

THE CHRISTIAN SALT AND LIGHT COMPANY - Studies In The Sermon On The Mount - Part three Teaching #1757 - Sunday, October 12th, 2014, 6:00 p.m.

Pastor Don Horban, Cedarview Community Church, Newmarket, ON

THE EXTERNAL INFLUENCE OF INTERNAL GODLINESS

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. [14] "You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. [15] 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. [16] 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."

These are the verses from which this series took its title. It's important to see the link between these verses and the ones we studied in our last teaching session (5:1-12). It's the kind of Christlike character described in the beatitudes that marks us out and gives us our distinct flavor in this world. Having *described* what the inner character of His disciples would be like, Jesus now describes the *effect*, the *influence* this will have on their surroundings.

And His main point is the effect will be greater than we might imagine. Jesus is strikingly *optimistic* about the power of the gospel fleshed out in ordinary lives. Imagine, this small band of uneducated fishermen and laborers would become the salt of the *earth* and the light of the *world*. We would never have guessed such massive impact by such an ordinary lot. Such is the power of the presence of Jesus in our lives.

1) JESUS UNDERSCORES THE MARKED DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THE DISCIPLE AND THE WORLD

Sometimes we get the idea that we will best reach the world by *becoming more like them in our behavior*. This has been a trend in the church in the last few years. Of course, we *should* make every effort to make ourselves both *approachable* and *understandable* to the world around us. So far, so good. Our Christian faith must be both *winsome* and *intelligent*.

To say these two things is not the same, however, as compromising a Christian *lifestyle* that is pungently different from the shallow values and habits of those we are trying to reach. Jesus said we were never to compromise nor blur the distinctive flavor He brought into our hearts. He said the *salt must never lose its edge and taste* (13). Neither compromise nor spiritual blandness helps the church's mission. They both destroy it.

The church is in a desperate need to rethink Jesus' words here - **Matthew 5:13** - "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."

These words are designed to splash cold water in our face. To the extent we become *identified* with the world in terms of our attitudes and behavior we become *useless* as disciples in the Kingdom of God. Jesus said so.

2) IN DESCRIBING THE CHARACTER AND MISSION OF HIS DISCIPLES, JESUS DESCRIBES THE STATE OF THIS WORLD AS WELL

The world, without Christ's saving presence, is both *decaying* and *dark*. That's why Jesus picked the images of His disciples as being *salt* and *light*. Jesus is saying two things about this world in these verses:

- a) **Our world is lost in darkness** - Because they are in the dark, people don't even understand their lostness. Drive around Newmarket and tell people how Jesus described their hopelessness and *they won't even believe you*. Not only do they not know where they're going in terms of spiritual and eternal realities, *they don't know where they are*.

Consider the nature of, say, having dreams at night. The only time you understand dreams, or can explain them to another, is when you are awake. When you're in them there's a sense in which you know the least about them. The same could be said of the condition of drunkenness. You can only grasp the shame and waste and personal damage of that condition when you're sober. The drunk man is, in a sense, the one person who understands drunkenness the least.

This is the nature of the kind of darkness Jesus says this world is in. They can't accurately diagnose their true condition, even though they may be perceptive to know something is definitely wrong. That should have a real effect on our evangelism and outreach.

- b) **Our world is moving into deeper and deeper decay and corruption** - Darkness points to our lost condition *presently*. Decay points to the impossibility of eradicating this problem on our own. Darkness is our *condition*. Decay is our *direction*. This is what Jesus is pointing to with His description of His disciples as *salt*. Salt *preserves*. The meat can't help but decay without the presence of the salt.

This is true of our world both on the *corporate* and *individual* level. It applies to raising kids and the state of our courts and legal systems. It shines a revealing light deep into an educational system which, for all its great strengths, still frequently operates on the assumption that if you show a person what is right and good, he will certainly do it. Jesus said we are actually as powerless to transform our own hearts as decaying meat is to become whole and normal on its own.

3) JESUS DEFINES THE ROLE OF THE CHRISTIAN IN THIS WORLD

Basically He outlines two broad characteristics. The disciple is to be *self-spending* and he is to be *noticeable*:

- a) ***Self-spending like salt - 13 - "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."***

Salt functions as a preservative. It was rubbed right into the meat. Jesus wants us to appreciate the ***close contact we are to have with this fallen world***. Yes, we are to be *holy*. But no, we must never be ***removed or distant***. The disciple must get right into the needs and wounds of this world. He gets fed in the church, but his ministry is to be in the world. Sometimes we get it all backwards.

Also, notice how Jesus taught that He came to ***put taste into all of life***. God forgive us for ever giving the impression that Jesus makes life dry, rigid and boring. Christ's presence is like salt on food. It adds. It improves the flavor of everything we do.

- b) ***Noticeable like light -14-16 - "You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. [15] 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. [16] 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."***

The very nature of light requires that ***it be seen***. Light that nobody sees is totally useless. Salt may work invisibly. And much of our ministry will be like that - away from the eyes and applause of men. ***But light must be seen to be of any value***.

We know that Jesus said He was the ***"light of the world"*** (John 8:12). People *saw* the light in Jesus. Now He says ***people are to see His same presence in us***.

All of this relates back to the character of the beatitudes. People should see my *mercy* when the world is cold and hard. They should see my *meekness* when others are arrogant and self-asserting. They should see me as a *peacemaker* when others are full of hate and arguments. They should see my ***focused hunger for God*** while the world scrambles after more money and position. It all gets that practical - and that challenging.

Notice also the ***inevitability*** of some kind of witness. This is what Jesus meant when He said ***"....A city set on a hill cannot be hidden"***(5:14). Salt *can* lose its taste. But a city on a hill *can't* be hidden. We all point to the kingdom one way or the other. We are *all* witnesses. Somewhere down the road a lost individual will make contact with a bright, authentic follower of Christ but will write off that witness before even giving him or her a chance because of contact with a hypocritical Christian years earlier.

4) THERE IS NO OTHER HOPE FOR THIS WORLD

We need to be gripped again by all of this. ***"You, and you only are the salt of the earth!"*** If they aren't reached by me they won't be reached. There are no other plans or systems in God's mind. It's the same truth Paul was laboring over in **1 Corinthians 19:12-27**:

"If all were a single member, where would the body be? [20] As it is, there are many parts, yet one body. [21] The eye cannot say to the hand, "I have no need of you," nor again the head to the feet, "I have no need of you." [22] On the contrary, the parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, [23] and on those parts of the body that we think less honorable we bestow the greater honor, and our unpresentable parts are treated with greater modesty, [24] which our more presentable parts do not require. But God has so composed the body, giving greater honor to the part that lacked it, [25] that there may be no division in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another. [26] If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together. [27] Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it."

We are the body Jesus uses to get things done in this world. That's what the body of Christ *means*.

- 5) **WHEN WE DO OUR PART, GOD IS FAITHFUL AND THE WHOLE PROCESS FITS TOGETHER** - 16 - ***"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."***

We will be blessed (remember the beatitudes). ***The world will take notice***. And ***God will be glorified***. All of this comes by our yielding to the work of the Spirit in our hearts. We need never be overwhelmed or afraid of the task at hand.