

Pass the Salt Mathew 5:13-20

The message this morning is the 2nd in a series about the Beatitudes, regarded as one of the most important sermons Jesus ever preached. Beginning in Matthew 5, Jesus uses the word blessed in the opening verses to describe nine attributes of those found in His kingdom of heaven. Above all, no pun intended, He said the kingdom of heaven is for the poor in spirit, those who trust entirely on Him and not themselves for kingdom blessings. As we saw last week, the cross is key to the kingdom of heaven. It isn't our efforts to be like Jesus that grants us access to the kingdom of heaven, but His work of redemption on the cross.

Jesus also said the kingdom of heaven is those who mourn. In context mourning is grieving for our sins, acknowledging we have fallen short. Comfort comes when repent and seek forgiveness, accepting Jesus offer to help us pick up the pieces and start over. In Psalm 30, King David describes this in vivid detail, and how God turns our wailing into dancing.

The kingdom of heaven is meek. Meekness is strength coupled with gentleness, speaking the truth in love. The kingdom of heaven hungers and thirsts for God's righteousness. Self-righteousness is an emptiness that keeps us from the kingdom of heaven.

The kingdom of heaven is merciful. Heaven is for those who have Christ-like compassion for the sick, the poor and the oppressed but even more so it will be filled with people who have the ability to show mercy by forgiving others as Jesus forgives us.

The kingdom of heaven is pure in heart. Happy and fortunate are those whose motives for doing good deeds are pure and free of self-serving rewards.

The kingdom of heaven is peacemakers. Heaven will be filled with those who seek to resolve their differences without using violence whenever and wherever it is possible. Heaven will be filled with those who refuse to carry a grudge.

And finally, the kingdom of heaven is those who are persecuted for following Jesus. Jesus reminds us to be happy when that happens, for it is only for a season. Someday, the rewards will be great. Nine times, Jesus uses the word blessed to describe His kingdom. Make no mistake about it, that kingdom is His church, which He calls the salt of the earth.

If I asked you this morning what two things are essential to sustain human life most of us would say food and water. Of course, that is true, for most doctors and scientists tell us we can only live about 8 weeks without food and 3-4 days without water. They are things we often take for granted- until we have to go without one or the other. Fasting before a blood test or surgery or working outside on a hot summer day without a jug of cold water will quickly remind us how important both are to our survival. Surely one of the simplest pleasures of life is a cold drink of water on a hot summer day or eating a warm tomato from the garden with a generous sprinkle of salt.

Perhaps you've never thought about it, but salt and light are also essential to sustain life. They are so important that Jesus mentioned them as he preached to the multitudes on the side of the mountain that day. Consider for a moment all of the different kinds of salt we use. In the typical home you might find table salt, iodized salt, kosher salt, pickling salt, smoked salt and seasoned salt. There is rock salt, road salt, fertilizing salt, and for the ladies there are cosmetics made from Dead Sea salt. Salt is one of those things we don't miss until our doctor puts us on a low salt diet or we have to navigate a slippery sidewalk or highway. Salt is surely one of the most important things our body needs to stay alive and healthy.

Table salt is probably the cheapest thing we can buy at the grocery store other than a 25 cent gumball from the machine in the lobby. Even so, it wasn't always that way. At one time salt was an expensive and valuable commodity. Historians tell us one of the ways the Union army was able to defeat the Confederates in our nation's Civil war was by controlling the flow of salt to the south. General Sherman once said salt was just as important as gunpowder to an army. It was needed to preserve food like ham and bacon and it was also needed to keep their horses healthy. The army travels on its stomach and its horses and salt is needed for both.

In the time of Jesus salt was just as valuable as gold and silver is to us today. Roman soldiers were even paid their wages in salt. With that in mind it's no wonder that Jesus used the metaphor of Christians being the salt of the earth. The point that Jesus was making to His followers in 5:13 was that they were an important, valuable, and necessary influence on their culture. A society without Christians is like food without salt- flat, tasteless, and quick to spoil. It seems He was also teaching that a church that has lost its saltiness is literally worthless and cannot be restored. The only way pure salt loses its saltiness is if it is diluted or overpowered by a bunch of other things in with it. Applied to the church, we could say salt is our mission to glorify and illuminate God. Nothing must dilute or taint it. Unlike a bowl of cheap canned soup, the church and the world can never be too salty.

Jesus issued a pretty tall order. Go and be blessed. Go and be salt and light to a dark and desperate world that needs something absolutely essential for life- the love of Jesus Christ. That order is still in effect today. And like those gathered at the feet of Jesus on the side of the mountain that day we can feel somewhat overwhelmed by such a challenge. But Jesus is counting on us to be blessed and to be a blessing to others. Unlike the cheap salt we buy in the grocery store today we need to remember that He considers us to be more valuable than the finest gold. If you need a bit of salt and light you've come to the right place to find it. I want you to know that Jesus loves you and longs for you to know Him. That is not just salt and light but a blessing. So be blessed and then be a blessing to others. The latter part is the most important. Try it and see what happens as a result. Trust me when I say our world will not be the same- and if you trust Jesus neither will you. Amen