

XV. Matthew in Biblical Perspective
A Royal Manifesto of the Kingdom from the King
The Christian and The Church in the World – Part 2
Matthew 5:13-17
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May 9, 2010 – Morning Sermon

This is our second sermon on this second section of the Sermon on the Mount of being salt and light, our ministry and our calling. We have looked at the beatitudes, who we are in Christ by the Gospel blessing and now we look at who we are to be in Christ and for Christ. Our text for this study is found in Matthew 5:13-17, **13** *“You are the salt of the earth, but if salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything except to be thrown out and trampled under people's feet. 14 “You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. 15 Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. 16 In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is 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.”* The grass withers. The flower fades. This is the Word of God. It abides forever and by His grace and mercy may it be preached for you.

If you were restricted to one word to describe the ministry and calling of the church of Jesus Christ and the promises of God, what would that one word be? I'd like to give you that word but first of all I'd like to give you two thoughts that I think are absolutely crucial. The first thought is there will be no cultural transformation without personal Gospel reformation. Why is this important in this text? This is important for many reasons for me but I'm just going to give you one. I have a very deep concern for where my nation, where I serve the Lord, is headed culturally, socially, and spiritually. I'm not a dooms day person, in fact I'm almost sinfully naïve. I tend to want to be a visionary and optimistic but it seems to me if I step back and with any objectivity that we are on the verge and maybe already in an immoral freefall into depravity that has become socially acceptable. The paganism of immorality and ungodliness not simply there are embraced. Where once was light is now called darkness and what was once called darkness is called light. What is called evil is called good and what is good is called evil.

Where is the answer? It is my opinion this is absolutely crucial. I want the Gospel to go to the world. I'm so grateful to be apart of a church that has a heart for the world but I don't want to be guilty of trying to send out there what I'm not trying to send here. I make no apology hopefully to have the heart of John Knox who when he left Geneva, having been trained in the Gospel ministry, came to his home and said, “Give me Scotland or I die.” So I make no apology for desiring the rule and reign of the grace of the Lord Jesus in my nation. I am also fully aware that the issue is here and every church that preaches the Gospel of Jesus Christ. There is not another place from which God will move to bring an awakening and a transformation to a nation. It is only going to come from the church of Jesus Christ. That's why I believe this text is so crucial and there is no accident that the Holy Spirit had the beatitudes before the call in Matthew 5:13-16, because there will be no cultural transformation without personal Gospel reformation.

Without the Lord doing that Gospel blessed work that we went through in the beatitudes. Gospel blessed, Christ centered, Christ exalting believers who have been Gospel blessed, what are the traits of being Gospel blessed? A Gospel reformation happens in their life from the inside out. There is a poverty of spirit. There is no longer pride and arrogance. Poor in spirit leads to a mourning over sin and the sinfulness of sin. That leads to meekness. When the strength of the Lord is there it is born with grace, humility and meekness in life. Then that meekness is exemplified by a hunger and thirst for righteousness. We who have been given the gift of the perfect righteousness of Christ to clothe us now desire to pursue righteousness for the One who has given us His righteousness. That will show up in one being merciful to those that are around them. That will show up in terms of them desiring to be pure in heart. God, do a work in me from the inside out that's full, free and glorious in Christ so that where sin abounds in my life grace does much more abound. Where will that lead me? That will lead me to being a peacemaker so that people will know the peace of God and the peace with God that comes through the Prince of Peace, the One who has overcome the world. In Him, Jesus Christ, you have peace. That will lead you to persecution.

What will the world do with such people who are transformed? The basic response will be persecution. Just as they did the prophets, you now have the opportunity in the New Covenant to bear what the Old Covenant prophets bore. *Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account (Matthew 5:11)*. If that's the response I get from the world what is it that I'm supposed to do if that happens? It is very simple. Rejoice and be glad. Your response back to the world is not self pity, withdrawal, or isolation but your response and my response is to rejoice and be glad. Now where will that lead me?

That leads me to the second thought. When we have personal Gospel reformation of necessity, cultural transformation will be inevitable. If the beatitudes, those character traits that come through a Gospel relationship by grace with Jesus Christ are in our lives, of necessity, we are salt and light. In Matthew 5:1-12 He is giving you the Gospel blessed character traits of those who have been saved and redeemed by Jesus Christ. Then in Matthew 5:13-16 He's giving you the inevitable ministry and calling of the believer. So what is the one word for the church of Jesus Christ with His Gospel blessed, Christ centered believers? It is 'influence' or the word 'impact' because you'll make a difference. You are salt and light.

He reaches for two metaphors/word pictures that would have been very common. Any one in Israel living in that day around Palestine would understand this. I need salt and I need sunshine. They understood the necessity of both. He is telling us two things here by implication and that is what a world is that is broken, depraved and in sin. We are salt, why? God has us as salt because the world inevitably will deteriorate in corruption because of sin. So you need salt to stop the deterioration and corruption. Why are we light? It is because the world is bound in darkness, despair and as long as you walk in darkness you will always be led to despair, depression, discouragement and being debilitated. So there is deterioration and corruption, darkness and despair and what are we? We are not just saved and let's go to heaven. We have been saved to influence – to bring salt to the corruption, retarded, restrained and to bring light to the darkness to transform it. So He gives the negative first which is salt to restrain and then He gives the positive light to transform.

I want to spend some time with this idea of salt. Let's take a closer look at Matthew 5:13 that says, *You are the salt of the earth, but if salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything except to be thrown out and trampled under people's feet.* I want to give you three thoughts from this verse and then I'll give you one takeaway. Here is Jesus up on this hillside doing this Sermon on the Mount and He has just told them about the work of the Gospel does of grace in the life of a man or woman in the beatitudes and then He says "now here's your calling. When I do this in you that means you are salt and light. You are the salt of the earth."

What came to their mind when He used that illustration to tell them what believers are together? I believe sitting on that hillside very likely two things struck their mind. Number one was the common use of salt. What do you use salt for? You use it for seasoning. What do you use salt for in that day? You use it to preserve things so they don't become corrupt. You salt the meat, you pack things in that in order that it wouldn't be corrupt. You not only have salt that gives taste and preserves but you have salt as an antiseptic. It is put on the wound. It is put there to heal. It is to make that which is diseased to be healed. In other words, Christians, if they are living for the Lord will sting. They'll be an antiseptic. They will be seasoning on the one hand as they bring the joy and zest of the Lord. On the other hand they'll be an antiseptic in that it just isn't fun to sin around a Christian. Their presence tends to restrain, retard and then that means they preserve the culture so that it doesn't go into that death spiral because of its restrain. We are not talking about transformation yet but we are talking about restrain. We are talking about retarding the freefall into depravity of a sinful world that the believer brings to that. So there is the antiseptic part of it to purify, preserve, to be preventive, to heal. That is what salt was doing.

I was trying to think of an illustration for this so I went back to my childhood where we used to ride bikes without helmets, elbow pads, or knee pads. I see people riding their bikes today and they look like a catcher on a little league team. So that meant when I would fall which would be on a regular basis I would get skinned up and then I'd go home to mother. There was something on my mind when I would look at my skinned up arm or knee. I'd say to my mother, "Macrome, macrome, macrome, no dialade, no dialade, no dialade." I'm trying to give you the way I talked back then. For times like this my mother had in the medicine cabinet two jars. I don't know if they still use them today or not because I'm not still falling off bikes. One jar was *Mercurochrome* and the other jar was *Merthiolate*. They were both red and my mother would use them on skinned up places but the *Mercurochrome* didn't burn and I remember that. That was the one I wanted, please. I would say, "No *Merthiolate* momma." Then she would say words I just did not want to hear. She would say, "Oh that's a deep cut." That meant no *Mercurochrome* but *Merthiolate* and I knew that was going to hurt. She would pull that out and dab it on and then I'd say, "Blow momma, blow momma, blow! Please blow because this is stinging!"

When believers are living for Christ and I'm not talking about arrogance or self righteousness, but that meekness, poor in spirit, and humility. When believers are living with that humility, self denial and the courage of divine confidence they are preservatives. They season with zest and joy and they sting as a preservative as they prevent and purify. One may say, "Harry there are not many of us." It doesn't take much salt to change things does it?

Here is another time I got into trouble. I had a student pastorate where Cindy and I learned to give meals for visitors. We learned to get other couples to help us give the meals so that people would get to know other couples in the church. There was this couple from New Jersey who were newly married and she was asked to bring the green beans which was her first time to bring them. I was not aware of all of that because Cindy was doing that planning. I sat down and they passed the green beans to me. I put some on my plate, took a bite and then said, "Oh honey, somebody forgot to cook these things." I found out that in New Jersey they didn't cook green beans the way we did. I had never had green beans that were crunchy before in my life. When my grandmother and momma made green beans that was an all day affair. They always had this big pot, with salt and onions and it cooked and cooked. When you put those green beans in your mouth you didn't have to chew because they just slid right down your throat. That lady broke into tears after I said that and I said, "They're good, they're good, they're just a little crunchy and I'm not used to that. I'm sorry." But have you even noticed there is not much salt in that big pot of green beans and it affects the whole pot and all that is in it.

Have you ever noticed that you never see the salt doing its job? It just does it. It does it in secret. It just kind of gradually gets it done. You are the salt of the earth. You bring seasoning and zest and that's what they are thinking when Jesus said that. You are a purifying agent. You are a preventative agent. You kind of sting because of the confrontation of sin collide with the way you live in humility yet with courage. You live differently, you talk differently. You look at your marriage differently, you look at parenting differently. Because of that there begins to be a preservation in society and the culture. Something begins to be restrained that normally would send it into a freefall. It's not done because we made some big announcement. We just live. It doesn't mean we don't speak against oppression, racism, and all that but we just live differently. It's just kind of happening inside, secretly, consistently as we live that way in our office, neighborhood and team. That's what they are thinking.

They are also thinking of the sacred use. There is a synagogue there at Capernaum and they would have been educated in the Old Testament. There were three things where salt was very highly identified and leveraged in the Old Testament. One is in Ezekiel 16:4 when a newborn baby was born Ezekiel refers to the practice of the people. They would cleanse the newborn with running water and with salt. To rub the baby with salt was hygienic and it would purify them and prevent diseases upon them.

The second thing is in Leviticus 2:13, 14 where I wish I had never left my New American Standard (NASV) Bible. Here is the NASV of Leviticus 2:13-15a; **13** *'Every grain offering of yours, moreover, you shall season with salt, so that the salt of the covenant of your God shall not be lacking from your grain offering ; with all your offerings you shall offer salt. 14* *'Also if you bring a grain offering of early ripened things to the LORD, you shall bring fresh heads of grain roasted in the fire, **grits** of new growth, for the grain offering of your early ripened things. 15* *'You shall then put oil on it...* The Lord loves grits! The Lord knows how to prepare grits because He says, "Put oil on it" and He's probably referring to butter. He says, "You shall mix it with salt in order to bring holy and sacred to the Lord." In fact, the Old Covenant was called the Old Covenant of the Salt. It was different. God had sanctified it.

The third time is during the time of King Abimelech in Judges 9:45 when he conquered Shechem. King Abimelech burned Shechem to the ground and after he did that he covered it with salt so that it could no longer bear fruit for anything. In other words he covered it with salt to restrain and retard its ability to grow up anything. So believers cover with salt so that sin and the weeds of sinfulness can't grow up. That would have been in their mind when they were hearing that. So this is the sacred use and the common use.

Here is a second thing. When He uttered these words, "You are the salt of the earth" they had a startling impact upon the people that were there. I went to East Carolina and when I was in East Carolina Marshall had come to play football against us and when Marshall was heading back they had this plane crash. There was a movie that was made about that. Of course you all know how the students got together, rallied in the next year and their cry was, "We are Marshall." I started to get you all to do that and say, "We are the salt of the earth" but I wasn't sure you all would go for that. Perhaps we're too Presbyterian for that one.

I want to tell you how it's written so that if you were to say "You are the salt of the earth" this is how it would be said. You would not say "You are the SALT of the earth" with the emphasis on salt and you wouldn't say "You ARE the salt of the earth" with the emphasis on are. You would have said "YOU are the salt of the earth." The emphasis is on you in the original but let me tell you how Jesus would have said it on a hillside in Alabama – "YA' LL are the salt of the earth" or perhaps He would have said "ALL YA' LL are the salt of the earth." The you is plural. You have to have a personal Gospel reformation but you don't privatize your faith in Christ. You join with God's people and ya'll are the salt of the earth. That is we as the church of Jesus Christ live together with one heart, one voice, one mind and one soul and God then uses us when He scatters us out there to be the salt of the earth.

So here He is saying to these disciples, these rag tag fishermen, merchants, tax collectors, the crowd, "YA' LL are..." He doesn't say, "Ya'll go do this." He doesn't say "Ya'll go be this." He's saying, "You people whom the Gospel has transformed, you who are poor in spirit, you who are meek, you who mourn over sin, you who hunger and thirst for righteousness, you who are pure in heart, you who are peacemakers, you who are persecuted and respond, rejoice and be glad. You are, not you become, the salt of the earth."

Notice how He says, "You are THE salt of the earth." God doesn't have another plan. God doesn't have another institution. It is the gathered church, ya'll together, that becomes that instrument that He uses to bring the salt to the earth. The answer isn't coming from Los Angeles or New York or Washington DC. The answer is coming from the church of Jesus Christ who sends people who are salt and light to New York, to the fine arts, to the popular arts, to the education societies and institutions. It is the church of Jesus Christ who equips the people who are Gospel reformed and reformation takes place in their life. Then they go out into the world and when they go they bring salt and light there. The salt and light is not coming from there, it's to go there from the church of Jesus Christ. You are THE salt. There is not another institution.

Do you understand what I am saying? When you see the freefall of the world in our culture that should not amaze you because that's what sin does whenever it's not restrained. If it is in a freefall that means we have either lost our saltiness or we have

isolated our self from the world. That's why it's doing it. So we don't immediately point the finger out there. We turn the eyes of God's grace to look at our self because we are the ones God uses to restrain that. If it's not restrained that should not amaze us from them but it should grieve us for us. Have we lost our saltiness? Have we disengaged? You are THE salt - sodium chloride, stable compound, prevents, restrains, seasons, stings, antiseptic - of the earth.

Now look at that last phrase. I'm not saying this irreverently. This statement is absurdly visionary. Here is this little group of timid followers right on a hillside at the beginning of Jesus' ministry, undisciplined, unlearned, uneducated in many ways, fishermen, good business men, farmers, tax collectors, and He says, "You are the salt of the EARTH, the whole earth! I am going to shake the world with you. I'm going to use you to restrain sin from the rising to the setting of the sun." What an unbelievable visionary statement on the side of that hill on the Sea of Galilee! You are the salt of the EARTH!

He then gives a warning. Salt will be salt unless it loses its saltiness. Jesus is highly criticized by the critics when they read this because they will say "It's obvious that Jesus doesn't understand science because science tells us that salt is a stable compound and it can't reduce itself so it can't lose its saltiness." Jesus is fully aware of that but it does lose its saltiness, not by salt becoming anything less than salt, when it's adulterated and contaminated with something else. That's what Jesus is telling us. So He is warning us explicitly not to be contaminated by adulteration. Don't be contaminated by believing something other than the truth of God's Word. Don't be conformed to this world but be transformed. Be in the world but not of the world. I don't want you out of the world in the name of purity I want you in the world but I don't want you to have the world in you because that contaminates you. If that contaminates you then you have lost your saltiness and then you're thrown out. When Jesus says, thrown out or being trampled under people's feet down the road, the road was the garbage dump. Pardon the clarity here, but it's the place they emptied the bed pan in the morning. It's the place they threw the trash out to. Then they would pray for rain to wash it all down, out the gate that would be down hill into a valley or they would shovel it out. That's why you would wash feet when people came to your house because of what they had to walk in, a garbage dump, to get there.

That's David He's talking about. Do you remember King David? He walked with the Lord and had a heart for the Lord and then all of a sudden went out on a porch and let his eyes wander where they ought not to be. He then committed adultery and then by conspiracy he had a man murdered. Then God brought him back to repentance. So he got right with God, praise the Lord but his usefulness was no longer. He not only was useless as a King after that but he became a liability to God's people after that. How about Lot? Remember Lot? Lot went down to Sodom and Gomorrah. He pitched his tent, then pitched his tent near Sodom and Gomorrah. Then the next time we read he has a house in Sodom and Gomorrah. Next he is sitting at the gates of Sodom and Gomorrah so when he spoke up for the Lord he had lost his saltiness and all they did was laugh at him. They ridiculed him because he pitched his tent and lived not among the world but with the world in him. Lot was a believer because the Bible tells us Lot's righteous soul was vexed but he had lost his saltiness.

I don't want to be that. I don't want us to be that as a Christian and I don't want us to be that as a church. I don't want us to be contaminated but adulteration by bringing in false teaching, false heresies or errors, and I don't want to be that because we begin to accommodate the world's standards of living.

Implicitly there is another warning. Salt is no good as long as it's in the salt shaker. I love Rebecca Manley Pippert's book Out of the Salt Shaker. I read it on an airplane one day and couldn't put it down. She makes the point, you can be salty with all the saltiness but if you stay in the salt shaker don't segregate yourself or contaminate yourself by adulteration and don't be guilty of containment by isolation. Get out there. I know we're well meaning but personally I'm not moved by our attempts to write plays, do arts, and write books back and forth to each other making an association and we give ourselves Christian awards. I want us in the popular arts. I want us in the fine arts. I want us in education. I want us in politics. I want us everywhere. I want the church to be salt and light and sending the salt out. We don't need to give each other awards. We need to get out there and get in the game. We need to be out there in the entertainment world, out there in the business world, out there in the education world and bringing salt and light there, not in the salt shaker congratulating ourselves back and forth. That's where we need to be.

Here is the takeaway. I believe what Jesus is teaching us in this is very simple. It is the Christian and the Christian church are God's appointed antiseptic to restrain the depravity of sin in the world, but to do so we must not become contaminated in what we believe and how we live or isolated by segregating ourselves for our comfort level. Say 'yes' to God's call today. We're going to talk about light because that's what transforms. Salt restrains but we have to start here. We don't start with the world in neutral. We start with a world that's in darkness and corruption so we need to be salt. Say 'yes' to God's calling. God, please use me on my athletic team, in my classroom, in my neighborhood, at my office, and may my mouth and deportment restrain sin.

I'm not talking about self righteousness where someone says something like, "I'm a Christian, how dare you say something like that around me." Please remember the beatitudes. Please remember the poor in spirit, meek, pure in heart etc. With that spirit of humility and that confidence and courage in the Lord, the way we speak and live, may they see no longer the divorce rate in the church in Alabama higher than the divorce rate in the state. I know there's a place for Biblical divorce, I'm not saying that but may people see the power of the Gospel transforming and our marriages made whole. May people when they see us see a people that don't dress for the eyes of others but they dress for the Lord. I'm not talking about you dressing the way they dressed 40 years ago either just because you're a Christian. Dress with the style but we're always modest. We are always not showing off a body but we dress with respect. When we go to the closet it's not what will make people stop and look at me but we dress for the Lover of our soul. God will use that. The humor of the world is not ours but let no unwholesome word proceed from your mouth but always such a word that is good for edification according to the need of the moment that may give grace to those who hear us (Ephesians 4:29).

Colossians 4:6 says *Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer each person.* Say 'yes' to God's call to be salt. What will the world do? The world will probably persecute you but you just rejoice and be glad. Walk carefully in the Lord and watch what the Lord does with you and

through you wherever you go as you are a preventive, a preserver. There are not many of us but remember it didn't take much salt. I'm not having an impact. You would be amazed at the impact you are having secretly that salt does that you don't know about yet.

His name was Woodrow Wilson and he would become a president of the United States. Before he became president of the United States he was just Woodrow Wilson and he went into a barber shop one day to get his hair cut. While he was in there it was a typical barber shop talk. Woodrow Wilson records this event in his memoirs. There was barber shop humor and language going on with things a little bit over the edge. Then this rather large man walks in and sits in a chair next to someone and begins to talk. As he is talking he starts talking about Jesus. He gets into a barber shop chair and begins to ask people questions very joyful, gregarious, kind, generous and sharing but not condemning at all about the way things were going on. He had just a very positive impact. Woodrow Wilson said the whole atmosphere of the barber shop changed. Wilson thought he was in an evangelistic meeting. The man got up, started to leave and Woodrow Wilson shook his hand and said, "Hi I'm Woodrow Wilson and you are?" The man said, "I'm D.L. Moody." Wilson purposely stayed behind at the barber shop and it was amazing the difference in the atmosphere at the barber shop before Moody came in and after he left.

Be salt of the earth wherever you go. Don't lose your saltiness. Say 'no' to contamination and containment. I believe the church is being perpetually blackmailed today. The world is telling us "You're losing impact and influence. If you want to have impact and influence change what you believe a little bit so we can make it acceptable. Kind of wipe out those miracles and wipe out that doctrine of hell." So we hear that and out comes these silly things like a prosperity gospel, a health and wealth gospel and the world says if you'll live more like us then maybe we'll show up and be apart of you and maybe we'll listen to your gospel message. Don't fall for it. The church today, I believe, in America is perpetually being blackmailed. They think that what will win the world is how much we're like them and how much we're acceptable to them.

I was there. I was an ungodly, violent, immoral, profane man and I began to search. It led me to a wife eventually. It led me to a church and I wasn't looking for people like me that had religion. I was looking for people that were different than me with truth and love. We are not the candy of the world. We are the salt of the world.

Finally, how can I connect back to this Jesus because I want to go back to that hillside? I want to leave with one verse in Mark 9:50 which says, *Salt is good, but if the salt has lost its saltiness, how will you make it salty again?* (answer) *Have salt in yourselves, and be at peace with one another.* Lord, I have lost my saltiness. He says, "Don't be contaminated. Don't be isolated. If you want to be salt in the world have salt in you." What's that? That is you being connected all the way back to that hillside at the Sea of Galilee when that Sermon on the Mount was preached which is Jesus in you. So you come to Him afresh and anew so that your life is hid in Christ and Christ is hid in you. Then God begins to do something in you and through you and you are the salt of the earth. We are the first Bible that people of the world read. Will they read God's Word after they have read us? YOU are the salt of the earth. Let's pray.

Prayer:

Father, thank You for the time we could be together in Your Word. God, please hear my prayer. First of all, dear Savior, forgive me whenever I've been contaminated by the pressure of the world. I want to be connected to the world but not conformed to it. I want to be accepting of others but not affirming of sin. Father, please work in my life that I might walk in humble difference in this world, that I might be in the world but not of the world. Father, hear my prayer for us here today. You may be reading this today and you're first step is to come to Christ who will do that Gospel transformation. Take step one and say, "Jesus I come." You may be reading this and say, "I've already committed my life to Jesus" then perhaps you and I need to come back to Christ afresh and anew. Jesus salt me, put the salt in me that I might be salt in the earth for You. Then Father, please lead us and don't let us isolate ourselves but lead us in every sphere of society and use us to restrain sin and set the table that the light of the world might transform men and women. God, I pray this today, in the Name of Jesus, praise His Name, in Whom are all blessings, Amen.