

Study Notes: Matthew 5:13-16
April 7, 2024: “Salt and Light”
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“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.

- The “you” in this statement refers to Jesus’ disciples. These words are spoken directly to those who follow Jesus. Jesus’ statements in these verses are statements of fact or reality. Jesus used the word “are” not “should be, could be, or might be.”
- The phrase “salt of the earth” must be interpreted based on the various uses of salt in Jesus’ day. Salt was used to enhance flavor, preserve and prevent decay, as well as to bring healing and to purify.
 - The New American Commentary explains, “Christians must permeate society as agents of redemption. Of the numerous things to which salt could refer in antiquity, its use as a preservative in food was probably its most basic function. Jesus thus calls his disciples to arrest corruption and prevent moral decay in their world.”
 - The Pillar New Testament Commentary adds, “Jesus is apparently thinking of the function of salt as a preservative, as the enemy of decay, and as giving taste to food. What is good in society his followers keep wholesome. What is corrupt they oppose; they penetrate society for good and act as a kind of moral antiseptic. And they give a tang to life like salt to a dish of food.”
- Salt was also used in sacrifices and covenants. In a covenant, salt represented the enduring and lasting nature. In this case, salt represents God’s lasting covenant with His people. Jesus’ followers are called to continue to live out that covenant with their actions.
- In the ancient world, salt was not purified, but a mix of various minerals. If the mineral calcium chloride was removed from the mix, it would cease to be salty. It had no purpose, so it was cast aside into the streets. In the same way, Jesus said, if we lose the purpose of our lives, we do the earth no good.
 - The New American Commentary explains, “‘Loses its saltiness’ reads more literally ‘is defiled.’ This is not the scientifically impossible notion of salt becoming flavorless but rather the common problem in the ancient world of salt being mixed with various impure substances and therefore becoming worthless as a preservative.”
 - In some senses, this statement is almost comical. It would be foolish to think of “non-salty” salt. In the same way, it is as foolish to think of a follower of Jesus who does not influence and represent Christ to those around them.

***“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.*”**

- The Expositor’s Bible Commentary notes, “Light is a universal religious symbol. In the OT as in the NT, it most frequently symbolizes purity as opposed to filth, truth or knowledge as opposed to error or ignorance, and divine revelation and presence as opposed to reprobation and abandonment by God.”
- Throughout the book of Isaiah, light is emblematic of the coming of God’s Presence and power to His people (see Isaiah 60-61). Light represents God’s Presence and His guiding instruction to our lives. In John’s Gospel, Jesus is called the Light of the World (John 8:12). In these verses, Jesus is calling His followers to reflect and shine His light to the world around them.
- Much like the statement about salt losing its saltiness, Jesus uses a similar statement about a city on a hill being hidden, and a light being put under a basket. These are foolish ideas, just as it would be foolish for disciples to not shine their light to the world.
- Jesus said that the light will shine through good deeds and will bring glory to God the Father. In the coming parts of the sermon, Jesus spoke of these good deeds.
 - The Pillar New Testament Commentary gives insight on the nuance of this statement as used by Jesus, “This light will issue in *good works* that are seen by people, a provision that must be understood carefully, for there were people like the Pharisees who made sure that their good deeds were seen by others and it is not this Pharisaic attitude that Jesus is commending. The good works are to be seen, not in order that the doers may be congratulated as fine, upstanding servants of God, but in such a way that the observers will *give glory to your Father*. There is to be no parade of virtue, no attempt to win praise for oneself. It is the *light* that is to shine, not those privileged to be the bearers of the light. People will always see the deeds that disciples do, and disciples are to make sure that when that takes place it is the light that they will see. And that they will see it in such a way that they will praise God.”