

Jesus' Greatest Hits

The Salt & The Light

Part 28 - February 24, 2008

[VIDEO: LIGHTING SHOP]

Have you ever had to find your way in the dark? No matter how hard you strain, your eyes just won't work! You're grateful for every little ray of light. In the parables of The Salt and The Light, Jesus reminds us that we've been empowered to help others find their way.

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. You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. 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. In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven. - *Matthew 5:13-16 NIV*

Not, "You should be", "You could be", or "You will be"; you "are" the salt of the earth.

This is what you are from *God's* perspective. He has chosen to sprinkle us onto, and rub us into this world for two big reasons.



1. To make people thirsty. That's what salt does. And that's what we're called to do. Don't push, don't shove, and don't lay guilt trips. But, *draw* them to what Jesus describes as living water. (*John 4:10-13*)
2. To purify and preserve. Before refrigeration or canning, salt was the main way to preserve foods (by prohibiting the growth of bacteria). Meat was dry-cured with it; fruits and vegetables were pickled in it.

And because of salt's purifying and preserving qualities, it was a symbol of God's covenant to purify and preserve His people.

Don't you know that the Lord, the God of Israel, has given the kingship of Israel to David and his descendants forever by a covenant of salt? - *2 Chronicles 13:5 NIV*

For the same reason, salt was added to the temple sacrifices.

... add salt to all your offerings. - *Leviticus 2:13b NIV*



In the minds of Jesus' Jewish listeners, salt and sacrifices naturally accompanied one another. Jesus is the sacrifice, we are the salt. He offers the ultimate purification and preservation; and we are called to proclaim His Gospel in this dying and decaying world.

But, we also have to keep in mind that too much salt will raise a person's blood pressure! A little salt goes a long way.

Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt ... - *Colossians 4:6 NIV*

We have to be "full" of grace, and "seasoned" with salt (that means an emphasis on love and gentleness and respect). Otherwise instead of salt, you'll just end up with pepper spray.

Have you ever heard the saying: "He isn't worth his salt." Salt wasn't common or inexpensive like today. In fact, Roman soldiers received a salt allowance as part of their pay. So, they literally had to be "worth their salt"! And, at certain functions, a guest's significance could be determined by where they were seated in relation to the salt.

Jesus says: "You are the salt" ... You are so *precious* in His sight.

But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? (*Mat. 5:13b*)

This is interesting, because salt *can't* lose its "saltiness". It can be *diluted* with "impurities" and lose its effectiveness (as can we). But it can be concentrated again; and Jesus insinuates here, that salt-less salt *can't* be made salty again.



The insight, I believe, is simple but incredible: If salt isn't salty, it isn't salt. But, if un-salty salt isn't salt, what is it? It's gypsum (the substance added to plasterboard). Gypsum crystals not only look like salt crystals; it's an evaporative mineral that forms in many of the same locations as salt ... they are counterfeit salt crystals!



Now, the dead sea was a huge source of salt; and it still is. The concentration of salt is a whopping 31.5%. Because of this, it's incredibly easy to float! When the water evaporates around the Dead Sea, white crystals form along the shore.



Some are salt, some are gypsum. Jesus' listeners weren't aware of Gypsum. So they referred to it as, "salt without the flavor". Gypsum was thrown onto paths, into roadbeds, and even sprinkled on outdoor marble floors to make them less slippery when wet. But, in each case ...

It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled by men (*Mat. 5:13c*)



Ever had an *unsalted* cracker with *unsalted* butter? Don't; it should be thrown out and trampled by men! That abominable tastelessness is like a believer who is too influenced by this world to have any influence for the Kingdom. We will spread the salt, or embrace the decay

And to this Jesus quickly adds a second example: "You are the light of the world". Again, not "should be", "could be", or "will be", but "are".

A city on a hill cannot be hidden (Mat. 5:14b)

Q: People are watching you ... what do they see?

A pastor warned a young man that his secular job could be difficult for him, and his coworkers would probably harass him for his beliefs. A few months later the man sees his pastor and tells him how wrong he was. The pastor says, "You haven't been bothered for being a Christian?" "Nope!" The man said happily, "They haven't even found out."

What they see has an influence on them (good or bad). The world is scary. People live in darkness without direction and they desperately desire a ray of hope and security.

I've always pictured the "city on a hill" at night, with lights shining.



But it would've been *difficult* to see; no streetlights, no windows, only candles in houses with closed wooden shutters. And Jesus says that it "cannot be hidden". All you'd have to do is blow out a few candles and it would be hidden in the dark. I think His listeners would've pictured the white limestone buildings that clung together on the hillsides and glistened brightly in the sun.

And then he mentions a second source of light:

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 (Mat. 5:15)

The city on a hill represents our public, *daytime* influence. The lamp in a house signifies a domestic, *evening* influence. My salt must season and my light must shine 24/7; day and night! What happens to a candle under a bowl? It uses up the oxygen and snuffs out. Paul said to Timothy:

... fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you through the laying on of my hands. - 2 Timothy 1:6 NIV

If I'm not fanning, I'm snuffing!

There are at least five different kinds of “lights”:



A. Christmas lights. They’re more for show than function; they brighten up once a year, and for special occasions.



B. Blinkers. They go on and off and on and off and on and off. The only thing consistent is their inconsistency.



C. Flashlights. They only light up in times of trouble, and they fade out quickly. You *can* make them brighter by shaking ‘em ... but, it usually doesn’t last long.



D. Candle lights. They work great when everything’s calm, but not so good if the wind blows or they’re caught in a storm.

And then there’s the light that we’re called to be. Can you think what it might be? Lighthouse? Search light? Laser light?



E. Signal Mirrors. 2 Corinthians 3:18 says that we reflect the Lord’s glory as we’re being transformed into His image. Signal mirrors are highly visible; not because they are big or powerful, but because their source *is*. But I need to make sure that my mirror faces the light; and that nothing comes between us.

When Jesus spoke again to the people, he said, “I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.” - *John 8:12 NIV*

In the same way, let your light shine before men (*Mat. 5:16a*)

Jesus says to shine our light “before” men, not “at” them. When you’re in the dark, and someone has a light, the last thing you want is for them to shine it in your face. Not only is it really annoying, it blinds rather than illuminates. We must be careful not to overpower people with the truth.

that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven (*Mat. 5:16b*)

You don’t turn on a light to draw attention to the light, but to light up whatever it’s shining on. When we respond with genuine compassion and authentic humility to the opportunities before us, God will get the glory.

Let’s see how well you’ve been listening; answer *true* or *false*:

1. If salt isn’t salty it isn’t salt.
2. Our words should be full of salt and seasoned with grace.
3. It’s okay to embrace a little decay.
4. Jesus is the sacrifice, we are the salt.