

“The Right Way, The Wrong Way, And The Kingdom Way”

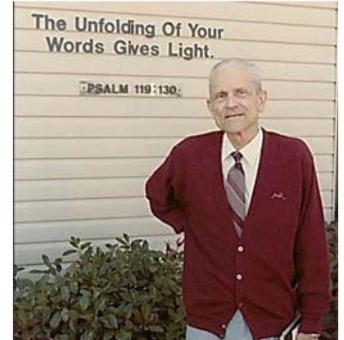
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Matthew 5:13-16 = “you-all is salt”

Robert Rice, Sr., Presbyterian missionary in Korea up to the 60's, later founded a mission called Literacy and Evangelism. In that capacity, he was returning from an overseas mission and arrived home quite ill. When he got off the plane, he collapsed and had to be hospitalized.

The doctors ran tests and the results were surprising. All he needed was salt. He was a health fanatic and had given up salt years before. However, if too little salt, you die.



Salt simple sodium chloride is essential for health, indeed one of the elemental building blocks of life. Nevertheless, we need it in balance ~ not too much, not too little.

Too much or not enough salt is dangerous, if not disastrous. Just so with light as well ~ another essential element for life and health.

When Jesus tells us we are salt and we are light, he is not particularly worried about us overshooting the mark. That's why he talks of the salt losing flavor and the light being eclipsed.

Our fire-in-the-belly can go out:

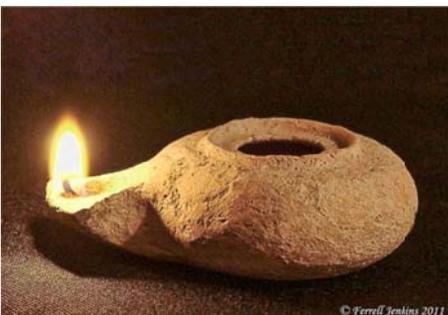
“You are the salt of the earth; but if salt has lost its taste, how can its saltiness be restored?”¹



Like soda that has lost all its fizz, like institutional cafeteria food, if our faith has been reduced to boring and lifeless, it is difficult to restore its strength.

For Jesus the boundary between light and dark is of even greater importance:

“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”²

For Jesus this division between illumination and darkness is nothing less than the unambiguous boundary between legitimate and illegitimate, between good and evil, between kingdom living and living outside God’s realm.

We’ve all felt this in our spiritual life: our fire gone out, our pilot light extinguished, our salt depleted. In our passage today, Jesus only sets up the problem for us ~ our salt can be leached out. Our lamps can burn out.



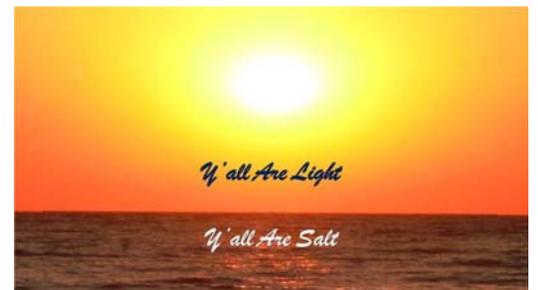
‘Burn out’ is defined as “giving much more than you are receiving.” Salt must be constantly replenished. Oil must be added to the lamp. Where is it we find spiritual energy? Where do we go to refill our spiritual tanks when they are empty?

Jesus does offer us a clue, albeit an almost hidden one in our English text. In English we have only ‘you’ for both the singular ‘you’ and a group of ‘you’s.’ While the same word in English, it is two words in Greek. Here Jesus is speaking not to us as individuals; rather Jesus is using the plural ‘you-all.’ Maybe Jesus was from Southern Galilee.

“You-all are salt”

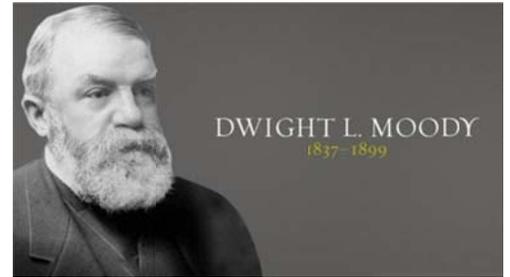
“You-all are light”

“You together, not as individual specks of salt, but as a big communal chunk of rock salt.”



Jesus addresses us as a collective, as a community of those blessed humble, poor, meek and hungry who inherit the kingdom. He’s talking to us, today, all together, in our family at GPC.

The 19th Century evangelist Dwight L. Moody says it this way. Moody once called on a leading citizen to persuade him to accept Christ. Seated in the man's parlor, it was a cold winter in Chicago. Coal was burning in the fireplace. The man objected that he could fulfill his faith by himself outside the community of Christ.



Wordlessly Moody moved over to the fireplace, took the tongs, picked a blazing coal from the fire and set it off by itself. In silence the two watched it smolder and go out. "I see," said the man understanding from this simple gesture that our faith is in essence communal.

That's Jesus' way. That's the way he intends for us to recharge our spirits. We don't do it alone. by ourselves in our own prayer closet, as important as private prayer is. Rather it is precisely in interacting with one another, in study together, worship together, fellowship together, community service together. Like those glowing coals, it is in the family of Christ that we recharge and replenish our spirits.

In the army, the saying is: there is "a right way, a wrong way, and the Army way." Just so in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus tells us there is "a right way, a wrong way and the kingdom way." As Jesus tells us in the next section:



"Do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets; I have come not to abolish but to fulfill. For truly I tell you, until heaven and earth pass away, not one letter, not one stroke of a letter, will pass from the law until all is accomplished."³



There is a right way, the way of righteousness. It continues in force in God's reign. The way of the scribes and Pharisees: the law and the legal codes. This way is extremely hard to fulfill. Indeed, not one

human has ever been able to will themselves into a state of righteous perfection.

There is a wrong way as well:

“Therefore, whoever breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches others to do the same, will be called least in the kingdom of heaven;”⁴



Ignore God’s law and live an anarchistic life, live only for self-gratification and ego. The wages of that life are soul death ~ and often physical death as well.

Yet there is another way, a better way, the kingdom way. Jesus follows up:

“You have heard that it was said to those of ancient times, ‘You shall not murder’; and ‘whoever murders shall be liable to judgment.’ But I say to you that if you are angry with a brother or sister, you will be liable to judgment; and if you insult a brother or sister, you will be liable to the council; and if you say, ‘You fool,’ you will be liable to the hell of fire.”⁵



How often do we break the commandment in Titus 3:2 to “speak no evil?” Even something so seemingly innocent as speaking what we deem constructive criticism or merely holding anger in our hearts, we are liable for God’s harshest judgement.

Many times we do just what is required and no more. Jesus knows one can obey the letter of the law and still disobey the spirit of the law. An action can be perfectly legal, but morally bankrupt. Sometimes, many times, the right thing to do is not what the law requires but rather much more.

Think of leveraged buyouts. From Phillips Petroleum to today’s Toys are Us, corporations suffering a hostile takeover are then gutted. 10’s of thousands of jobs are lost and businesses destroyed. Perfectly legal, quite lucrative, some would argue economically necessary as survival of the fittest, but few would consider such actions moral, upright or righteous.

There it is: “the right way; the wrong way and God’s kingdom way.”

The kingdom way is to recognize in ourselves we can never attain the way of righteousness by ourselves; that the way of anarchistic narcissism fails totally; and the kingdom way is to recognize both of those failures within ourselves and to repent of them ~ daily ~ together ~ mutually.



SALT & MATTHEW 5:13-16 LIGHT

In repenting of our failures in this ‘you-all,’ salt rock, light-bringing community of Christ, this is what breaks down the burnout, releases the spiritual energy, and opens us to soul replenishment. That’s the kingdom way, heart and soul, community and private.

That’s how we keep our saltiness replenished and our lamps burning bright.

¹ Matthew 5:13
² Matthew 5:14-16
³ Matthew 5:17-18
⁴ Matthew 5:19
⁵ Matthew 5:21-22