

## Matthew 5:13-20 Salt & Light Can Make a Difference

Early in His ministry, Jesus proclaimed a powerful, challenging, encouraging sermon to thousands of people. His words have been memorized, repeated, and quoted unknown times. Today a portion of His Sermon on Mount frames our Gospel reading, Matthew 5:13-20. Several of the verses stand out. Jesus taught: **“You are the salt of the earth, but if salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything except to be thrown out and trampled under people’s feet. You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.”**

Stop! Just look at the verb. **You ARE**. It’s a present status. It’s not something He’s telling us to be. It’s who we are. You already have your status as a baptized believer in Christ. God’s Word has shown the light of Christ on you and said, **“You’re forgiven. You’re loved. You’re saved, in Jesus.”**

We are in many respects like the moon. It doesn’t produce its own light. In and of itself it’s just a dead rock with an American flag on it and lots of dust.

Yet when the sun shines on it, it suddenly becomes beautiful. It just reflects the light of the sun and provides light to the earth at night. That’s one reason God put the moon in the sky as He did - to produce light at night.

Jesus is the light of the world. When He shines on us with His grace and mercy and love and forgiveness, **He brightens us up in a dark world. He makes us light, like when Moses’ face shone after coming down from Mt. Sinai after being in the presence of God. Only our light is even more glorious, because it’s reflecting the light of Jesus. I don’t have to work for this status. I already have it. It comes NATURALLY to me as a baptized believer. You are the light of the world.**

What do those verses mean to us? How do they apply to our lives? Let’s start here:

What do a ham and egg breakfast biscuit from Wendy’s or Burger King, French fries, pizza, potato chips, pretzels, burritos, cottage cheese, beef jerky and have in common – besides tasty great? I know that you already know the answer: **sodium – salt; and, lots of it!**

Now, let’s try this: what is the largest, brightest light in the world (and, no, not the sun or a planet – a humanly produced light)? **It is the Luxor Lamp located in Las Vegas, Nevada. It was constructed in 1993 to compliment the glitz and glamor of the city that never sleeps. When fully lit, it shines at a staggering 42.3 billion candela. On a clear night, the beam can be seen from 275 miles away by aircraft flying at high altitude. When it operates at full power, the system costs more than \$ 100 per hour for the electricity it uses.**

Now that we have reviewed simple facts about salt and light, we can understand why Jesus used them as metaphors about living the Christian life. **Salt and light matter.** They each can make a significant difference in our lives. **Jesus’ point, though, was not to discuss tasty food or shining lamps.**

**No, it was to caution about salt that goes flat and light that stops shining – a metaphor for Christians who lose their faith-driven distinction.**

At church, little Jane had listened as the Pastor preached on the topic, "Let Your Light Shine." When she returned home, she remembered the Bible passages but she did not understand what they meant. When she asked her mother to help her understand, her mother offered, **"Letting your light shines means being good, obedient, respectful, kind, patient, and cheerful."** It made good sense to Jane. She understood. **Yes, she understood because later in the day when Jane got into trouble and her unhappy Mother demanded, “Young lady, why did you do that?” Jane said with sincerity, “I think it is because I blowed myself out!”**

She did. We do, too. ***The things we promise to do, we fail to do. The things we vow to never do again, we do many times over.*** Martin Luther lamented that our human nature means well, but is weak, easily tempted, and prone to fail – in his words, the devil, the world and our sinful flesh falter and sin. St. Paul, in his letter to the Christians in Rome, said much the same of himself, **“I want to do what is good, but I don’t. I don’t want to do what is wrong, but I do it anyway ... it is sin living in me that does it. ... Although I want to do good, evil is right there with me. ... Oh, what a miserable person I am!”**

In addition to being a sinful, miserable person, our lack of salt and light also have consequences that affects our standing with God. Jesus warned, **“When you lose your faith distinctive, you are good for little**

**more than tasteless salt that is thrown on the path and trampled underfoot.”** Removing ourselves from closeness to God is dangerous and can be spiritually deadly!

Then, in addition, to a spoiled relationship with God, our tasteless, dark life also affects other people. See if this helps. Years ago, when train companies employed people to stand near crossings with lanterns to warn cars and pedestrians of approaching trains, a motorist was run down by a train at a grade crossing. He managed to escape but his car did not. The man responsible for signaling approaching trains had to appear in court. After a severe cross-examination, he remained unshaken in his testimony. He said he had waved his lantern frantically, but all to no avail. The following day the owner of the train line called him into his office and gushed, **"You did wonderfully well yesterday, Tom," he said. "I was afraid at first that you might waver."** **"No, sir," replied Tom, "but ... I was afraid that the lawyer was going to ask me whether or not my lantern was lit."**

When our language is coarse, our deeds selfish, our words cutting, our actions hurtful, we sin, not only against God and ourselves, but also against other people by failing to be Christ-like.

**Other people see, not Christ, but hypocritical Christians who say one thing but do the opposite ... the very actions that take glory away from God.**

There is a better way – a way of discipleship that makes a difference for us, for others, for the glory of God. It is receiving the love of Christ – the grace of God – so that we can reflect it in a sin-darkened world. You must be the change you want to see in the world, or at least the world around you or even your family or maybe even your church. The love of Christ will move you to be the salt and the light that is needed in and around your life.

Please allow me to show you. A king knew that he aged, it was important to designate one of his three sons to take his place on the throne. He thought of a test to determine the wisest of the three.

When he called his three sons together, he gave them equal money, and asked them to fill his throne room as full as possible with something – anything they could think of.

When the oldest son returned, he had used his money to buy sticks, lots and lots of sticks. There were nearly enough to cover the floor. A good effort.

The second son, though, had bought bales of straw. When he broke them open, they covered the floor up to several inches thick. Well done!

Then, when the third son returned, he carried only a candle and a match. His effort seemed doomed to fail and disappoint. But, as you can already surmise, when he struck the match and lit the candle, the room was soon filled – completely – with a soft, gentle light. **He was anointed heir of the king.**

Similarly, that Son could have been Jesus, the only Son of God, who is, as Scripture reminds us, The Light of the World in whom is no darkness.

His light shows us the wooden cradle of His humble beginning, then the wood of His blood-stained cross that paid for the sins of the world, and then, by the light of the new day, His empty tomb that affirmed His resurrection and defeat of sin, death and darkness.

In His light and life, we have grace, forgiveness and the ability to reflect His goodness. Be salt! Reflect light. By His Spirit's work in your heart, let others see His goodness in you. Amen.

I've sometimes compared it to the moon at night. It doesn't produce its own light. In and of itself it's just a dead rock with an American flag on it and lots of dust. Yet when the sun shines on it, it suddenly becomes beautiful. It just reflects the light of the sun and provides light to the earth at night. That's one reason God put the moon in the sky as He did - to produce light at night. Jesus is the light of the world. When He shines on us with His grace and mercy and love and forgiveness, He brightens us up in a dark world. He makes us light, like when Moses' face shone after coming down from Mt. Sinai after being in the presence of God. Only our light is even more glorious, because it's reflecting the light of Jesus. I don't have to work for this status. I already have it. It comes NATURALLY to me as a baptized believer. You are the light of the world.