



ASKING BETTER QUESTIONS -
THE SERMON ON THE
MOUNT 9

Salt and Light (Mt 5:13-15)

“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.



Initial Questions

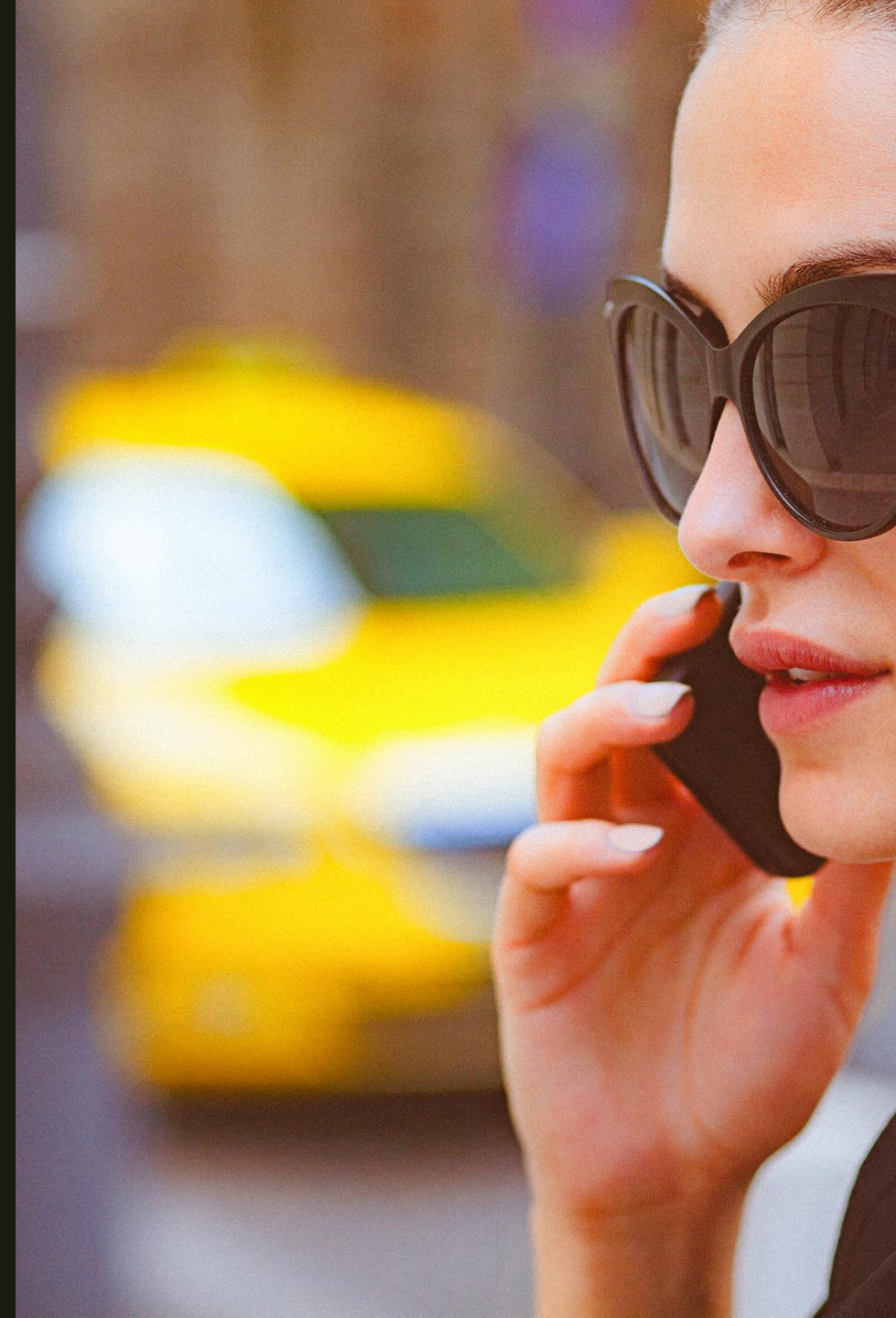
- Who is Jesus talking to?
- What does it mean to be *salty*?
- What does *salt of the earth* mean?
- What does **light of the world** mean?
- What does **let your light shine** mean?
- Anything else?

Where are we in the story?

- Just finished the Beatitudes.
- Jesus has been painting a picture of what righteous kingdom living looks like.
- ... we must recognize that it is **impossible** to follow the norms of the kingdom in a **purely private way**. The righteousness of the life you live will attract attention, even if that attention regularly takes the form of opposition. In other words, the Christian is not poor in spirit, mournful over sin, meek, hungry and thirsty for righteousness, merciful, pure in heart, a peacemaker—all in splendid isolation. These kingdom norms, diligently practiced in a sinful world, constitute a major aspect of Christian witness; and **this witness gives rise to persecution**. Nevertheless, the conduct of Jesus's disciples needs to be considered in its **effect on the world**, just as the opposition of the world has been considered in its **effect on the Christian**. [Carson]

Who is Jesus talking to?

- You = those listening, those interested in following.
- Perhaps Jesus is saying “You *already are* the salt of the earth and the light of the world. I’ve got no one else”
- How are you doing with that?



Salt in the Bible

- Used in temple sacrifice
- The Lord said to Moses: “Take fragrant spices: stacte, onycha, and galbanum; the spices and pure frankincense are to be in equal measures. 35 Prepare expertly blended incense from these; **it is to be seasoned with salt, pure and holy** (Ex 34:35)
- You are to **season** each of your grain offerings with **salt**; you must not omit from your grain offering the **salt of the covenant** with your God. You are to present salt with each of your offerings. (Lev 2:13)
- What do we notice here?





Referring to the Hebrew Bible (Old Testament)

- The people we read about in the NT were predominantly Jewish in culture and religion (but also Greek and Roman)
- Their religious and cultural practices and understandings are all shaped by the culture they lived in.
- So when Jesus mentions “salt”, what do they immediately think of?
- For us, we don’t have the same culture, so we have to do some extra work to discover the means in their culture before we apply the meaning from our own culture.
- Makes sense?
- What sort of things are in “the culture”?
- Food, music, greetings, marriage, ceremonies, holidays, laws etc

Salt in the Bible

- Salt is good, but if the salt should lose its flavor, how can you make it salty? Have salt among yourselves and **be at peace with one another.**” (Mk 9:50)
- What is the practical application of “being salty” here?
- Help prevent spiritual decay in one another?
- What does that look like in practice?





Salt in the Bible

- Your **speech** should **always be gracious**, seasoned with **salt**, so that you may know how you should answer each person. (Col 4:6)
- What is the practical application of “being salty” here?
- How a follower of Jesus talks to people **matters!** What sort of things should we think about?
- Kind words.
- Truthful words.
- Thoughtfulness: What is their situation? Their theological understanding. Don’t over-power with jargon!
- Content: not overly-religious, but not devoid of Biblical truth either.



How salt works

- Salt acts as a preservative that prevents decay.
- The purpose of salt is to fight deterioration, and therefore it must not itself deteriorate. [Carson]

**You are the light of the world.
A town built on a hill cannot be hidden.
(Mt 5:14)**

Town on the hill

Who's looking at this? What do they want?

Light in the Bible

- When Jesus spoke again to the people, he said, “I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.” (Jn 8:12)
- the people living in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of the shadow of death a light has dawned. (Mt 4:16, Isa 9:1,2)
- In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it. (Jn 1:4-5)

How light works

- What is this light by which Jesus's disciples lighten a dark world? In this context, we read of neither personal confrontation nor ecclesiastical pronouncement. Rather, the light is the “**good deeds**” performed by Jesus's followers—performed in such a way that at least some men recognize these followers of Jesus as sons of God, and come to praise this Father whose sons they are (5:16). [Carson]
- Agree or disagree?



More like this?

Or more like this?

In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven. (Mt 5:16)



Let Your Light Shine

- 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.
- Am I hiding it somehow?

Salt and Light – Double influence

- Nevertheless, the kind of service each brings is different. In fact, their effects are complementary. The **function of salt is largely negative: it prevents decay.** The **function of light is positive: it illuminates the darkness.** So Jesus calls his disciples to exert a double influence on the secular community, a negative influence by arresting its decay and a positive influence by bringing light into its darkness. For it is one thing to stop the spread of evil; it is another to promote the spread of truth, beauty and goodness. [Stott]

Salt and Light

‘Salt and light have one thing in common: they give and expend themselves – and thus are the opposite of any and every kind of self-centred religiosity.’ [Theilecke]

What do you think about that?

The paradox

- What possible influence could the people described in the Beatitudes exert in this hard, tough world? What lasting good can the poor and the meek do, the mourners and the merciful, and those who try to make peace not war? Would they not simply be overwhelmed by the flood of evil? What can be accomplished by those whose only passion is an appetite for righteousness, and whose only weapon is purity of heart? Are not such people too feeble to achieve anything, especially if they are a small minority in the world? [Stott]
- Impacting the world.
- Will this work?
- Jesus thinks it will.

The paradox

We need to be able to say:

- “Yes, this will work. Jesus knows what works.”
- “And I want to be part of that.”

In your own words

**You are the salt of the earth.
You are the light of the world.**

How would you say it in your own words?



Reflection

- What does “being salty” mean for me?
- Do I need to find some resources to understand Hebrew culture a bit better?
- What do I think about the idea of “good deeds”?
- Am I holding back the light I have in any way?
- Do I believe that Jesus’ teachings can work in my small corner?