

Salt, Light and Changed Hearts

Matthew 5:13-16

The Beatitudes tell us what our *character* should be. Jesus' metaphors of salt and light tells us what our *influence* should be.

The State of the World

Salt has a bad press, but in Jesus' day it was used as a preservative. If Jesus says we are the salt of the earth it means that our societies and the lives of individuals are at risk of going bad. His metaphor of light tells us that the world is dark when it comes to truth. If that's the diagnosis, what's Jesus' solution?

Salt and Light

If you're a follower of Jesus, you're part of the solution. You're to slow the decay and bring light to the darkness. How?

1. By living the beatitudes – not in a Christian ghetto, but in the world.
2. By living counter-culturally. No one builds cities on top of hills. A city on a hill stands out: you can see it from miles around, but also because it's unusual. We will be light in the dark world when we live counter-culturally: when we see and use money, sex and power differently from the world. Living that counter-cultural life spreads the light and it helps delay the rot.
3. By speaking the truth. Sometimes light needs to be put into words. Only the gospel can change people's hearts and that needs to be spoken. Sometimes it also means speaking out *against* things. Salt was an antiseptic. Antiseptics sting – and sometimes speaking the truth in love will sting. We are to do it, not because we hate the world, but because we love it.

Opposition and Attraction

Jesus takes it for granted that those who live as salt and light will be opposed. But you can be opposed for reasons other than for Jesus' sake. Being salt and light is caring so much about the state of the world that you're prepared to risk losing the respect of others, because you love those who are mangled by sin.

But that love comes at a cost, and we can withdraw from that cost and hide our lights. Or we can withdraw from a broken world for fear of being contaminated. Or we can think that we can only attract the world by becoming more like them. Jesus warns against all these. Instead there is a saltiness and a light that is intensely attractive. When we live like that we will face opposition but we will also see people responding to the gospel.

How can we combine a deep love for the world with the courage to point out what is wrong?

Christ, the changer of hearts

Christ came to take our shame away at the cross. The cross tells us we are no better than anyone else. It kills self-righteousness. That means you can oppose sin as one deeply humbled by your own need of salt and light. But you also know that Christ took your shame for you, and that changes how you see any shame or cost you might experience because of him. And in knowing the joy, forgiveness and hope that Christ brings, you know you have the light the world needs. You can be the light of the world when you know that Christ, *the* light of the world, has shone in your heart.