

Going: Next Door and Beyond

Oct. 31: Transformational Engagement in the World: Matthew 5:13-16

NOTE: (Should we read Matthew 5:1-12 together or responsively?)

Intro: Jesus “went up on a mountainside. The setting is surely modest. It is not a grand cathedral or a great stadium where our Lord delivered this world-changing message. He gave it on the gentle slope of a mountain beside the sea. I have been in that general area, and I can see in my mind the grass mixed with rocks and the scattered trees on the north shore of the Sea of Galilee. The sea itself is beautiful any time of day.

But it is a mountain where he sits just as Moses received the Law on a mountain, Sinai. There the Lord came down to the mount. Here the Lord goes up to the mount. There the message was delivered with thunder and lightning, here in a still small voice. Jesus is the new lawgiver. He delivers to us the “law of Christ,” as it is called (Galatians 6:2). Then they were ordered to keep their distance, but now to draw near. In these last days, Jesus is “the mountain of the Lord’s temple” where Isaiah invited all people to gather. “He will teach us his ways,” the prophet said (Isaiah 2:2-3), and that is what Jesus is doing.

Jesus sat down. He got set. He had a sermon to deliver. The crowd became quiet and still as they saw him assume this teaching position. Jesus set the stage for the delivery of his most famous message to his disciples and to us.

The care with which Jesus set the stage indicates how important this message was to him—and to us. With purpose and intention he calls us to hear, to remember, and to act upon his words.

This most famous sermon of Jesus is not about things to believe as much as things to do. In fact, Jesus describes a way of life here in these chapters. He said at one point, “If anyone shall do his will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God” (John 7:17). For Jesus, holy living is even prior to right thinking. If we are not ready to live the truths we know already, what point is there in finding out more!

Here then we have fundamentals for following Christ from his own lips. He begins the sermon with the Beatitudes which comprise a blessing for those who are poor, meek, hungry, pure in heart, peace-making and persecuted. As Dr. Luke writes in Acts 3:26, “When God raised up his servant, he sent him first to you **to bless you** by turning each of you from your wicked ways.”

These Beatitudes are at the beginning, not at the end, because they are the way to prepare your heart for what follows including the text for today.

I. Salt the Earth! Salt transforms what it touches.

A. Salt is a necessity for life.

1. I am told that the blood which courses through your veins bears striking resemblance to salty seawater.

2. If you take the liquids of the earth and distil them in a great, shallow vat baked under the blazing sun, you will soon have a crust of salty minerals all around the shoreline. The liquid will grow so dense that you cannot sink in it.

3. The Dead Sea was the point of collision for ancient civilizations who sent caravans to its shores to gather the salt for their civilizations.

4. Roman soldiers were sometimes paid in salt. Hence the saying, “worth his salt.”

5. Salt was valuable not only for seasoning but even more so for its powers of preservation. Fish and other meats packed in salt will last much longer in the heat.

***Block of minerals from the Dead Sea should be on display.

B. The WORLD cannot do without you. You are the salt. As a believer in Jesus, you are as necessary to life on this planet as the mineral sodium chloride.

1. You are salty. You have something the world needs and must have.

C. Do not lose your saltiness.

1. This must be an immediate threat to each of us or Jesus would not have mentioned it.

2. Losing your saltiness is a little mysterious. Salt itself is sodium chloride, a mineral. It cannot lose its saltiness.

a. Not recoverable. Once the salt loses its saltiness, there is no way to restore it. If Christ and the gospel are not able to transform your behavior, then nothing on earth will do it.

b. Good for nothing—USELESS. There is nothing more wicked than a professing Christian who is wicked. He both pollutes himself and everyone who looks to him. That includes preachers. That is why we find it so repulsive when pastors and spiritual leaders turn away from the holiness of Christ.

c. Cast out. All you can do with salt that is no longer savory is throw it out. It becomes part of the dirt on the road for men to walk over. That is how apostasy affects a man. Once he knows the truth and turns from it, he is without savor, without flavor, and without a fruitful future.

3. The Sermon on the Mount itself has the key to maintaining and increasing your saltiness as a follower of Jesus. Jesus says in his conclusion: “Everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock” (Matthew 7:24). We must PUT INTO PRACTICE the words of Jesus to increase our saltiness and turn up our light.

4. This is a radical call to holiness. Jesus says at the end of chapter 5, “Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect” (v48). He sets the bar very high. The more we reflect the character and values of the Father, the saltier we will be and the brighter our light will shine.

D. The salt must be scattered, just as the light must be diffused. They were not to remain in the saltshaker there in Jerusalem. Even though by persecution, they would be scattered around the Roman Empire and the world.

1. Gathering is the easy part. We should not neglect the assembly because the assembly feeds our soul and brings us encouragement and helps us know God’s will and purpose for us.

2. Scattering is not an easy thing. We are often alone in our witness and saltiness. We are tiny grain of salt in our place of work or our family. We feel small and insignificant and helpless and weak. Yet we are not helpless or weak.

3. The POWER OF SALT is its ability to season the food with just a little bit. It is scattered on purpose because it is potent and powerful.

II. Light the World! Light transforms our world.

A. Light is a necessity of life. ***I was down deep in Carlsbad Caverns when

they turned off the lights. We experienced what seemed to us to be total darkness. Then we tried to imagine those early explorers whose lamps went out, and they died in the deep recesses of that cave. Without a lamp an explorer had no chance in that treacherous terrain underground.

1. The ancients used small clay pots for their lamps such as the one I have here in my hand. You can purchase lamps similar to this one around the world. I bought this one for a buck or two from a farmer in the high Andes Mountains who lived by an Incan cemetery. All the graves had been blasted open decades earlier, and all the gold was stolen. But he said that he found the tiny pot while stirring around in one of those graves.

2. When my granddaughters came this last time they wanted to play with the flashlights. Nothing is more fun than having a light at night in a strange place—or even in your own homemade cave.

B. Jesus, the prince of preachers, came into this world to be The LIGHT OF THE WORLD. He said it himself (Jn 8:12, 9:15).

C. We do not want to hide our lamp under a bushel or a bowl. This would be like salt losing its saltiness or staying in the shaker.

D. The SCOPE of our influence is the EARTH and the WORLD. Earth is the simple word *gei*. World is *cosmos*. The prophets were a light and salt among their own people, Israel. But these disciples and the church itself is commissioned and destined to carry the light and the salt to the entire planet. They will fulfill the promise to Abraham that through his seed the entire earth will be blessed.

E. We are A CITY ON A HILL.

1. A “city” is a community of humans. This city is a symbol for the church of Jesus Christ, the “city of God” (Psalm 46:4). We are established in the earth as the weak and the poor. But our influence through these generations has touched the planet like no other force.

2. We are a city ON A HILL. The lights gathered together distinguish themselves and can be seen from afar. The church of Jesus Christ is to act corporately in such a way that it is a city of light upon a hill, shining for all the world to see. That is what I long for in my own congregation. The higher we lift the light the greater its reach.