

SALT, LIGHT, AND THE GLORY OF GOD

03.25.18

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INTRODUCTION

1. [Illustration]: In 1629, in order to flee religious persecution in England, a man by the name of John Winthrop joined – and later lead – the Massachusetts Bay Colony. A year later, he found himself headed for the New World on a ship called the Arbella. On his voyage to America he wrote a famous sermon entitled, “A Model For Christian Charity.” In it he laid out the deeply spiritual purpose behind the formation of this new colony.

[We are] a company professing ourselves fellow members of Christ... the Lord will be our God, and delight to dwell among us as his own people... we shall be a city upon a hill. The eyes of all peoples are upon us, so that if we shall deal falsely with our God in this work we have undertaken, and so cause Him to withdraw His present help from us, we shall be made a story and a by-word through the world.¹

2. [Transition]: For Winthrop and the MBC, the fulfillment of Matt. 5:13 ff. came by the institution and continuation of a community who was governed completely by the church. While they were right to desire such a community, they erred by presuming it could be accomplished from the outside-in.

Indeed the Kingdom of Heaven cannot be externally imposed but is instead internally worked out from the heart of each follower of Christ – working together as the Church.

¹ John Winthrop, “A Model for Christian Charity,” in *The Founding of Massachusetts: Historians and the Sources*, Edmund S. Morgan, ed., (Indianapolis, 1964).

3. [Proposition]: **God has made the Church to be salt and light in this world; therefore, shine for the good of others and the glory of God.**

BODY: In these few verses that immediately follow the beatitudes, Jesus switches from describing those internal qualities that constitute the ‘good life’ in the New Covenant community to how those qualities interface with the outside world.

In verses 13-16, Jesus uses two metaphors to illustrate what Christ-followers are and makes two assertions about what Christ-followers ought to do – or not do – in light of what they are.

1. What Christ-followers are
 - a. Salt: “You are the salt of the earth”
 - i. Earth/world/universe of people as the application in verse 16 makes clear
 - ii. 1st Cent. Salt: chemical mixture from the Dead Sea, typically composed of 33% NaCl.² Over time, ‘salt’ exposed to moist air, could lose its saltiness.
 - iii. Uses of salt in 1st Cent.³ (1) Taste/aesthetic: Food flavoring (2) Utility: Food preservation & Fertilizer
 - iv. Metaphorical use:
 1. **That which is essential for life**, “The world cannot endure without salt,”⁴
 2. **That which is beneficial in human relationships**, “Let your speech always be with grace, as though seasoned with

² Ulrich Luz, *Matthew 1-7: A Commentary*, Hermeneia, 1:203.

³ See N. Hillyer in *NIDNTT* 3:443-45.

⁴ *Soferim* 15:8; cf. *Wisdom of Sirach* 39:26

salt, so that you will know how you should respond to each person" (Col. 4:6).

- v. Like salt, Christ-followers have an essential role in benefiting the people around them – because that's just who Christians are: salt!
 - 1. Not every "Christian" does
 - 2. Not every Christian does it well

 - b. Light: "You are the light of the world"
 - i. Different word for 'world,' same idea
 - ii. Ancient lamps: small, didn't give off much light by themselves, and needed to be elevated on a "lampstand," which was just a designated shelf built into the wall
 - iii. A city on a hill?
 - iv. Like light, Christ followers, bring sight to a lost world

 - c. Jesus: true salt and true light
 - i. Jesus is *the* salt of the world: If salt is essential for life, how much more essential is Jesus? "All things have been created through Him and for Him" (Col. 1:16), and, "[He] upholds all things by the word of his power" (Heb. 1:3).
 - ii. Jesus is *the* light of the world: "I am the Light of the World; he who follows Me will not walk in the darkness, but will have the Light of life" (John 8:12)
 - iii. If Jesus is *the* Salt and Light, how can he say we are too? By faith, we are as Christ is! He is the true source of our saltiness and our light. **We cannot be salt or light if we are not first in Christ.**
- 2. What Christ-followers ought to do (or *not* do)
 - a. Just because Christ-followers *are* doesn't mean Christ-followers always *do*
 - b. WHAT? Be salty & shine
 - i. **Be salty** – I don't think Jesus is saying, "don't lose your saltiness," but rather, "be the seasoning you're meant to be." Can the world endure without you? Without us? In order to be salty, we cannot stay in storage
 - ii. **Shine** – "Let your light shine before others." Can the world see you? See us?
 - 1. In order to shine, we need to be present in darkness
 - 2. In order to shine, we need to be doing good works
 - a. "Good" = compelling
 - b. More about character than isolated good deeds
 - c. Good works proves one's faith, but they do not produce that faith. A flame's light and heat proves the lamp's lamp-'ness', but its light and heat didn't produce the flame. The flame was lit!
 - 3. Doesn't this contradict the principle Jesus teaches later in Matt. 6:1, "Beware of practicing your righteousness before men to be noticed by them; otherwise you have no reward with your Father who is in heaven"?
 - a. Similarity: Action (righteous deeds) & Sphere (public)

- b. Difference: Motive. "To be noticed by them," is the operative clause. It's all about motivation. Are we acting for our glory or for God's? This is at the heart of all sin and is the reason why "good" people are still in need of the gospel of Jesus Christ.
- c. HOW? Stick together: In order to be salty and shine, we need to stick together
 - i. Addressed to 'y'all'
 - ii. One grain of salt is useless on a French fry
 - iii. One measly flame wont light up a city
- d. WHY? For the glory of God (make Him look good): God uses our lives to authenticate the gospel
 - i. Those who accept the gospel, glorify the Father
 - ii. Those who reject the gospel will glorify the Father: "Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable, so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation" (1 Peter 2:12).

God calling you to season the lives of your families, co-workers?

- 3. The world needs our light. Christian/church, How bright are you(we)? How much light to you(we) give off? Are you(we) positioned strategically to do the most good? In your(our) doing good, are you(we) motivated by the glory of God? Where is the darkness you've been called to? In what dark room has God placed your lampstand?

Trinity, God has made us to be salt and light in this world; shine for the good of others and the glory of God.

CONCLUSION/APPLICATION

- 1. The world needs salt and light. The world lacks taste and light. It's tasteless (dull) and dark (ignorant/evil). The world isn't' as it ought to be – it's deficient? Why? Can you account for it?
- 2. The world needs our salt. Christian/church, how salty are you (we)? How essential are you(we) to what's going well in the spheres of your(our) life in which you(we) are a part? How is