

Deeper at the Crossroads

Sermon on the Mount

Week Two

Day One

Matthew 5:13

“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.”

Words and Phrases

“salt,” halas, salt

“earth,” ges, earth, land, people

Note: “You are the salt of the people,” is a possible translation.

“loses its saltiness,” moranthe, tasteless, insipid, foolish, cause to become nonsense.

Note: “if the salt of the people become foolish,” is a possible translation.

“be made salty,” halisthesetai, to become salty again, to restore the flavor.

“it is no longer good,” ouden, no one, nothing. Plus, ischye, have power, to have strength.

Note: a sense of “it has no power (or strength)”

“thrown out,” blethen, to throw, to do away with.

“trampled,” katapatesthai, trample on, despise, treat with complete disdain.

Explanation

This is not lite reading. Jesus is talking about that which is useful becoming useless.

My brother-in-law gave me a motorcycle once. It was a good model, big and powerful. But the engine had seized up on it. I gave it away. Even that level of waste doesn't match what Jesus is talking about because giving a motorcycle away isn't like treating it with disdain.

There is a lot of preaching about what Jesus meant by “salt.” Are we supposed to help spice life up with joy? Sometime salt was used in healing wounds (ouch!). Are we supposed to help heal the world? Previous generations would be very familiar with the idea that salt helped preserve food, to keep it from rotting. Are we supposed to help keep the world from decay and corruption?

Maybe the best answer is yes and no. He might not have been pointing to any one use of salt. He might have been including all of them. We don't know for certain, but what we do know is

that he is talking about something that is very useful becoming useless. There is even a sense of something wise becoming foolish.

Sin is stupid. It's foolish. It hurts us and it hurts others. It blocks the blessings of God and invites trial and even discipline. Not smart.

The words Jesus uses for the result of losing our saltiness are harsh. We are worth nothing and are worthy to be thrown out, to be trampled by people and treated with disdain.

Notice that WE are the salt. We like to separate sin and sinner. Our sin deserves condemnation, but we ourselves deserve love. But we don't. No one deserves God's love, or it wouldn't be grace, wouldn't be a gift. The true picture of us, not just our deeds, but us, is that when we turn away from God we lose our real value, and deserve to be thrown out.

Yikes. But Jesus asks a rhetorical question here, "who can restore the saltiness?" The answer we are supposed to give is that it can't be restored. Is it implied that this is not intended to apply to God? In Matthew 19:26 Jesus says it's harder for a rich man to enter the Kingdom of God than for a camel to go through the eye of a needle. The disciples are shocked and ask, "Who can be saved?" Jesus says, "With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible." I think we are on solid ground to say that Jesus is not saying God can't restore usefulness to us, nor that he won't. I think he's saying that without him, we lose our value.

Application

Jesus isn't doing anything in half measure in this sermon. We cannot save ourselves. We are useless without him.

If we ask ourselves, "How salty am I?" what is our answer? How useful to the Kingdom of God?

If you moved to Mongolia tomorrow, would God's work here be weakened? Or would there be little change?

Is your influence in your world strong enough to make any difference for good? Do you help prevent corruption? If so, how? If not, how could you be a godly influence?

Some recipes contain ingredients that make no difference in the taste, like parsley. You add the same amount of garlic, and it'll be noticed! Is your life salty? Does it look (taste) any different from the spiritual blandness of the world around you? Does your life have a Jesus flavor to it? Or do you blend in so thoroughly no one could taste the difference? Are you parsley or garlic?

When we stray from Jesus we are walking towards uselessness. Even if we don't get all the way there and are still a little useful, the journey towards irrelevance is easy and tragic. Do you feel you are moving towards purpose and usefulness, or are you drifting away?

Usefulness isn't just about church service or participation. Are you loving Jesus and others in such a way that people are being drawn to him?

Day Two

Matthew 5:14

“You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden.”

Words and Phrases

“light,” phos, light, bonfire, torch, people of God.

Note: English uses “pho” to refer to things that involve light, like photography.

“world,” kosmou, cosmos, universe, world, people.

“city,” polis, city, inhabitants, sometimes city treasurer.

“be hidden,” krybenai, hidden, to make invisible, to keep secret.

“hill,” orous, mountain.

Explanation

The world is darkness and we are its light. We’ll understand later that our light is Jesus, shining through us, but we are not to hide. Jesus is presenting a ludicrous picture here, nonsense. Some cities wanted to be hidden from enemies. Make your town hard to find and maybe the invading armies won’t notice you and will pillage somewhere else.

But bolder cities were built on top of hills and say, “Here we are. We aren’t afraid!”

The ridiculous picture would be of a city that was frightened and wanted to hide, but was built on a hill.

I play Hide n Seek with my grandkids. When they are young, they are not very good at it. They try to hide in plain sight with their heads under the bed and their entire bodies out in plain view. I’m not much better at it, not because I don’t know how to hide, but because I’m too big. Different story.

Jesus is saying that it is silly to hide a city on a hill.

Matthew 5:15

“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.”

Words and Phrases

“light,” kaiousin, ignite

“lamp,” lychnon, lamp

“bowl,” modion, basket, box, container

“stand,” lychnian, lampstand

“gives light,” lampei, shines, gives light

Explanation

Jesus continues with the ludicrousness of hiding something meant to be out in the open. Who would turn on a lamp then put it in a box? Not very smart. Ridiculous.

To take something intended to give light and then to hide it, is ridiculous. No sane person would do that.

If you build a city on a hill, you mean for it to be seen.

If you light a lamp, you mean for it to give light.

To build a city on a hill and then to try and hide it is ridiculous. To light a lamp and then hide it, is ludicrous.

We aren't supposed to be light. We ARE the light. God could have used angels to do his Kingdom's work, but he didn't. He uses us. He even used a donkey once, so he had lots of options. But he chose us.

We are the light of a dark world. But we try and hide the light. How? By blending in? By being so sweet and kind that we can't ever confront darkness, not even lovingly. By running from anything that makes us stand out.

Why do we hide? Jesus doesn't address that here, but I will. We are lazy. Being God's people is hard work. We are frightened. Stand out in this world and some people won't like it. Speak up for Jesus and you'll pay a price.

My wife, Diane, worked for years at a Christian company serving churches and ministers in downtown Dallas. She had a large lunch group that she ate with every day. One of the ladies was sort of rude to her, but one day she was gone. The other women in the group started talking bad about her. My little wife said, "You know, just because she isn't here today doesn't mean we should be gossiping about her." She said she got some dirty looks from around that table!

About a year later that lady came to her with a very personal issue she was having. Even though she'd often been rude to Diane, the lady came to her because Diane was the only one she could trust. Standing up for Jesus isn't easy. It's just necessary.

Application

Are you afraid to lovingly stand up for Jesus? To be seen? To be different?

Do you allow your light to be hidden? How is your testimony for Jesus dimmed or hidden?

What price would you pay for inviting people to church?

What price would you pay for showing others that you love the Lord and them? Would they receive it?

Who would most likely reject you if you acted, talked, and lived more fully like Jesus?

Day Three

Matthew 5:16

"In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in Heaven."

Words and Phrases

"in the same way," houtos, likewise, therefore, so

"Let ... light shine," lampsato, let shine, to give light. Note, this is a command. Don't hide the light. Don't shut off the lamp.

"may see," idosin, take notice, consider, pay attention to

"good deeds," kala erga, good works, beautiful workmanship

"praise," doxazosin, praise, glorify, honor. (Note, our word "doxology" is based on this word.)

"father," patera, father, parent, leader. (Note, "patera" is a root for "paternal," in English.)

"heaven," ournaois, heaven, sky, God

Explanation

Our light is our actions, our "good deeds." It's not our thoughts or our intentions. It what we do. Which is obvious. No one can "see" our thoughts or what we are feeling. We have to show them Jesus, by what we do.

And they are our good deeds. The overly pious Christian wants to cover themselves in humility by saying that we don't have any good deeds. It's a mis-reading of Paul in Philippians 3 where he is referring to good deeds previously done in order to save himself. Jesus is saying we do have good deeds, that we are supposed to have good deeds and that the lack of them is foolish, ridiculous, and leads to a loss of worth in the Kingdom of God.

But the purpose of our good deeds is NOT to point people to us. They are to result in the praise of God. Anything that is done to make others praise us is Philippians 3. Anything good done that results in the praise of our Father is Matthew 5.

Application

How do we help people understand that when we do something good it's because of Jesus? If they know we are his, they'll make the connection.

Do people view you as "sold out" for Jesus? When you do something kind for them, do you think they understand your kindness comes from him or do they think it's natural for you?

Do you have good deeds that stand out from the generic politeness of the world? Without bragging, what are a few ways you have acted to show the love of Jesus to others?