

February 6, 2011
Epiphany 5

"The Savior's Sermon: You Are Salt and Light"

MATTHEW 5:13-20

“You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled underfoot. ¹⁴ “You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden. ¹⁵ Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. ¹⁶ In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven. ¹⁷ “Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. ¹⁸ For truly I tell you, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished. ¹⁹ Therefore anyone who sets aside one of the least of these commands and teaches others accordingly will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever practices and teaches these commands will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. ²⁰ For I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven.”

This afternoon large numbers of people with sat down with family and friends to watch the Super Bowl. If you want to run a 30 second commercial for the Super Bowl it will cost you 3 million dollars for a 30 second spot. This afternoon there will be commercials for beer, potato chips, smart phones and cars. These commercials tell us that with these products are lives will be happier and more fulfilled. There will be no commercials showing someone sitting down with another person and sharing with them what really matters in life. That is summed up in the familiar words of John 3:16, “God so loved the world he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believes in him should not perish but have everlasting life.”

Today we hear our Lord Jesus telling us how he is going to advertise or promote the blessings of his kingdom to people who are not aware of God’s love for them. Jesus’ plan is to take ordinary people like you and me and use us to be the salt of the earth and the light of the world. How much is your life on this earth worth? Is it worth the 3 million for an ad in the Super Bowl? Is it worth over 100 million dollars? No, dear Christian, because of what you offer people as the salt of the earth and the light of the world, you life on this earth is precious. It is priceless. Philippians 2 says that we shine like stars in the universe as we hold out the world of life. Let’s listen to Jesus tells us what a privilege it is to be the salt of the earth and the light of the world. Let’s also let him tell us what a challenge this will be for us.

What a privilege!

Jesus left the crowds and went up to a mountain to be alone with his disciples. He sat down and talked to them about how blessed they were to have the blessings of God’s kingdom and to share them with people. “Blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the kingdom of

God." "You are the salt of the earth." You probably have a salt shaker such as this that you use to salt your food and make it taste better. Salt has also been used to preserve meat. Rub the salt on meat or soak it in salt water and the meat will keep from spoiling. I remember my father soaking hams and bacon in large crocks with salt brine, and then smoking them. They could last for months in the cool basement without refrigeration.

Meat rots quickly if it is not salted or refrigerated. Put a piece of meat on your kitchen counter, leave it sit there for a week in the summer and then tell me what happens to it. It perishes. So it is with people. Without Jesus they will perish eternally. Job said, "Man decays like a rotten thing, like a garment that is moth eaten." In John 3:18 Jesus says this about people who do not have him as their Savior. "Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God's one and only Son."

We have an important job in this life as the salt of the earth. Our job is to share the good news about Jesus so people can live forever with him. That is why the Lord leaves us here on this earth, to preserve life. Martin Luther had this to say about this position we have. "The real salt is the true exposition of Scripture, which denounces the whole world and lets nothing stand but the simple faith in Christ."

What if salt loses its saltiness? Jesus tells us, "But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled by men." I have never heard of salt going bad, have you? I am sure the disciples thought the same thing when Jesus talked to them about salt going bad. It just doesn't happen. If it could happen you would need to throw the salt away. Does it happen that Christians can fail to be the salt that Jesus has called them to be? If the salt remains in the container, it will never do the job of preserving. If we keep the blessings of Jesus just for ourselves, then people who are perishing will not have the opportunity to have these blessings in their lives and be saved. I heard recently that the city of Santa Maria is going to build another fire station. Can you imagine having fire stations but not sending trucks out to save people because we don't want to spend the money on fuel?

We are also described by Jesus as the light of the world. "You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven."

Have you ever had the electricity go off in your home? You probably have some flashlights and lamps you can use to bring light. You may have candles that you can burn. Where do you put a candle to provide light? Do you hide it under a bowl? Do you put it into the corner? No, you put the candle in the middle of the room where it will provide the most light.

You can hide in your house and live your life for Jesus as a solo Christian. You can be alone on an island by yourself with a Bible and continue to grow strong in your faith as you read God's Word. That is not God's plan for your life. He wants you to be in contact with other people who are Christians so you can share God's Word in worship and Bible study.

He allows wants you to have contacts with other people on the phone, on the internet and personally, one on one. Think of the people you interact with each day.

How do you let your light shine? Jesus gives us the answer when he says, "that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven." Our mission in life is not to use our good deeds to draw attention to ourselves. No our purpose is to live our lives for our heavenly Father out of love for what he has done to rescue us and save us. Listen to how the words of Psalm 103 encourage us to praise the Lord with our words and with our lives because of what he does for us. "Praise the Lord, O my soul; all my inmost being praise his holy name. Praise the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits- who forgives all your sins and heals all your diseases, who redeems your life from the pit and crowns you with love and compassion."

Think of how blessed you are. Think of all the benefits the Lord gives you with daily food, a home in which to live, friends and family. What really makes us want to praise the Lord is the fact he forgives all our sins. What I do wrong condemns me. It sends me to an eternity in hell, but then Jesus suffers the torments of hell for me on the cross so I can be forgiven. He rescues me from the pit. He crowns me with love and compassion. These blessings cause a light to shine on your face. They affect the words that you speak. They create a genuine love and caring for other people. Here is what is most amazing. The difficult and dark days of life that come to us provide some of the best opportunities to let our light shine for the Lord. Our job is never to draw attention to ourselves, but also to God's amazing love and mercy that is there for all people.

What a challenge

Being the salt of the earth and the light of the world will not always be easy because of what Jesus tells us next in this Sermon on the Mount. He says, "Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets. I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them." Jesus did not come to abolish the law and do away with what God requires for us to be saved. He came to fulfill the law, to provide a righteousness we could never find in ourselves. It is our job as salt and light to let the world know that God's standards of holiness and righteousness never change. Jesus tells us that until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter or the least stroke of the pen will be any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished. He told his disciples that if they wanted to be saved, they would need a righteousness greater than that of the Pharisees.

What a shock it is for people to learn that God's requirement to be loved by him in this life and for eternity is not "do your best and hope in luck for all the rest." No, dear friends, God's requirement is and always will be perfection. Romans 10:5 tells us, "Moses describes in this way the righteousness that is by the law: 'The man who does these things will live by them.'" Jesus said tells us to be saved we need to love God with all our hearts, all our minds, all our souls and all our strength. We need to love our neighbors as ourselves. What a shock it is to discover that if I keep the law perfectly and offend in just one point I am guilty of the sinning against the whole law of God. When the law shows me where I have failed God, then there is no place to put my hope except the perfect life that Jesus lived for me, and the perfect death he died for me. His resurrection from the dead is his way of assuring us that we have a righteousness apart from the law, not in ourselves or any other religion but only in Jesus. Imagine sharing this message on the Super Bowl with a one minute ad. That's the challenge we face as the salt of the earth and the light of the world.

When I was putting the finishing touches on this sermon yesterday, I thought of my mother who would have celebrated her 90th birthday yesterday. An illustration came to mind that might help us understand the tough challenge we face. My mom would often send me down to the basement for a jar of pickles, or pickled beets, or beans or corn, or tomatoes. There were rows and rows of jars with canned fruit and vegetables that came from our garden. She labored in the hot kitchen to provide all that food for us. It was home-grown and home-made. Think of someone going into the basement and throwing all those jars onto the concrete floor and breaking them. I can see my mother crying if that ever happened. I can see her angry at the person who had done that to all her canned goods. Do you see why it is tough for us to be salt and light? We have to tell people all the righteousness they have tried to store up for God is worthless and toxic. We need to throw it down and smash it for them for them so they are left putting their hope in only one place, that is Jesus, the only hope of not perishing. That's a tough job, but it is priceless. Your life this week is far more valuable than every bit of money spent on Super Bowl ads. Amen.