Northwest Bible Church

MATTHEW • SALT AND LIGHT • MATTHEW 5:11-16 • 1/31/2021

MAIN POINT

Despite what persecution they might face, disciples of Jesus must be salt and light in the world.

INTRODUCTION

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

> **Think about the last time the power went out at your home. What did you miss the most? What did you have the hardest time doing without light?**
>
> **What is light's impact on darkness? How does darkness respond to light?**
>
> **What are some of the biggest challenges you face in living as a light for Christ in our sin-darkened world?**

Jesus calls us to live as salt and light in our world, but He doesn't mince words when He says that the result of living this way is persecution. So, as we will see in today's teaching, if you are persecuted and insulted because of your faith, then you might actually be a true follower. Those who represent Jesus should expect some push back at some point. But through that experience, His spirit will rest on you and His character will be formed in you.

UNDERSTANDING

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

> HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ MATTHEW 5:11-12.

To encourage the disciples in the face of future persecutions, Jesus compared them to the prophets who came before Him. The Old Testament prophets faithfully followed God and shared His message with the world, regardless of the world's response.

Consider the prophets in the Old Testament. Would you consider their lives and ministries successful? What was persecution like for them?

What does this idea communicate about the kingdom of God?

By comparing Christ followers to Old Testament prophets, Jesus encouraged His disciples to remain faithful because their reward in heaven would be great—just as it was for the prophets.

> HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ JAMES 1:2-4.

Why should we rejoice about endurance? List some figures in Scripture who model this endurance.

Jesus understood that persecution would be a part of the lives of His people because of Him and His message. They would be reviled "on his account." He wanted them to rejoice in suffering because it was evidence that they would receive an award far greater than anything the world offered.

> HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ MATTHEW 5:13.

Why do you think Jesus chose salt as a teaching tool? What is a comparable metaphor today?

What did Jesus mean when He said believers are the salt of the earth?

Jesus calls His followers "the salt of the earth." Salt's primary function in Jesus' day was to help preserve food (especially meat), an act that was particularly important in the Middle East due to hot temperatures and arid climate.

What is the church's role in serving and preserving culture? What part do you play in that picture?

How is the command to be salt related to the Beatitudes in verses 3-10?

As believers, we act as a preservative in the culture around us by maintaining high moral and spiritual standards that counteract the sin and decay of the world. Salt also serves to add flavor, which is the primary way we use it today. Salt is distinctly different from the things with which it's mixed. Jesus' disciples likewise are to be different from the world.

How does the message of God's kingdom add flavor to your life? To the world?

Why must God's people be distinctly different from people who don't know Him?

By referring to salt, Jesus was making a statement about what it really means to be part of the kingdom of God. People who understand their need for God and have realized His mercy toward them, who seek righteousness even amidst persecution, must not lose their saltiness. Those who follow Him can't keep that hidden, which sets up verse 14 nicely. If we're part of God's kingdom, the world can't help but notice we're different.

> HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ MATTHEW 5:14-16.

How does light as a teaching tool in Jesus' day compare with its function today?

In what situations do people tend to hide their light "under a basket"?

The second comparison Jesus used was light. Jesus developed His comparison by mentioning two situations where nighttime light was especially welcome in the first century. First, imagine traveling on a cloudy night, longing to reach a city situated on a hill. Such a city cannot be hidden. Although the city's lights might be few, at some point you would come around a bend or over a ridge and there the city would be. You'd be almost to your destination. Second, suppose you were at home at night and had only one olive-oil lamp. You would put it on a lampstand so it would benefit all who are in the house. You would not put such a light under a basket. Light exists mainly so other things can be seen. Thus the good works of believers shine before men so other persons receive a blessing.

APPLICATION

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

When you're part of the kingdom of God, your life looks different. The characteristics described in the beginning of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount are the foundation on which those differences are built. When our attitudes are transformed, so are our actions. Unfortunately, because we're sinners who must rely on God's grace, the right disposition isn't always present. But when our attitudes and actions focus on God's glory and spreading His light, we can't help but impact the world.

What causes you to forget about the kingdom of God and your need for Him? How can you guard against that tendency?

What fears come with being salt and light in the world?

Think of those fears in light of verses 11-12. What does this mean for Christians when defining "success." What might be your next step toward success in God's

kingdom?

PRAYER

Reflect and pray for God's strength and guidence when facing persecution, so that we do not fear the hurt but completely trust in Him in order to be salt and light in the world.

COMMENTARY

MATTHEW 5:11-16

5:11-12. Verses 11 and 12 are written in the second person ("you"), whereas verses 1-10 are written in the third person ("they"). This means the impact is much more personal and direct. Kingdom citizens are blessed when people insult and persecute them because of Jesus. When those in the world say every kind of evil against the believers falsely, it means a blessing awaits. Persecution in itself is not a blessing, but Christians who have been falsely accused of wrongdoing and have suffered in Christ's service will receive a blessing/reward in heaven. Some people suffer because of their own poor judgment or for doing wrong. Such suffering brings no blessing. Jesus, however, will reward His kingdom citizens who suffer falsely because of Him.

Jesus told His followers under those circumstances to Rejoice and be glad (literally, "leap for joy") because your reward is great in heaven. The abuse of the world proves that the believers are indeed making an impact for God. Why? That is how they persecuted the prophets who were before you. Those who have lived godly lives suffered at the hands of the world. Think of Abel, Noah, Moses, Daniel, John the Baptist, and Jesus.

5:13. There are many lists of the uses of salt, most of them inspired by Jesus' statement here. However, among the many possible connotations, Jesus probably had two most centrally in His mind. First, salt preserves from corruption. In the centuries before modern refrigeration, salt was the method of choice for preventing bacteria from poisoning food. Just as salt prevents or kills bacteria in food, the kingdom servant prevents or confronts corruption in the world. Notice that it is the earth that needs the salt, not the kingdom of heaven. If the kingdom servant did not have a function to perform on earth according to God's plan, he might as well go straight to heaven upon conversion.

The second function of salt is to add flavor or interest (see Col. 4:5-6). Jesus highlighted this purpose when He spoke of the danger of salt losing its saltiness. Part of the church's task on earth is to live according to its new nature—alive, purposeful, hopeful, joyful. Christians should be living in such a way that others will pause and consider what is different about them (see 1

Pet. 3:15). Believers are different and should appear so, because the Father is different (holy; see 1 Pet. 1:15-16). The kingdom servant who does not live according to his nature as salt is useless to the king's advancement of the kingdom on earth.

5:14-16. The picture of light is similar to salt, in that both describe the influence the believer is to have in the world. However, it reveals a different facet of the believer's influence. The function of light is to make reality or truth visible, thereby giving direction and guidance by what is seen. Jesus again used the emphatic "you," and again clearly stated that this is already what a believer is, not something he might become. It is the nature of a kingdom servant to be light in the world. Any believer who fails to function as light is going against his nature as God's new creation. The believer has no light inherent in himself. The believer's light is a reflected light. Believers are to make certain that nothing comes between them and their source of light (see 2 Cor. 3:18; Phil. 2:13-16).

Both a city on a hill (v. 14) and the lamp on its stand (v. 15) fulfill their function by being elevated, so their light can be seen by many people over a broad area. Jesus Himself explained the application of this principle in 5:16. The light represents our good works, which must be done with such integrity that all who see have no choice but to credit our Father in heaven. The Christian's life and influence is to be visible and obvious, not secret or hidden. We must not camouflage our devotion to Christ, but humbly do all we can to allow its truest colors to be seen where we live. The term translated give glory to means "to make manifest or visible." When we shine our light before others by living righteously, we are making visible the character of the Father. It is the Christian's commission to live in such a way as to make God visible in a world that is blind to Him.

This is the first time Matthew calls God Father. It is a wonderful, new emphasis on personal intimacy for the believer. Matthew used this word forty-five times. And while the fatherhood of God was not unknown in the Old Testament, here it is endowed with a very personal sense (see Mark 14:36; Rom. 8:15; Gal. 4:6). The King wants His people to know that His kingdom involves a deeply personal relationship with God. It is so much more than a religious or organizational connection.