

Matthew Round / General

Matthew: Christ The Promised King / Community; Transformation; Mission / Matthew 5:13–16

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*intro me*

## **context**

So we've begun working our way through Jesus' famous teachings in what's often called "The Sermon on the Mount", thinking about this as **Jesus' blueprint for his Kingdom of transformed hearts.**

Three weeks ago, we saw there's good news for this broken world, for its nobodies, hurting, and empty: God is going to turn this world upside down. How? He'll satisfy our longing for things to be right out there by transforming us in here - by transforming our hearts.

Two weeks ago, we talked about the evidence of this transformation: as we start to see these shoots of the righteous seed he's planted in us sprouting up, becoming increasingly merciful, pure in heart and peacemaking, we have a reason to hope for mercy from God, presence with God and even relationship with God. So be encouraged - and encourage one another when you see these shoots.

Then last week we faced the sad truth that not everyone is going to be excited about this - there'll be persecution that comes with our transformation too. Pat told us to look - look back to those persecuted in the past, look around to the courageously faithful Christians in our world, and look ahead to our promised reward - to look, and then lean in to persecution. To dare to raise our heads above the parapet and take the risk that something might come back at us.

This is the context we need to read today's passage in. So, ready to go at this some more together? Let's dive into Matthew chapter 5 and we're starting at verse 13 today. Page 969 in our blue bibles and Summer's reading for us this morning. Matthew 5:13, page 969.

### **Matthew 5:13–16 NIV**

"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. "You are the light of the world. A town built 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 others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.

Thanks, Summer. That's a not a long passage but it has a lot to say to us - starting from the very first word, "you".

## communal

| Matthew 5:13 (NIV)

| "You are the salt of the earth.

you. Who knows another language here this morning? Hands up if you know another language enough to string a sentence together. Nice. What about two other languages? Allright. Three? Three plus? show offs! If you know another language, you'll know languages work in different ways, have their own peculiar features.

This part of our Bibles was originally written in ancient Greek, and in ancient Greek, like Spanish and plenty of other languages, the person doing an action, the subject, is specified in the verb itself. So you don't have to spell that out. In English we have to say "you are" but in Greek, like Spanish, their word for "are" carries the "who's doing it" inside. We can still say both words: "you are" but when we do, that's like underlining in red: "you - yes, you - are".

And though English only has one flavour of you, in Greek, again, like lots of other languages, there are two different kinds of you. You singular, just one of you, and you plural, a whole bunch of you's. Or, for our Americans, y'all. That's the you here. Y'all - yes, y'all here in front of me - are the salt of the earth, says Jesus - are the light of the world, says Jesus. It's **communal**

Why make a big point of that? It matters because it's an important part of what Jesus is saying here - particularly in our cultural moment. We live in a culture that is ultra individualistic, all about me, myself and I. When we think about almost anything, we think individualistically about it. When I read what Jesus is saying, my first thought is he's pointing the finger at just me, alone in the spotlight, that this is primarily about me the individual.

But it's not. The emphasis here is on the group - Jesus is speaking to his assembled disciples (peek back to v1 to see that), addressing them as a group, a collective, rather than individuals. And as we think about this teaching, we have to hear that same address, see that Jesus is addressing us as a church family together - in fact, Jesus is addressing his global church as a whole. You, yes, you, church, are the salt of the earth; the light of the world.

And actually that communal aspect is caught up in both of the images Jesus uses here, too. Just how salty is one grain of salt? Here's my KFC unsalted chips - why do they do that? who wants unsalted chips? - now I put one grain of salt on them. Any effect? No! You need a bunch of grains to do anything. Though, on behalf of all the health professionals in the room, if you want to *keep* eating fries for the long term, just a small bunch of salt, ok? But you get the point: any use of salt requires many grains.

And talking about light, Jesus brings in the image of a town, a city on a hill. Not one lone streetlight, one single exposed beacon, but a city: a whole bunch of lights together. Jesus double-underlines this community orientation. So as we dig into this passage, we have to keep that in the front of our minds - where our culture's

tendency is to focus on the individual instead.

## **communal nature**

So that's *you* out the way. Let's move on to our second word of the morning: "are"  
Mt 5:13

| Matthew 5:13 (NIV)

| "You are the salt of the earth.

Nope, I'm not kidding. This matters too - but this part is just as obvious in English as it is in Greek. Whatever Jesus is saying to us here is about a present reality. Y'all *are* this. Already. Right now. True for those very first clueless loser disciples at this earliest stage of their journey with Jesus: they already are salt, are light. Already. True for Jesus' followers here this morning right now, too. Y'all are salt, y'all are light. It's a **communal nature**.

So as we read and think about what Jesus is saying here today, we can't read this as a challenge: "you need to become salt" or even a promise: "you *will* become salt". It's not a challenge or a promise. We can't read this as potential: "you would be salt" or just a hope expressed: "you could be salt". It's none of these. Jesus states it as a fact, an identity.

Now don't worry, we've heard Jesus promise things already - and he's is going to have plenty of challenges for us as we get further into this block of teaching too - plenty of hopes for us, plenty of things he's put the potential for inside of us. But today we're talking about something that's already true. A fact. An identity.

And remember from two weeks ago, this fact is *evidence* of a gift, *evidence* of transformation, not something we've *earned* through our impressive conduct.

## **unique communal nature**

You - y'all, yes, y'all. Are - you are right now. Third word. Yes! Third word. Mt 5:13

| Matthew 5:13 (NIV)

| "You are the salt of the earth.

The. It's ok we're going to finish before mid day Tuesday. But I'm serious, one more word. The. Not a. We're not a light of the world among many others. Or a salt of the world among many others - sodium chloride vs. calcium carbonate for the chemists. We are *the* salt, *the* light. The implication is that there are no others. There's a uniqueness here that's emphasised. This matters too.

Put these three together and Jesus is telling us about our **unique communal nature**. Our unique communal essence. And he gives us two pictures of this: salt and light. Yep, that means it's time for word number 4.

## **salt**

| Matthew 5:13 (NIV)

| "You are the salt of the earth.

Don't panic - we're accelerating. Salt mostly makes us think about flavouring, about seasoning. Mmm salty chips. Two thousand years ago, they'd absolutely have flavoured things with salt; it was *the* essential seasoning in every home - but it also had another key use: as a preservative. They would salt meats - cover them in salt - to stop them going off. Still works, by the way! They'd use a lot more salt preserving things than flavouring things so in terms of quantity, that'd be the dominant use for salt - just as well or they'd be dead. But there are other ways we might understand what Jesus means when he calls us salt, too - it had other resonances in that time and culture.

So I think we need to be careful here. Since Jesus doesn't give us a clear pointer to use of salt he had in mind, it's pretty safe to assume that a particular sense or use wasn't his big point here; it's not like Jesus' big point is all about salt as flavouring - or salt as preservative or salt as anything else.

Instead, notice what Jesus *does* emphasise: that salt is salty. Kind of obvious - but that's the point he rubs in. It's different. It has a unique nature. And it's useless for *every* purpose without that distinctive nature. We're back to that idea of a unique communal nature - Christians, we are *different* to the world around. We have a unique communal nature. It's that unique nature which makes us useful rather than useless. Like salt.

## light

| Matthew 5:14 (NIV)

| "You are the light of the world.

So what about light? We have this unique communal nature also pictured as light - what does Jesus mean here? He has a bit more to say to us about light and I think to get our heads around this we have to get all physics-y and pull apart the source and the rays of light - the source and the rays. Like a torch and it's beam. Or the sun and the sunshine. And we're going to start with the latter - the rays, the beam, the sunshine.

Jesus tells us that our - plural, communal, remember - our good deeds are the shining, the rays. Mt 5:16

| Matthew 5:16 (NIV)

| In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds

what sort of good deeds? I think this takes us back to the beatitudes we've been looking at - these good deeds are the righteousness which we've hungered and thirsted for; these are the shoots of mercy, purity and peacemaking that are growing up from our transformed hearts. These are the deeds that belong in Jesus' kingdom, that his blueprint calls for. And as we keep going into Jesus' teaching here, he's

going to dive into much more detail on each of those three, showing us what it means practically, starting with peacemaking which we'll get to in just a few weeks.

But remember here that corporate aspect, that y'all aspect. The shining here, the rays, the good deeds emanate from the collected lights of the city on a hill; from the community of Jesus' disciples, from the Kingdom taken together, not in isolation. The y'all actually has a single light that shines here in verse 16.

Now if that's the shining, what's the light, the source? Sunday school answer time: it's Jesus, of course! In fact, Jesus will tell us exactly that in John 8:12

| John 8:12 (NIV)

| When Jesus spoke again to the people, he said, "I am the light of the world."

Jesus is the light within his disciples, within his people. He's that nature which we have, which we share, when he tells us here "you are the light of the world" - no accident it's the same phrase. Jesus is the source of transformation within our hearts - Jesus is the planter of that seed. And what comes out of that it its effect, its evidence: the light shining out in our good deeds.

Now we're making some progress! If we step back, I think we'll begin to see the bigger whole of what Jesus is getting at here now. Jesus is setting out our nature. And Jesus is setting out our purpose. Our nature and purpose.

First, our unique communal nature: we are the salt. This change is inherent, fundamental to our being. We're different. Disciples are heart-transformed - that's inherent to being a disciple. We're useless without that; we're not a disciple without that. It's part and parcel.

He tells us the same thing under the metaphor of light: our unique communal nature. A city on a hill cannot be hidden - incidentally, that's **our logo** - nice, 'eh? (*Ahem ahem other churches in our area called city on a hill.*) Not *shouldn't* be hidden, it cannot be hidden. A source unavoidably shines out. It's intrinsic to its nature. You can't turn on a bulb in a room and not have it light the place up. The sun can't burn without brightening our world. There are going to be rays if there's a source. Shining out is inherent to this transformation of our hearts - you can't be a light and not shine. The tree can't help but bear fruit. You can't be transformed and not produce good works.

Jesus is setting out our nature - and Jesus is setting out our purpose, our unique communal purpose. Wonder what your purpose is in life? Here's your answer: **Mt 5:15** no-one lights a lamp and puts it under a bowl. The point of lighting a lamp is for it to shine. To light up the room. The point of Jesus transforming our hearts, of the light of the world planting this seed within us, is that we, too, become a light, and we are to shine before the world around us.

**Matthew 5:15 NIV**

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.

Jesus didn't transform us so he could hide the result and no-one would ever know. He transformed us in order to put that transformation on display before the world. **Mt 5:16** Let your light shine before others - more literally, it's an active imperative "shine your light" rather than just a passive permitting of this. Our good deeds are meant to be on display, the rays that emanate from the transforming light of Jesus within us.

| Matthew 5:16 (NIV)

| In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds

But we've missed the point of all this if we miss how Jesus closes. Mt 5:16

#### **Matthew 5:16 NIV**

In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.

The result of all this, of Jesus' transformation of our hearts, isn't just good deeds, isn't just Jesus' kingdom drawing near, being established. The end of all of this, the root purpose and goal is glory to God. The Westminster Shorter Catechism, a summary of reformed faith in short questions and answers, asks the question "what is the chief end of man" - that is, what's the main point or purpose in humankind existing at all; what on earth are we here for? And it's answer is: "**man's chief end is to glorify God and to enjoy him forever**". Our ultimate purpose is glory for the God we get to enjoy forever.

God is the author here, the origin of this transformation. This is another reinforcement of the idea that we're talking about *evidence* here for what's happened to us, not *earning anything*. This is evidence of God's transforming work on our hearts, not us earning a place in his heart through our good performance. If we had to work this up ourselves, well, glory to us, right? If it's down to me, and I pull it off, well done me. Gold star. But it's not down to us - that's the point - it's down to God.

This is critical for everything we're going to see through the whole sermon on the mount. If we start thinking we have to work any of this stuff up, if we begin to believe we're responsible for delivering it, if we lit the lamp as it were, if it's our product, our good deeds - then glory to us. Well done me. But this whole thing is about glory to God - so this whole thing has to be founded on his transformational work, not our outstanding efforts.

And this is important to notice here: the truth about where any of our good deeds come from has to be evident not just to us - it's not just that I need to know it all flows out of God transforming my heart; I know I didn't work any of this up so I can't take any credit for it; the truth about where any of our good deeds come from has to be evident to *others* too. See that here Mt 5:16 - it's others who see our good deeds and know to glorify our Father in heaven - not us.

#### **Matthew 5:16 NIV**

In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.

We're made different by Jesus transforming our hearts. We are the salt.

We're meant to make a difference as a result. We are the light - Jesus within us. We're to shine, revealing that source.

Jesus' plan to change the world - salt *of the earth*; light *of the world* - to change the whole world is through changing us. Jesus is planning to bring in his Kingdom of righteousness, peace and joy through transforming our hearts to God's glory. And there is no plan B.

cool? cool.

### **so what?**

Maybe you're here today just exploring faith? We're so glad you're here. What should you do in response to this? What could you do in response to this? Well, I want you to hear loud and clear that Jesus thinks there's no solving the world's problems without a fundamental transformation of humankind. I challenge you to take a serious look at the other things our world puts its hope in instead: technology. education. democracy. freedom. capitalism. self-expression. Ask yourself: any signs of these fixing the world? Or are our problems much, much more fundamental? Jesus says it's only people transformed in here who are ultimately going to make things right out there.

And you could go one step further: the bible talks about tasting and seeing that God is good - a salt and light connection, perhaps - I invite you to taste and see: stick around, come close up - I don't think you should actually lick anyone to see how salty they are but poke your nose into church more. See whether there is anything different about his people; see whether there are good works shining from us which point back to God transforming us, any foundation for a hope that things could be made right out there through a change in here.

And what if you are a follower of Jesus today? What's here for you? The central thing from today's passage, I think, is that God's transforming work in us is meant to be made public not kept private. You are salt, you are light - you have been transformed and this is your nature now. Shine your light. Shine out mercy. Shine out purity. Shine out peace. Your nature is light and your purpose in life is to shine - so let it shine. Shine, and be careful to testify to the source of that light, the truth about how you've been transformed and by whom.

The other thing that's really stood out to me as I've been preparing is the communal nature of all this - y'all, remember? Not just one grain of salt; not just one light but a city on a hill; together, *the one salt, the one light*. The power and significance of being church together, being community *must* be part of what we learn here.

One of the beautiful things happening here at Hope City is that, although we're such diverse people, we're growing into one family together. There's a profound power in

this - it's all of us together who are the salt, the light. An amazing reason to connect - particularly to connect across the boundaries that so often divide us. That's an increasing challenge as we grow as a church but we're going to keep working on it.

And I think that's something which gives a profound significance to parts of church that's is easy to overlook. When we gather, we make it a priority to explore the bible. We make it a priority to sing and to pray. We need to also make it a priority to connect. Coffee time. Groups. Teams. Relationships. These are a profoundly important part of being church because our unique nature as God's transformed people is fundamentally communal. So make connection a priority.

If I can invite the band back up, we'll sing in a moment about the foundation for all this, the truth that needs to shine out from us together: "yet not I, but through Christ in me." Last week we saw there will be opposition from some as the evidence from his transformation begins to show - this week we see there'll be glory for God from others, too. Let's pray...