

Salt of the Earth, Light of the World

Thomas Robinson, *Seeing Life Through Jesus' Eyes 10*, March 18, 2012

Matthew 5:13-16

¹³ “**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.

¹⁴ “**You are the light of the world.**

A city set on a hill cannot be hidden.

¹⁵ 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.

¹⁶ In the same way, **let your light shine before people,**
so that they may **see your good works**
and give **glory to your Father** who is in heaven.”

John 1:4-5, 9, 14

⁴ In him was life, and the life was the light of men. ⁵ The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it. ...

⁹ The true light, which gives light to everyone, was coming into the world. ...

¹⁴ And the Word became flesh and tabernacled among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.

John 8:12 (Jn 9:5, 11:9, 12:46)

¹² Again Jesus spoke to them, saying, “I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.”

Leviticus 2:13

¹³ You shall season all your grain offerings with salt. You shall not let the salt of the covenant with your God be missing from your grain offering; with all your offerings you shall offer salt.

Isaiah 42:6-7 Yahweh to his chosen servant – Messiah/Israel

⁶ “I am the LORD; I have called you in righteousness; I will take you by the hand and keep you; I will give you as a covenant for the people, a light for the nations, ⁷ to open the eyes that are blind, to bring out the prisoners from the dungeon, from the prison those who sit in darkness.”

Isaiah 49:6 Yahweh to his chosen servant – Messiah/Israel

⁶ (The Lord) says: “It is too light a thing that you should be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob and to bring back the preserved of Israel; I will make you as a light for the nations, that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth.”

Luke 2:30-32

³⁰ ... “My eyes have seen your salvation ³¹ that you have prepared in the presence of all peoples,

³² a light for revelation to the Gentiles/nations, and for glory to your people Israel.”

God's Glory for the World

In his six "antitheses" (5:21-48) Jesus marks out the transformative character of his message of God's kingdom rule, a righteousness beyond the law, beyond that of Scribes & Pharisees.

Here Jesus is speaking to his disciples and crowds on a hillside and points to what is at stake.

God's goal is his whole creation, nothing less. These motley disciples are "salt of the earth" and "light of the world." Jesus speaks of facts, not possibilities: "you are...."

They may not know it, but the stakes could not be higher – the hope of the world.

Jesus is consciously refocusing the promise/challenge of God's people. In Abraham and his seed all the nations of earth will be blessed (Gn 22:18). Israel is to be a light to the nations. In Isaiah 2:1-5 Jerusalem, the city on a hill, is to be the source of the word of the Lord for the nations, the call for all to "walk in the light of the Lord." As Jesus proclaims now the coming of God's kingdom, his disciples are to fulfill those ancient promises.

Unsalty Salt, Darkened Light

Jesus doesn't define "salt" and "light" here, but emphasizes the importance of distinctiveness.

Whatever salt does, it does it by being salty. Light must shine! Otherwise it's useless.

Jesus wants us as disciples to sense how much is at stake in hearing his call clearly.

Israel had faced that danger. Isa 2:6 says God rejected his people when they became like other nations– no light, salt. Jesus called Israel to a way of peace and warned against fighting the Romans with their own violence. But as much as people wanted to oust the Romans, no one could imagine any way except by Rome's own methods of violence.

If the kingdom of God is to be God's, it must build and live by God's nature, character.

Thus Jesus in the sermon leads the disciples to see God as Jesus uniquely can reveal him.

Any other "revolution" only replaces one oppression with another. So, history's course.

The Scale of Revolution

What is Jesus after when he talks about the Kingdom of God? Is he seeking personal transformation of disciples; new spirituality? Is he setting up a new community that will have its own internal identity? Is he thinking about politics and government structures?

Yes! The whole of reality belongs to God. Nothing – music, physics, war, family, sports, sex, government, art, commerce, ecology, psychology, philosophy – is outside his domain.

Disciples are called to be salt and light in the earth/ world/ before peoples – embodying "good works" of God's reality and character. Embodying God's claim/rule for his world.

The disciple must be reshaped from the inside out as an individual. Must draw strength from a community of others who are experiencing the same exciting and challenging transformation. Must never yield any part of God's creation as outside God's rule.

God's Own Distinct Glory

As God's glory dwelt in the Tabernacle/Temple of ancient Israel, so the Word became flesh and brought God's glory to new realization – seen personally in the face of Jesus.

But Jesus in his teaching, life, crucifixion, resurrection shows the challenge of God's values to the entire structure of our world's values. We are easily corrupted. God is engaged in a long story that brings individuals, communities, and the whole universe to his love.