

Matthew 5:13-20
February 6, '11

"A MODEL OR A MIRROR?"

LET'S GET THIS OUT OF THE WAY RIGHT UPFRONT.

IT'S THE FORMER – AS IN "A MODEL" INSTEAD OF "A MIRROR."

IN THIS PASSAGE FROM THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT, JESUS IS CHALLENGING US TO SERVE AS A MODEL FOR THE WORLD INSTEAD OF A MIRROR.

WE'RE TO LIVE A LIFE THAT OTHERS MIGHT TRY TO EMULATE RATHER THAN SIMPLY REFLECT EVERYTHING WE SEE AROUND US.

THAT'S THE FOCUS OF THIS PASSAGE IN MATTHEW'S GOSPEL.

WE COULD ZERO IN ON A NUMBER OF POINTS JESUS MAKES HERE.

WE COULD CENTER ON THE LAST HALF OF THIS PASSAGE WHERE HE SPEAKS OF THE IMPORTANCE OF THE LAW, SAYING, *"DO NOT THINK THAT I CAME TO ABOLISH THE LAW OR THE PROPHETS; I HAVE COME NOT TO ABOLISH BUT TO FULFILL."*

HE GOES ON TO WARN AGAINST CHANGING ANYTHING FROM THE LAW OR VIOLATING EVEN THE LEAST OF THE COMMANDMENTS.

THIS COULD BE TROUBLESOME FOR US.

IT WAS TROUBLING FOR JESUS.

HE WAS WALKING A FINE LINE.

JUST A FEW VERSES LATER, HE BEGINS A WHOLE SERIES OF STATEMENTS THAT REPEATEDLY RAISE THE STANDARD FOR HIS FOLLOWERS - *"YOU HAVE HEARD IT SAID, BUT I SAY TO YOU..."*

SO, HERE AT THE BEGINNING OF HIS MINISTRY, JESUS WANTS TO BE SURE THAT PEOPLE UNDERSTAND HE'S NOT SOME WILD REVOLUTIONARY WHO'S GOING TO UNDO EVERYTHING THE JEWS HAVE ALWAYS BELIEVED.

HE'S SAYING, *"I'M ONE OF YOU. I FOLLOW THE SAME GOD YOU FOLLOW. I READ THE SAME SCRIPTURE YOU READ. YOUR LAWS & COMMANDMENTS ARE MY LAWS & COMMANDMENTS."*

THERE IS CERTAINLY MUCH THAT WE COULD DO WITH THAT PORTION OF THIS PASSAGE.

WE MIGHT ALSO WANT TO FOCUS ON WHAT JESUS SAYS ABOUT "LIGHT."

HE SAYS TO THOSE WHO HAVE GATHERED ON THAT HILLSIDE, *"YOU ARE THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD."*

THIS IS AN EXTRAORDINARY STATEMENT – EVEN MORE EXTRAORDINARY IN THE TIME OF JESUS THAN IT IS TODAY.

LIGHT FOR US IS SOMETHING WE TAKE FOR GRANTED.

WE ALWAYS HAVE LIGHT, LITERALLY, AT OUR FINGERTIPS.

NOT SO IN THE TIME OF JESUS.

IT'S NOT THAT LONG AGO THAT THESE WORDS WOULD HAVE MEANT MORE THAN THEY DO TODAY.

EMMA SUE & I WERE TALKING TO HER FATHER RECENTLY & HE WAS TELLING US WHAT IT WAS LIKE FOR HIM GROWING UP ON THE FARM WHERE THEY HAD NO LIGHTS.

EVERYDAY, HE WOULD GET UP ABOUT 4 O'CLOCK IN THE MORNING & HAVE TO LIGHT A LANTERN TO BEGIN HIS CHORES.

HE'D HAVE TO HOLD THAT LANTERN IN FRONT OF HIM TO BE ABLE TO SEE ANYTHING HE HAD TO DO. WITHOUT IT, THERE WAS PITCH DARKNESS.

NOTHING COULD BE ACCOMPLISHED WITHOUT THE LIGHT FROM THAT LANTERN.

JESUS TELLS HIS FOLLOWERS – JESUS TELLS US – YOU, WE – ARE THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD.

WE'RE LIKE A LANTERN.

WE ARE THE ONES WHO ENABLE THINGS TO BE ACCOMPLISHED IN THE NAME OF CHRIST.

I THINK ONE OF THE MOST ASTONISHING THINGS ABOUT THIS STATEMENT IS THAT ELSEWHERE – IN JOHN'S GOSPEL – JESUS SAYS THAT SOMEONE ELSE IS THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD.

PRIOR TO HIS HEALING OF A MAN BORN BLIND, JESUS SAYS, "*I AM THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD.*"

AND HERE HE SAYS, "*YOU ARE THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD.*"

HOW DO YOU RECONCILE THOSE TWO?

HOW CAN WE BE ELEVATED TO A POSITION THAT IS RIGHTLY HELD BY CHRIST ALONE?

WELL, IN JOHN'S GOSPEL, WHEN JESUS MAKES THAT STATEMENT, IT'S REALLY THE LAST HALF OF A SENTENCE.

THE ENTIRE STATEMENT IS "*WHILE I AM IN THE WORLD, I AM THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD.*"

I THINK THE MEANING FOR US TODAY IS THAT WE ARE TO SHOW THE WORLD THE LIGHT OF CHRIST.

WHAT WE DO SHOULD DIRECT ATTENTION, NOT TO OURSELVES, BUT TO CHRIST.

THINK ABOUT THAT WITH THE PURPOSE OF A LIGHT.

IF YOU WALK INTO YOUR HOUSE LATE AT NIGHT & FLIP A LIGHT SWITCH, YOU AREN'T DOING IT SO YOU CAN SEE THE LIGHT ITSELF.

YOUR EYES DON'T GO TO THE BULB.

THE PURPOSE OF THE LIGHT ISN'T FOR ITSELF BUT TO ENABLE US TO SEE THINGS AROUND IT.

THAT'S WHAT OUR PURPOSE IS AS THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD.

IT ISN'T TO DRAW ATTENTION TO OURSELVES – IT ISN'T SO THAT OTHERS WILL LOOK AT US – BUT OUR PURPOSE IS TO OFFER LIGHT & HOPE, PEACE & COMFORT TO THOSE IN A WORLD OF DARKNESS.

I REMEMBER HEARING A STORY OF ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON AS A YOUNG BOY.

HE WAS LOOKING OUT HIS WINDOW ONE NIGHT AT A MAN WALKING DOWN THE STREET, LIGHTING THE STREET LAMPS.

HIS MOTHER CAME TO HIS ROOM & ASKED HIM WHAT HE WAS DOING.

HE SAID, "*I'M WATCHING A MAN CUT HOLES IN THE DARKNESS.*"

THAT'S A GOOD DESCRIPTION OF OUR CHALLENGE AS THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD.

WE'RE CALLED TO "*CUTS HOLES IN THE DARKNESS*" OF THOSE WHO IN SORROW & PAIN, THOSE WHO SUFFER & THOSE WHO STRUGGLE.

SO THOSE ARE TWO PLACES WE MIGHT FOCUS OUR ATTENTION WHEN LOOKING AT THESE VERSES.
THE LAST HALF OF THIS PASSAGE WHERE JESUS TALKS ABOUT FULFILLING RATHER THAN ABOLISHING
THE LAW, IS IMPORTANT.

AND WHAT HE SAYS ABOUT HIS FOLLOWERS BEING THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD IS IMPORTANT AS WELL.
BUT WHAT ABOUT HIS OPENING WORDS IN THIS PASSAGE?

MAYBE THESE ARE THE WORDS THAT REALLY TELL US MOST CLEARLY OF OUR NEED TO SERVE AS A
MODEL INSTEAD OF A MIRROR.

“YOU ARE THE SALT OF THE EARTH.”

THERE IS SO MUCH MEANING PACKED INTO THOSE FEW WORDS.

THEY ARE WORDS THAT ARE BOTH CHALLENGING & AFFIRMING.

YOU CAN TAKE THESE WORDS IN COUNTLESS DIRECTIONS BECAUSE THERE ARE VIRTUALLY COUNTLESS
KNOWN USES OF SALT – BELIEVE IT OR NOT – MORE THAN 14,000!

WHICH USE DOES JESUS HAVE IN MIND WHEN HE SAYS, “*YOU ARE THE SALT OF THE EARTH?*”

OUR FIRST THOUGHT IS THAT SALT IS USED TO FLAVOR FOOD & YET LESS THAN 5 OF EVERY 100 POUNDS
OF SALT IS USED IN THIS WAY.

YOU NEED ONLY DRIVE DOWN THE STREET ON DAYS LIKE WE’VE HAD RECENTLY TO IMAGINE WHERE
MOST OF THE REST OF IT GOES!

AT THE TIME OF JESUS, SALT WAS ONE OF THE MOST PRECIOUS ITEMS KNOWN TO MAN.

IT WAS WORSHIPPED BY THE EARLY GREEKS.

HOMER CALLED SALT “DIVINE” & PLATO TERMED IT “A SUBSTANCE DEAR TO THE GODS.”

IN THE 13TH CENTURY, MARCO POLO FOUND THAT FLAT CAKES OF SALT WERE USED AS MONEY.

SHAKESPEARE MENTIONS THE WORD SALT NO FEWER THAN 37 TIMES IN HIS PLAYS.

WHEN JESUS MADE THIS STATEMENT ABOUT SALT, ROMAN SOLDIERS WERE GIVEN PART OF THEIR PAY IN
SALT.

THAT PART OF THE PAY WHICH THEY RECEIVED IN SALT WAS CALLED THE “SALARIIUM” WHICH IS
WHERE WE GET OUR WORD FOR “SALARY.”

IT’S ALSO INTERESTING TO KNOW THAT THE SAYING, “*NOT WORTH HIS SALT*” COMES FROM THIS USE OF
THE WORD.

IT MEANS SOMEONE ISN’T WORTH THE SALARY – THE SALT – THEY’RE BEING PAID.

OF COURSE, THE OTHER SIDE IS THE MOST BEAUTIFUL THING THAT ONE MIGHT SAY ABOUT A PERSON –
“*SHE’S THE SALT OF THE EARTH,*” AND THAT’S PRECISELY WHAT JESUS SAYS HERE ABOUT YOU.

NOTICE THAT HE DOESN’T SAY “*YOU HAVE THE POTENTIAL TO BE THE SALT OF THE EARTH.*”

HE DOESN’T SAY “*YOU WILL BE THE SALT OF THE EARTH.*”

HE DOESN’T SAY, “*YOU MIGHT BE THE SALT OF THE EARTH.*”

HE DOESN’T SAY, “*YOU WERE THE SALT OF THE EARTH.*”

WHAT JESUS SAYS TO YOU IS “*YOU ARE THE SALT OF THE EARTH.*”

HE SAYS THIS TO YOU!

IN LLOYD DOUGLAS’S NOVEL THE BIG FISHERMAN, PETER SAYS, “*THE CARPENTER DIDN’T SEEM TO BE SPEAKING TO THE CROWD; HE HAD SINGLED ME OUT & WAS SPEAKING DIRECTLY TO ME!*”

JESUS IS SPEAKING DIRECTLY TO YOU WHEN HE SAYS, “*YOU ARE THE SALT OF THE EARTH.*”

GIVEN THE 14,000 VARIOUS USES OF SALT, WHO KNOWS WHAT YOUR FUNCTION IS AS “*THE SALT OF THE EARTH.*”

MAYBE IT’S THE ONE WE THINK OF FIRST.

MAYBE YOU’RE BEING CALLED TO ADD FLAVOR – TO ADD ZEST – TO THE LIFE OF OTHERS.

SALT CAN BE USED AS A HEALING AGENT.

MAYBE YOU’RE CALLED TO BRING HEALING INTO THE LIVES OF OTHERS.

SALT CAN THAW OR MELT.

MAYBE GOD IS CALLING YOU TO BRING A THAW INTO FROZEN RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN LOVED ONES.

OR HOW ABOUT THIS?

THERE IS SALT IN SWEAT.

MAYBE YOU’RE BEING CALLED TO WORK TIRELESSLY FOR THE KIND OF WORLD CHRIST CAME TO USHER
IN.

AND THERE IS SALT IN TEARS.

MAYBE YOUR CALL IS TO EXPRESSION GENUINE CARE & COMPASSION TO THOSE IN NEED.

MAYBE YOU’RE BEING CALLED TO WEEP WITH THOSE WHO WEEP & MOURN WITH THOSE WHO MOURN.

WHATEVER IT IS THAT IS INTENDED FOR YOU, THERE’S NO DENYING THE FACT THAT YOU ARE CALLED
TO BE A MODEL FOR OTHERS & NOT SIMPLY A MIRROR REFLECTING THE WORLD AROUND YOU.

LISTEN TO WHAT HE SAYS FOR JESUS IS SPEAKING DIRECTLY TO YOU WHEN HE SAYS, “*YOU ARE THE SALT
OF THE EARTH.*” AMEN.

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