**SALT AND LIGHT OF THE WORLD**

July 22, 2018

Matthew 5:13-48

Key Verse 5:13-14 “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. You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden.”

Jesus said, “You are the salt of the earth,” and “You are the light of the world.” This has deep meaning, but in one word, Jesus is referring to influence. Influence occurs in many different ways. People influence the world with their ideas. Some ideas last longer than others but ideas can have a powerful influence in the world. Ideas like evolution, relativity, and socialism are influencing the world today whether we like it or not. People influence the world with their work. Steve Jobs has influenced how we interact with technology. Mark Zuckerberg has influenced how we interact with people. Jeff Bezos has influenced how we do shopping. Jesus’ disciples also influence the world, not by the strength of their own ideas or the quality of their work, but mostly by the substance and fabric of their lives. Phil Vischer, the creator of the Christian video series VeggieTales that has sold over 60 million copies worldwide, has said that the world does not learn about Christianity by watching Christian videos but by watching Christians. What do genuine Christians look like? Jesus taught us in verses 3-12. They are poor in spirit, mourn, are meek, hunger and thirst for righteousness, are merciful, are pure in heart, peacemakers and persecuted for righteousness. In today’s passage, Jesus teaches us how to be the salt and light of the world. Simply put, it is to live radical lives. In this world, people say, “I am a good person because I never killed anybody; I never cheated on my wife.” But that is not enough in God’s eyes. We should be radicals, even loving our enemies. Then we can be the salt and light of the world.

Look at verses 13-14. “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 by men. You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden.” Jesus’ disciples had been following him only for a short time. They were committed to Jesus but they did not actually know that much about him. They were not Bible scholars. They did not pray particularly well. They had never taken a mission trip or ever shared their life testimony. But Jesus did not say to them, “I hope you can be salt and light someday.” Jesus declared to his young disciples and anyone in the crowds, “You are the salt of the earth. You are the light of the world.” Whether we have been following Jesus for twenty days or twenty years, Jesus says we are salt and light. Though people tend to talk about their lives in terms of what they do --student, teacher, lawyer, doctor, accountant -- we are not primarily those things. Jesus said, “You are the salt of the earth. You are the light of the world.” That’s what we are. The effect of our lives is to be salty and to shine light.

**First**, you are the salt of the earth. What does it mean that we are the salt? What is the function of salt? It seasons the food. It is very hard to eat a boiled egg without salt; it plays a role of preservatives. We can preserve fish for a long time with salt; it brings out flavor out of other ingredients; it creates thirst. So Jesus’ disciples are indispensable in this world like salt. They give flavor among people. They prevent corruption in the world. They bring out unique talents out of people. Lastly, Jesus’ disciples make others thirst for God’s righteousness. Only 3.5% of the ocean is salt. However, it is enough to make the ocean very salty. Likewise, small minority of salty Christians can make a big difference in the world. Even one person in the crowd of 100 people can make a big difference. On the other hand, if Christians have no power of spiritual influence, they are useless. Look at verse 13b. “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.” In Jesus’ day, the salt was impure, mingled with rocks. So it may lose its saltiness, and it was good for nothing, except that it was used in a path, as we use gravel. If a disciple does not live according to the Sermon on the Mount, men will trample his testimony under their feet. The world has only contempt for an undedicated believer.

**Second**, you are the light of the world. Jesus’ people must also be the light of the world. Look at verse 14a. “You are the light of the world.” Jesus said in John 8:12, “I am the light of the world.” Jesus is the source of light. We are the reflection of his light. Just as the moon reflects the glory of the sun, we shine for Jesus Christ. As the children’s song goes, “This little light of mine/I’m gonna let it shine. This little light of mine/I’m gonna let it shine. This little light of mine/I’m gonna let it shine. Let it shine/Let it shine/Let it shine oh yeah!”

Why is it necessary to do so? Those who do not know God do not know God’s truth. They do not know what to do with their lives. In short, they do not have God’s light in their hearts; so they are only groping in the darkness without true life direction. Jesus’ people must have a clear direction in Jesus and lead others to God. Jesus’ people must lead those who are in darkness to God through one-to-one Bible study. In the past Toronto was a city on a hill. It was a holy city and gave light to the whole world. It sent out many missionaries to the whole world. As a matter of fact, several colleges of the University of Toronto started as seminaries to train spiritual leaders for this nation and the whole world. One of the graduates is James Scarth Gale who played a major role in translating the Bible into Korean. We must pray that God may restore this city and Canada as a city on a hill.

We are salt and light in school and work. This is revealed in our work ethic, pursuit of excellence, honesty, motivation, honoring God first and foremost in the work, and putting people ahead of accomplishments. We can all honor God in our studies and work. We can all work hard to become excellent, not for our own selfish sake, but to develop what God has given to us so that we can be useful to others and a blessing. We can all be mindful of the other people in class or work and put them ahead of ourselves. We are the salt and light on this campus. We do this by teaching the Bible, praying for students, and opening our lives to serve them. Look at verse 16. “In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.” As salt and light, we help people to glorify our Father in heaven.

**Third**, in order to be the salt and light of the world, we have to live radical lives. Many people say, “I did not kill anybody. I never committed adultery. So I am a good person.” Think again. When you look around the world, there are some really bad people in the world. In our heart, we may think, “I may not be the best, but at least I’m not the worst.” God is not calling us “not to be the worst.” He is calling us to something greater so that we can be the salt of the earth and light of the world. Look at verse 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.” The Pharisees and teachers of the law were the standard of righteousness in those days. They walked around in fancy robes, probably carrying around their large Pharisee Bibles. They could quote any verse in the Bible. They prayed and fasted. They gave money to the temple. They knew all the regulations on how to keep the Sabbath, not to mention the regulations for eating, cooking, and working. Jesus says that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and teachers of the law, you cannot enter the kingdom of heaven. You may be thinking, “But Jesus, that’s impossible.”

Jesus’ teachings have two purposes. The first purpose is to make us aware of our sinfulness and come to Jesus for the forgiveness of sins. Jesus’ words should convict you that you are a sinner and cannot live up to God’s standard of righteousness. That’s the point. We cannot live up to this holy standard by our effort alone. We need Jesus’ saving grace. Paul wrote in Romans 3:23-24, “for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and all are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus.” We need to yield to God’s will and receive the help and guidance of the Holy Spirit. Ezekiel 36:25-27 says, “I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your impurities and from all your idols. I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws.” We have to come to Jesus every day so that he may give us a new heart and a new spirit to follow his decrees with his strength. The second purpose of Jesus’ teachings is to help us to be the salt and light of the world by living radical lives, surpassing the righteousness of the Pharisees. The Pharisees believed that they were righteous because they kept all the requirements of the law. They were outwardly righteous, but their hearts were far from God. Their hearts were full of murderous thoughts, lustful desires, revenge, and lying spirit. Let’s look at Jesus’ examples.

Look at verse 21-22. “You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, ‘Do not murder, and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment.’ But I tell you that anyone who is angry with his brother will be subject to judgment. Again, anyone who says to his brother or sister, ‘Raca,’ is answerable to the court. But anyone who says, ‘You fool!’ will be in danger of the fire of hell.” Jesus quoted the Ten Commandments, from Exodus 20:13, “You shall not murder.” You feel pretty good about yourself right now, since you haven’t killed anybody. Hold on. Jesus says that anger toward another person is similar to murder. What? That’s right. According to Jesus, being angry at another person is a serious sin to God. Actually, anger is the attitude and motive behind intentional murder. Remember Cain. When God rejected his offering but accepted his brother Abel’s, Cain became angry and downcast. At that moment, God counseled him to do what is right. But Cain ignored God’s counsel and out of angry jealousy, he killed his brother Abel. The Aramaic word “Raca” means “empty-head” or “good-for-nothing.” In today’s world, it would be like calling someone a “garbage.” I was very disturbed when one missionary called another missionary “garbage.” Of course, she did it out of anger. In our anger, we say without thinking, “Go to hell.” Whenever we curse others verbally or in our hearts, Jesus says that we are in danger of hell’s fire. So, the evil we wish upon others, we are in danger of receiving ourselves. Jesus isn’t just asking us not to commit these acts. He is challenging us to get rid of the root causes of our sin: the anger, hatred, and lust in our hearts. If we don’t, we are just as guilty as the ones who do these things. Look at verses 23-24. “Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother or sister has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to them; then come and offer your gift.” If a person offends another, whether by anger or any other cause, there is no use in his bringing a gift to God. God will not be pleased with it. The offender should first go and make the wrong right. Only then will the gift be acceptable.

Look at verses 46-47. “If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that? And if you greet only your brothers, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that?” If we live naturally like worldly people, we cannot be the salt and light of the world. We will be just water in the ocean. If you say you are a Christian, your life must reflect it. If you say you are a Christian, your life must be different from the world. If your life is indistinguishable from the way pagans live, then you must re-examine the love of God in your heart. Reverend Sohn Yang-Won is remembered as a martyr of love who practiced Jesus’ command, “Love your enemies.” In 1948, his two sons were shot and killed by communist soldiers. Rev. Sohn, seeking to practice the love of Christ, adopted the man who had killed his sons. The young man quickly became a Christian. Within two years he was a student in the Bible Institute of Korea, after which he became a minister. Rev. Sohn wrote these ‘9 things to thank for’ at his sons’ funeral: “My God, I thank You, for having allowed martyrs to be born in the family of sinners such as mine…God, I thank You for giving me a heart of love for repentance of the enemy who murdered my sons and compelling me to adopt him as my own son. My Father God, I thank you for there will now be countless more sons of heaven through the fruit of the martyrdom of my sons.” Do we have the courage to forgive our enemy like he did? Jesus wants us to be the salt of the earth. Salt is amazing because just a little bit gives the whole batch of food so much flavor. Even a small act of love to your enemy or to one who you disagree with can change the entire flavor of that relationship. We are called to shine a light to this world. We can only do that if Jesus by his Sprit continues to work in our hearts.

May God bless you to be the salt and light of the world by living radical lives to the point of loving your enemies. As Jesus said, “Be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.” May God bless you to be perfect sons and daughters of our Father in heaven.