

Dr. Bert Jones • North Carolina Capitol Commission • Bert.Jones@capitolcom.org

Following the nine consecutive verses beginning “*Blessed*” (Matt. 5:3-11) that we call the “Beatitudes” (derived from the Latin “*beatus*” meaning “*blessed*”), Christ tells us to rejoice and be glad despite the fact that godly living will invite persecution, false accusation, and hatred from the world. He reminds us that God’s prophets were treated as such, and that our reward in Heaven will be far greater than earthly suffering.

Then Christ uses salt and light as pictures of those who will share in His kingdom. These images give us valuable insights of the importance God places on His people and the role He has for us as we are to live in the world, but not of the world.

Salt was very valuable in the first century (and through the ages). The English word *salary* literally means “*salt money*”. Roman soldiers were given salt rations. We can be reminded of this from the saying “*he is not worth his salt.*”

Just as salt (a preservative) is needed in a decaying world, light is needed in a dark world. Believers are different from unbelievers in that they have been born into God’s family, and possess His nature (2Peter 1:4), having been indwelt by the Holy Spirit (Romans 8:11, 1Cor 3:16). “*God is light*” (1John 1:5), and we are the children of light (“*For you were once darkness, but now you are the light of the Lord*” Ephesians 5:8).

It is notable that Christ uses these terms to describe what we would call “ordinary people”. His audience (then and now) might be more inclined to accept such terms as “salt of the earth” or “light of the world” to kings, caesars, or even exalted religious leaders. But God does not primarily work through the “elite”. He receives more glory by working through “ordinary people”, even very radically changed people such as Paul!

So by a great miracle of God’s grace, clay becomes salt, and darkness becomes light. Christ does not say that we *should be* salt and light, but that we are. While we cannot change what we are, we can waste it – by the salt losing its saltiness (v. 13) or putting the light under a basket (v. 14). Being salt and light for God is both a great privilege and a great responsibility.

God could have saved souls and translated us directly to Heaven. But His perfect plan leaves us as ambassadors for Him in the world that He created.

As much as many may prefer to deny it, apart from Christ the world is lost, dark, decaying and dying. The Bible does not condemn God’s creation, but says the heavens declare His glory and the earth reveals His handiwork (Psalm 19:1). God wants us to enjoy His created world. But creation is groaning because of sin (Romans 8:22).

God neither condemns His created world, nor the world of humanity. “*For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved.*” (John 3:16-17)

However, people can condemn themselves by rejecting God’s Son, preferring the darkness of sin over the Light of the World: “*He who believes in Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. And this is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and men loved the darkness rather than the light, because their works were evil. For everyone practicing evil hates the light and does not come to the light, for fear that his works will be exposed. But he who practices the truth comes to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that his works have been done in God.*” (John 3:18-21).

Humanity is lost without God. The mission of the Lord Jesus Christ was to seek and to save the lost (Luke 19:10). He did not come to teach us a program of how to save ourselves, “*if righteousness comes by the law, then Christ died in vain*” (Galatians 2:21). Rather, He became a sinless sacrifice, shed His blood and died as payment for our sins – “*the wages of sin is death but the gift of God is eternal life through Christ Jesus our Lord*” (Romans 6:23).

The Beatitudes began with building blocks of Christian faith. When we are “poor in spirit”, we realize we are spiritually bankrupt and lost without God. This leads us to salvation and eternal life with the inheritance of heaven. When we mourn our sin and the sins of the world, we seek ‘the God of all comfort’ (2Cor 1:3-4) for repentance and salvation. Meekness is not weakness, but true power under control. To better understand “inheriting the earth”, we can see the text in Psalm 37:9-11 that Christ was quoting.

We must hunger for God’s righteousness and not our own if we are to be truly satisfied. His righteousness comes by faith, not from the works of the law (Phil. 3:8-9). Then as we grow in Christ, we take on His attributes. God is merciful and calls us to be as well (Micah 6:8). He is pure in heart, and is the God of peace (Jehovah-Shalom). But Christ was hated without cause and persecuted, and reminds His people to expect the same when we are like Him.

As salt, we are to season others with God’s Good News and as light we are to shine it for others to see (Matt. 5:13-16). The Lord blesses us for our efforts, and He is glorified.

Matthew 5

The Sermon on the Mount

5 Seeing the crowds, He went up on the mountain, and when He sat down, His disciples came to Him.

The Beatitudes

2 And He opened His mouth and taught them, saying:

3 "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

4 "Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.

5 "Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.

6 "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.

7 "Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy.

8 "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.

9 "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.

10 "Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

11 "Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you on My account. 12 Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

Salt and Light

13 "You are the salt of the earth, but if 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.

14 "You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. 15 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. 16 In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father who is in heaven.

Memory Verse for the Week

"Let your light shine before me, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father who is in heaven."
(Matthew 5:16)