

Resonant Light

Echoes of the Kingdom Week 2

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I'm so glad you're here. So I assume a lot of you don't know who I am. So I wanted to start by introducing myself. My name is Lauren, and this is my family here. My husband's name is Tristan. Our oldest boy, Kieran, is 13, and he's now taller than me. Thomas is nine and currently loving baseball. Evie is four and she is a lover of all things horses and unicorns.

At the moment. Solomon is two and both he and Evie take dance classes. They just had a recital last week. I, work part time as a para educator over at Adams Elementary with the preschoolers, and in the past I have worked or volunteered at several daycares and schools and preschool programs. So I'm very experienced and comfortable with kids.

It's just room for all. So it's getting me out of my comfort zone. Although I don't believe you grow much inside your comfort zone. I am passionate about Jesus and His teachings, and so I am so honored to be invited up here and really excited that we get to go through the sermon on the Mount together. So you can see Matthew's account of this sermon as Jesus's greatest hits.

If you want to know what Jesus is all about, look no further. It is Jesus's manifesto on righteousness. He spells out for us the heart of what it means to follow him. Last week we looked at the first 12 verses of Matthew chapter five, commonly called the Beatitudes. There Jesus describes the kind of people to populate his kingdom.

It is countercultural. It does not describe the way the world seems to work. You see, in God's kingdom, it's not the rich and powerful who are happy. It's not the strong or the self-reliant that are happy. It's not even the ones that have it all together that are happy. It's actually the poor, the meek and the merciful. But this isn't the picture that the world around us paints for us as it.

Jesus is in describing the rules of the world, or giving us tips on how to get ahead in life. Instead, Jesus is offering us a whole new way to be human for the rest of the world. This sermon seems to be upside down, but for Jesus as followers, for those of us in his kingdom, it's right side up in the sermon on the Mount.

Jesus is teaching us what right side up really looks like, but it's going to take a refocus. So a few weeks ago, I was in the van driving to church and listening to the radio, and I heard a quote that just really stuck with me. And it was, you have to be different to make a difference. We as Jesus's followers, should look upside down to the rest of the world.

We carry on Jesus's teachings and bring people stuck upside down, right side up in order to make a difference. We have to be different. So today our focus is how we can be different. Difference makers. We'd be looking at just four verses total this morning. So let's start by reading the whole section. Matthew chapter five, verse 13 through 16 says, you are the salt of the earth, but a salt has lost its taste.

How shall its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything except to be thrown out and trampled under people's feet. You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand. And it gives light to all in the house.

In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works, and give glory to your father who is in heaven. So Jesus here is giving us two metaphors. Salt and light. Both salt and light change their surroundings for the better. They make a difference. Salt does not blend in. It enhances by being different.

Light is the opposite of darkness. Light dispels darkness. The two do not coincide. These metaphors work together, but each have their own nuances since they are unique in ways. Let's look at each separately. Verse 13 said, you are the salt of the earth. Jesus is giving you an identity. You are. Notice it doesn't say, I aspire to be the salt of the earth, or once you become the salt of the earth.

It simply says you are the salt of the earth. If you are a follower of Jesus, he is giving you an identity. Here. You are the salt of the earth. Okay, so what could this mean? What is Jesus saying about our given identity by calling us the salt of the earth? Let's get some cultural context. Since the salt that we go buy at the store today is very different than the salt in Jesus's time and place.

So this is a picture of the salt formations in the Dead Sea, which is located about a day or two's journey from where Jesus is likely teaching. The Dead Sea was and still is a resource for salt harvesting in the area. They would either mine these formations directly or they would collect seawater in a pan. Let the water evaporate out, leaving salt crystals.

Salt was very precious and expensive. Have you ever heard the phrase worth your salt? That idiom actually originated in Rome, where some soldiers were known to be paid their wages in salt. In fact, the Latin word for salary *salarium* is derived from *sal*, meaning salt. During the time of Jesus, salt was used to seasoned food just like it is today.

But most importantly, it was used as a preservative. There were no refrigerators, so they were dependent on salt to preserve their food in order to fight decay. They would pack meat with lots of salt and not just a grain or two. So what do we learn about our given identity

from this cultural context? I think we can make some informed guesses of what Jesus might have been communicating when he called his followers the salt of the earth.

Like salt, we are valuable to Jesus and His kingdom. Like salt. We seasoned the world. When we show kindness in a world full of hate. We make the world a better place. Just like salt makes food tastier. And like salt, we are a preservative. Salt preserves food. We preserve the world. When we push against injustices. We fight the decay of the world around us.

And like salt. We are most effective in a community when we are of one mind and mission. So I think it's likely Jesus had one, or maybe even all of these meanings in mind when he used salt as a metaphor to describe our identity. But Jesus had more to add to his metaphor. Let's finish verse 13 says, 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.

What is Jesus cautioning us against here? Consult. Lose it. Saltiness. Can salt lose what it is? Well, today we know that. That would be ridiculous. You can't take sodium chloride and change its very chemical makeup. But remember those salt formations? They were not pure sodium chloride. Like our table. Salt is, but likely a mixture of sodium, magnesium, and potassium.

When it would rain, the sodium chloride would be the first to dissolve. Now listen up. This part's really important. Leaving a white powdery substance that looked like salt, but without the effect of flavor or preserving properties, rendering it useless. But if 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.

So this part of the verse is less fun to apply to ourselves. But just as important. So here's my question. Do we represent Jesus purely or do we represent Jesus purely, or do we dilute his teachings with other agendas? Until Jesus is no longer recognizable in what we do and say. In the things we stand up for and the people we fight for, or maybe against.

Do we do pure Jesus? Or do we cut Jesus with cheaper substances to make him more palatable? This mixing of agendas would happen slowly and without our full awareness. And I believe this contamination is what Jesus is warning us about when he teaches about salt losing its saltiness. Jesus gave us the identity of salt. We get the honor of representing him and spreading his teachings to those around us, to flavor and preserve the world.

We can make the world around us a better place by being a positive influence to our family and to our neighbors. We fight against the decay of the world by staying vigilant about

representing Jesus purely. Now when Jesus says, no longer good for anything. He is not referring to his love for us. There's nothing we can do that will make him love us less.

However, he is speaking to our effectiveness in his kingdom. We can be confident in his love for us while still asking ourselves, am I fully living into the blessing I was created to be for the world? Am I changing my surroundings? Or are my surroundings changing me? So let's get back to our Scripture and start in verse 14.

You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden, nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand. And it gives light to all in the house. Jesus is saying we are meant to be visible. Noticeable, like a city on a hill is noticeable like a lamp on a stand is noticeable.

Light doesn't do any good. Hidden. We were made to stand out so that our presence brings clarity, direction and hope to the world. The word you in this sentence, as well as in verse 13 is speaking of the collective group. Some people today might use the word y'all. Jesus is all about community. Y'all.

This is not a new thing. This is not a me thing. This is an ass thing. First, Jesus calls us the salt of the earth, and now he says we are the light of the world. He's adding another layer to our identity. So let's look at some cultural context for light now. Since in Jesus's time there was no electricity.

The concept of light would be very different than it is today. When the sun goes down here, we just flip our light switches on and we stay up as late as we want. However, if you're a parent of young children like I am not without consequences. In the morning. Although I digress. In Jesus's time, once the sun went down, no more work got done.

They needed a light in order to do anything. But they weren't completely without hope because they had these. Here's a picture of what lamps look like in that time. They put oil inside, a wick was lit, and it would produce a similar amount of light as a candle. When candlelight seems insignificant to us, when we compare it to our light bulbs.

But do not underestimate the difference this flame would make in a small house. It would make sharing a meal or hanging out with your family possible. It would make community in dark places possible. Remember, community is something Jesus is all about and I believe he hints at it in his teachings often. Light as a metaphor in the Bible used to represent wisdom or instruction.

And actually that's a metaphor we still use today. For instance, if you want to represent a cartoon character being inspired, you could draw a light bulb above their head. If someone

has a good suggestion, we call it a bright idea. If we understand something better, we see more clearly. Anyway, hopefully I've shed some light on the situation for you.

Wink, wink, came down with the bronze, I promise. Back to our scripture. Verse 15 says, nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. So salt became ineffective by being contaminated. Light becomes, in fact ineffective. By covering it up. We become watered down and unsalted without being conscious of it.

But this basket, this basket is intentional. It is put on top of the lamp. Sometimes we hide our light to avoid looking strange. But Jesus says being different is the very point. Being different is light in a dark world. So what baskets cover your light? Is it fear? The first steps of bold faith can be scary. Just like when kids learn how to walk, their first steps are not confident.

But they do get back up and try again. Is a comparison or inferiority? See, I'm not experienced at preaching like is. So why even try? Is your basket compromise when we compromise Jesus standards in order to not offend or just to fit in? We are living upside down. Salt and light unmistakably change their surroundings. Light dispels darkness. It does not coexist with it.

Are we unmistakably Jesus followers? Do we look different from the world? Jesus uses the metaphors of salt and light to remind us that we are different, and to urge us to make a difference. Everywhere we go, we can make a positive difference for those around us. Jesus wants us to realize that we are different so that we can make a difference.

Verse 16 says, in the same way, let your light shine before men, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your father who is in heaven. Here is the ultimate why, in this section of his sermon, the reason to be salt and light is to lead others to God. When we are radically different, the rest of the world notices.

When we have their attention, we can invite them out of the dark, bland, upside down world they are living in and into the lit and tasty right side up kingdom. You have to be different to make a difference. Salt changes what it touches. Light changes what it touches. We were created not to blend into the background of the world's brokenness, but to shine.

And in that light, people begin to see God more clearly. When the world offers hate, we offer love. When the world warrants revenge. We forgive instead. And when the world tempts us to gain power, we serve humbly. Instead. So are you. Salt? Are you light? The answer is yes. If you chose to follow him, Jesus says, it's our identity.

The better question is, as salt and light, do we stand out as a positive difference? Am I fully living into the blessing I was created to be for the world?

Well, dear God, I thank you for giving us this identity of salt and light. It is a high calling. But God, we know that your Kingdom is. For those of us who know we need you. You promised to always be there, to never leave us. We ask that this week we have opportunities to stand up and stand out, and that you will give us boldness to do just that. Thank you for loving us and for forgiving us as you do in the name of Jesus Christ. I pray. Amen.