

## Sermon Notes February 5<sup>th</sup>, 2023

**Scripture: Matthew 5:13-20 (NRSVUE)**

### **Salt and Light**

**13** “You are the salt of the earth, but if salt has lost its taste, how can its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything but is thrown out and trampled underfoot.

**14** “You are the light of the world. A city built on a hill cannot be hid. **15** People do not light a lamp and put it under the bushel basket; rather, they put it on the lampstand, and it gives light to all in the house. **16** In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven.

### **The Law and the Prophets**

**17** “Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have come not to abolish but to fulfill. **18** For truly I tell you, until heaven and earth pass away, not one letter, not one stroke of a letter, will pass from the law until all is accomplished. **19** Therefore, whoever breaks one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever does them and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. **20** For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.

### **Sermon**

This morning, we are continuing in the book of Matthew and the Sermon on the Mountain. Jesus is continuing to instruct his disciples from the mountain. In this section of scripture, we see that Jesus moves from the beatitudes to the identity of the disciples. There are two identities that he highlights and they are simply, the salt and the light.

We are two thousand years removed from this text, so when we hear the words salt and light, we may hear them in a different way. For example, the readers of Matthew times would have heard salt in terms of enriching, preserving, and transforming. Their minds may have even wandered off to Elisha and the stories they heard of the salt miracle where Elisha made a spring wholesome again. So, salt was life giving.

For me, the definition that stands out is preservative. I also like the aspect of dwelling on the fact that the value of salt comes in the application of other things. Thus, when we think of followers of Christ as being salt then it should be recognized that, we are called to exist for others.

Now, there is a transition that occurs. The transition is from the beatitudes to their identity. I think Jesus is using their identity to zero in on their mission to the world. Their mission was very large. At the time, they may still not have noticed the magnitude of the mission that they were on. It is also very important for us to realize that their mission and now our mission is just as much about a reflection of who they are as followers or who you are as followers of Christ than the what they are.

The who they are and the who you are can be summed up in this one sentence: You are a Beloved Child of God.

On Wednesday nights, we stray away from the lectionary. We are in the midst of a five-week series called “Step-By-Step.” In the series, we are taking a look at the Fruits of the Spirit in Galatians. This past week, we focused on the Holy Spirit working in our lives. The Holy Spirit working in our lives is what drives the what we are. The what is this salt and light.

When the Fruits of the Spirits are produced in our daily lives, those around us will be impacted. Jesus seems to be encouraging his listeners to let their good works be seen by others. In this section, it also seems that Jesus is suggesting that our personal righteousness must be on the highest level.

Now, this may seem to be contradictory to other parts of Jesus message when he warns us about the public practice of our righteousness. Those warning come in chapter six and is our gospel reading for our Ash Wednesday service, which will be at noon on February 22<sup>nd</sup>. Do you like that public service announcement during the service?

As I was trying to think of which direction I wanted to go with this sermon, I was challenged on a few different fronts. The first one came from a colleague who was challenging us to lean more heavily into grace than law as we come upon the Lenten season, just a few weeks ago.

I then was really challenged by the who we are and what we are and how it can easily become a sermon where I give you a to-do-list on how we can be the salt and light. I mean, that is important; right?

Thus, I went on a digging expedition. On the expedition, I went down many rabbit holes and even messaged my lovely wife that I am way over my head, especially when I started to study third-person imperatives which I am not sure is really even a thing in our English language.

Thus, I want to share with you something that I found in my reading and research that might change how you hear the scripture. Maybe it will help you or maybe it will frustrate you. I am not sure.

In many of our translations, we read, “let your light shine.” You may have heard it in scripture, in songs, from pastors and maybe even me. Let your light shine. What changes for you if when you read this and hear this if you do not hear it as a command?

Instead of a command to you, it is a command to light itself. Now, if you are like me, you may want to scratch your head and say, “what?” Changing the command towards the light and away from us is very significant. This change means that the human audience in chapter five is not being issued explicit instructions about how they are to behave. Instead, the light is already part of our human essence and the light is instructed to be made even more manifested than it already is.

When I read this, I was once again taken back to our Wednesday evening message where I mentioned the following:

When we look at the fruits, it is important to remember that it’s not items we have to do on our own! If we want to be more loving, more patient, or more joyful, we don’t have to figure it out by ourselves. Because the qualities on this list are part of the fruit of God’s Spirit. That means apart from the Holy Spirit, we can’t get there. But with the Spirit, we can.

Thus, going back to the light command. It is not for humans to accomplish any particular work. Humans are simply to allow their core essence to be made more evident.

If we view it this way, maybe some weight can be taken off of our shoulders. The burden can be lessened.

I think that a lot of time and energy often goes into figuring out the meaning of salt and light. It makes perfect sense to do so. Yet, at the same time, I think that when salt and light come on the heels of the beatitudes; we need to connect the two.

Emerson Powery, the author of “The Good Samaritan: Luke 10 for the Life of the Church,” states that is more about the context. Thus, he likes to rest in the questions:

Who are the salt of the earth and Who are light?

His thoughts go back to the beatitudes.

The salt are the individuals who are humble.

They are the ones who mourn, the meek and those who thirst for what is right in the world.

The light are the ones who are merciful, the pure in heart, the peacemakers and those who receive abuse for standing up for what is right.

May we allow the Holy Spirit to work within us.

Here is my final wrestling that I had this week.

We, as individuals and communities, have a default mode. This default mode can be classified by the 3 C’s.

Comfort, Conformity and Complacency

May we set those aside and be the salt and light that Jesus is wanting and needing. For us, when we allow the salt and light to work inside of us; maybe the Holy Spirit will cause the salt to sting and maybe the light will expose what we don’t want to see.

In my closing thought, let me leave with this challenging thought. What if Jesus intention was for us as disciples to imagine and live into a righteousness that makes the kingdom of heaven possible here on earth?

**AMEN**