

“Kingdom Come”

Sermon on the Mount Series: Ninth Lesson

“You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled underfoot. You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.” (Matthew 5:13–16 NIV11)

Introduction

- Set within the context of the beatitudes these kingdom norms, diligently practiced in a dark world, constitute a major aspect of Christian witness; and this witness gives rise to persecution.
- The character issues in the beatitudes lead to the administration of salt and light by a disciple in this world.
- Our influence depends on our character.
- Jesus now turns to the witness aspect explicitly.

1. What it means to be salty

- Jesus' statements here are amazing
- Incredible as it may sound, Jesus referred to that handful of Palestinian peasants as the salt of the earth and the light of the world, so far-reaching was their influence to be.

Defining the idea

- Rabbis used salt as a symbol for wisdom (loses its saltiness is lit. ‘becomes foolish’).
- Salt = preservative and flavour-enhancer. It was also added to Jewish sacrifices.
- Jesus, “is saying that apart from his disciples the world turns ever more rotten”. The world “is putrefying. It cannot stop itself from going bad.”
- Salt can be adulterated & if so would be thrown onto street - the rubbish dump of the ancient east. What a tragedy - from “saviours of society to supplying materials for footpaths!”
- Salt, if it is not pure, is not salt. Salt is a symbol of purity.
- For effectiveness the Christian must retain their Christlikeness, just as salt must retain its saltiness.
- We must be an irritant to the world. “...we Christian people should be more courageous, more outspoken in condemning evil.”
 - Jesus did not say, “You are the honey of the world”!
- On the more positive side of salt as a flavour-enhancer, Green says, “There should be a flavour of Christlikeness, a sparkle of joy and unselfishness about them that is immensely attractive.”
- Salt and light are both essential but have their necessary effect on their environment only if they are both distinctive from it and yet fully involved in it.
- Perhaps salt's emphasis is the prevention of the spread of decay (evil), while light's emphasis is the encouragement of the spread of light (truth).
 - Part of our responsibility is to help the hurt individuals, but part is to influence the institutions that created the hurt in the first place.
 - To try to improve society is not worldliness but love.
 - To wash your hands of society is not love but worldliness.

2. What it means to shine

A. Defining shining

- In Bible times the darkness was total when clouds covered the moon and stars.
 - Even a small light would be seen for miles.
 - A city on a hill, even exuding only a little light at night, would stand out easily.
- 'Secret' discipleship is impossible! Nor are we to stand aside, off in a corner while the world marches inexorably to destruction.
- City of lights indicates collective shining of disciples, not individual shining.
- A light can be:
 - A lighthouse - a warning
 - An attraction - a light in a window when we are lost or coming out of the fog
 - A guide - think of a flare or torch

B. Providing Biblical examples

- Jesus:
 - He was the light of the world - Jn 8:12, 9:5.
 - And an irritant to the religious hypocrites
- His disciples identify with him in this as much as anything else.

3. How these truths affect the way we live

- These metaphors emphasise that there are two 'worlds' in this world; the community of the Spirit and the community of the flesh.
- The world and the kingdom are as chalk and cheese.
- This means we have an incredible responsibility.
 - The word "you" is at the start of the two sentences about salt and light not just in English but in the Greek as if to say 'You and only you are...'
 - If we realise we are the light and salt of the world then we know we are powerful - if not by the methods of the world, yet more powerful than any force in the world.
 - It brings to mind the statement of Paul in Romans: Rom. 1:16.
- Acts of service are not for the purpose of making ourselves feel better, but for the purpose of drawing praise to God.
 - Our 'light' is our good deeds as described in principle in the beatitudes. Our light shines from us but is that donated to us by Christ because of his transformational work in our hearts. Therefore the glory goes to God and not to us.

Conclusion

- "The norms of the kingdom, worked out in the lives of the heirs of the kingdom, constitute the witness of the kingdom."
 - "Prison reform, medical care, trade unions, control of a perverted and perverting liquor trade, abolition of slavery, abolition of child labour, establishment of orphanages, reform of the penal code - in all these areas the followers of Jesus spearheaded the drive for righteousness." See 'What if Jesus had never been born', Dr James Kennedy.
- There is no option for separation from society as a Christian.
 - "We are not promised that we shall be able to Christianise the legislation of the world, but we are challenged to be an irritant, marching to a different drum and calling on society to heed God's standards."