

**Part Two**  
***Salt and Light***  
***Matthew 5:13-16***

<sup>13</sup> “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. <sup>14</sup> “You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. <sup>15</sup> 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. <sup>16</sup> 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.

**STUDY**

**1) READ**

- a) In the Beatitudes, Jesus describes the character of His disciples. What is He describing here?
- b) What are the parallel elements in Jesus' metaphors (i.e. they both start the same)?

**2) MEANING**

- a) What were the roles of salt in Jesus' day? How does that relate to the role of Christ's followers in today's world? In our community? In our relationships with others?
- b) Based on Jesus' words, how would you describe “letting your light shine”? Why might Jesus have used two examples, a city on a hill and a lamp in a house? What is the ultimate purpose of being a light?
- c) In both metaphors, Jesus cautions His disciples against shying away from the roles He has given us. Why does He do so? What would be the impact of losing saltiness and hiding the light?

**3) APPLY**

- a) What would be some examples of working to prevent decay in our world? (Consider the entire spectrum from the world at large, to our culture, to local communities and even to individual relationships).
- b) Likewise, what are some opportunities I might have to shine light, both in words and actions?
- c) How can we resist losing our saltiness or hiding under a bushel? How can we help one another fulfill these roles?

**NOTES ON THE PASSAGE**

v.13 – Salt has always been used as a flavor enhancer, but before refrigeration it was critical for preserving meats which otherwise would decay and putrefy. In Jesus' day, “salt” referred to a white sediment, prevalent around the nearby Dead Sea, that contained sodium chloride (pure salt) but was contaminated by silt, dust, and other elements. Exposure to water would cause the salt to leach out of this mixture, rendering it tasteless and useless in preventing decay.

## COMMENTS

After describing the intended character traits of His disciples in the Beatitudes, Jesus then explains their role in the world. It is striking that “the poor of spirit”, “the meek”, and “the peacemakers” -- as opposed to the rich, the powerful, and the warriors -- could ever have a such a significant, positive impact that Jesus would call them “the salt of the earth” and “the light of the world”. It seems totally incongruous, and some have revolted against such a notion. For example, Nietzsche defined “good” as power, and “bad” as “*all that proceeds from weakness.*” “*What is more harmful than any vice?*” he asks, then replies: “*active sympathy for the ill-constituted and weak – Christianity*”<sup>1</sup>. But Jesus radically turns such human wisdom upside down, as is explained in 1 Corinthians 1:27-29:

*<sup>27</sup> But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; <sup>28</sup> God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, <sup>29</sup> so that no human being might boast in the presence of God.*

What is Jesus telling His disciples? Consider salt: in Jesus’ day it was an essential preservative for food storage. This first metaphor, then, is focused on arresting decay and preventing spoilage. Romans 1:18-32 is a vivid description of what happens when a society suppresses the truths about God – His eternal power and divine nature -- that are clearly seen in His creation. Society deteriorates in a downward spiral as mankind continues to push back against God, choosing instead to follow their self-centered desires.

How can we be “salt”, in words and actions, to halt or at least slow down the downward spiral? With words we can call out what is false and evil, as well as promote what is true, good and decent. We can act, individually or with others, to support and improve institutions within our society designed to deter evil and promote good. Examples include promoting more just laws and strengthening family structures. Or addressing social ills, assisting when evil wreaks its toll on individuals, families, or groups in our society.

In contrast, “light” has a much more positive impact. How can we shine in both our words and deeds? Certainly, telling others about Christ and His impact on our lives is part of this. As is helping others grow in faith through counsel, guidance and encouragement. In terms of actions, the opportunities for shining light are far-ranging and diverse, reflecting the wide variety of natural abilities and gifts bestowed by the Holy Spirit. Every follower of Christ will have a unique set of opportunities, “*for we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.*” (Ephesians 2:10). We would each do well to regularly reflect on our individual gifts, abilities and opportunities to shine, which includes our roles in the Body of Christ, the church.

In closing, we should recognize the order and cohesiveness to the first two parts of the Sermon on the Mount. It is only from the transformed character described in the Beatitudes that saltiness and light-shining can flow, and so give glory to the Father.

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<sup>1</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, “*The Anti-Christ*”, first published 1895