

Did Jesus Really Say That?

Week 2 – Can I Get a Witness? – Salt and Light

October 31-November 1, 2020

Text: Matthew 5:13-16

We are in week two of our message series focusing on Jesus and His teaching in a famous message. It's what we know as The Sermon on the Mount, as recorded in the Bible in the book of Matthew. We're calling this series *Did Jesus Really Say That?* Because as Jesus shared this message with the crowds, He used many references to things that were familiar to His listeners to help them get the point and to remember His teaching. While those references and analogies were very understandable then, some of them sound a little different to us today.

In today's passage, Jesus is talking about salt. And even though we are very familiar with salt, it's a little different take on the subject than we're used to. So if you have your Bible or App with you today, I'd invite you to join me in **Matthew 5**.

As you're finding that, I need a volunteer with a sense of adventure. Someone who's not going to get salty if you get a bad taste in your mouth. (Pastor has someone come up and try to tell the difference between plain water and saltwater. He has them pick one to drink.) So, what's the point of our little science experiment? Salt changes water. But from a casual observation, it's hard to tell whether or not a glass of water has salt in it. But water with salt in it is very different from plain water. Here are just a few ways salt changes water:

- Taste – every hydro-homie knows that water tastes great. But it tastes very different with salt in it.
- How it Conducts Electricity -- I remember being shocked in science class when I learned that pure water is an insulator, but that even a miniscule amount of salt or other substances makes it an excellent conductor of electricity.
- Density -- The density of water goes up dramatically whenever there is salt in it. Things and people float more readily. [Picture shown on the big screens of someone floating in the Dead Sea.] When people visit the Dead Sea in Israel, one of the things to do is to see how easy it is to float because its salt content is about 30%. It's far easier to float in it than it is to float in the ocean.
- Freezing Point -- In the 'Burgh, we depend on salt every winter. It melts ice and snow and keeps the roads safer because salt lowers the temperature at which water freezes.

So salt changes almost everything about water, even though we have to get up close to see whether or not it's in there.

Unseen things can also have a profound effect on us. For example, when we follow Jesus, there are things that change in us. But until we get closer to someone, they're not

always obvious. For example, in this picture, can you tell who is a follower of Jesus? [Picture of a crowd at a Steelers game shown on the big screens.] Probably not the guy in the Ravens jersey, just sayin'. Seriously. No, from the outside and far away, you can't see the difference. In the same way, when you just see someone from a distance, you may or may not have an idea about their faith. But as you get closer

-- get to know them, become friends with them -- it usually becomes pretty obvious. Because when we follow Jesus, it can and should change us. Especially how we relate to and interact with others. And that's what Jesus is teaching about in today's passage. **Matthew 5:13** *"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 underfoot.* Let's pause here and dive in. What does Jesus mean when He says we are to be the "salt of the earth"?

The key to understanding this is knowing what the people listening to Jesus knew about salt. The first thing to know is that although salt is very inexpensive today, salt held tremendous value back in the day. So much so that Roman soldiers were paid with salt. Salt was not just valuable, it was also critical to life. Salt was the primary preservative for keeping food from spoiling. In fact, the only way to preserve meat in the ancient world was to dry and salt it. Everyone understood this application.

Then Jesus teaches about the idea of salt "losing its saltiness." That even valuable and critical salt could turn worthless. The reason for that was that most of the salt came from the Dead Sea and therefore had a lot of impurities mixed in with it. So it could lose its effectiveness over time.

Now that we understand the context of salt in Jesus' day, it helps us to grasp the metaphor that Jesus is communicating. **Jesus Wants You to Know: You are valuable.** God created you and everyone around us with immense value. You are not an accident or random. In **Jeremiah 1:5**, when God reveals Jeremiah's purpose, God's first words are *"Before I formed you in the womb, I knew you."* Jeremiah is doubting himself, his abilities, even his value. And God destroys his feelings of being worthless. Before He formed you, God knew you. And Jesus wants you to know that you are valuable.

You are created to make a difference. Salt is also a flavoring. That is, it makes food better. God has designed you to make a difference. To make the world a better place. One of the ways we make a difference is by living differently. Instead of adding chaos to the world, we become conduits of God's peace. Rather than fostering or tolerating division, we work for unity. And we can inject respect for people in every situation. Want a practical application for that this week? Tuesday is Election Day. [Election Day graphic shown on the big screens.] As followers of Jesus, we know that our hope is in Jesus. And that God's Kingdom transcends politics. So how can you be the "salt of the earth" this week? Communicate value to people. Remind them that they matter. That their value is not in a political affiliation. But that they have intrinsic value from God. And because we value people, we respect them. That we can hold differing viewpoints on important matters and still be brothers and sisters in the Kingdom of God. Bring peace and unity to those who need it.

Then Jesus continues His teaching. **Matthew 5:14-16** *"You are the light of the world. A town built 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 others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven. It's very hard to hide a light. Light is very visible, especially at night. When you fly over the continent of Africa at night, you can get a fresh perspective on light. If you have never experienced it, here's what it looks like. [Photo shown on the big screens.] Because the people and population centers are spread out across vast distances, there is a stark contrast between light and darkness. Prior to GPS and radio beacons, that's how airplanes navigated at night -- by following the light. Because where there is light, there is life. "You are the light of the world." As a follower of Jesus, you are filled with life. And because of the life Jesus gives, you have light. Light is not meant to be hidden. Jesus said we are to be like "a town built on a hill." When it is lit up, it's not just visible. It's incredibly obvious.

The light in you is meant to be obvious to others. Like a city on a hill at night. And the world seems darker these days. COVID is not just a pandemic. We are experiencing an epidemic of anxiety and depression. The CDC reports delays in medical treatment are causing cancer deaths to skyrocket. Many jobs and financial situations seem tentative. In 2020, uncertainty can seem like the only certainty. But we know that the hope of Jesus is always certain! The hope of Jesus is critical all the time, but even more so now for the people around us without that hope. Jesus has called us to reflect His light. It's important to understand that we don't create the light but rather reflect the light of Jesus to those around us.

My friend loves the outdoors and recently told me about a favorite hike. He and his wife wanted to climb a fourteener in Colorado, where there are 58 peaks that exceed 14,000 feet in elevation. Because of the weather, they decided to do most of the hike at night. I thought that was adventurous. You can translate that as insane. Because I'm imagining stepping off a cliff in the pitch-black darkness. What I didn't understand was that there was also a full moon. And because they were away from the city, it was so bright that they didn't even need a headlamp. The reflected light made it seem like daylight.

A great example of this is found in the Bible in the book of Esther. Esther lived a few hundred years or so before Jesus was born and was from the margins of society. Esther was a woman. She was Jewish, living in the Persian Empire, and was an orphan who had been adopted by her uncle Mordecai. Despite this, through a number of God-ordained circumstances, she is chosen to be the queen. Even as the queen she has to hide her nationality and hide her faith. So she is hiding her true self. But then an evil plot of genocide is hatched, and a day is decreed when all the Jewish people will be destroyed. They are to be *"killed and annihilated"* (v 3:13.) Uncle Mordecai discovers the plot and challenges Esther to stop hiding. Esther initially fears for her life and refuses. ***Esther 4:12-14*** *When Esther's words were reported to Mordecai, ¹³ he sent back this answer: "Do not think that because you are in the king's house you alone of all the Jews will escape. ¹⁴ For if you remain silent at this time, relief and deliverance for the Jews will arise from another place, but you and your father's family will perish. And who knows but that you have come to your royal position for such a time as this?"*

"For such a time as this." What a phrase to ponder. Esther doesn't just ponder it. She also rises to the occasion. She declares, "if I perish, I perish." And because she is willing to reflect God's light, the Jewish people are saved. Esther realized this -- she had been positioned by God to make a difference. And when the moment was right, she stepped into her mission. Esther had been hiding. She is being what Jesus describes as a lamp hidden

under a bowl. But she recognizes the moment and lets God's light reflect from her and in doing so brings deliverance for her people.

Maybe you don't see yourself that way. And maybe you even doubt that God could use you in an important way. But that's not what Jesus said if you follow Him. "You are the salt of the earth." "You are the light of the world." Maybe your mission is not necessarily to save your nation. But have you considered that God has uniquely positioned you to bring life and hope to the people in your life? Maybe even for such a time as this? The people where you live, work, play, and learn. Those are your people. They are your mission. Just like the people around me are mine. That might seem like an impossible task. Or at least one you don't know how to start. But in this passage, Jesus gives direction on how to be salt and light.

Maximize your effectiveness. Jesus cautioned us to not lose our saltiness, to not hide our true selves from others. In other words, to not lose your effectiveness, be who God created you to be.

Let Others See the Light of Jesus in You. That sounds complicated. But it's really rather simple. Jesus says to let others "see your good deeds" not to impress others but to "glorify your Father in heaven." Remember the Prayer of St. Francis we prayed together earlier? To borrow a few phrases:

- Pray "Lord, make me an instrument of your peace."
- Sow love where there is hatred.
- Bring hope where there is despair.
- And bring light where there is darkness.

Let's get extremely practical. How do we do this? We heard it last week. Our message focused on how to BLESS others. [BLESS graphic shown on the big screens.] Begin with prayer, Listen, Eat, Serve, Share. At first, that can sound like a project or a process. It's not. It's all about people. A great way to think about it is this: Learning to share Jesus in the everyday stuff of life. No one wants to be a project. But everyone desires to be valued. So BLESS is an approach to people that helps us to live out Jesus' command to be salt and light. Here's how it can look in your life. [Video shown on the big screens.]

As we conclude today, I want to both challenge and encourage you to pray about or to write down, who will I BLESS this week? [Bless graphic shown on the big screens.] Who is God putting on your mind or heart? Who around you where you live, work, play, or learn needs to find hope or experience light this week? When you ponder the phrase, what does "for such a time as this" mean for you? How do you take that idea, and with God's help, turn it into action and be "the salt of the earth" and the "light of the world" this week? Don't shrink back from who God has made you to be!

Let's pray.