

Salt and Light

We are continuing our series, studying the words of Jesus from His *Sermon on the Mount*.

I'm calling the series *The King's Speech* to help us keep in mind that the *Sermon on the Mount* (Matthew 5-7) is a **description** of the Kingdom of God by that Kingdom's leader: King Jesus. While it may not sound like a typical *royal speech* given by the head of a great government or kingdom, that **is** what it is... and we shouldn't expect it to sound like any other speech because Jesus is unlike every other king, and His Kingdom is unlike every other government.

Jesus opened His speech with the *blessings* we often call *The Beatitudes*. Those blessings make it clear that this Kingdom is unlike any other, because the blessings are unlike, even *up-side-down* from, the way we generally understand blessing.

We naturally think and feel like we are blessed when we are wealthy, healthy, and powerful... when we have what we want and everyone likes us. But Jesus says that blessing looks more like poverty, meekness, mourning, hunger, thirst, peacemaking, purity, and mercy. He completes his list of blessings explaining that those who are truly blessed will suffer persecution *because they are blessed*.

Immediately following this list of unusual blessings, Jesus uses two metaphors to describe his Kingdom; more precisely, these metaphors describe the **citizens** of His Kingdom. So... if we consider ourselves to be citizens of God's Kingdom, or even aspire to be such, these metaphors should describe us.

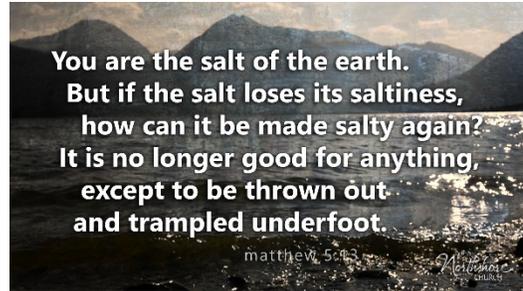
A *metaphor* is a word picture that describes something in terms of something else. We often use the word *like* in a metaphor. Even though we don't see the exact word *like*, Jesus is saying that citizens of His Kingdom (Christians) are **like** salt and **like** light.



First he says:

You are the salt of the earth.¹

In our days, we generally think of **salt** as a *seasoning*... the sort of thing that makes fries and potato chips so delicious. So we might think that Jesus is saying that we Christians are what make the earth so delicious. Do we think that is what Jesus meant?



In the days of Jesus, salt was primarily a **preservative**, especially for meat. We preserve meat with refrigeration, keeping it in our freezers and refrigerators long after it is butchered. But without such luxuries 2,000 years ago, people would preserve meat with salt... much like we do today with processed meats and jerky.

When Jesus describes citizens of His Kingdom as being like salt of the earth, He is making it clear that we citizens have work to do, now, throughout the earth. Just like even a pinch of salt makes a significant difference in a meal, we are called to make that preserving difference... throughout our networks, and even around the world.

But as we read on we see that the emphasis that Jesus was making wasn't as much on the *positive* aspects of salt, but more of a **warning**:

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.²

We do throw out salt and trample it underfoot on icy days to melt the ice... but that isn't what Jesus is talking about. He is supposing that salt *could* lose its saltiness and become worthless. We ought to wonder, then, how salt could lose its saltiness.

From the perspective of a chemist, such an idea makes no sense. Salt is salt... sodium chloride, NaCl. If we change the compound, it is no longer salt. Salt doesn't wear out or go stale. Apparently Jesus would have failed high school chemistry.

¹ *The New International Version*. (2011). (Mt 5:13). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

² *The New International Version*. (2011). (Mt 5:13). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

But, of course, we remember that this is a *metaphor*. Jesus is saying “if citizens of God’s Kingdom are not like salt in the world, then they are not behaving like citizens of God’s Kingdom.” If Christians are merely sequestered in our homes and churches having no preserving impact on the world, then we are *not living up to* our citizenship in God’s Kingdom.

Jesus goes on to say:

You are the light of the world.³

What do we need more than anything else?

- Food? We can go without for about 40 days or so.
- Water? 3-5 days.
- Breath (oxygen)? 3-5 minutes.

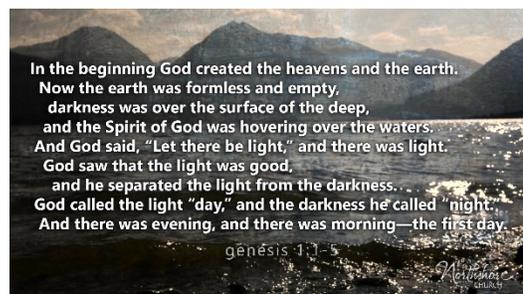
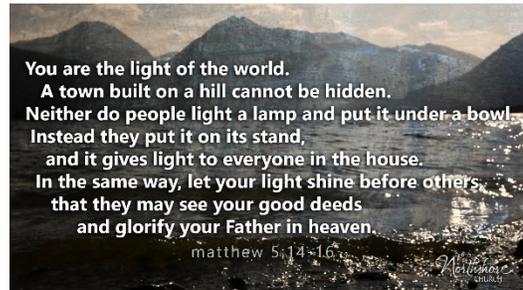
We look to God to meet our needs, so we might think about Creation. We don’t see on the first day the Creator saying, “Let there be food and water.”

What does it say? What is the first thing God creates, and could it be that it is that thing that we need the most?

And God said, “Let there be light,” and there was light.⁴ God saw that the light was good, and he separated the light from the darkness.⁵ God called the light “day,” and the darkness he called “night.” And there was evening, and there was morning—the first day.⁴

Not food or water or air... **light**. I suppose that is rational. We wouldn’t have food to eat, clean water to drink, or oxygen-rich air to breathe without light. Light isn’t just a matter of sight for us; it is integral to every aspect of survival.

While this reference to light in the creation story is literal, we see throughout our Bible’s light juxtaposed to darkness in figurative, even spiritual, terms.

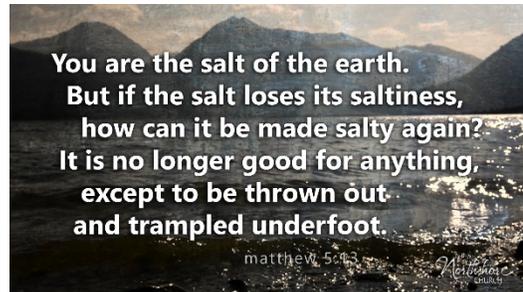


³ The New International Version. (2011). (Mt 5:14). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

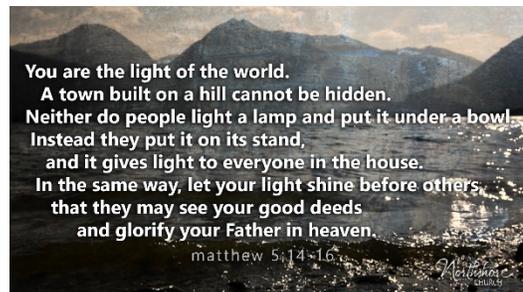
⁴ The New International Version. (2011). (Ge 1:3-5). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

We not only need literal light to meet our basic survival needs, we need figurative light to show us the way... to dispel the darkness that keeps us from meeting every other need.

When Jesus said “you are the salt of the earth,” He told His followers then and us followers now, that the world needs something special. It is in danger of rotting, or going bad. But there is an antidote; there is salt... and the followers of Jesus are that salt.



In the same manner, Jesus is saying that the world needs something special. It is dark. Those who dwell in this world can't see; they can't find what they need... and they are even in danger of not being able to meet their most basic needs. But there is an antidote; there is light... and the followers of Jesus are that light.



It is not a matter of one simple candle either... not just a matter of “this little light of mine.” Jesus said

¹⁴ “You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden.”⁵

A city... a Kingdom.

This is about establishing the Kingdom of God on a hill for all to see. It is about establishing the Kingdom of God in this world, establishing the rule of the King in the hearts of people.

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.⁶

First Jesus said that light **cannot** be hidden; now He is saying that it **should not** be hidden.

In the ancient world, since lamps always included a flame (no fluorescent squiggly bulbs or LEDs in the ancient world), putting a lamp under a bowl would not only block the light of the lamp, it would also *snuff out* the lamp.

⁵ The New International Version. (2011). (Mt 5:14). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

⁶ The New International Version. (2011). (Mt 5:15). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

A lamp under a bowl would quickly exhaust the oxygen available to the flame and would suffocate.

Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house.

Not hiding the light, and certainly not suffocating the flame, the lamp should be optimally placed so that it can do the most good... high on a stand with as little obstruction as possible so as to get the most out of the flame.

¹⁶In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven. ⁷.

I've decided that the most important word in this sentence is one of the shortest. It could seem like one of the most insignificant words: **Let**. Not *make* your light shine. Not conjure up a brighter light... but simply let your light shine.

A simple concordance search reveals that there are only three places in the Gospels where we find Jesus saying "light of the world."

There is, of course, this one in Matthew; the other two are in John's Gospel. In neither of them is Jesus saying "you are the light of the world;" they both are Jesus saying "I am the light of the world."

This could cause us to ask the simple question, "Which is it?" The answer is both because whatever light we have is the light Jesus shines through us.

We don't have to make the light, or brighten the light... all we are called to do is let the light shine. Just let Jesus shine.

How we might ask?

Through our work. Light shines best not through our words, or even our spiritual disciplines, but through work. Jesus demonstrated this marvelously when He walked among us feeding and healing and performing all manner of miracles.

Notice that it says

let your light shine before others, that they may **see your good deeds** and glorify your Father in heaven. ⁸

⁷ *The New International Version*. (2011). (Mt 5:16). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

⁸ *The New International Version*. (2011). (Mt 5:16). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

It doesn't say hear our good words. Doesn't it seem like there is simply too much **talk** these days, and not enough action. Talk truly is cheap.

It doesn't say "hear our good words" and neither does it say that we should be the *assault* of the earth. Right? Jesus call's the citizens of His Kingdom to be the salt of the earth, not the assault of the earth.

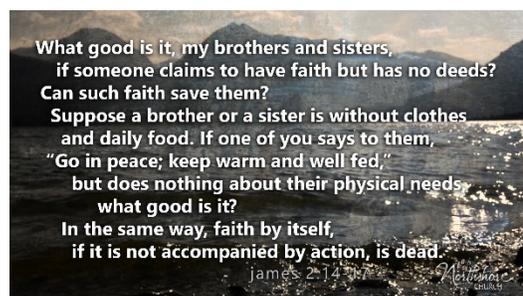
These are days of hot rhetoric... even persecution for the sake of righteousness. Some of us find ourselves in places where we are being shouted down; I've heard a number of stories from people in our congregation just this week. Regardless of our positions on various issues, should we shout back? Do we need to **win arguments** for righteousness sake... or might we take the words of Jesus to heart today? Even when persecuted (maybe *especially* when we are persecuted) we would do well to let our light shine through good deeds. There are certainly times for words, but it seems like all times are times for good deeds.

Our neighbors will see more of the light we have to share through our acts of kindness than our mere spiritual words. We can, and should, pray for our friends and neighbors... but it will be the work we do for them, and with them, that will get their attention. We can, and should, share the Gospel, preaching the Word, but our words of faith must ride along with our good deeds and actions.

Not just good deeds or some sort of watered-down social gospel, but faith-filled action in Jesus' name.

James heard Jesus speak of the work of salt and light, he put it this way:

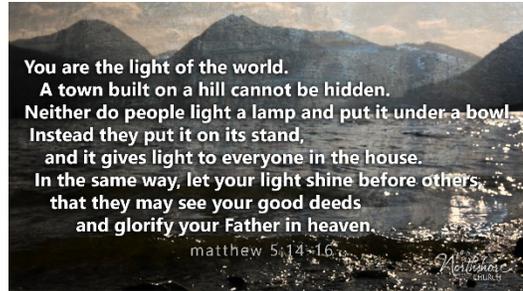
¹⁴ What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if someone claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save them? ¹⁵ Suppose a brother or a sister is without clothes and daily food. ¹⁶ If one of you says to them, "Go in peace; keep warm and well fed," but does nothing about their physical needs, what good is it? ¹⁷ In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead. ⁹



⁹ The New International Version. (2011). (Jas 2:14-17). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

I'd like to go back to that idea of the putting the lamp under a bowl and ask, "What are our favorite hiding places? What is the contemporary bowl under which we hide our lamps?"

What do we use to hide the light more than anything else?"



I think we take our light and place it in intricately crafted bowls. They are often beautiful, and complex. We don't mean for them to block the light from the world, in fact we really mean quite the opposite... but they often obscure, corrupt and block the light nevertheless.

We have one... it is big and brown and sits right here on 68th in Kenmore.

It seems to me that our most favorite place to hide the light is in our churches... in our buildings and in our programs.

While we might hope to build our churches as beacons of light, it often only takes a brief passage of time before our sanctuaries and services, our parishes and programs, become a structure that blocks the light more than shines the light.

He said "let your light shine before others," not merely **each** other.

Let's face it; we Christians often *turn on* our brightest lights when we're with each other here at church. It is all with good intentions that we put on our best clothes and faces, make special plans and preparations, and act with our best behavior when it comes to church. We do it as an act of worship; we honor God with our best.

But in regard to this command of Jesus, the light we shine on each other here at church has the least real impact.

God has a mission, and it is so much more than what happens here at 10:00 every Sunday morning. God has made the way for humanity to enjoy eternity with Him. We have been made His by His mighty power and His grace. And now that we are His, now that we have seen and received the Light, it is our best response to let that Light shine in and through us so that others may receive this same grace.

Let your light shine here... but God help us to let it shine all the brighter in the darkness of a light-starved world. Let it shine here on Sunday... but let it shine bright on Monday too, in our homes and schools and workplaces. Let that light shine in our acts of kindness and generosity and love so that others will see and glorify God too.

We **each** have responsibility alone, and we certainly have responsibility **together**. There are a number of outward-focused works that are part of Northshore, and we have three big things that we are working to launch in the coming weeks and months.

Our permit application is under review for the **Kenmore Community Market**. We plan to welcome our neighbors and vendors to our campus on Thursday afternoons and evenings throughout the summer. We want people to know that they are welcomed here. We want to serve them. And we want them to see that we're a pretty good bunch here at Northshore.



We continue to work on plans for **day camp** here at Northshore. We had a successful experiment late last summer and I'm working with the leadership of Cedar Springs Camps to significantly expand the outreach of what is already very successful at the camp in Lake Stevens and the Cedar Park campus in Bothell. We will take some steps in the coming months... I'm hoping we can take some pretty big steps (stay tuned).



We are working with the leadership of Cedar Park schools to bring **daycare** and **preschool** back to Northshore. Applications are in process to expand the licensing to include Northshore as a site. I'm hopeful that we will be able to take significant steps forward in the coming weeks and months.



We are passionate about making all three of these outward-focused initiatives happen. I'm sure that one or two will get going very soon, with the others following in time. We are passionate about all of this because we see the potential impact to be salt and light, serving our community so that all will see our good deeds and glorify our Father in heaven.



My appeal to us today is to share in this passion, and join in this work. In our work together and in our individual work in our unique networks, let's be about this work of being salt and light. It will require sacrifices of time, talent, and treasure... but it will be worth it as we respond to the call to action proclaimed by Jesus.

And if you haven't joined the team in this work, we welcome you. Believe in Jesus and find yourself as a citizen of God's Kingdom, and lend your support here at Northshore, this expression of God's Kingdom in Kenmore (a sort of town built on a hill).

Let's pray, thanking God for this part of His work He shares with us, inviting us to be active in His Kingdom work.