

## The Adventures of Jesus as told by Matthew: Are we Salty and Shiny?

### Sermon Pt.1, The Obstacles

#### Matt.5:13-16, Salt and light

<sup>5:13</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.

#### What did the disciples expect to hear?

When Jesus sat down to share his wisdom, he began with those blessings we discovered are not ordinary but extra-ordinary blessings. They are Prophetic Blessing Proverbs that show what his phrase, 'the Kingdom of Heaven has come near' (v.17) means.

Jesus finishes those blessings with a paradox of sombre joy; sombre because he talks about being persecuted and joyful as he assures them of great reward in heaven.

And this paradox is his springboard into the parable of salt and light.

The picture of salt describes their reason for being. Salt both preserves food, helping prevent it going off, and brings out the flavour of the food. Both of those are positive qualities and I think Jesus' imagery is really helpful for Jesus' followers in learning how to show faith.

We will consider the practical application more in a few moments but first we need to recognize some obstacles:

**Obstacle 1:** If the salt loses its flavour, it is thrown out because it is not fulfilling its purpose. That's a scary thought when applied to the life of faith and a reaction can be to overdo it. In trying to show faith and help bring God's Kingdom to Earth there is a temptation to pour too much salt or put salt in the wrong place. Think of it like this - as pouring salt, instead of sugar, into a cup of tea.

**Obstacle 2:** people push back against the gospel of Jesus. They don't want to know, and society says we can believe what we like, as long as we keep it to ourselves. In wanting to keep the peace and not cause trouble, or because we want to avoid conflict, it can seem easier to keep our faith quiet.

So, the temptation is to ignore Jesus' warning, replacing it with the thought that 'as long as I keep my faith in Jesus, then I don't have to worry because my skills are not in evangelism or prophecy – others can do that. If too much salt in the wrong place is one extreme, then this describes the other, blandness.

Let us recognize those obstacles but not allow them to stop us from learning how to apply Jesus' parable of Salt & Light.

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As shared earlier: Let us also recognize that Jesus presents this as a fait accompli – something that already is. Each follower of Jesus automatically inherits the role of being salt and light to communities in which they operate.

As an encouragement...

Although Jesus' wisdom may not always be wanted, it is always needed.

Learning the skills to be salt and light, which is the raison d'être (reason for being) is so important for all Jesus' followers.

### **'Let your light' skills,**

Part of the skill we are encouraged to learn is how to get the right measure of salt and/or light into our communities and relationships.

#### **Skill Nr.1. It's not so much about forcing faith to shine as not supressing it.**

Jesus said, 'let your light shine', which give an indication this is a most natural state of faith.

Forcing creates the obstacle of too much salt, or mis-placed salt described earlier.

James and John, two of the first disciples and nicknamed 'The sons of Thunder' were instrumental in exemplifying this:

Two lessons they learnt: First, when a Samaritan village did not welcome Jesus.

- 'What, they are refusing to receive the Good News?
- 'Shall we call down fire from heaven to destroy them?' (Luke9:54)
- But Jesus rebuked that method.

A second was when James & John were scrapping about who would be the most important in Jesus' Kingdom. Again, they were rebuked and later it is James, now an Apostle, who questions the church people, 'what causes fights and quarrels among you?'

James and John wanted the Good news to be heard and accepted. Great! But to force faith on others is to adopt worldly methods that do not respect that others are made in the image of God.

However, I think the more common problem is the opposite: the attempts to suppress faith so as not to upset the other and risk getting that negative response. This is why I say, it's not so much about forcing faith as not suppressing it.

The disciple who stays quiet is trying to do what Jesus described as putting a bowl over the lamp.

The skill is to allow God's Holy Spirit to prompt actions and words that best speak into each situation. It is simply, 'to let your light shine.'

I say simply because lots of Jesus' followers think it is too complicated for them. It is not!

Practice of this skill has to start before the encounter.

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How? When each of us are embarking on a new day – or night for the night-shift workers – ask God's Spirit to give opportunities to display his salt and light.

How that then plays out is very wide and varied – God is creative remember!

It could be a difficult situation arises and we find ourselves remaining calm and dealing with it. A colleague may comment on that later, giving opportunity simply to say, 'It's a funny thing, but I asked God's spirit to show something of his Kingdom today, I guess he just showed how he gives peace.'

It could be that being conscientious and honest in what and how we do our work gets noticed. I remember Paula sharing about such an occasion in her work – please do ask her to share her testimony with you.

It could be that a friend, colleague or someone else we occasionally meet shares about something difficult and we are able to offer wisdom in our observations and answers.

God's spirit creatively works through us when we begin by asking him to.

'Lord, let my faith shine; I neither want to force it nor hide it. Please let me be salt and light this day. Amen.'

### **Skill Nr.2 Finding People of Peace**

Later on, Jesus adds another picture for being salty and shiny.

BTW, Matthew's account has it all as part of the Sermon on the Mount – but Jesus may well have shared his wisdom series over several occasions and may have repeated themes.

The picture Jesus later uses is this:

<sup>6</sup> 'Do not give dogs what is sacred; do not throw your pearls to pigs. If you do, they may trample them under their feet, and turn and tear you to pieces. (Matt.7:6)

It is a strong picture! There is even an occasion where a Samaritan woman asks Jesus for help and Jesus offers her this challenge:

<sup>26</sup> He replied, 'It is not right to take the children's bread and toss it to the dogs.'

<sup>27</sup> 'Yes it is, Lord,' she said. 'Even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their master's table.'

<sup>28</sup> Then Jesus said to her, 'Woman, you have great faith! Your request is granted.' And her daughter was healed at that moment. (Matt.15:26-28)

The woman understood the metaphor, or picture language, did not take offence but sought Jesus all the more.

What is the skill?

To look out for people of peace. Like the first skill it is wise to ask Jesus to send people of peace into our life. Again, this shows our desire to let our light shine.

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- People of Peace ask us about our worldview, noticing it is different from secular society.
- People of Peace notice how we are, our demeanour. They may comment on it – wanting to know what it is that makes us tick.

The skill is not to say – keep me out of trouble Lord, don't let me get picked on for being a Christian but is to say,

That is who I am. I am a follower of Jesus, and I will let his salty shininess be displayed through me. Please send me and help me recognise people who are people of peace Lord. Amen.