

DEEP IN SCRIPTURE

Verses & Notes June 14, 2006

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 trodden under foot by men.
- 14: "You are the light of the world.
A city set on a hill cannot be hid.
- 15: Nor do men light a lamp and put it under a bushel,
but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house.
- 16: Let your light so shine before men,
that they may see your good works
and give glory to your Father who is in heaven."

Discussion Notes:

Intro:

- The 1st examples / applications of the Beatitudes in Jesus' sermon.
- Telling them WHY living out the Beatitudes is so important.
- The disciplines of the Beatitudes, especially resultant persecution, can lead to an inward focus, an individualistic, isolationism; but disciples are called to be "fishers of men."

First Analogy:

13: "You are the salt of the earth;

- "You" ... Who is Jesus talking to?
 - Remember context of Scripture:
 - Jesus preaching on mount to Jewish crowd in general;
 - But more specifically to the disciples gathered at his feet;
 - Matthew writing to Jewish Christians (who are familiar with stories);
 - Church proclaiming to all baptized disciples of Christ.
- "Are" ... What does this say about them?
- "the salt":
 - Salt has 3 basic qualities / purposes:
 1. Preserves food;
 2. Brings out / enhances its flavor;
 3. Disappears (must not be overpowering)
 - Often represents wisdom.
- "the earth" ... earth / world / peoples.

but if salt has lost its taste how shall its saltiness be restored?

- "moranthei" = (aor. Subj. pass) "should have grown foolish, become insipid"
 - How can salt lose its flavor? (*Apparently in the days of Christ, the salt used in Palestine was impure and could go through a permanent chemical change and lose its saltiness.*)
- Rhetorical question: How CAN salt become salt again once it is lost?

It is no longer good for anything except to be thrown out and trodden under foot by men.

- Emphasizes inability to restore flavor once lost.
- ∴ What does Jesus mean by calling them "salt of the earth"?
 - The People of God were given a unique God-given responsibility to the earth / world.
 - This responsibility was crucially important & could be squandered.
 - The People of God & individuals could lose their "saltness". (grow foolish)
 - Once lost, they are worthless for the kingdom, cast aside, condemned! (John 15:1-7)
 - Same to the disciples? ("For to him who has will more be given..." Mt 13:12)
 - To the first readers? To the Church? To us as individual Christians?

Second Analogy:

14: "You are the light of the world.

- Hebrew poetry = parallelisms.
- "the light" ... common image for truth, being "enlightened". (John 1)
 - Like salt, light is essential for life.
- "the cosmos" || "earth"

A city set on a hill cannot be hid.

- Seems to change metaphor; but using a familiar example to establish perspective.
- Being of the People of God / a disciple means being a visible image of God.

15: *Nor do men light a lamp and put it under a bushel, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house.*

- Men light a lamp for a purpose; the People of God were chosen for a purpose.
- All 3 metaphors imply: disciples are called to make a discernable difference in the world.

16: *Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.*

- "Your light" ... not shining forth your own ideas, values, etc., but what God has illumined within you by His Spirit to change you & to share / to do.
 - "before men" ... we have a responsibility to others.
 - "that they may see" ... no place here for "private" religion.
 - "your good works" = sharing / living out saltness & light
 - "they may ... give glory to your Father who is in heaven..."
 - purpose of good works not salvation, but drawing others to / back to God.
- "What the soul is to the body, that Christians are to the world." Letter to Diognetus*

- 1st use of “your Father who is in heaven” in New Testament.

Overlying Application:

- Like the Beatitudes, these two analogies can be understood / interpreted as separate, individual statements of spiritual encouragement.
- But also like the Beatitudes, the arrangement & connection of these metaphors conveys a deeper, overlying application:
 - Saltness is more natural; illumination is far more supernatural.
 - Here we find an overview of salvation history, as well as our own individual spiritual journeys:
 - The Jewish people were chosen to be the salt of the earth;
 - They failed to fulfill this, and as a result were condemned.
 - But while they were yet condemned, God sent His Son to be “the light of the world,” (Jn 1);
 - And this light shines in the darkness & enlightens every man, and those who received this light (him) were given the power to become the children of God (Jn 1);
 - And now as children of God we are to let our light shine.
 - This is true first for the new People of God, the Church, but also for every individual believer;
 - In Baptism, we have the stain of our un-saltiness wiped away, and we receive the illumination of His light, the Holy Spirit, that empowers us to be salt & light in the world.

***“...once you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord;
walk as children of light”
(Ephesians 5:8).***