



THE PRAYER CLOSET

ENCOURAGING & EQUIPPING BELIEVERS IN PRAYER

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TOO UNWORLDLY FOR THE WORLD

Christians are too unworldly for the world. That is the summary of Jesus' beatitudes in the Sermon on the Mount. In these beatitudes, Jesus reveals the character of those who follow Him. As you read and study them, you see clearly that those who trust and follow Jesus are different from the world. Moreover, the world sees and knows there's a difference.

In **Matthew 5:13-16**, Jesus concludes the beatitudes. His conclusion focuses on this difference – the difference that exists between those who follow Him and those who don't. Because of this difference, the followers of Jesus are to exercise influence. Christians are to have an impact on those around them. Jesus tells us three things about our influence as Christians:

You are salt – Retain your distinctive flavor.

Jesus says, "Ye are the salt of the earth: but if the salt have lost his savour, wherewith shall it be salted? It is thenceforth good for nothing, but to be cast out, and to be trodden under the foot of men" (**Matthew 5:13**). It's important to understand that this is a statement of fact, not an imperative. In other words, Jesus is stating a fact. He's not giving a command. He says, "You are the salt of the world." The fact that you identify with Jesus by faith and seek to follow Him makes you different. It sets you apart; it makes you stand out.

When Jesus says that we are "salt," what does He mean by that? In surveying commentaries, I have found 11 different meanings to Christians being salt. All these are helpful and I'm thankful for the

research. Yet, the words of Jesus give us a clue as to what He primarily means. In this verse, Jesus says that salt can lose its savor – it can lose its distinct flavor. Salt has a distinct flavor about it.

When I was in seminary, I grew tired of eating Vienna sausages and ramen noodles. These were staple foods in those days! However, I decided to fix some homemade soup. When I sat down to eat, I wondered if

I had put enough salt in it. One bite was all it took. It was apparent there was too much salt. There was no mistaking that there was salt in the soup!

This is Jesus' meaning behind saying we are the salt of the world. We are different; we have a distinctive flavor from those around us. There's a difference when we are in the mix!

Our "saltiness" attracts others to Christ and to His salvation. It makes them wonder why our lives are so different from all those around us and what makes that difference. The British preacher Martin Lloyd-Jones once said, "The glory of the gospel is that when the church is absolutely different from the world, she invariably attracts it. It is then that the world is made to listen to her message, though they may hate it at first."

At the same time, Jesus gives us a warning. In this verse, He teaches us that we can lose our distinctive flavor. Salt is a very stable compound. Strictly speaking, sodium chloride remains sodium chloride. However, salt can lose its saltiness if it is over saturated with other substances.

Think of a bowl of soup that has all the right ingredients – meat, vegetables, noodles, water, and salt. What would happen to the taste of the soup if you added too much meat, or vegetables, or water? You wouldn't be able to taste the salt. The salt would lose its saltiness.

That's the point of Jesus' warning – you can become a diluted disciple! If you start adding extra ingredients, you're going to lose your saltiness. If you add a cup of lying, a pinch of greed, a quart of immorality, and a dash of hot temper, you will lose your distinctive flavor. The people around you won't taste the saltiness of your life even though you profess faith in Christ. You can water down your witness by living the way those around you live and pursuing the pleasures that they pursue.

This is why Jesus says, "Have salt in yourselves" (**Mark 9:50**). We must retain our distinctive flavor. We must maintain the difference between being disciples of Jesus and the world. The more we allow secular

society to influence us, morally and spiritually, the more we lose our saltiness. Jesus warns us against this danger. When you start adding all the ingredients that the world loves, you lose your distinctive flavor. We must seek to retain this distinctive flavor through His Word and by His help.

You are light – Let your light shine by good works.

Jesus gives us another insight about our influence, “Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hid” (**Matthew 5:14**). In this verse, Jesus reveals that a person’s Christianity should be perfectly visible to all. A light is going to shine in darkness. In the same way, a Christian is going to shine in the midst of a dark, sinful, and lost world.

Jesus doesn’t want invisible disciples. In the days before the electric light, it would have been absurd to light an oil lamp and then cover it up, “Neither do men light a candle, and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick; and it giveth light unto all that in the house” (**Matthew 5:15**). He wants us to shine. Again, this is a statement of fact, “You are the light of the world.” It’s not a command; it’s a statement of fact. Because of our relationship to Jesus Christ, we are now light. The world is dark – it is filled with the darkness of wickedness and hopelessness. Through Christ, we are to stand out. Christians are to be visible!

How do we shine as lights in this dark world? Jesus gives us the answer, “Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven” (**Matthew 5:16**). It is by our good works that we shine for Jesus. When we do good works, people see the light of Christ in our lives. Christianity is made most visible through the good works of believers.

What are the good works that Jesus speaks of in this verse? Good works are actions that God has commanded us to do in His Word and that are the fruits and evidence of a true faith in Jesus Christ. First, faith in Jesus Christ is the reason or the catalyst for truly good, God-pleasing works, “But without faith, it is impossible to please him” (**Hebrews 11:6**).

Second, good works are actions that we are taught by God in His Word. Knowing and obeying the explicit commands of Scripture is the place to start and stand. When Christians live out the teachings of the living Word of God, whether in the Sermon on the Mount, the gospels, the rest of the New Testament, or the Old Testament, non-Christians start to “see” the

beauty, attractiveness, and truthfulness of the Lord Jesus Christ.

When we love our enemies, the lost see light. When we pray for our enemies, the lost see light. When we don’t show partiality but love and minister to everyone, the lost see light. When we give to those in need, the lost see light. When we have respect and pray for those in authority, the lost see light. When we abstain from immorality and pursue purity, the lost see light. When we control our lying, greed, and anger, the lost see light. When we trust God to provide in trying economic times, the lost see light. When we clothe the naked, feed the hungry, take care of orphans and widows, welcome the stranger, and visit the sick or those in prison, the lost see light.

As Christians, we are not to hide ourselves from the world. However, we are rather to permeate and penetrate the darkness with the light of Jesus Christ by our good works. We are to be as visible to the world as a lamp on a table in once dark house.

Be prepared – People will either persecute you or repent.

As salt and light, the world will take notice and will take action. It is usually in one of two opposite extremes. One is persecution and the other is repentance.

Jesus has already told us that we can expect persecution (**Matthew 5:10-12**). We certainly don’t seek out persecution, but we are to expect it (**2 Timothy 3:12**). It’s unfortunate but ironic. A Christian who is humble, meek, merciful, and a peacemaker will face persecution. Yet, Jesus tells us this to prepare us. We are to be on our guard. If we are salt and light, some people will not like it. They will be hostile to us and oppose us.

Yet, Jesus tells us there will be another reaction. He states it that some people will behold our good works and will “glorify your Father which is in heaven” (**Matthew 5:16**). What does Jesus mean when He says that they will glorify our Father who is in heaven? It’s certainly true that people can glorify God by showing forth God’s justice – by being judged for their unbelief and disobedience. Some interpret this phrase to mean that lost people will acknowledge God one day in judgment – they will glorify Him in judgment.

However, the tone is **Matthew 5:16** is positive. Jesus says that people will see our good works and then give glory to God. This could mean a sincere but generic praise for God. Yet, it seems to me that Jesus is saying that people will believe the gospel and praise God.

How does one glorify God? A person does this by turning to God through Jesus Christ and then loving, serving, and living for Him.

Jesus is teaching that our good works attract people to hear and believe the gospel. People must certainly know the content of the gospel in order to turn to Jesus Christ in faith and experience His salvation (**Romans 10:17**). We must be faithful to share the gospel with lost people. There is no salvation apart from hearing the Word of God and believing the good news about Jesus Christ.

Yet, most people aren't attracted to the gospel purely by hearing it but often by seeing the good deeds that spring from it. It is the good works that flow out of our faith in Christ that make the gospel attractive to people – that causes them to wonder about what we believe and why we live the way we do. They see the difference in us and they want to know what makes that difference.

Salt And Light Praying

How should the truths of this passage lead us to pray to our Father? The following are some suggestions on how to pray in the light of this passage:

Father, thank you for saving me by Your grace through Your Son Jesus Christ. I thank You for the people You used to bring me to Yourself through the gospel. I now ask You to empower me to make a difference in the lives of others. Use me to bring others to You.

Father, reveal to me anything that would cause me to lose my gospel saltiness. Let my life have a distinctive Christlike flavor about it to all those around me.

Father, empower me to know and obey Your Word. I ask You in Jesus' name to enable me to do the good works that will let my light shine in this dark world.

Father, help me to glorify You with my words and my life so that others will believe your gospel and will then glorify You by surrendering to You and living for You.

Father, deliver me from fear and discouragement. Grant me the strength and the boldness to let my light shine in this dark world. I don't want to hide my light; I want to shine brightly in the darkness of this world. Grant me grace and power to do this.

Spit Out Salt and Snuffed Out Light

Jesus tells us that we are the salt and the light of this world. What do you do when your salt is spit out or someone attempts to snuff out your light? In other words, what do you do when people reject your witness? How do you respond when people don't respond to your saltiness and your light? The following are some suggestions on what to do when you salt is spit out and they try to snuff out your life:

- **Thank God that you have the opportunity to suffer for Christ's sake.** The Word of God says, "And they departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for his name" (**Acts 5:41**). It hurts when someone rejects your witness. It's painful when people are indifferent to your salt and light. Yet, this is part of our persecution as Christians. This is part of what it means to suffer for Christ. Rather than being dejected by this, rejoice that you get to suffer for His name. Rejoice that you are counted worthy to suffer shame for His name.
- **Don't let your heart become hardened.** It's easy when your salt is spit out and your light is snuffed out to get hard-hearted. We can easily become hard-hearted in these times. We can choose to harden our heart and resolve not to reach out to anyone else – to back away from being a witness with our words and our lives. Yet, we have to choose not to harden our hearts. We must determine in our hearts to love, minister, and witness to others regardless of their response. Ask God to give you strength to preserve in your personal witness.
- **Encourage yourself with Galatians 6:9.** The Word of God says, "And let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not" (**Galatians 6:9**). God promises that we will reap if we don't give up. There will be people who will reject your salt and light. That's inevitable. Yet, if you don't give up, you will have impact in the lives of others. Instead of being overwhelmed with discouragement, cling to **Galatians 6:9!**
- **Ask God to have mercy on those who reject your witness.** It is sad when people don't respond to our salt and light. It's the sign that there is a deep, spiritual need – a sign of a hardened heart. Rather than giving up on them and writing them off, pray that God will have mercy on them. Plead that He will manifest His mercy in their lives.

- **Call on the Lord to raise up people who will be able to speak truth into their lives.** We have to remember that people coming to Jesus is a process. God uses believers in a variety of ways. Some believers break the ground, some sow the seed, some cultivate, and some reap (**I Corinthians 3:5-8**). You may just be a part of the process of bring people to Christ. Pray that God will raise up other believers that can have deep spiritual impact in their lives.
- **Remember the words of Jesus.** In **Matthew 5**, Jesus gives us advance notice. People will respond to our salt and light with persecution or repentance. Be forewarned and be prepared. His words will come true. Don't be surprised or overwhelmed.
- **Be committed for the long haul of being salt and light.** We have to determine in hearts that we will be salt and light in the lives of others. We have to decide to be faithful in our lives. There will be times when people will persecute. There will be times when people are transformed. There will be times when we will not see any fruit at all. Yet, regardless, we have to be committed for the long haul. God is faithful. He will bless our efforts. We may not see it now. However, eternity will reveal the beauty and glory of a life of being salt and light!

The Prayer Closet News

At The Prayer Closet, we are rejoicing over God's faithfulness and provision. In October, we were able to pay off the debt on our new facility. We thank God for His blessing in this and for your prayers and donations. We are now looking forward to finishing the facility so that we can move in and begin a new phase of this ministry. Please continue to pray for this ministry and for me. I would also ask you to consider giving to this ministry. Your donations will enable us to carry out the ministry that God has given us. It will make a difference in the lives of people across this country and the world.

We thank God for the past seventeen years of ministry that God has given us. We look forward to what God will do in the future. Thank you for your prayers and your donations. May God richly bless you this holiday season and in the new year!

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