

In John 17 our Lord said that we “are not of the world” and therefore the world would hate us as it has hated Him. Nevertheless it was not His prayer that we are taken out of the world (Jn. 17:15) for He has sent us into the world (Jn. 17:18) that through the testimony of our oneness the world may believe that the Father sent the Son (Jn. 17:21). The sum of these verses is that we are sent to the world, but will be hated by it; we are to remain in the world, but not become a part of it; we are to be different from the world as a testimony to it.

In Matthew 5 Jesus expresses the same truths. In 5:1-12 He told us that if we look like the beatitudes, we will be persecuted. Now in 5:13-17 He tells us that we are left here for the purpose of bearing witness; we are salt and light to the world.

Matthew 5:13

You are the salt of the earth; but if the salt has become tasteless, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled under foot by men.

Mathew 5:13-14 presupposes two things: first, it assumes that the world needs light, and secondly, that it's decaying. Light is brought where there is darkness. Salt prevents decay.

The verbs that Jesus uses (“are”) stress a state of being: We ARE salt; we ARE light. Salt is unlike the medium in which it is placed. Light is unlike darkness. In other words, we are to be in the world but not of it.

The Dead Sea, as well as the marshes and lagoons around it were, and still are, a tremendous repository for salt. However, without refineries the salt there was not pure sodium chloride as we find in supermarkets today; rather, it was a white powder that was contaminated with other substances (Stott). The sodium chloride was the most soluble component and could be easily washed out, leaving only the impurities behind. Though this powder was no doubt still called “salt” it didn’t taste or function like it. In such cases, it was useless. It couldn’t be disposed of in a field since it would kill everything growing there, so it was just thrown on the road to be trampled on.

In the ancient near east, without the aid of refrigeration, salt functioned as a food preservative, and this is most likely the gist of Jesus’ analogy. A person who reflects the beatitudes is like salt, in that he helps slow the moral and spiritual deterioration taking place in the world. If a Christian's life does not function as it should, he becomes like salt that has lost its saltiness and is worth nothing.

In a similar way, light is also an apt picture of the Christian's witness. The purpose of light is in manifesting. Its presence is conspicuous. A Christian, like a lighted city on a black night, cannot be hidden.

Matthew 5:14-16

You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden; nor does anyone light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on the lampstand, 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.

The world is often pictured in the Bible as spiritually dark (Jn. 1:4-8; 3:16-21; 8:12). Jesus is its light (Jn. 1:9; 8:12; 9:5; I Jn. 2:8; also II Cor. 4:4). But the believer is to be its light as well as we reflect the glory of the Son.

2 Corinthians 4:4 tells us that Satan has blinded the unbeliever's minds so that they cannot see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ. Yet ". . . God, who said, 'Light shall shine out of darkness,' is the One who has shone in our hearts to give the Light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ." (2 Corinthians 4:6)

God, who first ordered the light to shine in the darkness has flooded our hearts with His light. We now can enlighten men only because we can give them knowledge of the glory of God as we have seen it in the face of Jesus Christ.

In a similar vein, 2 Corinthians 2:15 tells us that through us, God diffuses the knowledge of Christ in every place; we are the aroma of Christ. "When a man's garments are full of the fragrance of incense he fills with its fragrance every place he enters" (Hodge, 45). So we, wherever we go, omit the fragrance of Christ.

Although light cannot lose its essential nature like salt could, it can be hidden and become useless. But who would light a light if he was then going to hide it under a basket?

Whether we hide our light because we the fear offending others or because of indifference or for any other reason, we demonstrate unfaithfulness to the Lord.

1 Peter 2:9 says, "But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession." Why? "**So that you may proclaim** the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light." In Matthew 5 it says "**that they may see your good works**, and glorify your Father who is in heaven."

The shining forth of light takes place both by means of the verbal proclamation of the gospel and, here, through our good deeds. As it has been said before, good works can save no one, yet at the same time, faith that does not result in the production of good works is not true faith and is of no saving value (Ja. 2:14-20).

The result is the same: the glory of God. The proclamation of God calling us from darkness to light and the beatitude-like-behavior we exhibit both give God glory for they declare the radical change that He has wrought in us.

Whether we are portrayed as salt, light, or an aroma, if we could reduce Jesus' teachings in these two verses to one word, it would be the word 'influence.' "Our Lord is saying that the Christian who lives according to the Beatitudes is going to influence the world as salt and light. In all that a person does and is (or is not), the sum total of our character, consciously or otherwise, affects other people." (MacArthur)

Salt, in order to be effective, has to be mingled with the substance it's affecting, and yet salt is distinct from that substance. Light, in order to dispel darkness, must shine upon the darkness, yet is distinct from the darkness. Like salt and light we need to remain unstained by the world.