

Life Is Stewardship
Part 3 – Salt and Light: Sharing What We Have Been Given
Matthew 5:13-16

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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 under foot.

¹⁴ “You are the light of the world. A city built on a hill cannot be hid. ¹⁵ No one after lighting a lamp puts it under the bushel basket, but 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.” (NRSV)



This morning our text comes out of Matthew 5 and it is about how we can make a difference. This text comes directly after the “Blessed are those...” portion of the Beatitudes. Jesus is encouraging his followers to live as his disciples. He reveals in this passage that how we live matters. What we do or don’t do, makes an impact. In true Jesus style, he uses images to show the difference we make.

Jesus says, “You are the salt of the earth.”

I love how he uses that metaphor ... saying that we, followers of Christ, are like salt.

Consider with me the uses of salt. In the time that Jesus spoke this, salt was used for much the same reasons as it is today: Preservation and flavor!

In ancient Roman days, there were no refrigerators and the main way that meat was preserved was through salting the meat and drying it. When I go to a Mexican restaurant and order chips and guacamole I can tell right away if those tortilla chips are salted! And In-n-Out French fries... they do not salt their fries much my friends. I am always adding salt to them!

Salt was essential, simple, humble and necessary element.

There are more uses of salt than I can list. If you are curious can just grab your phone and ask AI to give you a whole bunch of other uses from health benefits to

fertilizer to manufacturing glass products. The point is, Jesus just said that WE are this essential.

We might think Jesus is only referring to the things we can do. Rather, Jesus is referring to not only or ‘good deeds’ but also our character. Have you ever heard someone referred to as a “salt of the earth” kind of person. They are referring to a person who is honest, hardworking and reliable. When our character is good, we have an impact similar to that of salt.

Now he follows this with a curious statement... “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 under foot.”

The nuance of this statement is lost in translation. For the word here means both “to become foolish” and to “lose its saltiness.” It is foolish to think that salt could lose its saltiness. It cannot. However, if a grain of salt becomes mixed with other elements, you aren’t going to taste that salt and it certainly wouldn’t be good for preserving food. It would then only be good for the road. Where if you’ve driven on winter roads that are snowy and icy that salt can even be useful here, but the point is that it is no longer useful for the good impact of flavor and preservation.

Another angle for understanding this verse means looking a little bit at salt production that many of us might have considered.

Salt is collected in pools or salt mines. Most of the salt for Jesus’ followers would have come from the Dead Sea.

Consider this slide and how the salt production occurs. The salt water is divided up into shallow pools and as the water evaporates, the salt and is left behind and collected. Now, the concern with salt losing its saltiness is not with the compound changing from NaCl to something else. Rather, the concern is that the salt could become tainted by other impurities, therefore making the salt less salty and diminishing its preservation effects when salt was less pure in this way and no longer good for preserving or flavoring food.

Connecting this to us... We do not lose Christ in us - for he has become our make up when we accept him as our Savior and Lord. We are certainly disciples. However, our usefulness in the kingdom of God as people who make a difference and share the love of God becomes diminished as we cover Christ in us with other things. Our impact changes.

Next Jesus changes metaphors and encourages his disciples saying, "You are the light of the world."

Almost immediately I ask, where does this light come from? Jesus answers this in John 8:12 when he says "**I am the Light of the World.**"

We each have a light that we shine into the world and this light is from Jesus. Our lives have purpose and meaning. We have an impact on the world because of Christ in us.

You matter. I matter. What we do matters. Who we are matters. Because of Christ in us.

Just as salt is an essential component of life, so is light. Consider all the uses of light. Of course, it allows us to see in the dark when we shine a light, and fuels photosynthesis for plants, it generates electricity and solar panels produces vitamin D in our bodies for strong bones, lasers, fiber optics medical treatments all relate back to light. There are, no doubt, countless more.

In ancient times, light was a bit simpler, but nonetheless very useful. It had an impact, just as light today has an impact.

This is a picture of a lamp that was excavated. It is an ancient Palestinian lamp and in one hole you poured in the oil and the other there was a wick with a flame... very simple. This is a similar type of lamp that Jesus could have been referring to. When he said that we could put a bowl on top of it to put it out that is how this lamp would have been extinguished by placing a bowl probably a clay bowl over the top of it. This lamp would not have given a tremendous amount of light and so it was usually placed on a lamp stand so that the light would emanate as far as possible within the room.

Jesus used two images, salt and light, to help us understand our impact. I loved that he used ordinary, examples, common examples. Accessible examples. He did not say that we are the saffron of the world or the aurora borealis of the world being a disciple of Jesus is not rare or expensive special or elite. It is rather ordinary or common. Regardless of our status profession, family background, ethnicity or identity. All people have access to Jesus therefore, all people have an

impact all people are salt and light Jesus excludes no one.

In addition, salt and light do not exist for themselves Dale Brunner says in his commentary on Matthew "Christians should not exist for themselves." Salt left in a salt shaker is worthless and salt that is poured out and mixed with food is beneficial and valuable. Also light that is kept under a shade is really not very beneficial, but light that is placed on a lamp stand is useful to an entire room to illuminate it.

The Greek in this passage is also interesting as it does not say you as in you, Bob or you, Jane individually are the salt and light of the world, but it is the plural form of you. It says you folks are the salt of the Earth and you folks are the light of the world and there is something about the way that Christians are and about the way they live together and they talk together and they come together to make a difference in an impact on the world. When we are together all moving toward the common goal of following Jesus, we become as useful as salt to flavor and preserve. We become as useful as a lamp bringing vibrancy and illumination to a dark world.

Our world is full of darkness - If you listen to the news or have even an inkling of the violence, hunger, suffering of others - you might be like me at times - what can I do? I am just one person - what difference can I make?

I've also always loved the popular starfish story. It's from an essay that was written in 1969 called *The Star Thrower* by Loren Eiseley. It reads:

"A young child was walking along a beach upon which thousands of starfish had been washed up during a terrible storm. When she came to each starfish, she would pick it up, and throw it back into the ocean. People watched her with amusement.

She had been doing this for some time when a man approached her and said, "Little girl, why are you doing this? Look at this beach! You can't save all these starfish. You can't begin to make a difference!"

The girl seemed crushed, suddenly deflated. But after a few moments, she bent down, picked up another starfish, and hurled it as far as she could into the ocean. Then she looked up at the man and replied, "Well, I made a difference for that one!"

The old man looked at the girl inquisitively and thought about what she had done and said. Inspired, he joined the little girl in throwing starfish back into the sea. Soon others joined, and all the starfish were saved."

We can make a difference to a few and that it's important to those few. Love that is shared with even one person is important.

Remember the parable of the lost sheep? The shepherd left the 99 to go and find the one that was lost. Jesus values every life. Even one. So should we.

This past week there were a lot of quotes I read as the life of Dr. Jane Goodall was honored. The one that particularly stood out to me was this one...
"You cannot get through a single day without hanging an impact on the world around you. What you do makes a difference, and you have to decide what kind of difference you want to make".

I love this quote because it reflects to us that what we decide to do matters. Whether large or small we make an impact. And, when we all make an impact together bringing our love, our resources, ... our salt and light together, our small ways add up. As Jeff reminded us last week, we are the body of Christ. We each have something to bring Something to offer. And when we all offer it together, we have a far greater impact.

Have any of you been to a candle light service? Years ago, and I don't know if it's still done, we would each get a candle and at the end of the Christmas Eve service we would turn out the lights. Then a single candle was lit and passed from candle to candle throughout the sanctuary until all were lit. A room that was completely dark at the start was illuminated and shining. We would file out in quiet and sing Silent Night around the fountain.

And I ask us all to consider, what is it that is my salt? How do I bring flavor and preservation and nutrients and goodness to those around me? What is my light? How do I help push back the darkness? How can I bring energy, warmth, brightness to others? Really the question is, how can I love?

As Martin Luther King Jr. said so well, "Darkness cannot drive out darkness: only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate: only love can do that."

Only the love of Jesus shared with the world can push out the evil that pervades it.

How can we reflect the love of God to this dark and hurting world? I would venture to say that only together we make the largest impact.

The largest salt flat in the world is in SW Bolivia near the Andes mountains. It is at an elevation of over 11,000 feet. For most of the year it remains a dry salt flat. However, during the rainy season, the flat creates a mirror effect with the sky. It is such an awe-inspiring

sight that it draws tourists each year so that they can experience the impact of the salt flats covered in a very thin layer of water to reflect the sky.

This is an analogy for us. As we all bring our salt together, covered in the waters of our baptism, we too can reflect the awe-inspiring love of God to the world. When we bring our small flames of light together, we reflect the light of the world - the love of Jesus for all.

We have received the love of God through Jesus Christ on the cross, dying for all the sin and brokenness, all that is wrong in the world, bringing His love, and His resurrection power to our lives. As Romans chapter 11 says, "For from him through him and to him are all things to him be the glory forever and ever." And that is how the passage ends this morning. Jesus concludes the teaching that we are salt and light in this world by reminding us that it is **All** to the praise and glory of our Father in heaven. For it is God who works in us and through us to bring about the greatest impact.

This morning as we bring our time, our talents and consider our stewardship... how we are in ministry together as a congregation for this next year, let us remember that even if we bring the smallest grain of salt or the smallest flicker of light God is capable of using that ...when it is all joined together to make an incredible impact on the world to the praise and glory of God!

Let us pray.

Father God, you have called us to be the salt of the Earth and the light of the world. Jesus, in your name, may it be so, teach us how to live to be this way so that we might experience the flavor and vibrancy of walking and living with you, Jesus. Holy Spirit, fill us that we might have an impact on this world for you and for others.

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The Next Step

A resource for Life Groups and/or personal application

1. Read Matthew 5:13-16 again, perhaps out loud and slowly. Is there a word or phrase that stands out? Notice and pay attention to what God might be saying to you.
2. What does the image of salt and light represent in this passage? Why do you think Jesus used these particular images?

3. Consider the importance of salt in our lives. What is it used for and why is it so significant? Connect these with our own importance and significance as disciples. How are you “salty”?

4. Consider the importance of light in our lives. What is it used for and why is it so significant? Connect these ... What is your light? How do you shine your light?

5. What doubts arise in you as you think about being the light of the world and the salt of the earth? What fears or worries arise in you when you consider Jesus’ words applying to you?

6. Are there ways you are hiding your light “under a basket” or not allowing others to know Jesus through you? How can you increase your salt and light impact in the world?

7. Encourage one another, how do you see others shining their light or adding “salt” to life? Reflect to each other, as in a mirror, how you see love shining and adding salt to the world through them. Give thanks to God for his salt and light shining through us.

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Table to Table:

For kids and adults to consider together

- What did Jesus mean when he said, “you are the salt of the earth; you are the light of the world”?
- Where do the salt and light come from?
- What happens when people experience our “salt” and “light”?
- How can our family add more “salt” and “light” to our world?