

The Sermon on the Mount #3

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- [0 : 00] It's not clear who invented the first microscope, but around 1600, the Dutch spectacle maker Zacharias Janssen is credited with making one of the earliest compound microscopes, ones that used two lenses.
- The development of the microscope opened a whole new world of discovery, allowing scientists to make new insights into the body, disease, and to see the intricacies of creation.
- One such discovery, laminin. Fun fact, laminin protein is the cell adhesive molecule that holds our cells together. Under a microscope, we see it is shaped like a cross.
- Last week, we stood and declared what it is we believe, based on Colossians 1 and verse 17. Jesus is before all things, and in him all things are held together.
- It's crazy how scientific discovery has allowed us to see God's blueprint for holding the body together. Laminin. It's shaped like a cross.
- [1 : 04] And as we know, the cross connects us to God and holds us together as one body in Christ. Is that a coincidence? Well, back to why I mentioned a microscope.
- As Christians, we are under ever-growing scrutiny. People are vigilantly pulling out the microscope and interrogating Christians under a magnifying glass, trying to catch us out.
- People want to see our lives matching our faith and belief in Jesus. And fair enough, really. As soon as we slip up, people are ready to pounce.
- I heard a Christian say this. I saw a Christian do that. You wouldn't believe it. Of course we will fail. Our human nature is sinful.
- It makes me feel better when Christians fail. I think possibly... It doesn't make me feel better, sorry, but it makes other people who aren't Christians feel better.
- [2 : 05] And I think possibly so they can justify their own disbelief or their own sinfulness or maybe feel self-righteous about their own behaviour. But we are different.
- We have a clear understanding and conviction of the total depravity of our hearts. We are drawn to God's irresistible grace and unconditional love, knowing that if we humble ourselves, we are forgiven through Jesus.
- Christianity isn't a club for good people. It's a hospital for broken sinners who need a life overhaul, healing transformation. How is Jesus impacting our lives?
- This new year, we've been looking at Jesus' upside-down kingdom revealed in the Sermon on the Mount. The last two weeks, the Beatitudes, blessings, or congratulations go to those who have the complete attitude of Jesus.
- We can't have one or a couple who have the whole attitude of Jesus. There's no escaping it. We are under the microscope. We need our lives and our love for Jesus to shine and we need them to match our calling.
- [3 : 20] Today, we're considering Jesus' call to be salt and light in the world. Before I unpack this, remember, when Jesus spoke, there were no verses. It's one giant speech.
- We can dissect it into fragments, but we still need to see the big picture. So while we may focus on a handful of verses, we need to see what's going on around these to build context and meaning.

In Matthew 5, verses 13 to 16, Jesus calls us to be different. 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 city 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 all people that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.

[4 : 23] Jesus uses the metaphor of salt and light to describe how we should live in this world. This follows directly after Jesus has rattled off the Beatitudes. In other words, if we live with the beautiful attitudes of Jesus, we will be salt and light in the world.

And after the salt and light metaphor, Jesus continues taking the Ten Commandments to the next level and concludes actually with a phrase in verse 48 of chapter 5, be perfect as your Father in heaven is perfect.

Jesus is presenting to those who are willing to participate in his kingdom a very difficult task, a standard in the way we relate to one another, and it's not being a good person, it's perfection.

So before we panic, remember the Christian message is not about work salvation, about doing things to be saved.

The good news is stop trying and start trusting. Jesus did what we can't do. He alone meets God's impossible standards. Jesus who did not come to abolish the law, but to fulfil it.

[5 : 37] Then, once we're right with God, we're then to be salt and light in the world, with Jesus as our foundation. Motivated by love for Jesus and love for others, what follows is good works.

And Jesus later goes on to say, this is the fruit of what you believe. So the significance of salt and light, the imagery, let's draw that out and let's start with salt.

Salt is essential. Our bodies require salt as an element in our diet. Salt was a vital necessity for everyday life. Taken in this way, Jesus indicates his followers are vitally important to the welfare of this world with their daily presence and their message.

Salt preserves. Before people had fridges and freezers, food was salted to preserve it. The salt stopped decay. Jesus wants his followers to work to preserve all that is good in our world.

As the world turns even more rotten, Christians are to have the effect of delaying moral and spiritual decay. Salt is valuable. It was extremely expensive and labour-intensive to harvest the mass quantities of salt necessary for food preservation and seasoning.

[7 : 00] Salt was used as currency in Jesus' day and for centuries. What value can we place on our soul? Jesus alone has the words of eternal life.

Salt has value. Salt is pure. Many people in ancient times thought salt was pure just because of its colour. It's pure white. Jesus wants his followers to have hearts that are pure.

There's high standards in our thoughts, our speech, and our actions. Salt is seasoning. Salt enhances the flavour of food.

It makes it taste more interesting. Try eating chips without salt to get it. Knowing Jesus gives life. It's life to the full and makes it meaningful.

Jesus wants his followers to make life more pleasant for others. Salt protects. Salt scattered on roads melts ice and makes conditions safe.

[8 : 04] In biblical times, salt was even put on manure heaps to stop the spread of germs. Jesus wants his followers to spread the good news about him to everyone they meet and so offer the protection of God's love to everyone.

Salt was actually used in small quantities as a fertiliser when applied to certain types of soil. Jesus' disciples will enhance the growth of God's work in this world.

Jesus likens his followers to salt. Essential, valuable, pure, preserving, seasoning, pleasant, protecting, bringing growth.

If our lives are like salt, Christians cannot help but be an influence for good in society and history shows this. Hospitals, schools, aged care facilities, care of the homeless, orphanages, abolition of slavery, worldwide literacy programs.

Christians have been at the forefront of these initiatives. The second metaphor Jesus uses to describe the Christian witness in the world is that of light. Have you ever been in a place that is so dark you actually can't even see your hand in front of your face?

[9 : 22] When I was in year nine we were taken to Currie Currie on a geography excursion and I was one of a handful picked to go down a mine. We were in a few kilometres underground and we had the safety helmets with the torches on top.

At one point they asked us all to switch the torches off and it was eerie. I'd never been in something so pitch black. We left them off for a while even as our eyes adjusted we couldn't see anything and then further down in the mine shaft some other miners were coming and just a glimpse of their light before it actually the full blown light appeared was enough to start to illuminate the darkness.

If we're to be light in the world the implication is that the world is actually shrouded in darkness thick darkness blind to Jesus' identity. We are witnesses for Jesus we need to shine God's light so that those stumbling through life in spiritual darkness can come into the safety of the light.

Jesus talks about two sources of light here the light from the city on a hill and the light from a lamp. You are the light of the world a city 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.

We should be able to picture these images if you've done some long driving stints out in the country it can be really dark but before you get to the next town you see it coming from a distance because of the glow reflecting onto the sky.

[11 : 00] In ancient times darkness and light would have been absolutes there was no electricity but you could still make out the glow of a city when navigating the deserts.

Imagining a world without light we can understand how darkness can be a terror and a symbol of evil. Imagine walking through a park at night and I've actually done this I've actually put the keys between my fingers feeling worried for myself.

The same goes for hiding a lamp under a bush. By modern standards a lamp doesn't cast a great amount of light but if the alternative is pitch darkness to distinguish or cut off the light it seems ludicrous.

Darkness things can be hidden but in the light things are revealed. A light is a guide. Like in the tunnel of the coal mine we needed light. Lights are used to guide people and indicate the safest direction.

Jesus wants his followers to act as guides. He wants them to point others to Jesus the way the truth and the life and show others the best way to live. A light is a warning.

[12 : 11] Many lights act as warnings. Flashing lights on ambulances fire engines the police lighthouses. Christians need to warn the world the judgement is coming and without Jesus there is no prospect of eternal life.

Light is effective illuminating darkness. Without light there are many things that we would not be able to do. Drive at night read in bed and there's all kinds of accidents and mischief that take place under the cloak of darkness.

Crimes tend to happen at night. Light increases our enjoyment of life but more importantly it chases away the darkness. Without Jesus the light of the world we shipwreck our lives.

Jesus wants his followers to chase away sin and darkness in their own lives and around them. Light is essential. Plants need light in order to grow.

People also need sunlight for health and strength. We need a good dose of vitamin D. They also need to know the light of Christ in order to live life to the full.

[13 : 25] Jesus wants his followers to shed the light of God's love into the lives of those they meet. A light should not be hidden. A light that is hidden is of no help at all.

Imagine what would happen if a set of traffic lights were under a blanket or a lighthouse on the clifftops was extinguished. Lights are meant to be shown to good advantage.

There is no place for a quiet shy hidden personal faith. Jesus wants us to be open about the fact that we follow him otherwise we are of no use to others.

Be salt and let your light shine. Jesus then takes it to the next level and we glimpse how upside down God's kingdom really is while further drawing out the implications of what salt and light really look like.

Referring to the Mosaic law Jesus says you've heard it said long ago do you remember this? You've heard it said long ago and then he lists off a handful of commandments do not murder most people can say great that's not me I haven't murdered Jesus then declares that anyone who harbours anger in their heart or even calls someone a fool receives the same judgment as a murderer okay that's pretty much everyone and it does seem a bit extreme do not commit adultery you've heard it once said do not commit adultery everyone goes yeah we've heard that well we may be hearing more of this in society it is still frowned upon by most people no matter what their belief system and so you hear this and if you've never done this you go well good I'm a good person tick I haven't done that but Jesus then goes to the next level he says if you've looked at someone lustfully you've committed adultery in your heart now that seems pretty extreme and I'm pretty sure that covers most everyone so they're starting to think well murder anger adultery lust oh hang on Jesus this is an impossible standard let's go up a level love your enemies say what

[15 : 43] Jesus now you've gone too far Israel was under Roman occupation this was God's promised land and you want us to go to extra mile you want us to turn the other cheek you want them to us to give our tunic you want us to lend willingly this is outrageous Jesus and when you give to the needy he goes on don't make a show of it do it humbly in secret no giant checks and big TV coverage do it in humility and don't boast you need to forgive as your heavenly father has forgiven you that's unmerited it's unconditional loving others but hang on God please there's some people that have just rubbed me up the wrong way they've just pushed it too far they're just too hard to forgive don't worry as God looks after the birds in the air and the flowers in the field how much more will he look after us so don't worry but hang on

Jesus I've just lost my job and we've got this huge mortgage how are we're going to pay that off don't judge others in the same way you judge you will be judged we're in such a judgy age at the moment people just desperate to get likes on insta the big pile on that takes place when people are cancelled that's a judgment and people are ruthless Jesus standard is the next level if we're going to be genuine followers of Jesus we need changing Jesus presents us presents us with a very difficult task a standard in the way we relate to one another and that standard is 100% reliant on God caring for the poor and needy being humble pure in heart meek peace loving persecuted for righteousness loving enemies forgiving not worrying not judging not boasting about giving basically being salt and the light of

Jesus in the world when the light of light of Jesus and his love shines through Christian deeds they do expose darkness for what it is evil and estranged from God here's another reason Christians experience persecution just as we cringe or cover our eyes when a bright light hits us in the eyes and just think of driving at night and someone's high beam when we are salt and light in the world it can draw attention to sinful behaviour biblical Christianity doesn't win a popularity contest I could think of times when I've been at parties and I've been talking with someone and eventually they say oh so what do you do for a living I say I'm a minister and they go oh what political party are you with and then when I say I'm a Christian there's this awkward pause sometimes a bit of an uncomfortable silence some discomfort and then it's almost like you can see in their mind they're going through what have I just said oh I've just been swearing or blaspheming and a lot of people start to apologise for me to me and some even sort of politely go oh the others just got to go and make this yeah they excuse themselves

Jesus and by association Christianity spotlight things and actually this is Jesus' verdict light has come into the world but people love darkness instead of light because their deeds are evil everyone who does evil hates the light and will not come into the light for fear that their deeds will be exposed whoever lives by the truth comes into the light so that it may be seen plainly that what they have done has been done through God Jesus warns the world does not like the light it likes the darkness but don't sell out don't lose your saltiness and don't hide your light can salt lose its saltiness?

well because salt by its very nature cannot be anything other than salt it cannot lose its property of salt but it can be sufficiently ruined rendering it useless for example if you mix it with sand you won't discern the salt and so it loses its saltiness likewise when Christians conform to the immoral materialistic patterns of this world our witness can be rendered ineffective we can lose our saltiness the purpose of salt is to fight deterioration the worse the world becomes the more corrupt the more it stands in need of Jesus' followers when we fail and it happens to all of us remember there is grace we all need God's grace the Sermon on the Mount is challenging it's an impossible standard that's why we desperately need Jesus we all sin Christians sin ministers sin

[21 : 06] I know colleagues who are now no longer in public ministry due to their sin Romans 7 reminds us we don't always do the good we want to do so until the new creation we battle but in the strength of the Holy Spirit and by God's grace we can be conquerors don't lose your saltiness don't hide your light the answer to living in this world is not imitation be like everybody else fit in do what everyone else is doing that's not the answer and the answer is not isolation don't be like anybody don't have any association with the world in fact remove yourself become a recluse and maybe live in the hills the answer is not imitation the answer is not isolation the answer is insulation and D.L. Moody expresses it this way Christians should live in the world but not be filled with it a ship in the water insulated from its surrounds like a ship lives in the water insulated from its surrounds but if water gets into the ship she goes to the bottom so Christians may live in the world but if the world gets into them they sink

Jesus concludes in the same way let your light shine before others so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven believe it or not the composer Johann Sebastian Bach was obscure for a century after his death until he was rediscovered by Felix Mendelssohn as a result many of his compositions were lost no one knows how many but of those that do survive on each manuscript the interesting insertion in Bach's own hand of the letters J.J.

at the beginning of each and S.D.G. at the end they are abbreviations for the Latin Jesu Juva Jesus help me and Soli Deo Gloria glory to God alone Bach recognised that his ability to compose was not natural or normal and was in fact a gift from God as a result his desire was not to make a name for himself but rather use his gifts to honour God and give God the glory there needs to be something different about us we are under the microscope we need to be like Jesus Jesus wants us to be open about the fact that we follow him otherwise we are of no use to him at all not only no use to him but no use to others we need to be salt and light in the world as followers of Jesus he wants us to have an effect on those around us like salt and light does on everything they come in contact with we are to have one motive like Bach

Soli Deo Gloria glory to God alone in Jesus upside down kingdom being salt and light will point others to Jesus and our motivation is clear let your light shine before others so that they may see your good works and give glory to your father who is in heaven let's pray heavenly father we thank you for Jesus witness and example how he's shown us how to live and to love help us to follow in his steps to be salt and light in this world for your glory and your glory alone in Jesus name we pray amen