

Matthew 5:10-17, 20 (New Revised Standard Version)

Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you. You are the salt of the earth; but if salt has lost its taste, how can its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything, but is thrown out and trampled under-foot. You are the light of the world. A city built on a hill cannot be hid. No one after lighting a lamp puts it under the bushel basket, but on the lampstand, 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 in heaven. Do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets; I have come not to abolish but to fulfill. For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.

**Christian discipleship, to faithfully follow Jesus
has never been about our personal comfort and ease.**

Matthew was originally addressed to a Christian community
struggling and suffering under severe attack and persecution,
and for them, having chosen to be faithful, **came at a high cost.**

So the author of Matthew reminds them of what Jesus said, vs. 10-11.

Blessed are those who are persecuted for **righteousness' sake**, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you **falsely on my account.**

Several of the newer translations use the word, happy for blessed,
but that's far too weak and touchy-feely, and it misses the mark.
Blessed is a lot more than just feeling nice or fortunate.

Blessed is the idea of dwelling within God's purpose and intention.
It is to be at peace for having made righteous and godly choices,
and to be on track and in line with God's intent & desire for you.
It's when your life is in tune -- in harmony with God.

This passage was intended as a message of encouragement & assurance,
that though our faithful commitment and obedience to Jesus Christ
can be costly and sometimes does come with a price to pay,
ultimately that high cost **will lead to abundant blessings**,
living the purposeful, meaningful and satisfying life
that the Lord has graciously prepared for us to receive.

As Jesus points out, to stand courageous and strong against wrong,
to declare God's truth despite the risk, danger and even threat,
places us in some pretty good company, amid the prophets,
faithful servants who preceded us, vs. 12.

God's

Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for in the same way they
persecuted the prophets who were before you.

To live that life of faithful Christian discipleship
means to live set-apart and different from the ways of culture,
which Jesus describes and explains and defines
as being **the salt and light of true righteousness**, vs. 13-14.

You are the salt of the earth; but if salt has lost its taste, how can its saltiness be restored? It is no

longer good for anything, but is thrown out and trampled under-foot. **You are** the light of the world. A city built on a hill cannot be hid.

**So what does it mean for us to stand and live as salt and light
within the context and perspective of our culture and society?**

In our world and in the lives we lead,
there are many other voices that seek our attention and loyalty,
but we cannot serve the Lord God and compromise with them,
for we are challenged **to live distinctly into God's grace.**
We are called to live out our Christians identity as salt and light.

And there are real consequences set in motion by what we choose,
for either God is the priority of our lives, or God is not,
and so we are challenged to consider our own commitment to Jesus,
& our willingness to take the risk of standing in faith with Christ.

And that means we are on guard and aware that this world can seduce,
& the dangers of compromising with popular culture & its influence,
rather than **standing against the prevailing winds of society.**

In my former career, when I ran an office products business,
by far the most popular
and best-selling color for desk accessories was beige,
because it always fit in with whatever was already there.
It was safe, because beige goes with everything and never clashes.

While that's OK for a file cabinet, a desk tray or a pencil cup,
but Christians and churches ought not be **non-offensive beige,**
for Jesus has blessed us, and commissioned us to stand out,
You are the salt of the earth. You are the light of the world.

So how do we do salt?, and how do we do light?

I've always found that salty food makes me thirsty.

Ask yourself this, are the influences and effects of your living,
causing those who come in contact with you and those around you,
to thirst for the living water of Jesus Christ?

That is a part of being God's salt to the earth.

When other people are with us out in the world, can they and do they
recognize God's grace in us, in our relationships and how we live?

Does the presence of God in us make **any discernable difference**?

Is God's gracious love transforming us in a way
that attracts others toward a relationship with God?

Is our relationship with God guiding the relationships we live?

That too is a part of being God's salt to the earth.

Continuing from this same passage, Jesus proclaims, vs. 14, 16

You are the light of the world. A city built on a hill cannot be hid. In the same way, **let your light shine before others**, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven.

The connection and call is clear,

You are a light to the nations, and You are the light of the world.
Theologically, light serves several critical functions.

1st like a lighthouse, as a sign of hope, guidance and encouragement
like the bright sunshine that plants need to grow & bear fruit
like a surgeons healing lazar-tool cutting out a tumor.

2nd light also dispels the darkness - it reveals truth and reality
light is able to expose secret & hidden nooks & crannies,
exposing what lies deep in the darkness of secret places,
for light lets things be seen as they really are.

The light **exposes and drives off** the shadows of the darkness,
while the light of what God's love accomplishes through us
is appealing and invites, drawing others toward the Lord.

The way we live as characterized by grace, compassion & goodness,
is a reflection of God's presence, mercy and graciousness,
and of God's justice and mercy, as we walk in faith with God.

In cooperation with **the light of God's grace, mercy and invitation**,
our lives **can reflect** God at work and his activity in our world,
and **serve to help** the wandering lost find their way to the Lord...

... and that's what it means for us **to stand and live into that light
in the context and perspective of our culture and society,
against the trash that blows in and seduces from the world.**

Simply put, the goal of the Christian life isn't compromise & ease,

but that having received the blessing of God's gracious love,
to let it grow and shine into the darkness of our world
so that the world may see, know and be drawn to Christ.

Our call is to a refreshed awareness of God and God's grace,
of God's presence and activity in our lives and out in the world...
... so that we celebrate our Lord's faithfulness **a lot more,**
and live out a deeper sense of gratitude, joy and hope,
as evidence that all are loved and precious to God...

... for that's what it means to be the salt of the earth, the light of the world.

The message however, is not try to **be saltier or shine more brightly.**

Jesus did not say, do this and you will **become salt and light,**
He said, you **are** salt and light, --- **we already are.**

Part of our task is not to let our salt be diluted or contaminated,
and not to allow our light to be filtered or blocked by the world.

To live a truly faithful life of obedient Christian discipleship
does set us apart from the values, goals and ways of our culture,
by choosing **the righteousness of a right relationship with God,**
which as Jesus explains fulfills & serves God purpose and will
in way that the Scribes and Pharisees didn't see, vs. 17, 20

Do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets; I have come not to abolish **but to fulfill.** For
I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom
of heaven.

The righteousness to which Jesus refers throughout the gospels
is far more than a rigid & legalistic adherence to a set of rules.

Jesus doesn't focus on outward obedience to the Law and ritual,
as much as **seeking to have an authentic relationship with God --**
a faithful and humble heart that leads to living as God intends.

In our broken, polarized and angry world of harsh bitterness,
we can stand distinctly and separately faithful to God
by living out visibly God's grace, promise & truth **in love,**
by refusing to reject or disdain even those who differ,

because, assured of the divine and powerful sovereignty of God,

we can trust, believe and know that God's truth will prevail.

A life aligned to the will of God is the point of the Matt. 5 passage,

a call that goes beyond simple adherence to the letter of the law,

toward becoming all that God created each of us to become.

And this is not something that we can or will accomplish ourselves,

but it's what the Lord **is already accomplishing for us in Christ...**

... which is what we're celebrating today at the Lord's Table.

**The Lord's Table points beyond itself toward God's gracious love,
as a sign of invitation to a joyful, blessed & shared family meal.**

We are here to celebrate God's gifts & blessings, new possibilities,

and that we are part of something awesome, mysterious and wonderful,

for God is still very much at work,

still seeking the lost and transforming human lives,

and even better, inviting us to enjoy & participate.

Our call is to deliberately and actively demonstrate

God's love and grace by our attitudes and attention,

by serving as caring dispensers of God's love and grace.

So, in your thoughts & meditation today at the Lord's Table,

I encourage you to ask the Lord to make known and clear to you,

and to point you toward **some situation or person in your life,**

so that this week, you focus on how your own life can be

the salt and light of God's grace to someone's need...

... as each of us consider carefully, honestly and prayerfully,

where can I reflect God's grace into the world where I live?