



Group Discussion Guide

For group meetings from April 18 afternoon through April 25 morning

Matthew 5:13-16

You are the salt of the earth, but if salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything except to be thrown out and trampled under people's feet. "You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven. (Matthew 5:13–16)

Jesus taught that his followers must be like salt and light. Salt was a preservative and a flavoring, but was only useful while it maintained its taste. A light could only be seen if it was out in the open. Jesus taught that those who follow him must be able to be identified by the rest of the world, and the goal was to point others to the Father. Just as salt and light are only useful when they are distinctive, so disciples must maintain their distinctive character to bring glory to God.

Strictly, pure salt cannot lose its salinity; but the impure 'salt' dug from the shores of the Dead Sea could gradually become unsalty as the actual sodium chloride dissolved. In any case, Jesus was not teaching chemistry, but using a proverbial image (it recurs in Bekhoroth 8b). The Rabbis commonly used salt as an image for wisdom (cf. Col. 4:6), which may explain why the Greek word represented by lost its taste actually means 'become foolish'. (Aramaic tāpēl, which conveys both meanings, was no doubt the word used by Jesus.) A foolish disciple has no influence on the world.

R. T. France, Matthew: An Introduction and Commentary, vol. 1, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1985), 117.

Selected Scriptures

In John 8:12, Jesus said he is the light of the world, so it stands to reason that a disciple who desires to be light must follow the life and teachings of Jesus. He said this again in John 9:5, when he told his disciples that as long as he was alive, he continued to be the light of the world. This was a reference to work he was doing during his earthly ministry. Similar to this were his words in John 12:35-36. Here he told a crowd of people to believe in him while he was still among them.

In Ephesians 2:1-10, Paul contrasted how someone lived before coming to faith in Jesus and after coming to faith. Through God's mercy and grace, those who believe are saved and created for good works. A few chapters later, Paul reminded the believers in Ephesus to "be imitators of God" and then outlined things to avoid and things to seek after (Ephesians 5:1-21). He wrote,

“for at one time you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord,” (v. 8). Philippians 2:12-18 contains a similar teaching of Paul, who wrote that believers are “children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world ...” (v. 15).

1 John 1:5-10 teaches that God is light, and the difference between walking in darkness (living in sin) and walking in the light (living in obedience to God). This theme continues in 1 John 2:7-11, where the author wrote that living in the light of Christ also means loving other people, and that one cannot hate others and claim to be living in the light. Hatred of people is a sure sign that one is walking in darkness and “does not know where he is going, because the darkness has blinded his eyes,” (v. 11).

Discussion Questions

1. What does Jesus' use of salt and light as analogies teach you about what it means to follow him? How can we as believers "stop being salty" or "have our light hidden"?
2. According to Jesus, what is the purpose of doing good works out in the open? What does it take to maintain that perspective as we seek to do good in this world?
3. What are some practical things we should build into our lives so that we walk in the light of Jesus?
4. Based on our reading this week, what do you think it means to walk in darkness? What is the danger of living this way?
5. In Ephesians 2:1-10, Paul taught that good works do not save us, and yet we are created in Christ Jesus for good works. How do you think we can accept the truth of salvation by grace through faith and yet still properly understand the importance of doing what is right and good?
6. How does Philippians 2:12-18 deepen your understanding of what it means to be a light in the world?
7. How does John's writing in 1 John 1:5-10 and 1 John 2:7-11 help you grasp what it looks like to walk in the light of Christ?