

You Are the Salt...; You are the Light

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Matthew 5:13-20

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In her book “Wisdom of the Sadhu,” Sundar Singh says, “Those who seek to follow the spiritual life are like salt in the world. Salt crystals cannot give flavor to food unless they dissolve. If we dissolve the salt in a pot, it disappears but it does not cease to exist. Indeed, it can then give flavor to thousands of grains of rice. “It is the same with us,” she says. “If we are not melted in the fire of love and spirit, if we do not sacrifice ourselves completely, then we cannot pass on to even a single soul the blissful experience of the spiritual life.”¹

This is what Jesus is saying when he says, “You are the salt of the earth.” Speaking to the crowds during his Sermon on the Mount, Jesus says his followers are like salt and light, which are able to make great changes in the world. In other words, even though they have little power to change the corrupt system that’s making life so hard for them, they still have a key role in changing the world for the better.

That must have been hard for them to see and believe – that as poor as they are, as powerless as they are, as low as they are in the hierarchy of society, the ultimate outcome of Jesus ministry depends on them.

This is why Jesus spent so much time telling them who they really are. The world may see them as quite limited, but to Jesus, they are like salt, which is actually small but very powerful. Just one grain of salt causes a chemical reaction that adds flavor. Salt also works as a preservative, and it’s able to purify and disinfect. Likewise, our role as followers of Christ is to make changes for the better, to preserve the faith, and to treat all of life as pure and sacred.

Jesus not only sees us as salt, but also as light. Light does not exist for its own benefit, but for the benefit of everything it illuminates. Light also provides warmth and energy, and it encourages life and growth.

As Christians, we seek to give of ourselves for others, provide comfort and warmth where needed, encourage others to grow and flourish. That’s what we are – salt and light. It’s not something we need to strive for.

¹ Sadhu Sundar Singh, *Wisdom of the Sadhu* (Plough, 2000)

Think about – all the positive things you do each day, all the love and light you send out. That is who you really are.

And when you're not, when you find yourself struggling to make a positive difference or to shine light where needed, that has more to do with how you react to the world around you than who you are in your heart of hearts. It's not easy letting our inner light shine forth when we're surrounded by so much darkness. But at the very least, we don't have to give in to the darkness; we can strive to overcome the darkness, by remembering that we are the light that Jesus sends into the world. Remember that and then find ways to be that, be the light in any place of darkness.

There's a story about a mother whose daughter was addicted to sweets. After trying everything she could think of, in desperation she reached out to a great spiritual teacher, hoping he would talk with her daughter. The guru heard her story and said, "Bring your daughter to me in three weeks' time and I will speak to her." After three weeks, the mother brought her daughter to him. He took the young girl aside and spoke to her in such a way that she was able to begin limiting her sweets. The mother thanked the wise guru and then asked him: "But why didn't you speak to her three weeks ago?" "Because," he said, "three weeks ago, I was still addicted to sweets."

It's not easy letting our inner light shine when we're surrounded by darkness or get pulled into the shadows. It's not easy having a positive effect in the world when we're drowning in negativity. But remember, that's not who you are. If we want to maintain a positive outlook and be able to shine love and light in this world, then we need stop and remember who we are –children of God, followers of Christ.

This is why Jesus adds a call to righteousness after reminding us that we are the salt of the earth and the light of the world. "Let your righteousness exceed that of the scribes and the Pharisees." In saying this, Jesus points to the law and the prophets, saying, "I have come not to abolish (the law) but to fulfill (it).

Well, as you may recall, later in Matthew, Jesus summarizes the law and the prophets, saying, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind" ... and "love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend on all the law and the prophets." (Matt. 22:37-39)

Look, when we focus on loving God and neighbor, it's not that hard to figure out how to be salt and light, having a positive effect in life, shining out through the darkness. When I think of loving God, I think of worshiping God above all else. That really helps to put things in perspective. It's much easier to prioritize things when God is at the top of your list.

And when I think of loving my neighbor, I think of not hurting one another with your sexuality, your money or your power. That really helps keep us out of the dark shadows of life. "...

Let your light shine before others,” says Jesus, “so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven.” In other words, do the right thing and refrain from doing wrong – that’s what it is to be the salt of the earth and the light of the world.

And finally, when Jesus says, “Not one letter . . . , not one stroke of a letter will pass from the law until all is accomplished,” he is underscoring our role in the fulfillment of God’s plan for peace and love the world over. Our love of God and neighbor is just that necessary in order for God’s plan and purpose to be fulfilled.

We’re not left here just waiting for Jesus to perfect all things. No. We are here to do our part in seeing God’s purpose accomplished. Jesus is the embodiment of the law of love; we are followers. As Jesus says, “I have come to fulfill (the law),” fulfill the love of God and neighbor through us, his followers.

So you see, doing right and refraining from doing wrong isn’t just a nice way to go through life. It’s actually the only way for us to achieve true life, the fullness of life, and to share it with others.

And the greatest thing about it is that just like nothing can stop salt and light from doing what salt and light are made to do, nothing can stop us as followers of Christ. As long as we stay focused on our love of God and our love of neighbor, we can be assured that God’s light will pierce the darkness, and that our lives will have been instrumental in the peace and love that God brings. Amen.

PASTORAL PRAYER

Gracious God, we thank you for the high calling in Christ Jesus to be your people. We praise you for the privilege of embodying your life of love, forgiveness and justice to the world.

We gladly receive the responsibility to be salt and light, knowing that we will often fail to live up to who you have called us to be, but thankful nonetheless for the opportunity to respond to your mercy in our lives.

Arouse within us, we pray, such joy in serving you and others, such compassion for the friendless and downcast, and such empathy at the plight of the abused, exploited and stigmatized that we cannot remain silent, will not remain uninvolved, and will not accept life as usual.

Convict us in our comfort and inspire us to a new vision of what it means to bear witness to your kingdom.

We pray your healing touch upon those struggling with illness and disease. Thank you, Lord, for the comfort and healing you bring.

Let us continue to be instruments of your grace and mercy, as we join together now in praying as you taught us, saying together:

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name.

Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our debts,

as we forgive our debtors; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.

For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.