill or mountain cannot be hidden.

In verse 15 he gives us another great illustration. Neither do men light a candle and put it under a bushel. They put it on a candlestick and he gives light to everyone in the house.

What a great illustration this is. Remember in the gospel of John chapter 15, the upper room discourse when Jesus turned to the apostles, men whom he had met with at that first Christian retreat. In this last Christian retreat, which we call the upper room discourse, he turns to those disciples and he says, You have not chosen me, but I have chosen you and ordained you that you should go and bring forth fruit, fruit that remains, so that whatever you ask the Father in my name, he may be able to give it to you.

In John chapter 15 verses 16, the word ordained is not the same word that we use today when we speak of ordaining a minister. It's a Greek word that is found three times in the New Testament. It means to be strategically placed.

The way a general would strategically place his troops in a field around an objective. Jesus said to those men in John chapter 15 verses 16, I have strategically placed you that you might be fruitful. Here you have the same concept in this beautiful illustration.

He is saying you are the salt of the earth. You are the light of the world. You are a city built on a hill that cannot be hidden and you are like a candle on a candlestick.

What a beautiful illustration this is. In those days, of course, they did not have electricity, so they used candles. This was a very common ordinary everyday illustration.

When you light a candle, Jesus was using a sense of humor. Do you put it under a bushel? Do you put it under something? No, of course you don't. You put a candlestick in a prominent place in the house so that the candle gives light to the whole house.

What Jesus is saying is this. The world is in darkness. You who have come to me, who have come to embrace the truth and values I have brought into this world, it's as if you were a candle that was not lighted before I met you.

But now that I've met you and you have met me, the encounter you have had with me is going to light up your life. It is going to light your candle. Perhaps he is speaking of regeneration, the new birth, as the candle lighting.

He says that whenever he lights a candle, he has a candlestick for every candle he has lit. You would not light a candle and put it under a bed or under a bushel and neither does he. Now that he has lighted the candle that you are, he has a candlestick for every one of you.

That should encourage the life of every believer in an exciting way. I remember hearing a sailor say one time, Pastor, I am the only follower of Christ on my whole ship and there are hundreds of men on my ship. I remember getting excited and saying to him, isn't that wonderful? Think of all the darkness on that ship and how your bright candle is going to shine because you're the only light on that whole ship.

You see a candle shines brightest where it's darkest. Think of a chandelier like they used to have with a thousand candles on it. Suppose one of those candles was the candle that you are.

Your light would not be very significant on a chandelier with a thousand other candles. But if you took that little candle that you are out there into the corner of darkness somewhere, think of how much more valuable that light would be. If you are in a city and you are the only believer, think how strategically placed the candle that you are would be.

If that is true in the office or store where you work or the school where you teach or the neighborhood where you live, think of how exciting that should make your life. Considering this illustration, I believe that every follower of Christ should feel that wherever he or she works or lives or socializes or even goes to church, these places are their candlesticks and they are not there by accident. They have been strategically placed there by the Lord Jesus Christ himself, just like the candle that's been lit and placed on a candlestick.

Real Christianity, when you get down to the essence of it all, down to the reality of it all, involves an encounter with the Christ who is. An encounter so real and so vital that it is as if before you had this encounter, before you met him, you were like an unlit candle. But now that you have met Christ, he lights up your life.

He lights your candle. Now once he lights your candle, it is not only so that your candle may be lit. It's not only for you.

He loves you and it is for you. But it's not only for you. Once the candle that you are has been lit, now there's another issue.

Where is the candlestick on which he wants to place this candle that you are? His strategy is expressed in verse 16. Let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works, and then glorify your Father in heaven. This is another great verse taken from this great teaching we call the Sermon on the Mount.

There is a sense in which it is your light, but we know that the one who lighted the candle was not you yourself. It was Christ. So there is a sense in which it is not your light.

It is his. But it is the light that he wants you to be. So he refers to it as your light.

Let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works, and then glorify your Father who is in heaven. In other words, as men behold you giving off light on this candlestick, as this candle that you are burns, people will look at this light that you are and they will not be drawn to you as an end in itself. They will be drawn to you and then directed to your heavenly Father because they will know that you are not responsible for the fact that that light is burning.

There are so many things in all of these illustrations of Jesus. In order for a candle to give off light it has to burn up and be used up. There's no way that the candle can stop burning and still give off light.

If it is going to let its light shine, it has to be used up by itself. The only way you could stop it from being used up would be if the light were snuffed out. But there is no way it could shine and still preserve itself.

In other words, we have to expend ourselves in order for the light to shine. Jesus said that once you have found the candlestick he has chosen for you, then burn there. Burn up there.

Burn up there for him and give off light. Light that will draw men not to yourself, but to the heavenly Father. Light that will attract their attention.

They will say, there's something unusual about that person, something extraordinary about that person, and the quality could not be explained simply by that person. When they come to behold your good works, which is your light, of course, then they will be directed to glorify the Father in heaven who is the source

and the power behind it all. Having told us to look inward in the Beatitudes, Jesus is saying, now look around.

Look around at your world and consider the challenge involved when the kind of character you have in you by the grace of God impacts a culture. A culture that is corrupted. A culture that does not have life.

A culture that is in darkness. Be the light strategically placed that Jesus has called you to be. God bless you until next time.

We trust that these lessons are helping you discover the devotional meaning of the teachings of Jesus and how they apply to your daily life. Now, until we meet again, may our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ fill you with power so that you can be the faithful disciple he is calling you to be.

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