

Salt, Light & Law

Matthew 5:13-20

Intro

Salt, light and law...

These three things are creations of God — and they are things that are necessary for life...

Because I, for one, cannot live without salt...

Job 6:6 (NKJV)

Can flavorless food be eaten without salt?

*The answer is **no**...*

But salt is not only necessary for enjoying food, it is also required for our bodies to function correctly...

- Likewise, **light** is essential for life — without it no plants could grow and life on planet earth is unsustainable without plants...

Also, without light we couldn't see where we are going or what we are doing and we would not be able to survive for long...

- Finally, **law** is vital to life — without law, life would be unlivable...

Without laws and law enforcement, there would be nothing to govern the sinfulness of man and destruction would be the inevitable result...

- Now, we might not think of **salt**, **light** and **law** together — but all three are addressed by the Lord Jesus in this section of the Sermon on the Mount...

So it is our privilege to consider these three subjects this morning...

With that said, would you please follow along as I read the passage that we will be studying during our time together...

Matthew 5:13-20 (NKJV)

13 "You are the salt of the earth; but if the salt loses its flavor, how shall it be seasoned? It is then good for nothing but to be thrown out and trampled underfoot by men.

14 "You are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden.

15 Nor do they light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house.

16 Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven.

17 "Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill.

18 For assuredly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law till all is fulfilled.

19 Whoever therefore breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches men so, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever does and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven.

20 For I say to you, that unless your righteousness exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven.

Let's move into our first section...

1) Salt (vs 13)

13 "You are the salt of the earth; but if the salt loses its flavor, how shall it be seasoned? It is then good for nothing but to be thrown out and trampled underfoot by men.

Notice that the Lord Jesus says to His disciples — to His apprentices — **You are the salt of the earth...**

- The **you** is in the emphatic position in the Greek — this means that the Lord Jesus is making it clear that His disciples (and His disciples alone) **are the salt of the earth...**

And I believe that this is part of the reason that believers usually remain on earth after they receive salvation...

- Because we believers have work to do — we have a mission to accomplish...

To remind ourselves of this truth, please turn to...

Ephesians 2:8-10 (NKJV)

8 For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God,

9 not of works, lest anyone should boast.

10 For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.

Please turn back to Matthew 5 as we continue on in vs 13...

You are the salt of the earth;

The Lord Jesus tells His apprentices that they are the salt of the earth and it is important to remember that when salt enters an environment, it changes that environment...[expand]

Now, let's consider two of the primary ways that salt changed the environment in Jesus' day...

1) as a seasoning — salt improves the flavor of food...[expand]

I believe that apprentices of Jesus should be the most interesting people in the world — they should bring spice to life...

- This is possible because apprentices are the ones who understand the meaning of this life and who look forward to the life to come...

Apprentices of Jesus are in intimate fellowship with the most interesting and most intelligent person who ever lived...[expand]

- Apprentices are indwelt and empowered by the Holy Spirit to live lives that are focused on things above — to live lives that matter not only for the present but also for eternity...[expand]

This leads apprentices to becoming full people — becoming unique representatives of God who live lives that are meaningful to Him and a wonderful blessing to those they encounter...

CS Lewis wrote the following in Mere Christianity...

“At the beginning I said there were Personalities in God. I will go further now. There are no real personalities anywhere else. Until you have given up your self to Him you will not have a real self. Sameness is to be found most among the most ‘natural’ men, not among those who surrender to Christ. How monotonously alike all the great tyrants and conquerors have been: how gloriously different are the saints.”

If you and I want to be different — if we want to make a genuine contribution for God and for good — then we must stay salty — we must be the godly spice that God has created us to be...

Now, the other main use of salt in Jesus’ day was...

2) as a preservative — salt was used to preserve food...

Before mechanical refrigeration was invented, salt was the primary tool used to keep food from spoiling...[expand]

- As disciples of the Lord Jesus we are to be salt in society — we are called to slow the decay of society...

And we do this by walking in humble obedience to the Lord Jesus — by refusing to participate in the fallen world’s way of doing things...

The Apostle Peter had this to say in...

1 Peter 2:11-12 (NKJV)

11 Beloved, I beg you as sojourners and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul,

12 having your conduct honorable among the Gentiles, that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may, by your good works which they observe, glorify God in the day of visitation.

Now, regrettably, I have followed the example of unbelievers countless times throughout my life — and it has had a degrading effect on my life...

- But when I have followed the example of faithful apprentices of the Lord Jesus it has had a preserving effect...

So the simple question is what do we want for ourselves and for others — degradation or preservation?...

- Because how we answer that question will determine the direction of our lives...

Continuing on in Matthew 5:13, the Lord Jesus asks...

but if the salt loses its flavor, how shall it be seasoned?

This seems strange — how can salt lose its flavor? What is the Lord Jesus talking about here?...

One commentator gives this helpful insight...

“...most salt in the ancient world derived from salt marshes or the like, rather than by evaporation of salt water, and therefore contained many impurities. The actual salt, being more soluble than the impurities, could be leached out, leaving a residue so dilute it was of little worth.”

I believe that the Lord Jesus is warning that we can become ***defiled*** and ***diluted*** and lose our saltiness...

- Through disobedience to Christ we can lose our ability to season and to preserve...

I believe that this danger of disqualification is what the Apostle Paul was referring to in...

1 Corinthians 9:27 (NKJV)

But I discipline my body and bring it into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified.

Continuing on to the last section of Matthew 5:13 we read...

but if the salt loses its flavor, how shall it be seasoned? It is then good for nothing but to be thrown out and trampled underfoot by men.

One commentary...

“In biblical times, salt that had leached out, and lost its saltiness, was used for coating pathways.”

- [expand on imagery — connect to professing Christians who have lost their witness and have had their reputations trampled underfoot...]

Let's move now to our second section...

2) Light (vs 14-16)

14 "You are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden.

Apprentices of Jesus are the light of the world — we remain here to illuminate this darkened world — we are to be a beacon of hope...

Disciples are a lighted city that is set on a hill that will be seen for miles around...

This city on a hill imagery let's us know that this light is to be shared — it is not to be hoarded or hidden...[expand]

15 Nor do they light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house.

It would be foolish to hide a lamp under a basket — that would defeat the purpose of lighting the lamp in the first place...

- [ex. "this little light of mine — I'm gonna let it shine"...]

With this in mind, let's consider two purposes of light...

1) light reveals what is wrong — “bringing things out into the light”...

If you would, please turn to...

John 3:19-21 (NKJV)

19 “And this is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil.

20 For everyone practicing evil hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed.

21 But he who does the truth comes to the light, that his deeds may be clearly seen, that they have been done in God.”

- [ex. light as revealer — feeding the kids sweet potato baby food when they were babies — the natural light revealed the truth...]

This is why it is so difficult to be around people who are walking in the light when we are walking in darkness...

- Those people reveal the truth — they show that things are not the way that they should be...

But that is not a good reason to avoid them — instead, we should be thankful that our sin has been revealed because now we can do something about our darkness...

APPLICATION — Spend time with people who are walking more closely with the Lord than you are — read books by those who are more mature in the faith than you are...

Embrace the revelation of the light — walk in the light and know that the Lord reveals what’s wrong in order to make it right...

As we turn back to Matthew 5, let’s consider a second purpose of light...

2) light reveals the correct path — *light illuminates our way, it helps us know where to go...*

- [ex. you are at an unfamiliar camp — and you have to go to the bathroom but you can’t find your flashlight...]

This world is filled with darkness and we need true light if we are to walk well in this world...[expand]

Psalm 119:105 (NKJV)

**Your word is a lamp to my feet
And a light to my path.**

John 8:12 (NKJV)

Then Jesus spoke to them again, saying, "I am the light of the world. He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness, but have the light of life."

Continuing on in Matthew 5 to vs...

16 Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven.

Please notice that the Lord Jesus instructs disciples to ***“Let your light so shine before men”***...

These words speak of **active** participation...[expand]

- [ex. dispute sun and moon analogy — we are not passively reflecting the light of the Son — the Son lives in us — but we can choose whether or not to reveal Him...]

Ephesians 5:8 (NKJV)

For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light...[expand on choice...]

So, we can restrain the light — we can put the light under a basket — we can turn off all the lights in the city on the hill...

- And if we choose to hide the light — it is likely that we will do it out of fear — fear of rejection, fear of persecution, fear of humiliation, fear of loss...

But all fear is *self-focused* — it is about *me* and what *I* might lose...

But for the apprentice there is no need to fear because the Father loves us...

Luke 12:32 (NKJV)

"Do not fear, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom."

1 John 4:18-19 (NKJV)

18 There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves torment. But he who fears has not been made perfect in love.

19 We love Him because He first loved us.

So, as we trust in the simple words, “*Jesus loves me this I know, for the Bible tells me so*” we will be empowered to let our light shine before others...

- And it is interesting to note in **Matthew 5:16** that the Lord Jesus wants His disciples to *let their light shine before men so that men will see their good works...*

This brings up the question of **motivation** — the Lord Jesus exhorts His disciples to let their light shine ***so that the Father may be glorified...***

- But in Matthew 6, the Lord Jesus warns about prayer, giving and fasting that is hypocritical because ***it is not only done before men — it is done to be seen by men...***

This is the difference between **truth** and **hypocrisy** — between ***the Father being glorified*** and ***seeking the glory for ourselves...***

- As disciples we are not merely *light reflectors*, we are *light bearers...*

But that light was *given* to us — we did not create it — we did not earn it...

- But we can *share it* — so that the Father might receive the glory that He deserves...

The Lord Jesus did countless good works in public — His light was continually shining — but He did it all to glorify the Father...

The Lord Jesus is the perfect example of what it looks like to let your light shine before men so that the Father might be glorified...

I love the instruction that Paul gives on this issue in...

Philippians 2:14-15 (NKJV)

14 Do all things without complaining and disputing,

15 that you may become blameless and harmless, children of God without fault in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world...

Let's move now to our final section...

3) Law (vs 17-20)

17 "Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill.

18 For assuredly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law till all is fulfilled.

The Lord Jesus did not come to earth to destroy what was written in the Old Testament but to fulfill it...

- He fulfilled the *Suffering Savior* prophecies during His first advent — His incarnation — and He will fulfill all the *Conquering King* prophecies during His Second Advent — when He returns in glory...

Also, the Lord Jesus came to fulfill the Law — He did what no one in human history had ever done or could ever do — He kept the law perfectly...

19 Whoever therefore breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches men so, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever does and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven.

20 For I say to you, that unless your righteousness exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven.

*I believe that what the Lord Jesus is doing here is exposing the sin of **externalism** — of focusing merely on outward behaviors with no concern for the heart...*

And this was the prevailing sin of the scribes and the Pharisees...

- The scribes and the Pharisees were seeking ***to become righteous by the things that they did — by the way that they conducted themselves outwardly...***

But this is simply a form of ***self-righteousness*** — externalism says that I can make myself acceptable to God through outward ritual — but this is impossible...[expand]

- Tragically, the scribes and Pharisees created more and more laws and regulations in a vain effort to make themselves right with God...

But they were finite — and sinful — so they could neither keep God's law nor their own man-made regulations...

- So they had to make some decisions — on what to obey and not obey...

Inevitably, they focused on keeping what was **external** and **measurable** and neglected what was **internal** and **unmeasurable** (at least unmeasurable from a human point of view)...

- In response to this, the Lord Jesus gives the Sermon on the Mount — the Lord Jesus challenges **the self-righteous externalism** of the scribes and Pharisees and **exhorts all people to obey from the heart...**

The heart of Jesus' message to the scribes and Pharisees is illustrated in...

Matthew 23:25-26 (NKJV)

25 "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you cleanse the outside of the cup and dish, but inside they are full of extortion and self-indulgence.

26 Blind Pharisee, first cleanse the inside of the cup and dish, that the outside of them may be clean also."

Now, as believers, we are perfectly righteous in the eyes of God — *we are right with God* — because God has given us His perfect righteousness...

The Apostle Paul makes this clear in...

2 Corinthians 5:21 (NKJV)

For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.

God has made us right with Him because the Lord Jesus Christ died in our place and gave us His righteousness...

- Now, when it comes to our relationship with the law of God as revealed in the Old Testament, we must remember that the law is good — but it is limited...

[ex. Law is a mirror — simply tells you what is wrong but cannot fix you...]

For more clarity on this issue, please turn to...

Romans 3:19-26 (NKJV)

19 Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God.

20 Therefore by the deeds of the law no flesh will be justified in His sight, for by the law is the knowledge of sin.

21 But now the righteousness of God apart from the law is revealed, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets,

22 even the righteousness of God, through faith in Jesus Christ, to all and on all who believe. For there is no difference;

23 for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,

24 being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus,

25 whom God set forth as a propitiation by His blood, through faith, to demonstrate His righteousness, because in

His forbearance God had passed over the sins that were previously committed,

26 to demonstrate at the present time His righteousness, that He might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.

This is what the Lord Jesus is foreshadowing in Matthew 5:20 when He says...

For I say to you, that unless your righteousness exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven.

- [expand — self-righteous externalism of the scribes and Pharisees vs the righteousness of Christ given to all who trust in Him...]

The question is simple — will we trust in ourselves to be made right with God or will we trust in Christ to be made right with God?...[expand]

[expand — people who have left this fellowship to seek a more legalistic faith (so-called Messianic Judaism, etc)...

Please turn to...

Galatians 3:19-25 (NKJV)

19 What purpose then does the law serve? It was added because of transgressions, till the Seed should come to whom the promise was made; and it was appointed through angels by the hand of a mediator.

20 Now a mediator does not mediate for one only, but God is one.

21 Is the law then against the promises of God? Certainly not! For if there had been a law given which could have given life, truly righteousness would have been by the law.

22 But the Scripture has confined all under sin, that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe.

23 But before faith came, we were kept under guard by the law, kept for the faith which would afterward be revealed.

24 Therefore the law was our tutor to bring us to Christ, that we might be justified by faith.

25 But after faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor.

Conclusion

*We will have to stop here for today — but as we consider how we can faithfully be **salt** and **light** in this fallen world, I want to remind us that the Lord Jesus has simplified things for us in relation to the **law**...*

So, if you would, please turn to one final passage...

Matthew 22:34-40 (NKJV)

34 But when the Pharisees heard that He had silenced the Sadducees, they gathered together.

35 Then one of them, a lawyer, asked Him a question, testing Him, and saying,

36 "Teacher, which is the great commandment in the law?"

37 Jesus said to him, "You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.'

38 This is the first and great commandment.

39 And the second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself.'

40 On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets."

In the power that God provides we will be the salt and light that we are called to be — we will be the true fulfillers of the law and the prophets — as we simply Love God and Love Others...