



DESERT VIEW BIBLE CHURCH

MATTHEW 5:13-16 • 9/25/2022

MAIN POINT

As salt and light, Christians bear the responsibility of representing Jesus to the world.

INTRODUCTION

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

What are some of your favorite foods that you simply cannot eat without salt? How do those foods taste without salt?

Have you ever had to go on a low sodium diet? If so, how significant of a shift was it for you? Did you grow accustomed to it?

Salt is the most basic and universally desired seasoning. There are few foods, even some sweet desserts, that are not enhanced by its flavor. No wonder Jesus chose to use salt as a metaphor for describing what it means to be a Christian in a fallen world, as we will see today in this study.

UNDERSTANDING

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

READ MATTHEW 5:13.

Why do you think Jesus chose salt as a teaching tool? What is a comparable metaphor today?

What did Jesus mean when He said believers are the salt of the earth?

Jesus calls His followers “the salt of the earth.” Salt’s primary function in Jesus’ day was to help preserve food (especially meat), an act that was particularly important in the Middle East due to hot temperatures and arid climate.

What is the church’s role in serving and preserving culture? What part do you play in that picture?

As believers, we act as a preservative in the culture around us by maintaining high moral and spiritual standards that counteract the sin and decay of the world. Salt also serves to add flavor, which is the way we use it today. Salt is distinctly different from the things with which it’s mixed. Jesus’ disciples likewise are to be different from the world.

How does the message of God’s kingdom add flavor to your life? To the world?

Why must God’s people be distinctly different from people who don’t know Him?

By referring to salt, Jesus was making a statement about what it really means to be part of the kingdom of God. People who understand their need for God and have realized His mercy toward them, who seek righteousness even amidst persecution, must not lose their saltiness. Those who follow Him can't keep that hidden, which sets up verse 14 nicely. If we're part of God's kingdom, the world can't help but notice we're different.

READ MATTHEW 5:14-16.

How does light as a teaching tool in Jesus' day compare with its function today?

In what situations do people tend to hide their light "under a basket"?

The second comparison Jesus used was light. Jesus developed His comparison by mentioning two situations where nighttime light was especially welcome in the first century. First, imagine traveling on a cloudy night, longing to reach a city situated on a hill. Such a city cannot be hidden. Although the city's lights might be few, at some point you would come around a bend or over a ridge and there the city would be. You'd be almost to your destination. Second, suppose you were at home at night and had only one olive-oil lamp. You would put it on a lampstand so it would benefit all who are in the house. You would not put such a light under a basket. Light exists mainly so other things can be seen. Thus the good works of believers shine before men so other persons receive a blessing.

READ THE FOLLOWING PASSAGES ABOUT LIGHT IN SCRIPTURE: GENESIS 1:3-4; EXODUS 10:23; PSALM 27:1; JOHN 1:1-5; JOHN 8:12; AND 1 JOHN 1:5-6.

What does light signify in each of these passages?

What do these verses teach us about our function as lights in the world?

LOOK MORE CLOSELY AT JOHN 8:12.

**If Jesus is the Light of the world, what does that imply about the world?
What does it imply about you?**

“You are the light of the world” (v. 14) is an allusion to texts that describe the ministry of Messiah, Servant of the Lord. Jesus’ disciples are to be extensions of His ministry, carrying salvation to the ends of the earth. Such ministry is intrinsic to true discipleship. A disciple should no more conceal his/her righteousness or the gospel message than a glowing city should douse its light at night. The reference to giving light “for all” combines with the reference to “the world” to show that Christ’s ministry is intended for all people. If Jesus is the Light of the world, then the world resides in darkness (us included). Anyone who is drawn to the light of Jesus comes purely as a gracious gift of God, because evil naturally flees the light. This anticipates the Great Commission of Matthew 28:18-20.

In addition to salvation, what other positive effects can God’s kingdom have on the world?

As a believer, you are a witness to who God is. What role do your imperfections and ungodly attitudes play in helping others see God?

APPLICATION

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

When you're part of the kingdom of God, your life looks different. The characteristics described in the beginning of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount are the foundation on which those differences are built. When our attitudes are transformed, so are our actions. Unfortunately, because we're sinners who must rely on God's grace, the right disposition isn't always present. But when our attitudes and actions focus on God's glory and spreading His light, we can't help but impact the world.

What causes you to forget about the kingdom of God and your need for Him? How can you guard against that tendency?

How can you remind yourself daily that you are first and foremost citizens of God's kingdom?

It takes time to be salt and light. What changes can you make in your routine this week so you can spend more time around those who need God's mercy and gentleness?

PRAYER

Reflect and pray for strength from Christ to be the salt and light of the world so our lives honestly display God's love and mercy to the world.

COMMENTARY

MATTHEW 5:13-16

Jesus explained in two word pictures the impact that a truly righteous person will have on his or her world. The entire sermon, including the Beatitudes before and the many teachings after, shows us how to live as “salt and light” in the world as representatives of another kingdom. These word pictures also serve Matthew’s purpose—to encourage believers to change their world (Matt. 28:18-20).

There are many lists of the uses of salt (v. 13), most of them inspired by Jesus’ statement here. However, among the many possible connotations, Jesus probably had two most centrally in His mind. First, salt preserves from corruption. In the centuries before modern refrigeration, salt was the method of choice for preventing bacteria from poisoning food. Just as salt prevents or kills bacteria in food, the kingdom servant prevents or confronts corruption in the world. Notice that it is the earth that needs the salt, not the kingdom of heaven. If the kingdom servant did not have a function to perform on earth according to God’s plan, he might as well go straight to heaven upon conversion.

The second function of salt is to add flavor or interest (Col. 4:5-6). Jesus highlighted this purpose when He spoke of the danger of salt losing its saltiness. Part of the church’s task on earth is to live according to its new nature—alive, purposeful, hopeful, joyful. Christians should be living in such a way that others will pause and consider what is different about them (1 Pet. 3:15). Believers are different and should appear so, because the Father is different (holy; 1 Pet. 1:15-16). The kingdom servant who does not live according to his nature as salt is useless to the king’s advancement of the kingdom on earth.

The picture of light (vv. 14-16) is similar to salt, in that both describe the influence the believer is to have in the world. However, it reveals a different facet of the believer’s influence. The function of light is to make reality or truth visible, thereby giving direction and guidance by what is seen. Jesus again used the emphatic “you,” and again clearly stated that this is already what a believer is, not something he might become. It is the nature of a kingdom servant to be light in the world. Any believer who fails to function as light is going against his nature as God’s new creation. The believer has no light inherent in himself. The believer’s light is a reflected light. Believers are to make certain that nothing comes between them and their source of light (2 Cor. 3:18; Phil. 2:13-16).

Both a city on a hill (v. 14) and the lamp on its stand (v. 15) fulfill their function by being elevated, so their light can be seen by many people over a broad area. Jesus

Himself explained the application of this principle in 5:16. The light represents our good works, which must be done with such integrity that all who see have no choice but to credit our Father in heaven. The Christian's life and influence is to be visible and obvious, not secret or hidden. We must not camouflage our devotion to Christ, but humbly do all we can to allow its truest colors to be seen where we live. The term translated give glory to means "to make manifest or visible." When we shine our light before others by living righteously, we are making visible the character of the Father. It is the Christian's commission to live in such a way as to make God visible in a world that is blind to Him.