

May 8, 2016

God Renews  
Matthew 5:13-16

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A man walks into a grocery store and asks, “do you sell salt?”

“Ha!” says the proprietor. Do we sel salt? Just look! Pop showed the customer an entire wall stocked with nothing but salt. Sea Salt, Iodized Salt, Kosher Salt, rock salt, garlic salt – every kind, shape and colour imaginable. “Wow”, exclaimed the customer. “You think that’s something, asked pop – that’s nothing. And Pop led the customer to a back room filled with shelves and bins and cartons and barrels and boxers of salt. “Do we sell salt?” scoffed the proprietor.

“Unbelievable”, said the customer. “You think that’s something, said Pop, I’ll show you some salt.” And Pop led the customer down the steps into a huge basement, give times as large as the back room. It was filled, floor to ceiling with every imaginable form of salt – even ten pound salt licks for cattle.

“Incredible”, said the customer. “You really do sell salt.”

“That’s the problem though”, admitted the store owner. “We never really sell any. But that salt sales guy, hoo-boy, does he sell salt.”

*“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 underfoot.*

*“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.*

Storytelling was an important skill in Jesus' time. A few years ago, archeologists unearthed a creiai school just outside of Nazareth that dated to the time of Jesus. The creiai were a group of Greek poets and philosophers who believed in the power of story, and would train to be able to retell a story with all of the details changed, that was nevertheless, the same story.

Some scholars believe that might be what Jesus was doing here.

Because there are precious few examples where Jesus spends time telling us in the Gospels what our role is in what's happening. Instead he tells us, the Kingdom of Heaven is like ... or God is like ... or even I am ...

But rarely does he say You are like.

So telling the crowds listening to the sermon on the mount that they are the salt of the earth and the light of the world is supposed to make our ears perk up.

"Hey, he's talking about me. Maybe I should pay attention..."

Salt and Light; Light and Salt. These are two sides of the same coin.

And, instinctively, we get that. Most of what they do is similar.

**They're both good for us. Light chases away shadows; salt is antiseptic.**

We've evolved to be nervous around shadows. We don't know what might be hiding around that corner, and so our brain tells us it could be anything – our worst fear. But turn on the lights, even for a moment and that pile of clothes on top of a chair stops being a scary monster and starts being a pile of clothes on top of a chair. Even walking into a dark room causes heart rate to rise slightly. Salt does the same thing for our bodies. Ancient Roman

physicians used to sprinkle salt on a wound because they understood its antiseptic properties.

**They're both passive. Light enables us to see, salt enables us to taste.**

Except after a rainstorm, we seldom get to see light. But light lets us see everything else. The same is true for salt. Go home and eat something low sodium, and you'll find that it's not only low sodium, but low flavour in general. The salt receptors on our tongue are among the most powerful in your mouth.

**They're both variable. Different colours of light affect us differently; salt affects different flavours differently.** There's been tons written about the ways different colours affect us. The Japanese government painted their bridges blue and suicide rates at those bridges dropped by 60%. The NCAA had to institute a rule that colleges in the States weren't allowed to paint visiting team locker rooms Pink because it gave the home team an unfair advantage. Researchers at the University of Rochester found that exposure to the colour green makes you more creative than you would be otherwise. Likewise, forget to put salt in a batch of cookies and they taste less sweet. Add salt to a tomato sauce to bring out the savoury flavours, and add it to buttery popcorn to make it saltier. Salt acts differently in every recipe.

**They're both subtle. They're both innocuous until they're overdone**

Both salt and light, you tend not to notice until there's way too much of it all at once. Whether it's the optometrist watching your pupils dilate or mixing up sugar and salt in a batch of pancakes, too much salt or light is unpleasant.

Salt and Light have plenty of similarities.

But it's where they are different that Jesus wants us to focus.

Because light that doesn't let people see is no good to anyone, and salt that stays on the shelf doesn't do anything.

Jesus might as well have written

You are the light of the world; but if the light has lost its brightness, how can it's light be restored? It is no longer good for anything, but is missed and so is everything that happens around it.

You are the salt of the earth; the salt in the recipe cannot be missed. No one after cooking throws the bread away, but they eat and share it with everyone around them In the same way, let your saltiness be shared with others, so that they may taste and see that God is Good.

Your Light is what lets people see God through you; Your Salt is what lets people know God is Good.

Day by day, that is the promise of God. The sunrise in the morning reminds us of his faithfulness, but the salt that we crave reminds us of his goodness.

We are the salt of the earth, the active agent in the world by which God calls everything to be made new again. To be Good again.

Amen.