

Sermon on the Mount II - New Creation Identity - Salt, Light, City

by Michael Flowers

In this sermon, Michael Flowers explores the identity of Christians as salt, light, and a city on a hill, emphasizing their role in the world and the importance of community and good works.

Duration: 20:33

Scripture: Habakkuk 3:17-18, Matthew 5:3-6

Topics: "New Creation"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker discusses the importance of being salt and light in the world as followers of Jesus. He emphasizes that Jesus cares about the earth and sets the stage for the Sermon on the Mount. The speaker explains that the beatitudes provide descriptive qualities of being in the kingdom of heaven, rather than prescriptive commands. He also highlights the paradoxical properties of salt and light, which can both illuminate and expose darkness. The speaker encourages the audience to embrace qualities such as being poor in spirit, mourning, and meekness, and to throw parties that include the poor and marginalized, as instructed by Jesus.

Transcript

Lord Jesus, we thank You that You are the Living Word, and we ask that that Living Word would animate us today, that we would feed, virtually feed upon that life in Jesus Christ today. Lord, let it be embodied through this preaching today to feed us sacramentally, we pray. In the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit, one God, Amen.

Amen. Alright, the scripture out of Habakkuk, or Habakkuk, however you want to say that. It took me back to a time in Uganda when I was asked to come and do a worship seminar in one of the churches there.

And the Lord gave me a song for the choir to sing. It began with, though the fig tree should not blossom, and there be no fruit on the vine. It was just so, you know, it just had such relevance in Africa, in Uganda, when you're singing that.

Though the fig tree should not blossom, there be no fruit on the vine, there be no cattle in the stalls. I will exalt in the Lord, I will exalt in the God of my salvation. Doesn't that tie in with the Beatitudes and what we talked about last week? Blessed are the poor in spirit.

Happy is what the word Mercarius means. Happy are the poor in spirit, because there's a promise attached to that happiness. It's not the here and now.

Theirs is the kingdom of heaven. They're seeing something beyond this present evil age. There's the present evil age and there's this present world.

There's this earth that Jesus is talking about today. And so we're going to look a little bit about the salt of the earth and the light of the cosmos, the light of the world. And so I think he's talking about that earthy, crunchy thing.

Yeah, Jesus cares about this earth. And so in today's gospel, Jesus is setting the stage. He's still setting the stage for what's come to be known as the Sermon on the Mount.

That's what we're going to be looking at the next four weeks now. And last week, we considered the first twelve verses commonly known as the Beatitudes. Jesus, far from giving prescriptive commands in the Beatitudes, provides descriptive qualities, states of being among his church.

Happy, as I said, are those who are poor in spirit. Theirs is the kingdom of heaven and so forth. Jesus isn't suggesting that we go out and try to become any of these qualities, poor in spirit, meek or any of that.

That's not the intent of what he's doing because he's describing a people. He's describing those qualities that are there within his church. There, there shall be those who are poor and crushed in spirit in God's church.

But they know that there's more to life than their present flight. Theirs is the kingdom of heaven. So we have among us the poor in spirit, those who mourn and the meek, the powerless.

And each is in solidarity with the other. This is why our parties should be different, guys. But how does Jesus say through a party? You know, Jesus tells you how to throw a party.

Anybody know when you throw a party, when you throw a banquet? Jesus says, invite the poor, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind. These are the words of Jesus. And you will be more courteous.

That's another the attitude. You will be blessed. You will be happy.

Look, 1413 just had to slip that in. He's upsetting all homogeneous social constructs. You see, that's what the kingdom of God is doing.

And that's what the attitudes are doing. OK, so this is the idea which brings us to three identity markers. And today in our reading had to back up a little bit because the attitudes are flowing right into what we're going to talk about today.

So you can't forget it. In today's reading, Jesus gives us three identity markers. He says, you are something.

You are the salt of the earth. You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill which cannot be hid.

These three things, salt, light and a visible city. Now, notice that Jesus is not saying that you should be salt. You should be light.

You should be a city set on a hill. He's not saying you ought to be. This is indicative.

OK, this is not an imperative. This is not a command. This is indicative.

He's giving you an identity. He's giving me an identity. He's saying by virtue of being in union with me, you are my new people and my new people are the salt of the earth, that crunchy earth that we walk on.

You're the salt of the earth. You're the light of this cosmos. That's the word light of the world.

And you're a city that's going to be set on a hill. You are based on following him, being in union with him by the indwelling spirit of adoption. He's making us his children, sons and daughters of the king.

We are gifted with a new identity. Three of which are being given in this passage. You are these three gifts to the world.

That's the important thing. He's made us three identifying markers that are gifts to the world, gifts to the world. None of these three identity markers exist for themselves.

Have you ever tried to salt your salt? You just don't do that, do you? You don't salt your salt. Salt doesn't exist for itself. Have you ever shined a flashlight onto your hundred watt light bulb that's already illuminating the room? No.

Light doesn't exist for itself. In Jesus' time, salt was used to season and to preserve meat, among other things. With no refrigeration, meat had to be cured in order not to go rancid.

And so salt would be one of the major ingredients to cure meat, for example. But it was also to render the ground infertile. You don't hear this very much about we being the salt of the earth.

When a conquering nation sought to destroy an enemy city, they would bring the city to rubble, tear everything down and then pour salt all over the earth so that nothing would ever grow there again. An enemy city. Underscore that.

For example, this is what Rome did to Carthage. Tore its walls down, burned it and then poured salt, saturated the ground with salt. Salt not only preserves, it has properties of destruction.

Rendering the ground infertile. So salt doesn't exist for itself. Its value is in what it does.

Now, let's not overlook the fact that Jesus is speaking in the plural. You, plural, are the salt of the earth. I'm one little grain of salt.

And that doesn't do much when you put it on your food, right? You know, you got a salt shaker and you probably, you know, you maybe have 20 or 30 grains right there. Have you ever tried to salt your food with just getting tweezers and getting that one little grain out? No, it takes a body. It takes a salt shaker.

It takes more than one grain, right? You, plural, community, church, my people are the salt of the earth. Don't go trying to do that by yourself. Get out of the shaker with some other salt.

That's what he's trying to say. OK. Light doesn't exist for itself either.

You turn on the light. And you won't see the light. You turn on the light and you see what it illuminates.

The psalmist says in thy light. We see light. The Lord is my light in salvation here today.

But light not only illuminates what is unseen in the dark, it also exposes the dark. So salt and light have these two paradoxical properties going on. And, you know, we like to be zesty and flavorful.

But we might not want to be spread on the ground to destroy enemy territory so that render it infertile. Salt can do both. Light can do both.

It can expose darkness. This is why most crime is done in the dark. And that's when I hear the most gunshots is at night on the weekend around 11 o'clock.

For those of us who live in the urban core, right? And thirdly, in ancient times, a city on a hill was used for navigation. The way folks would get their bearings city on a hill, there's that city. I need to go eastward.

It was used kind of like a lighthouse for ships. And we live in a world that seeks to privatize faith because a city is to be set on a hill so that it can be seen. It can be a navigational point, giving guidance to those who are traveling, who are journeying through this life.

And a light must be put on its stand. If you take it off the lamp stand and put a shade over it, it's not going to do much. Not what it could.

And so we do live in this battle seeking to make us private, tame, domesticated, to make us something like hidden from the public square, invisible, quiet. We speak of our faith sometimes as spirituality, a disembodied set of values that are invisible, that brings fulfillment to my life, my internal life. And the idea here is that such a faith is there to make our lives better, spiritually satisfied and fulfilled.

But Jesus is saying to the contrary, that his followers are like salt or light or a city set on a hill meant for others, meant for others to taste, meant for others to taste and see that the Lord is good. For others to see our good works, as it were, when Jesus is talking about the light by the illumination of the light of Christ and thus glorify our Father who is in heaven. Jesus is saying that his followers are not of this world, but are sent into this world and are for this world, salt of the earth, light of the world.

And this is the paradox of faith. This is what we talked about last week. Now, remember that salt and light have opposing properties.

As salt, we are to preserve and bless that which is best in culture. Absolutely. We are not world denying, especially Anglicans are not.

God wants us to enjoy the good things of this world. And yet. We're to confront, undermine and destroy what is harmful.

That's the way salt and light work. Right. To expose darkness and illuminate the good and the beautiful.

To preserve and yet to render infertile that which is harmful. Salt both preserves what is nutritious like meat and makes infertile what is harmful in the same way. Light both illuminates the good and the beautiful, but also exposes evil and that which is destructive.

This is why Jesus backing up speaks of those who are persecuted for my name's sake. Blessed are those who are persecuted for my name's sake, because they're standing in the tradition of the prophets. Right.

Who came before us? Jesus is saying that his alternative kingdom community is a prophetic community. And this is what gets us into trouble. And this is why we have lost our saltiness many times.

We may sign on to being one without the other. I like being light. I like being salty.

I like being flavorful. I want I want the world to taste and see that the Lord is good. But to spread that and make enemy ground infertile.

Now we're going into territory that will bring backlash. Blessed are those who are persecuted for my name's sake. And so this brings us to the first morning.

This is the first morning in the Sermon on the Mount. If we lose our saltiness, this is the first morning. If we lose our saltiness, we are no longer good for anything except there's a band name.

Well, they're not they're not they're not here anymore, but they got their name from the Sermon on the Mount. Not Led Zeppelin trampled underfoot. Anybody seen trampled underfoot? Yeah, great, great blues band.

OK, got to get out. Enjoy this world, right? Yeah. David, the psalmist, is a blue.

He was the first blues cat in the church. How long, oh, Lord, will you forgive me forever? We just want to sing happy songs, right? That's why half of the world can't relate to what we see. The other half are going to the bars to hear reality.

That's an overstatement. OK, it's not all true, but there's some truth there, right? A grain of salt. I love it.

That's so good. And so if we lose our saltiness rabbit trail, we are no longer good for anything, because if we lose our saltiness, then we have ceased to serve society. Not the way society wants to be served.

But we've ceased to serve society in the way that Jesus sends us out into the world, not to be of it. But to be for it when the whole world is singing. For it.

And so when we cease to be good for anything, as Jesus is saying, we are thrown away and trampled underfoot by men. That's what he says. That's where he gets the phrase.

And so it's the same with light placed on a stand without a lampshade or a city on a hill. It cannot be hid. The lamp stand and the hill provide the same function.

The lamp stand is important because you can put light under a bushel. Jesus is saying you don't want to do that. You want to put it on a stick.

You don't want to put a lampshade on it. Visibility is the idea. Visibility.

While secularism seeks to undermine our saltiness, our illumination, our visibility, lest we upset their values and create the culture. That's creating a culture of death in many ways. So what are we going to do? Jesus gives us the answer in verse 16.

What are we going to do? He says, let your light shine in such a way. Oh, we could just unpack that for days and days. I want you to think about that because I don't have all the answers here, because when you get out of here, you're going to have to do.

You have to think on your feet. Let your light shine in such a way that requires an open heart to the Lord in the moment. And letting him flow through you and give you the creative idea or word or nothing to say, sometimes it's total silence.

Right. I'm finding these days in the cultural climate that I'm doing more listening than talking. Lest I say something that I regret.

So I'm still dealing with some stuff before I have something good. Right. I'm just going to keep my mouth shut many times.

That's not the best place to be forever. But it's a good place to understand if if you know that if you don't keep silent for that moment, something irremediable is going to come out. There's different ways to let your light shine in.

Jesus is saying it's in such a way. This is the key. Let your light shine in such a way before others that they may see you know.

That they may see your good works. There's another key. There's another key.

It's not me they're going to see. It's not you that they're going to see. It's your saltiness.

It's the light illuminating in the moment. It's becoming a part of that city. Know that you're not alone, but you're a part of a city that's set on a hill.

The new Jerusalem coming down out of heaven really ultimately is that city coming down to renew and make all things new. And so we now are speaking into this present evil age that which is coming from the age to come. The already not yet kingdom.

So let your light shine in such a way before others that they may see your good works. They may see your good works and glorify your father. Who is in heaven.

Father has spoken about 17 times in the Sermon on the Mount. And this is the first mention of your father. Because we're his kids, his children.

So in such a way. How to be salty and bring illumination of Christ to those around us? Question mark. How? I'm going to leave you hanging.

Because the next verses begin to show us how. You're going to have to read ahead. Following verses will begin to make clear how.

To be such a people under the reign of Jesus. You have heard it said. But I say to you.

Read the rest of the chapter. And help me out next week. In the name of the father and the son and the Holy Spirit.

Amen.

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