

Sept 9th 2012: Sermon on the Mount #3: "Salt and Light" Mtt 5:11-16

You will have noticed from the Bible reading, that I have linked together the two verses that come at the very end of the beatitudes(11-12) with the three verses(13-16) in which Jesus describes His followers as Salt and Light. This wasn't just to make the Bible reading longer, but because Jesus Himself connects them very strongly together.

As we saw two weeks ago Jesus gives in the 8 beatitudes mentioned in verses 3-10, the pattern of life for those who choose to follow Him. Despite the toughness of the Christian life which includes mourning and meekness and persecution they are in fact the blessed ones because of the eternal relationship with God they have, summed up by the promise, "For theirs is the kingdom of heaven." (Talking to Beverley...)

Then in v11 Jesus turns from talking about this general pattern to addressing those who have already chosen to follow Him—His disciples. Those who are already the blessed one. And speaking directly to them He says "Blessed are **you**."

(¹¹ "Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. ¹² Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.)

But look what makes them blessed!! Insults, persecution, false accusations—because this behavior from others against them proves, that they, like the prophets before them, truly belong to God. So in fact says Jesus, as my followers you can expect a hard time in the future, but you can even rejoice in that hard time, because it confirms the reward that is awaiting you in heaven after you have overcome all things on earth.

In Australian rules football these days it is always the best player in the team who gets the best tagger from the opposition. Throughout the game they have to put up with this other player who is all over them like a rash and sledges them continually. But when they complain about this to their coach he tells them that this proves that they are a great player and a real threat to the opposing team, so they should feel chuffed about that, and should play in a manner that proves how good they are and will result in great commendation at the end of the game.

Jesus is saying something very similar to His followers and it is vital for us to notice that He doesn't promise them, or us who believe in Him, a trouble free existence at all. He actually promises the opposite. And He continues on to tell them why this is so. It's because of the job believers in Him have been left on this earth to do. Look at verses 13-16

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 by men.

14 "You are the light of the world. A city 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 men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.

The 'you' here is strong, all inclusive, and non-negotiable. As a believer in Christ you have no choice. You are the salt and the light along with the rest of God's people.

Because He is talking to believers as a group here He doesn't say "You are the Preachers of my Word". Or "You are the Evangelists". Some of them will be gifted in such a manner but not all of them. But all will be the salt. All will be the Light, and that will cause the evil one to attack them and non-believers to insult them, lie about them, and even persecute them.

For being the salt and the light is more about what we do, who we are, and what we stand up for, than what we say.

So what does Christ expects from us as 'the salt of the earth'.

Well in those times salt was such a valued commodity that Roman soldiers were at times paid in salt. So if a Roman soldier wasn't fulfilling his duties well, it was said of him that 'He wasn't worth his salt!'

Salt was used widely to preserve food stuff from corruption and to add flavor. Its taste was not always pleasant and one had to be careful that they added neither too much or too little salt, but it was seen as an absolute necessity.

It is an amazing illustration of what a Christian or a Christian group should be in a society mainly composed of non-believers. The rot soon sets in when that Christian influence is removed or is non-effective, and the reverse is just as true when believers make themselves part of a group or society.

I saw a great example of this when I was Pastoring in a small country town of Cranbrook. Several of the young men of the church decided to join the local Apex organization which had an upper age limit of 40. The organization did a lot of good but there was an emphasis on the consumption of alcohol in the meetings which was at times excessive. When the church guys started to attend the group began to provide one bottle of coke along with the crate of beer they had always provided. Not long after that the number of bottles of coke was just about

equaling the number of bottles of beer, as others in the group found a freedom not to drink the alcohol if they so wished, that they hadn't before.

Our lives are to make the type of difference in the groups that we are part of, that salt was renowned for making when applied to food. Our church is to make that type of difference too.

But even when He said this Jesus realized that such would not always be the case. He knew that believers would never stop being the salt of this earth, but sometimes due to fear, apathy, or the attacks of the evil one, they would not be effective. He knew that salt can lose its saltiness.

Unfortunately church history proves how true this is. When we think of the sexual abuse of children that plagues portions of the church even today we see cases of where the salt has lost its savour. When we consider that divorce amongst Christians is as high as it is outside the church, and we see this church in conflict with this church, and this Christian at war with this Christian, then the salt has lost its saltiness. And when individual Christians can exist for years in a neighbourhood or work place without others knowing that they belong to Jesus, then surely salt has lost its saltiness.

In such cases says Jesus they may still remain my people but their testimony is not effective. It's not good for anything but is trampled under the feet of men.

You and I are the salt of the earth. Left here by Christ to make a difference in this world. Are there changes God wants us to make in our lives that will stop us from losing the power of being salt in our world for Jesus?

But not only are we the salt we are the Light, and the Light is all about being seen. Being noticed as Christ figures in the world, for He is the Light of the World.

¹⁴ "You are the light of the world. A city 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 men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.

I remember many years ago going to a Baptist Youth Rally that was being held at the WACCA. At the entrance someone had set up this massive search light, and the beam from it could be seen from miles away. A testimony to what was happening at the cricket ground that night, that in some way it was different—more important than normal.

Every church group should be a searchlight for Jesus that shines into the community around it, and note that the light here is made up of what we do in

the name of Jesus. Others need to see the good deeds we do and know that we do them because we believe in Jesus and are following His example.

Then, as the Light shines in what we do for Jesus, we must trust God to challenge people regarding their response to it. At times He will call us to add to our light the words of His challenge as the opportunity arises, and at other times He will give some other believer the privilege. That's God's business. Ours is to be, as the church and as the individual believer, the light of our world.

This is why we as a fellowship put a lot of energy and time into helping people in our community, and this is especially why on our food assistance days we always pray with the people who come and tell them how much God loves them.

And whatever we as a church do in being the light, we should all be involved in some way in it, for we all are the Light, not just a few.

As a believer in Christ you need to show forth your light in some way. Christ did not save you to sit you under a bowl, but to set you on a stand. He does not faithfully provide for this church so that we can look after our own needs as a priority, but so that we will be a city set upon a hill

Finally this morning, ask yourself, 'why is it so important to Jesus that we be both salt and light'? The answer should be obvious to you.

Because this is all about His people being left here on this earth to grow His kingdom. It won't be easy to do because there will be opposition, but such is the main reason that God puts breath in your body and life in your flesh. It is also the reason that He has made us to be the Salt of the earth and the Light of the world.

Just the other day I came across this quote from someone and it is just so true that I want to leave it with you to think about for the rest of today....in fact, hopefully, for the rest of your life:-

That is the task that Jesus has left you on the planet to accomplish. We can still worship him when we get to heaven. We can still serve him when we get to heaven. We can still fellowship with each other when we get to heaven. But one thing we cannot do in heaven is help other people discover how they can get there too.