



Sermon-Based Study Guide
Good Shepherd Presbyterian Church

Matthew 5.13-16 | April 16, 2017

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I. Introduction to this Study

This week we begin a series called They Will Know Us by Our Fruit, looking at the marks of discipleship we are aiming for as a church. Each week we will look at a particular “fruit” that should result from allowing God’s Spirit to work within us. Today we’ll consider how the Church, and individual Christians, should be those who are “Sharing Openly.”

II. Connecting with One Another

What do you think of when you hear the word “evangelism”? Why?

III. Study the Text

- a. Our passage today, Matthew 5.13-16, is taken from the Sermon on the Mount. John Stott writes this about it:

The Sermon on the Mount is probably the best-known part of the teaching of Jesus, though arguably it is the least understood, and certainly it is the least obeyed. It is the nearest thing to a manifesto that he ever uttered, for it is his own description of what he wanted his followers to be and to do. To my mind no two words sum up its intention better, or indicate more clearly its challenge to the modern world, than the expression ‘Christian counter-culture’.

In what ways do you agree or disagree with how Stott describes the Sermon on the Mount? Why?

- b. Read Matthew 5.13-16. Note that the listeners are to be salt and light for “the earth”, for “the world”, not exclusively for themselves. How does this speak to the focus of the church today?
- c. Read Matthew 5.13-16. The main function of salt in the ancient world was as a preservative—to keep food from going bad. God had called Israel to be the salt of the earth, to keep the world from turning “bad”. But Israel, with its power politics, factional in-fighting, and militant revolutions was behaving just like everyone else. Israel had, therefore, lost its “saltiness”. In the same way, Israel was called by God to be the light of the world (Isaiah 42.6; 49.6). But these intended light-bearers had become part of the darkness.

How does this context help you to understand Jesus’s words to the gathered crowd? How is it a warning? How is it a challenge?

- d. A secondary function of salt is for seasoning. Israel was to not only preserve the world but add “flavor” to it. They had also largely failed at this. In what ways can a joyful Christian life add seasoning/zest/flavor to the earth? Do you think the world sees Christians/the Church in this way? Why or why not?
- e. The primary function of light is to illuminate. The houses in Palestine were very dark, usually with only one small window. Even in daylight hours the home could be very dim. The lamp of the home was like a sauce-boat filled with oil and a floating wick. Barclay writes:

It was no so easy to rekindle a lamp in the days before matches existed. Normally the lamp stood on the lampstand which would be no more than a roughly shaped branch of wood; but when people went out, for safety’s sake, they took the lamp from its stand and put it under an earthen bushel measure, so that it might burn without risk until they came back. [But] The primary duty of the light was to be seen.

How are Christians meant to “be seen”? What are ways that followers of Jesus sometimes hide “under a bowl”? Is it ever appropriate for Christians to do that?

f. The “you” in verses 13 and 14 is plural. These words should certainly be applied to us individually, but the plural form indicates that Jesus has a corporate function in mind. What does this teaching say to groups of Christians? To churches?

g. In verse 16 letting our “light shine” is equated with “good deeds”. Stott writes:

It seems that “good words” is a general expression to cover everything a Christian says and does because he is a Christian, every outward and visible manifestation of his Christian faith. Since light is a common biblical symbol of truth, a Christian’s shining light must surely include his spoken testimony.

Note: For Christians, a testimony shares how you have experienced God in your life. It can answer why you are a Christian, experiences you have had, ways God has helped you overcome sin or hardship, and more.

Read 1st Peter 3.15-16. What should Christians always be prepared to do? How should they do it? Are you prepared to do this? Have you had the opportunity? What happened?

h. Note that Jesus says you *are* the salt...you *are* the light. Not you *should be* or you *will be*. Salt and Light are who and what the people of God already *are*. When you think of yourself as “salt” and “light” in this world, how does it make you feel? How does that reality make you want to act?

i. In the religion of ancient Israel it was assumed that God was not only the source of light for daily life (“Thy word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path,” Psalm 119.105) but light itself (“In thy light do we see light,” Psalm 36.9). The New Testament makes this even more clear: “God is light and in him is no darkness at all” (1st John 1.5). And Jesus claims this divine illumination when he states: “I am the light of the world” (John 8.12).

In what sense, then, can the church understand *itself* as the light of the world?

IV. Reflect

a. How can you be “salt” by preserving the good and protecting against evil in the world? How can the Church do this?

b. How can you be “salt” by adding zest and joy to those God has placed in your life? (family, neighbors, coworkers, people you see regularly at the grocery store, etc.)

c. How can you reflect the light of Jesus and shine with “good deeds”? What does it look like for you to Share Openly and authentically about “the reason for the hope that you have”? (1st Peter 3.15)

V. Pray

a. Settle yourself comfortably...focus on your breathing...allow your spirit to become quiet...open yourself up to God’s presence with you...

b. ...identify one or more character traits of God to praise...goodness, faithfulness, justice, patience, mercy, wisdom, lovingkindness, grace...praise God...

c. ...bring to God any confession you need to make...what have you done or left undone that you are sorry about...speak to God about it...

d. ...thank God for the forgiveness that is yours in Christ Jesus...reflect on the other blessings in your life...thank God for these, as well...

e. ...ask God to help Good Shepherd be salt and light in our community...ask God to help you...to find ways to share openly and authentically, with gentleness and respect, your hope in Jesus...now pray for people and situations that are on your heart...and release each one to God’s care... Amen.