

Salt and Light

From the Series, “The King and I – Matthew Tells Us About the King of the Universe”

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Presented on July 21, 2020

To Trinity Church of Teaneck, NJ

Introduction

Many years ago, I served as a youth pastor in Northeast Philadelphia. I worked with the Wissinoming Bible Fellowship Church. The Senior Pastor had been at the church for over 10 years when I arrived. I learned that the pastor had started a longstanding tradition. Every Summer, he would round up all the young people in the church, along with a few volunteers, and take them for a weekend to a camp in Lancaster PA. It was called “The Promised Land Camp”.

Because the group went to the camp every year, there were certain traditions - Certain activities that were repeated every time the group went. One of those traditions was the moonlight hike.

The property of the camp wasn’t all that big. Being an inventive type, the man who ran the camp learned a trick. At night, you couldn’t see or remember landmarks. So, this man discovered that he could start a hike, and take the participants around in circles. That made the property feel mammoth.



One of the stops on the hike was a cave.

In the daytime, it didn’t look like much. Of course, nighttime had a way of growing that cave just like everything else on the hike. Prior to this time, the hike was a quote “moonlight” hike - No flashlights required. However, for a cave, the guide pulled out a big heavy-duty trail light. We all went in.

At different points, the ceiling of the cave was very low, so we had to crawl. I recall that the cave was very damp. There was mold and slime all over the place. At one point, someone complained that had something weird on their hand. The tour guide said it was bat dung.

Despite the cramped quarters, there was a feeling that at some point the cave would end, and we’d all be back outside. At one point though, in the deepest part of the cave, the guide said, “Hey everyone, want to see what a cave is like in the dark? He then turned off his flashlight.

That was one of the darkest places I’ve been in my life. We’ve all heard phrases like “It was so dark you couldn’t see your hand in front of your face”. Well, that’s what it was like. Of course,

since any of us might have had bat dung on our hands, there was no point in put our hands in front of our faces to check.

Total darkness is almost thick. Add damp and slime, and this was a place none of us wanted to be for long. Add to this, the guide was a prankster. When someone suggested he turn his light back on he said, “Oh no – I think I dropped it.” This was before every 7-year-old walked around with a cell phone or other source of light. It was a great way to scare little kids. Then, the guide said, “Oh good – I found it”. With that, the light came on and we were all able to get out of that cave.

Darkness. In our modern electrical age, darkness is rare. Few people know what it’s like to have darkness become thick. Fewer know what it’s like to feel stuck in darkness. Centuries ago, that’s how the world worked. At night, it got dark. So, people understand concepts like dark and light. If you were outside at night, and you got too far from a home, it was a dangerous world. Without light, you could get lost and never be found. You could fall into a pit. You could meet a wild animal. You could meet a thief who could kill you and easily hide your body. ***People knew the danger of darkness in those days.***

Let’s read our passage for this session:

13 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.

14 You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden. 15 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. 16 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)

Jesus is about to tell us about two very important qualities of disciples. Qualities so important, that the world is hurt without them.

I. Salt

“You are the salt of the earth.” Today, salt is so common, the average person is in danger of getting too much of it. In the days of Jesus, salt was a much more expensive substance. In order to get it, you had to go to a relatively small number of mines and dig it out by hand.



Salt was so valuable, that Roman soldiers were paid with salt. That's where we get a well-known phrase. If a soldier was courageous, loyal, and strong, that soldier was said to be "Worth his salt."

A. Common uses of salt

Salt had several purposes, just like today.

1. Flavor

Today, the main purpose for salt is flavor. I still remember the day my grandmother taught me how to eat eggs when I was around five years old. Eggs are good by themselves, but a little salt and pepper brings them to life. Salt can make all kinds of mundane foods taste special. Many of us have saltshakers right on the table. We don't need to spend too much time on that one. Salt tastes good.

2. Preservative

Salt had a purpose years ago that we don't use as much today. Before the days of refrigeration, salt was one of a handful of ways to preserve food. If meat or fish are left around at room temperature, they can become dangerous in only a few hours. If meat or fish is heavily salted and then dried, they can last almost indefinitely. Two centuries ago, the British navy relied heavily on salted beef and pork to feed its sailors. You could load up a ship and set out on long journeys with no worries of the food going bad.

Going much further back to Jesus' day, salt was how the people of the Mediterranean region preserved fish, so that it could be transported miles inland.

So, salt was commonly used for flavor and preservation. Because of those things, it was used as symbols for the people of faith.

B. Symbolic uses of Salt

1. To enhance offerings

When Moses gave the ancient Hebrew people instructions on offerings, they were sometimes to include salt:

Season all your grain offerings with salt. Do not leave the salt of the covenant of your God out of your grain offerings; add salt to all your offerings. (Leviticus 2:13)

Because salt was expensive, it added value to the offering. Because salt adds flavor, it made the offering special, just like adding salt to your eggs makes them better. Because salt preserves, it became a symbol of things that last a long time. The covenant of God lasts forever.

So, adding salt enhanced offerings to God.

2. It represents wisdom.

In the time of Jesus, Salt began to be associated with wisdom and grace.

Let your speech always be with grace, as though seasoned with salt, so that you will know how you should respond to each person. (Colossians 4:6)

So, how does this relate to a disciple of Jesus?

The Application of the salt Principle

The world has a problem: It's broken. It broke when Adam and Eve sinned. This results in a lot of problems. Let's talk about two.

1) Decay

The Apostle Paul talks about it:

19 For the creation waits in eager expectation for the children of God to be revealed. 20 For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope 21 that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the freedom and glory of the children of God. (Romans 8:19-21)

Look in particular at that phrase, "bondage to decay". The earth is decaying. It's decaying because of human sin.

2. Meaning

Life for many on earth lacks meaning. When people struggle to find a purpose for their life. That's because we're separated from God.

But your iniquities have separated you from your God; your sins have hidden his face from you, so that he will not hear. (Isaiah 59:2)

An Illustration

Years ago, I was looking through a consumer magazine. You know – the type that rates different kinds of products for quality and safety. I ran into an article on peanut butter. The magazine found some peanut butter experts and asked them to review a number of different brands.



Apparently, there are some keys to making good peanut butter. You have to start with good peanuts. When you find your peanuts, you have to process them well. That means you can't leave them sitting around too long. If you leave them too long, they lose their flavor. They might even start to taste a bit rancid.

I recall the comments on one brand in particular. The reviewer said, "This brand has too much salt". He went on to say, "That's likely because the manufacturer didn't handle the peanuts well, so they need extra salt to cover the bad flavor."

It seems the peanut butter maker got some peanuts and left them around too long. The peanuts hadn't quite gotten to the point where they were unhealthy and needed to be thrown out. They just didn't taste quite right. So, the manufacturer added salt.

Although that's a bad practice when you're making peanut butter, this pretty much describes what's going on with planet earth. The earth is broken. It's decaying. So, it needs a preservative to slow the decay.

The world needs flavor. We are separated from God. So, our lives have no meaning.

God addresses these problems by providing us. He sends followers of Jesus. We are the salt of the earth.

C. Failures of salt

Now, notice something: "You are **the** salt of the earth."

The original language is very specific here. It's not, "you are **a** salt or **a type** of salt". Disciples of Jesus are **the** salt. There is no other. That means disciples have responsibility.

Let's read on:

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. (Matthew 5:13(b))

How does salt lose its saltiness?

Dilution

Sometimes, salt becomes diluted. If you mine salt from the dead sea region, which is where many people in Jesus day got their salt, you sometimes ran into salt that had other things mixed in - Things like calcium and magnesium. The salt miners might start digging into a place where the salt was pure, but if they dug too long, they ran into impure salt. If the miners didn't properly check, this salt could be bagged up and placed alongside the good salt.

If you were the hapless recipient of diluted salt, you had a problem. Hopefully, you didn't discover the problem after you put the salt on your food. You have this substance that you paid a lot of money for, but it's useless.

Worse, you can't just dump it out in the back yard. Many people had gardens where they grew their food. Dumping chemicals could endanger the food and prevent other food from growing. The only place you could dump it was on the road. There, it was walked on by anyone using the road. Impure salt eventually dissolved and disappeared forever.

People who want to be disciples have to ask: Have we let things creep in that dilute our walk with God? Have we become diluted? Disciples of Jesus are called to be the salt of the earth. We preserve – we slow the decay of the earth. We add flavor – we help people to be reconnected to God so that they can discover their meaning and purpose. ***And we're it. Without us, there is nothing else.***

Let's read about the other quality of disciples.

II. Light

14 "You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden. 15 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. (Matthew 5:14)

We talked about light in the introduction. There are times in life when we feel fine. We feel like we have the things we need to make it through life. Then there



are those times when we feel lost. We stumble around. Maybe we feel like we're totally in the dark, like the cave I described earlier.

Those times are important. They're important because they're a picture of our eternal state. In terms of eternal reality, we spend our whole lives lost. I know this because I teach religion. Everyone knows in their heart that eternity awaits us. We all know that there is something more than this earth.

Humans have come up with all kinds of ways to deal with eternity. They all have something in common: *The followers of those religions are never sure if they've made it.*

There was a man years ago named D. James Kennedy. One day he was talking with someone about faith, and he felt led to ask a question: If you were to die tonight, are you 100 percent certain that you would go to heaven? He found that no one who followed religions other than Christianity could answer that question with certainty. Even a lot of Christians weren't certain. So, Dr. Kennedy would read them the following statement from the Bible: "I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life. (I John 5:13)"

The apostle John, who was one of Jesus' closest followers, was under the impression that you could know with 100 percent certainty that you had eternal life.

And he wasn't the only one.

The apostle Paul wrote about this. He was going through a time of suffering. So, he wrote this to his good friend Timothy:

11 And of this gospel I was appointed a herald and an apostle and a teacher. 12 That is why I am suffering as I am. Yet this is no cause for shame, because I know whom I have believed, and am convinced that he is able to guard what I have entrusted to him until that day. (II Timothy 1:11-12)

Think about that statement: "I know whom I have believed, and am **convinced** that he is able to guard what I have entrusted to him until that day."

John was certain. Paul was convinced.

Let me ask: If you were to die today, are you 100 percent certain that you would go to heaven? If you're not, please contact us. Our website is: TrinityTeaneck.org. You can find out more there. Let us tell you how you can know with 100 percent certainty that you're going to the right place someday.

In order to do that, you need light. As you read through the Scripture, you see all kinds of references to light.

Your word is a lamp for my feet, a light on my path. (Psalm 119:105)

When there is no light on the path, people trip and fall. God says his word, which we know as the Bible, provides the light. It gives us wisdom for this life.

The Lord is my light and my salvation—whom shall I fear? (Psalm 27:1)

When there is darkness, people are afraid. Do you ever feel afraid? Do you know it's possible to go through life without fear? Here, it says "The Lord" is my light. With the Lord in your life, you can live without fear.

Later, Jesus said this: "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life." (John 8:12)

In the Old Testament it said "The Lord" is light. Jesus says he is the light. That's why we believe that Jesus was God visiting the face of the earth. He said that anyone who follows him will never walk in darkness.

Jesus tells his followers that they are to be like him. They know the light. They have received the light. They benefit from the light. So, they are to share the light with others. The disciples of Jesus are the light of the world.

Jesus says more:

14 "You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden. 15 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. (Matthew 5:14-15)

Why does Jesus talk about towns (Some translations say, "city")? Well, imagine that you lived in a day when there were no streetlamps. You're walking down a road and all of a sudden it gets dark. You can't see much. Then, you look up. On a hill is a town. If one light helps, the town on the hill has lots of lights. You can see clearly. Jesus tells us that we are to be more than one candle. We are to join together with other believers and become a festival of lights. And we are to be obvious.

Jesus says no one puts a lamp under a bowl. In those days, a standard lamp was a small, shallow bowl with oil and a wick. If you put it under a bigger bowl, no one would see it. However, it would still burn oil. Oil was another substance that wasn't cheap in those days. Why waste oil by lighting a lamp and hiding it? You put the lamp on a stand so that you can provide maximum light.

Why did Jesus have to say this? Could it be that there are people who receive the light of Jesus and then hide it? Sadly, this is so.

God gives us light through Jesus Christ. He then tells us that disciples of Jesus share that light. We must proclaim it.

Why?

16 In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven. (Matthew 5:16)

We become salt and light so that we can glorify our Father in heaven. What does this look like?

An Example

I have a friend who had two experiences lately. He works in a store. One of the customers came to him for help. As you know, during the virus crisis, everyone is supposed to wear masks when they come into a store, and you're supposed to stay 6 feet away. This person wasn't wearing his mask correctly, and he stood too close. My friend politely asked him to fix his mask and step away. The result: The customer became angry.

Now, my friend could have become angry, too. He was in the right – he would have been justified by reacting with anger. This could have escalated into a fight. If this happened, the customer might have stormed out of the store and yelled at others. He might have gone home and kicked his dog, or worse.

But, instead, my friend chose to take a breath, and give a kind response to the angry customer. My friend said the customer's whole attitude changed - He calmed down.

My friend chose to be salt. He chose to be a preservative to an angry, broken world. Instead of adding anger to an angry world, there was peace. The world is better because of it.

Later, my friend went home. Some children in the house had stumbled onto a TV broadcast that reported rioting. The children were understandably afraid.

My friend pulled out God's Word, the Bible. He lovingly explained that God is in control, no matter how bad things look in the world. The children calmed down.

In this instance, my friend chose to be light. He was surrounded by children who felt lost, they were in the dark. But he led them into the knowledge of a sovereign, loving God. The lives of those children are better.

That's a disciple - A man who chooses to be salt and light.

Conclusion

Sometimes, we go through life, and it feels like that midnight hike I went on so many years ago. We don't have light, so we wander around in circles. We stumble into dark, slimy areas and we wonder if we'll ever find our way out.

But God gives us light. He gives us wisdom to navigate through a broken world. He gives us that wisdom in his word, the Bible. He gives us himself. Jesus Christ walks with us. And Jesus doesn't just show us how to get through this earthly life - He shows us the way into eternity. When we follow him, we have 100 percent assurance that we will follow him into the realms of heaven one day.

The followers of Jesus receive that light. When they do, Jesus tells his followers to be salt and light. We are to share what Jesus gives us with others.

So that when we do, we glorify our father in heaven.

