

“Be Salty and Shine!”

Isaiah 58:1-12 & Matthew 5:13-20

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Jesus helps us picture the Kingdom of God and invites us to see ourselves in that picture. Today's scripture is an excerpt from Jesus' Sermon on the Mount that began with the Beatitudes that we explored last Sunday. By God's grace we will all fully enjoy the Kingdom of God in heaven for eternity. On earth we enjoy snippets of the Kingdom of God. Jesus teaches how we can enjoy more of the Kingdom of God today.

Jesus said, **Matthew 5:13-20 NLT** “**You are the salt of the earth. But what good is salt if it has lost its flavor? Can you make it salty again? It will be thrown out and trampled underfoot as worthless. You are the light of the world—like a city on a hilltop that cannot be hidden. No one lights a lamp and then puts it under a basket. Instead, a lamp is placed on a stand, where it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your good deeds shine out for all to see, so that everyone will praise God. Don't misunderstand why I have come. I did not come to abolish the law of Moses or the writings of the prophets. No, I came to accomplish their purpose. I tell you the truth, until heaven and earth disappear, not even the smallest detail of God's law will disappear until its purpose is achieved. So if you ignore the least commandment and teach others to do the same, you will be called the least in the Kingdom of Heaven. But anyone who obeys God's laws and teaches them will be called great in the Kingdom of Heaven. But I warn you—unless your righteousness is better than the righteousness of the teachers of religious law and the Pharisees, you will never enter the Kingdom of Heaven!**”

The Sermon on the Mount is harsh if we do not hear it in the context of God's grace. We all fall way short of God's standard; glorious, complete, perfection, always pure in love and joy. God's grace bridges that enormous gap. We experience snippets of the Kingdom of Heaven today by God's grace when we are salty and shine.

You can bring heaven to earth by striving to live like Jesus. Jesus is empowering you with grace to bring abundant life through your joyful love.

Robert Test wrote, “At a certain moment, a doctor will determine that my brain has ceased to function and that, for all intents and purposes, my life has stopped. When that happens, do not attempt to instill artificial life into my body by the use of a machine. And don't call this my "deathbed." Call it my "bed of life," and let my body be taken from it to help others lead fuller lives. Give my sight to someone who has never seen a sunrise, a baby's face or love in the eyes of another. Give my heart to a person whose own heart has caused nothing but endless days of pain. Give my blood to the teenager who has been pulled from the wreckage of his car, so that he might live to see his grandchildren play. Give my kidneys to one who depends on a machine to exist from week to week. Take my bones, every muscle, every fiber and nerve so that someday a speechless boy will shout at the crack of a bat and a deaf girl will hear the sound of rain against her windows. Burn what is left of me and scatter the ashes to the winds to help the flowers grow. If you must bury something, let it be my faults, my weaknesses and all my prejudice against my other humans. Bury my sin. Give my soul to God. If, by chance, you wish to remember me, do it with a kind deed or word to someone who needs you. My love will live forever.”

John Ruskin lived in the days when English villages were lighted by lamps along the street. One evening, he watched with a friend as a lamplighter moved slowly on a distant hill, lighting the lamps along the street. Ruskin said, "There is what I mean by being a real Christian. You can trace their course by the lights that they leave burning." It is our job to keep the lights burning.

Listen again to Jesus' words this time from The Message paraphrase. **Matthew 5:13-20 MSG** “**Let me tell you why you are here. You're here to be salt-seasoning that brings out the God-flavors of this earth. If you lose your saltiness, how will people taste godliness? You've lost your usefulness and will end up in the garbage. "Here's another way to put it: You're here to be light, bringing out the God-colors in the**

world. God is not a secret to be kept. We're going public with this, as public as a city on a hill. If I make you light-bearers, you don't think I'm going to hide you under a bucket, do you? I'm putting you on a light stand. Now that I've put you there on a hilltop, on a light stand—shine! Keep open house; be generous with your lives. By opening up to others, you'll prompt people to open up with God, this generous Father in heaven. “Don't suppose for a minute that I have come to demolish the Scriptures—either God's Law or the Prophets. I'm not here to demolish but to complete. I am going to put it all together, pull it all together in a vast panorama. God's Law is more real and lasting than the stars in the sky and the ground at your feet. Long after stars burn out and earth wears out, God's Law will be alive and working. Trivialize even the smallest item in God's Law and you will only have trivialized yourself. But take it seriously, show the way for others, and you will find honor in the kingdom. Unless you do far better than the Pharisees in the matters of right living, you won't know the first thing about entering the kingdom.

When we live in the light of Christ, something amazing happens, grace abounds. We begin acting not by our own effort, or virtue or steadfastness. We become part of the light, experiencing God loving in us and through us. Our light is joined with the light of others, creating a brilliant community, a Kingdom of God hot spot, where grace, love and joy illumines all.

There is a story about a concerned mother who had a daughter who was addicted to sweets. She explained her concern to a spiritual director and asked her to talk to her daughter. The spiritual director replied, "Bring your daughter to me in three weeks' time then I will speak to her." After three weeks, the spiritual director helped the daughter. The mother thanked her, then asked, "But why did you wait to speak to her for three weeks?" She replied, "Because three weeks ago, I was still addicted to sweets." We must do more than just point out the right road to others, we must be on that road ourselves. The integrity of our private lives down to the smallest detail is the light behind our words.

Jesus said. **Matthew 5:13a NLT** “**You are the salt of the earth.**” Jesus calls us to be salty to bring out the wonder, glory, beauty, goodness, joy, peace, majesty, order, radiance, love in others, ourselves and the cosmos. We are to be salty, receiving, savoring and sharing God's blessings, being abundant life enhancers.

Jesus said. **Matthew 5:13b-d NLT** “**But what good is salt if it has lost its flavor? Can you make it salty again? It will be thrown out and trampled underfoot as worthless.**” When we lose our saltiness, our flavor, which happens all the time by our inability to fully receive love and joy and be loving and joyful we cannot make ourselves salty again. But God's grace does make us salty over and over again. God's grace washes away our tasteless sinfulness, throws our sin out, buries sin by the cross, so we can be receptive again to love, joy and blessings.

Steve Brown created a top ten list of ways he believes we lose our salty flavor. “We live in fear. We define ourselves by our failures instead of God's love. We surrender the freedom for which Jesus has set us free. We think of God as either away on vacation or Santa Claus, instead of looking to Jesus to find out what God is really like. We are obsessed with getting better instead of being grateful for God's forgiveness. We forget the gospel and sacrifice the joy that sets us free. We wear masks instead of being authentic. We put our leaders on pedestals and thereby demean ourselves. We demonize our enemies instead of acknowledging their humanity. We avoid the reality of pain.” God's grace makes us salty again and again.

Hear Jesus words again through The Message translation. **Matthew 5:13 MSG** “**Let me tell you why you are here. You're here to be salt-seasoning that brings out the God-flavors of this earth. If you lose your saltiness, how will people taste godliness?**”

There are many ways we lose our saltiness. Sometimes by failing to live the unforced rhythms of grace, other times by failing to let go so we can let come, sometimes by undervaluing ourselves, other times by overvaluing ourselves. Ken Kesselus said. “It might be instructive to note something Jesus did not say. He did not tell his disciples to become the "pepper of the earth." Pepper calls attention to itself, as opposed to salt that, when properly used, only highlights what it flavors. Jesus does not expect us to call attention to ourselves in our

salting efforts. Rather, we are to make others more acceptable, more meaningful, more loving.” Always remember, every time we lose our saltiness God’s grace makes us salty again.

Here are three examples. A compassionate young person cares deeply for others, treats others equally with encouragement and serves others humbly. This person has academic talents to make the world a better place. Their compassion gets twisted as they become overwhelmed by what they perceive to be the expectations of others. They feel more and more pressure to get excellent grades which makes them anxious and tired. Their grades falter. Their self-talk turns negative. They become exhausted. Their salty compassion, love, and service loses its flavor. God’s grace comes to them through scripture, youth fellowship, teachers, and parents. They realize again, they are salty, a talented, compassionate person, that is wonderful for who they are rather than their grades. They let go, relax, think positive thoughts, and become even more compassionate. Their talents flourish enabling them to make earth more like heaven.

A man and woman become best friends. They fall in love. They enjoy adventures and playing together. They bring out the best in each other. They delight in their children and strive to help them be salty. They are generous with their work striving to give their best for their employers. They endure accidents, setbacks, and parents and siblings entering Life Triumphant. They become discouraged by the fruit of their work. They became exhausted. Then burn out. They still deeply love each other, but they let demands crowd their time for each other to the exhausted leftovers of their day. They drift apart. Their salty relationship that once was abundant with blessings for each other and everyone around them loses its saltiness. They get stuck in a flavorless relationship for years. God’s grace bombards them, especially the husband, through mentors, friends, coworkers, books, scripture and an unexpected blessing a trip for the two of them. They talk, cry, laugh and enjoy silence and the awe of creation together. God’s grace reveals again the beauty they love in each other. They become playful, best friends, and bring out the best in each other again.

A young lady becomes super salty through her sport. It gives her confidence, passion, and joy that blesses everyone around her. She gets hurt over and over. Determined to excel she becomes tenacious with her physical therapy, training, stretching, nutrition, and life to regain her health. Her injuries shatter her goals. Her sport loses its saltiness, no longer fun, it becomes a constant discouraging climb of setbacks. God’s grace prompts her to help a friend that is suffering from a similar injury. God’s grace uncovers a skill for helping others regain their movement, strength, and vitality. God’s grace gives her a new goal to become a physical therapist, so she can help others excel in life. God’s grace uncovers a different form of joy in her sport.

You, and the cosmos, are abundant with marvelous, glorious God flavors. You are salty. God created you to savor, enhance, and reveal God’s flavors. You will fall into slumps, dark nights of the soul and struggles, that will cause you to lose your saltiness. God throws the unsalty ugliness away. God’s grace will make you salty over and over again. God has placed, and is placing, goodness in you, and all around you, that only you can reveal. Be salty and shine. Amen