



MATTHEW

THE KINGDOM COME

Kingdom People
Matthew 5:13-16

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Ethan Ezikian

I. Introduction

Prayer

Let's pray.

*Father in heaven, you were there in the beginning. By the power of your Word you created something out of nothing. You said, "let there be light" and there was. Now Father, as we open up your Book would you do it again? Would you let loose the Word of Christ and by your Spirit would you create in us something where there was nothing before? Let the light of the Word of Christ expose darkness in us and in the world, let the good news of the gospel compel us, and comfort us, and challenge us, and propel us out as lights to a dark world. Everything we are about to do, if it is to be worth anything, depends on you. We are at your mercy, God. We need you!
Amen.*

Welcome

Well, good morning! My name is Ethan and I'm one of the pastors here at Union.

If this is your first Sunday with us, I'm grateful you're here and if I haven't met you yet I would love to make that happen after the service.

As a church, we are spending most of our first year of existence marinating in one book of the Bible - in the Gospel of Matthew. And one of the things that I love about working through a whole book is that it forces us to look at every passage of Matthew in light of where we've *already been* in the book of Matthew. Every sermon is, in a sense, built on the one before it because Matthew isn't like your instagram feed. Like, if I were to look at your social media feeds and scroll through all your posts, I would probably see posts that would show me what you had for dinner, who your kids are, how you spent the holidays, what political views you hold, which internet scams you buy into and through a whole lot of disconnected pieces of information I would build a picture of who you are, right? And that's sometimes how we treat the Bible. Like, if we sit down to read it we'll just flip open to a random page and read whatever we find there and hope that we'll get something out of it. But that's not how most of the Bible is written, and its certainly not how Matthew is written.

So our passage for today, if you have any kind of christian background, is one you might have heard quoted or preached about on its own before. Maybe you've even sung songs about it! "Hide it under a bushel, NO! I'm gonna let it shine." To be "salt & light" is definitely a kind of Christian jargon that we throw around a lot. But what I want us to see today is that Jesus' word to us about salt and light is birthed out of what Jesus has already taught! And as we unpack the text, here's what I want us to see

and apply: **In following the way of the Kingdom, disciples of Jesus live as agents of preservation and illumination for the sake of the world.**

II. Unpack the Text

Our passage for today is part of what is famously called Jesus' Sermon on the Mount. Last week, Pastor Kyle taught a really good message on the first part of the Sermon in the Mount: The Beatitudes. Seriously, it's worth listening to or relistening to. One of the things I loved was how Pastor Kyle helped us to see that Jesus' sitting down to teach was in response to the crowds, but was aimed at his disciples, at the ones who have submitted themselves to Jesus. And even though Jesus knows that crowds will overhear and be attracted to his message, his purpose in the sermon on the mount is to teach his people. His disciples.

You know, that's our purpose too! Especially when we come to places in scripture where God is telling us how to live. We never want you to mistakenly hear that in laying out ethical standards of behavior, Jesus is teaching us the path to salvation. As if trying hard enough to do what he said to do, will cause him to accept you. Jesus isn't giving us a to-do-list to enter into his kingdom. He's teaching the disciples who he had called into his kingdom. And so what he's doing is teaching the people that already follow him what it means to follow him! What it means to be a citizen of the Kingdom of heaven.

So if you are, for some reason, listening to this teaching and you're not a disciple of Jesus, you're not a Christian, I just want to point out to you that you are in the position of the crowd. You are seen by Jesus (and by us), you are loved by him (and by us), and our hope for you is that you would overhear Jesus' teaching to his disciples and that you would simply be compelled by the vision for the good life in the kingdom that Jesus is painting.

So in the first part of the Sermon in the Mount, Jesus begins to lay out for his disciples what life in the kingdom of heaven looks like. These Beatitudes are a counter-cultural way of life that Jesus is calling us into. Blessed are the poor in spirit. Citizens in the kingdom of heaven see their own weakness, need, and dependence on God. Blessed are those who mourn. Disciples of Jesus don't ignore the wickedness and sadness of the world, but look at it honestly and grieve. Blessed are the meek. The way of the kingdom is not to be disagreeable or harsh, but to embrace meekness and gentleness. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness instead of the things that the world promises will satisfy, but never will. Blessed are the merciful. Kingdom people practice mercy instead of vengeance. Blessed are the pure in heart. Kingdom people have hearts that aren't divided and conflicted by the rule of other masters, but new and clean because Jesus has become their king. Blessed are the peacemakers. Citizens of the kingdom of heaven are characterized by making peace instead of stirring up conflict or division. Blessed are those who are persecuted on Jesus' account. Followers of Jesus endure suffering and persecution with patience instead of worshipping comfort and ease.

Christian, this is the way of life that you are called to by your king!

All of that is review from last week, but incredibly important for this week. Because after Jesus calls you and I to follow this way of the kingdom he then teaches us that the new identity we've been given as citizens of the kingdom of heaven is to be lived out in the midst of this decaying and dark world.

Over the summer, our yard and the area around our house became inundated with these big brown stink bugs. They are the worst! They were constantly finding ways into our house, but at least in the house we could manage them. But at a certain point in the summer, if you went outside they would be

everywhere. And there was one time when my kids forgot about the stink bugs and they rushed outside to play. And moments later we hear screaming and every kid who had just run out, now stampedes back into the house to separate themselves from the bugs.

And part of what happens when you become a follower of Jesus is that you begin to see the whole world differently. As the Holy Spirit sanctifies you, things that wouldn't have caused you to bat an eye before now affect your conscience because they grieve the heart of God. And things that seemed wise before, now seem foolish. And some of the things that you've done, you look back on and they seem really dark. And it's like we've stepped out into the yard and then our eyes become opened to the things of the world buzzing all around us and they feel threatening. And in that moment what do you do? How do you live as a person of the kingdom of God, while you're surrounded by the kingdom of darkness?

In Jesus' day there were a few competing approaches to answering this question. Israel was occupied by the Roman Empire. They were literally surrounded by people who did not believe in the God of scripture, who lived in ways that were reprehensible to the Jews, and who actively oppressed them. And there were several different factions within the Jewish people that offered different answers for how to live as the people of God and bring the kingdom in the midst of the darkness all around them. So there was a faction called the zealots and they believed the way for the kingdom of God to break in was through violence. And there was another faction called the Essenes who were basically separatists. They retreated out to the wilderness so that they would never have to touch the uncleanness of the world. There was another faction called the Pharisees who held themselves as morally apart, who bet all their chips on the observance of the law. And there were the Sadducees who just compromised. They did everything they could to get along, accept, and cave in to the world around them. And you could look throughout history and identify ways that the church has given in to those same instincts: to be at war with the culture, or to wall ourselves off from the culture, or to be morally superior to the culture, or to succumb to culture. We could probably identify those things at play in the world today.

But Jesus isn't calling us to any of that, He's calling us into a better way. **He's calling us to live as agents of preservation and illumination for the sake of the world.**

III. Agents of Preservation

Prophets of Jesus

Here's what I mean:

Look at verses 11 & 12. It's right before our passage from this week. Jesus ends the Beatitudes by saying,

¹¹ Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. ¹² Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

So the Lord finishes laying out the way of life for citizens of the kingdom and he basically tells disciples, "you will be persecuted on my account, but it's ok because your reward will be great. How do you know the reward will be great? Because this is how they treated the prophets of old and you know the prophets have a great reward. So the way the prophets were treated is how you are going to be treated" Why will they be treated like the prophets? Because they are prophets. Prophets of Jesus Christ"

The prophets were people who were sent with a mission from God to speak the message of God. So we are not to wage war with the world, we're not to withdraw from the world, we're not to hold ourselves as superior to the world, and we're not to compromise with the world. We are sent into the world, to move toward the world and proclaim with our lives and with our lips the good news of a different and better kingdom!

Salt of the Earth

In doing this, In following the way of the Kingdom, Jesus says we are the salt of the earth.

Now there's a lot of speculation about the various ways salt was used in Jesus' day and some scholars want to take their speculations and draw major conclusions about what exactly Jesus' metaphor means, but one thing every scholar will tell you is that in those days salt was used to preserve food. It was to keep the food clean and prevent decay. And do you know what's crazy? Salt, when it is applied to food, doesn't just preserve the food as it is. It transforms the food.

For Jesus to say, "You are the salt of the earth" means that followers of Jesus are meant to be potent agents of preservation that transform in the world! We exist as followers of Jesus for the sake of the world.

The life you live as a follower of Jesus, is for the preservation of the world. And this bears out as we look at history!

Do you know that, wherever Christianity has been historically present, human flourishing increases over and above places where there has not been a history of Christianity? And I'm talking about how non-christian sociologists would measure flourishing. Christianity gets a really bad rap because its true that there have been wicked things done in the name of Christianity. And we condemn those things as evil and unbiblical, and opposed to the way of Jesus. And we hear those things talked about all the time, but what tends to get less press is that where Christianity has been historically present there are more, better hospitals, there are more systems in place to care for the poor and the needy, and we could go on and on... one of the books on my reading list is a book called, "Dominion" by a historian named Tom Holland (not spiderman!) and to my knowledge he's not a christian, but he traces the spread of Christianity through asia, and europe, and africa and documents how things that we value and take for granted in the western world today - things like human rights, the equality and dignity of every person, the value of the poor and the weak, the necessity of caring and advocating for them all, the belief that love is of great value, or that we should forgive our opponents. - all these central tenets of the modern western world come from Christianity. Even though most of the "cultural elites" have abandoned Christianity and would argue in favor of things that go against scripture, the presuppositions they have, and the values they are working from find their roots not in a universal morality, but in the way of Jesus. So yes the church has failed spectacularly in the past, but even the way we measure its failure comes from the ways the teachings of Jesus have permeated people, and preserved the world, and transformed the world.

That means that your perseverance in the faith, your striving for holiness, your discipling of your kids, your membership in a local church, whatever rhythms/habits/actions you take to follow Christ, the counter-cultural life that we are called into is not simply for your own nourishment. It contributes to the preservation of the world. Because you are the salt of the earth. Christian, be encouraged that if your life is ordinary and unremarkable you never achieve fame, you never spearhead a movement, you never have a platform or a following, your life of quiet, counter-cultural faithfulness to God and his kingdom is potent. It contributes to the preservation of the world.

Now in Jesus' day, the salt that people used wasn't often pure sodium chloride. It was mined out of other minerals so the white granules that people used would often be salt mixed with other minerals. And so sometimes people would be using "salt" that had no sodium chloride in it. And Jesus tells us what people did with that "salt." It was good for nothing, so people threw it out.

What would it look like for the people who profess to be Christians, the salt of the earth, to lose our saltiness?

We lose our saltiness when we cease to live in the way of Jesus, which is counter to the world's culture. We lose our saltiness when we cease to be different from the world.

Now remember - the rubric Jesus has laid out for being different from the world is the beatitudes. We are to be people who are poor in spirit, who mourn, who are meek, who hunger and thirst for righteousness, who are merciful, who are pure in heart, who are peacemakers, who endure persecution... I think it's interesting that the beatitudes aren't a list of do's and don'ts. It's almost like they're attitudes or characteristics that should flavor the things that we do. Now I'm not saying that Jesus doesn't care about the works that we do. He makes it really obvious in just a few verses that he cares about the law. The Bible makes moral rights and wrongs clear. God cares about those things and if we were to go against the teachings of scripture and engage in idolatry, or embrace a different sexual ethic than the scriptures, or lie, cheat, or steal, or not take care of the widow or the orphan then surely we would be a people who have lost their saltiness.

But the beatitudes are telling us that God doesn't only care about what we do. He cares about how we do it. So let's think about this: How we seek to change the culture around us matters. How we engage in politics matters. How we fight for truth matters. How we confront injustice matters. How we point out and name sin in the world matters. In all these things the ends don't justify the means. How we get there matters just as much as getting there. And this is an area where I think the church has lost so much of her saltiness!

I know there are Christians who are rejecting the bible, going against its teachings. I'm sure that in our midst some of you have sin that you need to repent of and turn away from because it is taking away your saltiness. But what I see coming at me from so many angles as I think about the last two years as the church has navigated a pandemic, and lockdown, politics, issues of race, and vaccines, more and more division in our world, (and can I name any other things that make us uncomfortable to talk about in group settings?) is Christians who have strong convictions about what is right or wrong

in the world and who don't seem to think much about whether or not they are meek or merciful when they present their views to the world. They don't seem to care whether or not the means to their ends are pure in heart, and are aimed toward righteousness. They seem to rely on human power instead of poor-in-spirit dependence. They disdain the wrong in the world with arrogance rather than mourning. They care more about ease and comfort and treat persecution like a boogie man and their fear of persecution kind of fuels the cycle all over again.

I see the church ignoring the way of the kingdom of heaven in how she interacts with the world. I see her losing credibly, losing potency, losing her saltiness.

Listen, our unbelieving neighbors should be so confused by us because they should be able to say about us: "Those Christians are so backwards [according to the world], but man they are the most loving, meek, merciful, peaceful, humble people. I even watched them suffer and they suffered in such a way that I don't know why, but I am attracted to them." Holding tightly to the teachings of scripture AND proclaiming with our lives and with our lips the good news of a different and better kingdom! This is how we live as **agents of preservation in the world**. Oh that God would guard us from losing our saltiness, because if we do then all of this will no longer be good for anything.

God has called us to be agents of preservation in the world, and he has called us to be agents of illumination. Jesus said in verse 4, "You are the light of the world."

Now if Jesus' words about salt losing its saltiness were a message of warning and correction, this is a message of assurance and hope. Let me tell you why.

In a lot of ways, Jesus is just using a different metaphor to keep teaching the same thing. You are to be my prophet people who proclaim with your lips and your lives the good news of the kingdom. It's you're the salt... it's also like you're light! And so what it means to be an agent of illumination in the world means to push back darkness. To do what Paul in Ephesians 5 tells us to do, to "Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them." Through our good works, through living the way of the kingdom, Jesus says we are to bring light to dark places and let our light shine before others so that they may see your kingdom living, and be compelled by it to worship God. This is Kingdom living for the sake of the world and for the glory of God.

And there's another layer here that, like I said, is full of assurance and hope for us. If you are overwhelmed by the task of being the salt of the earth. Maybe you have the right view of your own weakness... Or maybe you're discouraged by your track record... or maybe you look at the world and see so much decay and darkness that your question whether or not your part in all of it matters.

Jesus said, "you are the light of the world." You. Are. the light of the world. This is striking because just a chapter earlier Jesus opened up a prophecy from the Old Testament that said, "the people dwelling in darkness have seen a great light." and Jesus read that to signify that he himself was the light to those in darkness. In John 8:12 he comes out even more explicitly and says, "I am the light of the world." Then in John 12:46, he says, "I have come into the world as light, so that whoever

believes in me may not remain in darkness.” Jesus is the light of the world. “In him was life, and that life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness and the darkness has not overcome it.” (John 1:4-5) Jesus walked through this world as God made flesh, untainted by the decay of the world. Jesus took the sin of the world on his shoulders as he died on the cross. Jesus conquered the darkness and decay of the world when he rose from the grave. Jesus brings salvation to people by calling us out of darkness and into his marvelous light (1 Pet 2). Jesus will come again to remake this decaying dark world and fill it with light and life. This is the hope of the gospel and it's all bound up in Jesus!

And yet here in Matthew 5, Jesus says to his disciples (and he says to Christians today) *you* are the light of the world. And that is true about you because of this: “at one time you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord” (Eph 5:8). “God, who said, ‘Let light shine out of darkness,’ has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ” (1 Cor 4:6). “He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.” Jesus has united himself to his people in such a way that our sin and guilt and shame have been taken with him to the cross... and our presence as his church here on earth is an extension of his light. So in Jesus, we become a city on a hill; a lamp that cannot be hidden. And though in this life of following Jesus, we will always be having our eyes opened to more and more ways that we are losing our saltiness and could be saltier, the light of the world assures us that he will complete the work he’s begun in you and that even now if you are little lamp - the kind that they used back then was just a teacup size with a little oil and a wick - even if you were a little lamp, because of Jesus your light will shine in the darkness and the darkness will not overcome it.

DIVE DEEPER

Scripture references focusing on light/darkness

Isaiah 42:6

“I am the Lord; I have called you in righteousness; I will take you by the hand and keep you; I will give you as a covenant for the people, a light for the nations,

John 1: 4-5

4 In him was life,[a] and the life was the light of men. 5 The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

John 3:16-20

16 “For God so loved the world,[i] that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. 17 For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. 18 Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God. 19 And this is the

judgment: the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil. 20 For everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his works should be exposed. 21 But whoever does what is true comes to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that his works have been carried out in God.”

John 8:12

12 Again Jesus spoke to them, saying, “I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.”

John 12:44-46

44 And Jesus cried out and said, “Whoever believes in me, believes not in me but in him who sent me. 45 And whoever sees me sees him who sent me. 46 I have come into the world as light, so that whoever believes in me may not remain in darkness.

Acts 26:18

18 to open their eyes, so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me.’

2 Corinthians 4:6

6 For God, who said, “Let light shine out of darkness,” has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

Ephesians 5:6-14

6 Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience. 7 Therefore do not become partners with them; 8 for at one time you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light 9 (for the fruit of light is found in all that is good and right and true), 10 and try to discern what is pleasing to the Lord. 11 Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them. 12 For it is shameful even to speak of the things that they do in secret. 13 But when anything is exposed by the light, it becomes visible, 14 for anything that becomes visible is light. Therefore it says,

“Awake, O sleeper,
and arise from the dead,
and Christ will shine on you.”

Colossians 1:13-14

13 He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, 14 in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

1 Thessalonians 5: 4-11

4 But you are not in darkness, brothers, for that day to surprise you like a thief. 5 For you are all children^[b] of light, children of the day. We are not of the night or of the darkness. 6 So then let us not sleep, as others do, but let us keep awake and be sober. 7 For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk, are drunk at night. 8 But since we belong to the day, let us be sober, having put on the breastplate of faith and love, and for a helmet the hope of salvation. 9 For God has not destined us for wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, 10 who died for us so that whether we are awake or asleep we might live with him. 11 Therefore encourage one another and build one another up, just as you are doing

1 Peter 2:8-10

9 But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. 10 Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.

1 John 1:4-6

5 This is the message we have heard from him and proclaim to you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all. 6 If we say we have fellowship with him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth.