

Title: Taste and See
Text: Matthew 5.13-16
Theme: The calling of a Christian
Series: Matthew #21
Prop Stmt: The world tastes and sees Christ and his gospel by the essence of our lives.

Read Text:

The story of the USA ‘Miracle on Ice’ hockey team in the 1980 Olympics is one of the most endearing accounts in all of sports history. No one gave this team a prayer to do anything much less make it into the medal round and defeat the Russians for the gold. No one saw this coming. I still remember Al Michael’s screaming into the microphone, “*Do you believe in miracles?*” as the seconds winded down to end the game.

That event captures so much of the ethos of the Bible. Do you know what I mean by that? Ethos means sentiment, or character. It is a defining aspect, in this case of the kingdom of Christ. When you look at the people that God chooses to call to himself and redeem from sin and use for his purposes, we have to admit, that we do not look like much. On top of that Jesus says that the people in his kingdom are humble, grieving over their sin, meek, hungering and thirsting for righteousness, merciful, pure in heart, peacemaking and persecuted, we think, “Well, this won’t amount to anything.” People like this will get run over in this world. And you are right. They will. But, when they get run over, even crucified, the testimony of their lives will influence others in such a way that will actually change the world. That sounds crazy. But Jesus believed it and taught it and lived it. And we are the evidence that he was right. Why shouldn’t we believe him?

Look at what Jesus is doing here. Let me show you what is coming. He says:

- “This is what my people are.” (5.1-9)
- “This is how the world will react.” (5.10-12)
- “This is how you influence the world in a general sense.” (5.13-16)
- “This is how you influence the world in a specific sense.” (5.17-the end)

Your life is to taste like Jesus and illuminate Jesus. You do that when your understanding and pursuit of righteousness, is different than this world. You do this when you do not react in anger like your world does, or live dominated by lust, like our world. This text (5.27-30) is going to be addressed in a few weeks. But, even now, some of you need to really take this question to heart. “Do you love pornography so much that you are willing to spend eternity in hell for it?” I do not know how else to understand what Jesus is saying here. When our lives are characterized by purity, we are hindering the decay. We are breathing out an aroma of life. We are illuminating Christ. We are salt and light when our marriages are different, when our commitments, that is our word is our bond, when we do not seek retaliation as the world would, but we respond to hatred and lies with love and truth. That is salt and light. Salt and light is loving your enemies and giving to the needy and forgiving others. Salt and light is not laying up treasures on earth but investing in the kingdom of Jesus. It is not being anxious, or being judgmental and condemning of others. It is treating others as you would like to be treated. We are to live

in such a way, that the world can taste and see Jesus in us. In order for this to happen, we must recognize that...

1. **We are fundamentally different than the world.** (what you are)

Jesus is making it clear that there are two categories. He is defining terms. He is making a distinction and drawing lines that divide people into two groups. Group #1 is made up of people he calls salt. Those are his disciples. Group #2 is the rest of the people of the earth. Group #1 is also known as the light. While again, group #2 is the rest of the people of the world. Fundamentally, this means that not everyone follows Jesus. This means that, no matter what nice little poem or story the funeral director may say at the end of a service alleging that everyone goes to heaven after they die and that we will see them again; Jesus is saying that this is not the case. The earth is decaying and the world is dark. We are called to do something about it.

What Jesus is saying here, is radically different than what his audience expected him to say. They understood that they were different than the rest of the world. They were Jews. That is the story of the Old Testament. Now, at this point, most of them, if not all of them, thought they were different because they were better, which is a concept that Jesus is going to blow up. But, the Old Testament is all about separation and distinction. So, here is the big idea, right here. My people are different than the world, BUT, my people are not called to stay away from the people in the world, but to affect them, without losing their identity.

a. **The earth is decaying and we are salt.**

There are about 11 different uses that salt has. Even in the Bible we see that it was added to sacrifices as a sign of purity, used to make a land desolate, used as a sign of loyalty, used to clean newborn babies and associated with wisdom. Did Jesus have all of these in mind when he said, “You are the salt of the earth.” I doubt it. Jesus used an example from his culture that his audience would identify with. The two main uses of salt were that of a preservative for meat and as a taste enhancer for food. Jesus is telling his disciples that their lives were to influence the earth in such a way that they will help slow down the decay of society. They are to be a preservative of the contamination that comes from sin. We are the presence of life in the midst of death. We are the fresh aroma of life in the midst of the putrid, and gagging smell of decay.

Jesus is telling his disciples that they are a distinct community that is different than the world. He is preparing them to understand what the church is all about. The church is THE community of the people of God, distinct from the people of the world. The people of the church, the community of Christ, are in the world, touch the world, influences the world, but is not OF the world. The effectiveness of our relationship with the world depends on our distinctiveness from the world.

b. **The world is in darkness and we are light.**

These opening statements have a sense of urgency because of the exclusive nature of them. Jesus is saying you are the salt of the earth, implying that there is no other hope to hinder this world from heading directly into total ruin. The same thing is true about this statement. You are the light of the world. If we do not shine, there is no light. How should we understand this in relation to Matthew 5.3? Here is a good rule of thumb. When you are tempted to stand up and speak, you probably ought to sit down and listen. When you are tempted to stay in the background and be quiet, you probably ought to stand up and speak. In essence, Jesus is saying to be what you are. Don't hold back. What are you afraid of? What are you waiting on?

c. **Our distinctiveness points to their hope.**

When Jesus talks about salt, he says that if the salt does not retain its saltiness, then the world loses its hope. Even though the world will be irritated with the followers of and the message of Christ, they need it. There is no impact without distinction. Therefore, we gladly own the distinction and accept and expect the ridicule that will come with it. But know this. Some of the pushback that you receive from others is there way of seeing if you are for real. Our world has witnessed plenty of cheap and bad religion, and I don't just mean the blue jeans. Anyone looking for a reason not to trust Christ can find plenty of hypocrites to use as an excuse. But what about the person who is looking for a reason to believe? What about the person who realizes that he is empty? What hope is there for him, if everyone around him lives for the same thing that he does? You are called to shine. You are called to be humble, to treat sin as a serious issue, to be meek, to hunger and thirst for righteousness, to be merciful, to be pure in heart, to be a peacemaker and to have joy even in persecution.

Richard Wurmbrand was a pastor who was arrested by both the Nazi's and then the communists in his native land of Romania. His crime, was preaching the gospel. He knew this text. And he knew that he was called to be salt and light by rejoicing even in his persecution. So, Richard made a deal with the guards. He told them that he gets to tell them about Jesus and they get to beat him. You want faith like that? You will, when you need to, you will. One day, Richard was discouraged when these words came again to mind, "rejoice and be glad...for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you." So, Richard stood up in his cell and began to dance and sing and clap his hands. The guards thought he lost it and felt sorry for him and that day gave him bread and extra rations. He fought for joy in the midst of trial and that fighting for joy demonstrated a profound distinction that gave those guards hope.

2. **Our mission is to people who are different than us.** (what you do)

The idea of a Jew being a missionary; that is loving and demonstrating concern for anyone other than another Jew was completely foreign. Many of you are familiar enough with these words but when Jesus said them, it was another stunning statement. The Jews did not have dealings with non-Jews. Now Jesus is saying that you are the salt of the earth and the light of the world. You are called to go to people who are different than you.

That is not easy and it was not easy for the disciples either. When you read the story of the early days of the church, you know that Jesus told them to start in Jerusalem then go to Judea, Samaria and then to the rest of the world. They did ok with the Jerusalem part, and were finally getting the ministry organized and effective when persecution broke out. The result was that the early believers were scattered. Jesus was shaking the salt-shaker. He doesn't want us sitting inside the salt-shaker admiring how white we all look. (I don't mean that in a racial sense, though that can certainly be an application.) He wants us to have an influence on people who are not like us. By the way, I think one of the evidences of the authenticity of Christianity is the fact that with a little prodding, this is what the early church did. They went to their world with the gospel.

a. **There is no impact without contact.**

During the life of Christ, there were three main religious groups in Israel: 1) Pharisees 2) Sadducees and 3) (anyone know?) the Essenes. They called themselves 'the sons of light.' The reason why you know so little about them is because they were the ones who literally lived in isolation from everyone else. They considered themselves to be the true followers of God and had to avoid contact with everyone else lest they be contaminated. They were like 1st century monks, before it was trendy to be monkish. Jesus is blowing up the idea of a monastic life. You are not on this earth to run away and hide. You are salt! And salt has no affect on its surroundings if it is not in contact with its surroundings. The purpose of salt is to have a beneficial influence on its environment, but if the salt never comes into contact with the meat or the food, then nothing has changed. If you are not in strategic and meaningful contact with people who are decaying (lost) then you are wasting your life.

This has been a serious problem for the church for centuries and continues to be a serious issue. We tend to react to worldliness with isolation and we react to isolation with worldliness. Jesus is warning about both extremes. They are both wrong. They are both dangerous. They are both disastrous. Some of you have been exposed to the stifling affects of isolation. Isolation from the world always leads to pride, which destroys our sense of mourning over sin. We do not mourn over sin because we are removed from it (at least we think), we are above it and different from it. And once we begin to think that we are fundamentally better because we are in isolation from the world, then the desire for meekness and the need to hunger and thirst for righteousness is blown up. We do not need to long after God when we are already "better than our world." We lose motivation to be merciful, and what is particularly dangerous is that we think purity is keeping the code of isolation. As long as we do not have any non-Christian friends or non-Christian influences, then we are pure. But isolating ourselves from our world does not give us pure hearts. We are born with impure hearts, but we do not see our need of purity when we are convinced that because we go to a Christian school, or are home-schooled, or only have Christian friends at a Christian college and only do Christian things with Christian people, then we must be fine. But, what are you doing about the fact that you live surrounded by people who are going to die and go to hell unless they know about and trust Christ? Does the lost-ness of people matter to you? Does the smell of decay and

sounds of dying have any impact on you, or do you roll up your windows and put your Christian music and sermons on your ear buds and ignore them?

b. There is no influence without clarity.

That is why we are called “the light of the world.” Light makes things clear. Part of our mission is to clarify things and define things for people. Now, obviously that is controversial. It doesn’t matter. When you clarify issues as God does, you immediately influence a situation.

You know what I mean. What happens when someone at work asks your opinion about a moral or social issue? If you give the typical, generic, gray, post-modern, you know, everyone has a right to their own opinion, who are we to judge sort of response, you are as irrelevant to the conversation as the dust in the air. But, open your mouth and say, “It is a sin that will incur the judgment of God” or something like that, and watch people have strokes! What happened? You clarified the issue for some people. And with that clarity comes influence. Of course, with that clarity also comes rejection. And that is not pleasant. However...

3. If we lose sight of our mission, we will be useless. (13) (if we fail)

a. Lose our identity.

What is salt that has lost its saltiness? Now, plenty of people have pointed out that salt cannot technically lose its saltiness since it is a stable compound. Jesus is not giving a science lecture here. He is simply making a point that these people would understand. You see, everyone around Jesus knew about the Dead Sea. The Dead Sea was surrounded by salt marshes. Much of the salt that was harvested from this region contained many impurities and was contaminated by the soil to the degree that it was not good for anything. It was so compromised that it could not preserve food and hinder decay and you certainly were not going to use it on your food. All that you could do was throw it into the street, which is where many people threw all sorts of things that they were getting rid of (even human waste). Jesus is pointing out the obvious. If the people of God (the church) become polluted by the world, then they will lose their identity as salt and lose their effectiveness to affect change.

b. Lose our purpose.

Some of you are miserable because you think your purpose is to be served, to be noticed, to be respected, to be successful, to be obeyed – no matter what, to be in charge, to have comfort, to have an unbothered life where you have no worries, no debts, no demands and no problems. When something happens that does not fit into your expectations – you can’t believe it. “I just got done dealing with this, and now I have another problem that I have to attend to!” You say that like it surprises you. You say that as if you were given an exemption from difficulty. What planet do you think you are on? Seriously, the most miserable people I know are those who fail to live according to their purpose. They want

to retreat. They want to hide. But it is not who we are. And if you try to live that way, you will feel lost because you will be denying your very reason for existence.

4. **If we live our mission, we point to God.** (16)

a. **Light reveals.**

Your life, as a follower of Christ is to help reveal truth to others. You are to bring illumination to a dark world. This does not simply mean by being nice. Light reveals what has been hidden in the darkness. When lights shines in darkness, things that are hidden become revealed and that usually becomes a big problem As the sermon that Jesus preached points out, you are called to live fundamentally different than your world. When you live differently your life reveals what is hidden in others. This means that someone will most likely want to punch your lights out. But that is what happens when you live as a follower of Christ. But, we need to remind ourselves that we cannot will ourselves to live as Christ is calling us to. We cannot manage anger and lust. You cannot make promises and keep your word, or respond with grace when you are sinned against. You do not have it in you. You need Christ in you. And that is point of this sermon that we will get to next week. But, when you have Christ. When Christ lives through you, your life reveals him in such a way that it causes other people to take notice.

b. **Light attracts.**

It attracts more than moths and bugs. It attracts attention. I know that we live in a post-modern society. I know that our culture has given up on the concept of absolute truth and therefore an objective basis for right and wrong, good and bad, righteousness and evil. I know that we appear to be so outdated. But, truth is not outdated. Do you see the opportunity before us? Do you realize the opportunity that God has served to us? People do not believe in truth. That means that people have no convictions. We live surrounded by people who have nothing to fight for, nothing to die for, which means that they have nothing to live for. When you live on the basis of conviction, you are the light that has no competition, and you will attract attention from a very long ways away. (India – story)

c. **Light shows the way.**

We not only reveal the problem, we get to reveal the solution. We get to point people to Christ. Because the source of the light is not us. We are the light of the world to the extent that we reflect

It was September 23, 1986. Kelly (Captain Kelly) Castleberry was on a training exercise in his F-4 Phantom Marine Corps fighter jet over the Atlantic Ocean just off the coast of South Carolina, when his F-4 crashed into another F-4 during a dog-fight maneuver. Kelly was never seen again. That day, a little boy lost his dad. Kelly had a son named Grant. Grant needed a dad to teach him how to navigate the perils of growing up and how to be a man, how to work hard, how to provide for and protect his family, how to love his wife and most importantly, how to follow Christ.

When Grant was a little older, his mom gave him a picture of his dad along with other guys in his squadron. It was taken at a beach house on the night when many of the young pilots received their “call-signs.” No wives or family members were allowed to attend for reasons that soon became clear. Someone invited strippers as entertainment. Kelly told his wife about this later on. She asked him what he did. He told her that he stayed in the corner of the house with his hand over his eyes. A few months after the crash, another pilot in the squadron gave Kelly’s wife a picture from the beach house that night. Sure enough, Kelly was sitting in the corner of the room with his hand over his eyes. The other pilot told her that deep down everyone respected Kelly for it, but that no one had the guts to follow him. This was the picture that Grant’s mom framed for him and put it in his room as a reminder of the responsibility that he had as a man to walk in purity.

Today, Grant is a husband, a father of two girls and a minister of the gospel. His father may have died when Grant was only three, but the salt and light of his life will go on forever.

Let your light shine. It will never be wasted – never.

Small Group Questions from June 23, 2013

Read Text: Matthew 5.13-16

1. Discuss your overall reaction to the message from Sunday. Did anything “stick with you” throughout this past week? Why or why not?
2. Bob mentioned this weekend that how we live can illuminate what Christ is like? What does this mean? How can we illuminate Christ? Think of some specific ways you can illuminate Christ in your workplace, your home, your neighborhood. Discuss those ideas together and make a plan to do that.
 - a. **Parents:** It is important to teach your kids about the differences between the ways Christians live and the ways non-Christians live. But it is more important to teach them that we live differently not because we are better or are trying to earn God’s favor, but because we are expressing gratitude and allegiance to King Jesus. Ask your kids to think of some ways they can show they are thankful for all that God gives to them. Help them plan to do one thing this week that clearly demonstrates that thankfulness.

3. Bob mentioned that as “salt” Christians are supposed to “help slow down the decay of society.” How can we help slow down the “decay of society?” What practical things have Christians throughout history done? What can we do today? There is a social aspect to this, but it is more than that. How does the gospel connect to this “slowing the decay” activity?
4. Read John 17:15-16. We summarize these verses often as saying “Christians are to be in the world but not of the world.” What’s the difference? Bob said that our “distinctiveness” points non-Christians towards hope. Christians should not be “weird” simply for the sake of being different. Sometimes our Christians subculture can get in the way of our evangelism. Do you agree with that statement or not? Discuss your reactions. How can our Christian distinctiveness point others to hope?
 - a. **Parents:** Help your kids see and understand what positive examples of Christian uniqueness looks like. Take time to talk to them about the stories of Christians from history like Martin Luther, William Wilberforce, or Dietrich Bonhoeffer. Ask them to draw a picture about one such person’s story as you talk to them about it. If they are old enough, assign them to research one of these people (or another) from church history.
5. Bob mentioned this weekend that our mission is to people who are not like us. What does this mean? It is crucial that Christians know non-Christians! Who has God put in your life that you are sharing, or can be sharing, the gospel with? Bob mentioned that throughout history the church has had two extreme failures: we react to worldliness with isolation, and we react to isolation with worldliness. What’s wrong with both of these positions? How can we as a church fight against these failures? How can you as an individual resist both isolation and worldliness?
6. Bob stated plainly that, according to verse 13, if we lose sight of our mission we will become useless. What does this mean? Losing sight of the mission can be very subtle. How can we lose sight of the mission God has given us? How does being part of a community of healthy believers help us to stay on track? Spend some time tonight praying together for the mission of the church.