

Salt & Light ... Sermon on the Mount

When someone says, “she’s the salt of the earth,” what does that mean?

Matthew 5:13-16 (p. 1501)

“These words are addressed to the same audience as the beatitudes – to those who are summoned to follow the Crucified in the life of grace. Up to now we must have had the impression that the blessed ones were too good for this world, and only fit to live in heaven. But now Jesus calls them the salt of the earth – salt, the most indispensable necessity of life.” *Dietrich Bonhoeffer*

“Salt has something of the nature of fire.” *Pliny, 1st century AD Roman philosopher*

Sodium chloride (NaCl) – a mineral

Why was salt so important in Jesus’ day? What was it used for?

Leviticus 2:11-13 (p. 156)

“The salt of the covenant refers to the solemn, irrevocable character of the relationship between God and his people.” *Dictionary of New Testament Theology*

(But is salt necessary to preserve grain?)

“The disciples ... are the highest good, the supreme value which the earth possesses, for without them it cannot live. They are the salt that sustains the earth, for their sake the world exists, yes, for the sake of these, the poor, ignoble and weak, whom the world rejects.” *Bonhoeffer*

Notice that Jesus does not say “you must be salt” or “you ought to be salt” or even “you need to be like salt”

“But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again?” (*Matt. 5:13*)

- Can salt lose its “saltiness?”

If salt fails to be salt, what is it worth?

“That is the judgment which always hangs over the disciple community, whose mission is to save the world, but which, if it ceases to live up to that mission, is itself irretrievably lost. The call of Jesus Christ means either that we are the salt of the earth or else we are annihilated; either we follow the call or we are crushed beneath it. There is no question of a second chance.” *Bonhoeffer*

What are your thoughts on that?

How would you interpret this verse if Jesus had said, “You are the jalapeño pepper of the earth?”

What does “light” mean? What is the purpose of light? What happens when there isn’t any light?

“You are the light of the world.” What does that mean to you?

1 John 1:5-7 (p. 1898)

So how did the disciples become light?

“In what sense... can the church be described as the light of the world? In a derived sense only. It is only as the church genuinely proclaims Christ as Lord, that is, not by mouthing theological platitudes, but by manifesting his life in its life, that the church can truly be the light of the world.” *Douglas R.A. Hare*

What does Jesus likely mean by “a city on a hill?”

If we hide the light as this passage talks about, what does that mean?

We are called on to do good deeds and to make sure those deeds are visible

- But what about the credit for doing good work?

“Flight into the invisible is a denial of the call. A community of Jesus which seeks to hide itself has ceased to follow him. ‘Neither do men light a lamp and put it under a bushel, but on the stand.’ Once again we are confronted with an alternative; the light may be covered of its own choice; it may be extinguished under a bushel, and the call may be denied.” *Bonhoeffer*

How will you shine light so it is visible to the world?