

## **“Let Your Light Shine”**

February 9, 2014

Matthew 5:13-20

New International Version (NIV)

### ***Salt and Light***

<sup>13</sup> *“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.*

<sup>14</sup> *“You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden. <sup>15</sup> 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. <sup>16</sup> In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.*

### ***The Fulfillment of the Law***

<sup>17</sup> *“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.*

<sup>18</sup> *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. <sup>19</sup> 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. <sup>20</sup> 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.*

You know how as a kid our parents would lay down the law, and then we would have all the additional parts to make sure we kept to it. Like bedtimes. I know my mother would say, bedtime is at 9:00pm. That means to make sure I would be asleep by 9:00 I would actually go up to get ready for bed at about 8:00, so I could do all my bedtime routine and then lights out would be at 8:45 so that I could officially be in bed and asleep by 9:00pm. While this was my own family bedtime deal I am sure many of us can think of similar rules or laws that we have had to follow. It was those sort of laws that helped the Jewish people to better live out the laws of Moses. They had many additional laws and practices so that they could not even come close to breaking the original laws. They often however in this attempt to not break the law made things so complicated and crazy that it was hard to maintain. We often hear Jesus talking about those self-righteous Pharisees. The Pharisees were meticulous keepers of the law and in doing so they were so wrapped up in keeping the little laws that they tended to forget the big picture of why the laws were there in the first place.

The bigger Picture is what Jesus continually likes to remind us of in the scriptures. Today’s scripture follows the Sermon on the Mount, the Beatitudes, and is used to help further illuminate what Jesus is teaching his Disciples. As we read through scriptures and listen to the many teachings of Jesus we often here multiple examples such as what we have heard in today’s scripture as Jesus is trying to make a point to either the crowd, or to his disciples, and equivocally to us as the readers of scripture.

We often throughout Christian history have eisegeted and put our own meanings onto what the scripture says, and means for us as the church and even as individuals. As Disciples our foundation is built on learning and interpreting the scriptures for ourselves so that we can make educated decisions about our personal beliefs. We are comfortable also acknowledging that not every person, will come to the same conclusions as they exegete and try to find meaning in scriptures that are still applicable for today. Denominationally we do not like to take any sort of information blindly but rather appreciate learning and hearing more, and then thinking about it on our own. I sometimes like to think that if Jesus had a choice; he would have been a Disciple too, continually finding meaning in the scriptures.

In finding the evolutionary meaning Jesus today gives us two examples, salt, and light. These two examples talk about Us as the salt of the earth, and us as the light of the world. I know one of my favorite songs growing up was “this little light of mine, I’m gonna let it shine.” The verses go on to talk about not putting my light under a bushel. It was not until I was

older that I finally understood that these two examples mean the same thing. If I let my light get wrapped up in all the little things, then I will not be able to live the life I was called to live, the life that follows after God.

Light as you know is used metaphorically throughout scripture. It is probably the Biblical metaphor that we are most familiar and comfortable with in the life of our church. Every Sunday we have the light on our table to symbolize the presence of God. We send our youth down to their Worship service taking the candle flame so they can light the candles on their own table. Light is the symbol of Christ coming into the darkness of the world. It is the self appointed understanding that Jesus called himself and his Disciples in the Gospel of John chapter 8:12 "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life." We have so many understandings of light that it can be difficult to know where one ends and the other begins. (Let us put up a new light today in the center of our table)

Yet still, we have another example, the example of being the salt of the earth. That is a familiar phrase and the meaning is still the same through the ages, it still means that we keep it simple and real and tried and true. Yet strangely in our place of worship we do not have a bowl of Salt. So let me rectify that this morning. (Bowl of salt on the table) Salt is one of the oldest compounds for preservation. It is a natural substance and can also be chemically created. It is also used a lot in ancient times and symbolized a variety of things permanence, loyalty, durability, fidelity, usefulness, value, and purification. In the First Testament alone you will find over thirty-five mentions of salt and in the New Testament you will find other mentions including this one today. It is one of the instances where Jesus takes another common and familiar element and calls it into our attention. And for his Disciples salt is a common element in their understanding of faith. If you are familiar at all with the Jewish tradition Salt plays a significant role in many of their rituals for Shabbat and Kiddish.

However even with these two examples that would make sense to the Disciples and also make some significant sense to ourselves Jesus again reminds us that he is not abolishing the laws but rather has come to fulfill them.

There is a story I happened across when Chad and I were engaged, it was of a couple who was also getting married and as they were preparing a slide show presentation of their lives growing up and then as they came to be a couple the woman pulled out one of her favorite photos of a family vacation to Disney World. Her fiancé looked at the picture and then did a double take, in the background was him, on his father's shoulders on that same day. So funny how we can focus on the small picture but when we look beyond it we can see something astounding and amazing.

This is what Jesus is asking of us to do, to not get ourselves locked away and wrapped up under the bushels that fame our vision into something narrow and limited and do not allow our light to shine and be used. We are being asked to take a look at the big picture.

We are asked to take the summation of specific parts and look towards the whole. The Pharisees were caught up in the legalese of how and what so that they forgot to look towards the whole. How often though do we too get caught up in the legalese of living a life of faith? We know the difference between perception and reality but we often get ourselves caught up in feeling guilty because reality does not meeting our expectation.

I think sometimes we need to hold ourselves accountable and ask why? Why do we allow ourselves to picture an image of abounding faith and Christian values? Why do we try to be the Pharisees instead of Jesus? Both are trying to accomplish the same thing, a renewed covenantal understanding and relationship with God. But one gets caught up in the perceived image and the other just simply lives it and perceptions be \_\_\_\_\_ you can easily fill in the blank!

That is quintessentially what Christ is saying in our scripture today, as he continues to illuminate his Disciples on the correct attitudes of what it means to live out and be blessed are those who live as salt of the earth and let their lights shine. Amen.