

Salt and Light

Richard Dawson 23 June 2013

Matthew 5^{13,14} and 10²⁶⁻³⁰ Genesis 1²⁰⁻³¹

You are salt. You are light. You are not becoming these things. You are not starting to be these things. You are or you are not! How can this be? Jesus here speaks specifically to His followers – His disciples and He is clear that they are salt and light. That means us friends – you and I, we who have decided to follow Jesus – we are salt and light in this world. What does this mean?

Salt changes the substance of whatever it is mixed with. It raises it up, it highlights taste, it preserves what is there. Light, on the other hand, reveals what is there – it exposes it and enables us to see it, to understand it. Salt and light both act on what is there – they highlight and compliment the environment they're put in; they reveal it – one by acting, as it were, from the inside and the other by acting as it were from the outside.

When I was maybe about 8 years old I became friends with a man who is now a very well-known musician and writer of music in New Zealand. He is one of New Zealand's foremost advertising music writers and has written many songs and even an opera or two. He lives now in Auckland but he grew up in Mornington and he became my best friend through primary school. As the time I met him he had been learning the piano for about 3 years and he was already very competent and picking up musical themes from

the TV and playing them for me. I had had little exposure to music but I enjoyed singing. So, greatly inspired by my young friend I went home and asked mum if I could learn the piano and she and dad arranged it. Without a word of lie music changed my from the inside in that it awoke in me a new way of seeing the world. It coloured everything I did – it seasoned everything I did – it salted everything I did. Nothing tasted the same after being introduced to music. Moreover, it helped me to see things differently. I suddenly realized the beauty of orchestral music, the joy of popular music, the haunting enchantment of certain forms of music and the wild excitement of others. Music has changed me both inside and out. Christ's presence does so even more. He is salt and He is light and when we invite Christ to be Lord of our life we automatically become, for this world, salt and light. You are salt and light but what does this mean? Let me review some of the things I've been saying over the last few weeks...

The first point I made was that both salt and light imply contact – contact with the things they are to effect. Salt is no use sitting in the salt shaker in the middle of the table. It must be applied to be of use. Light is of no use hidden away somewhere – it must be allowed to shine **in** the darkness so that it can shine on to those things which need to be revealed. Contact with the light is the key again. What can we make of this? One obvious application is this.

We Christians are meant to be 'in the world.' This is our natural home – this is where we were made to be effective. As a car is made for the road and a plane is made for the air we are made to

be in the world and this is where we will find the Spirit most active.

A second but associated point here is that, in large part, our influence is a result of our association with Jesus rather than any quality we bring. Yes we are salt and yes we are light but Jesus doesn't qualify these things by saying something like – you are salt because you are an amazing person or you are light because you bring amazing insight wherever you go. No we are salt and light because we are in Christ and His presence within us is a mystery. It may well be the case that we never know how we've changed things around us.

I remember a very influential Sunday School teacher of mine who, in point of fact, was not a great teacher really. I can't remember one single lesson he taught or one single point he made in all the years he was my Sunday School teacher. But his countenance, his approach to each of us and his kindness left an indelible impression of holiness on whatever he did. He brought a sense of delight and joy at being with us boys which was palpable and we grew to love this man without really knowing why. It was a sad day, frankly, when we all graduated into Bible Class because we just liked being with this man. He, friends, was salt and light amongst us. He was the presence of Christ amongst us and several of those boys have become influential leaders in the church due, in no small measure, I am sure, to his influence.

Thirdly, and this is sometimes a hard thing for us to swallow – neither salt nor light are everything. Rather, salt makes up but a small proportion of the meal and light consisting in the natural world of massless photons simply illuminates what is there.

Neither is the main thing! What are we to make of this?

I think first of all we need to recognize that in this dark and faithless world a knowledge of God, still less, a heart changed by God, may well be a rare thing. You and I both know heaps of people who either refuse to believe or who cannot believe. Jesus said that our walk would be one through a narrow door and that the other way was one that was broad and easy to walk in. We should not be surprised if our view and our life is a minority one. In one sense at least it has always been a minority position. Faithful people have always lived against overwhelming pressure to conform and to discard their core beliefs. Nothing has changed today.

A second take on notion of the salt and light being a small part of the picture is that faith itself is often a matter of small obediences. The woman with the issue of blood reached out in faith just to touch the hem of Jesus' cloak and that faith touch which He could not have felt was enough to allow the power of God to flow. The offer of a piece of bread and a few small fish wasn't much in itself but given in faith it was enough to feed 5000 and more. I call these moments 'despised obediences' because often we are tempted to despise them because they are so small and so seemingly trivial and yet it is the way of faith for God to

take these moments and turn them into miracles. What is it that we will not give to God because we count it too small? What is it that we are not giving because we are ashamed of how little we can give? Friends, if God is pleased with your gift it doesn't matter how small it is – He will use it to change the world.

Is it the \$5 to the charity which has sent a collector to our door? Is it the hour free to help with a much larger task for the school or the community project? Is it the half an hour to spend just talking with a child or a spouse when we know we owe them much more? Jesus was willing to work with these little obediences – why aren't we? I'll tell you why. It's because we can never offer one of these obediences and imagine that we, by our power and goodness, really made a difference. We simply offered a little – what we could and the power of God moves to change everything and yet it is often a matter of pride to us that what we offer is seen to make a real difference.

You see this (teaspoon of honey) – this is a bee's life. A bee lived and died for this spoon full of honey. This is all a bee can collect in its very short lifetime. Not much is it. But imagine if a bee decided that such a small amount of honey wasn't worth much and so it might as well do something else. What would happen if bees thought this way? **There would be no honey – no sweetness from nature. All honey would be lost.**

We are salt – but we are so in the smallness of our offering. If you can give two Sundays a year to kidztime – do it. If you can only

give \$5 a week – give it! If you can offer a day a month to a boy who needs make company – offer it. This is what it means to be salt and light. God takes these offerings and works power and kingdom might through them and we will never be able to say it was us.

Let us also allow this principle to work the other way as well. If we can give a million dollars to a cause that is worthy and God honouring let us not imagine that our offering is everything to God. It is, perhaps, easy to develop a martyrs complex about what we are giving and to forget that whatever we give has been given to us – even if we've had to work for it – the ability to do so and the opportunity to earn are, essentially, God given.

Furthermore, whatever we give is, in relation to what God has already given for us, very little. God's offering for you was the life of His own Son. What can compare to that?

We are salt. We act as a preservative of what God has placed in Creation – of the good God has created here. We preserve it because in Christ we touch all Creation with a cleansing effect – we make holy that which has been defiled.

We are light. We illuminate what is really there. We chase away darkness. We expose the Truth and we do this because Christ works within us to address the Truth and to live in the Truth. Imagine if we would live life in the light God has given us all the time. Imagine if we gave God every opportunity we could to let His light shine in and through us...

In the latest film about Robin Hood this scene illustrates something of what it means to be light...

It is the turn of the 12th century, and King Richard the Lionhearted and his army, having fought in the Crusades, are on their way back to England. One evening, Richard, weary of the patronizing of his inner circle, has emerged from his tent with his right-hand man, Sir Loxley, in search of an honest Englishman's opinion of him and his crusade. They come upon a raucous crowd of soldiers gathered around the fighting Robin Hood and Little John. Sir Loxley angrily stops the fight, but King Richard, more amused than angry, asks who started the fight. When both Robin Hood and Little John take responsibility, King Richard is so impressed by their honesty that he addresses a question to Robin Hood: "Are you honest enough to tell a king something that he does not want to hear? What is your opinion on my crusade? Will God be pleased with my sacrifice?"

Robin is silent for a moment, and then he slowly raises his eyes to look King Richard in the face. "No, he won't," Robin says. When King Richard asks why God won't be pleased with his crusades, Robin Hood reminds the king of a recent battle where a group of civilians were slaughtered mercilessly: "When you had us herd [2,500] men, women, and children together, the young woman at my feet, with her hands bound, she looked up at me. There wasn't fear in her eyes. There wasn't anger. There was only pity. For she knew that when you gave the order, and our blades would descend upon their heads, that in that moment, we would

be godless. All of us. Godless.” From King Richard's expression, it's clear that he didn't really want an honest answer. Embarrassed and disgusted by Robin Hood's indictment, he ends the conversation by dismissing Robin with a curt response: "Honest, brave, and naïve." Then King Richard walks away.

Imagine if we Christians began to judge our own actions on the basis of whether God was truly in them. Imagine the light that would shine in this dark world. Imagine if, instead of working for profit we began to work by the light of prophecy; imagine if instead of comfort we began to work towards being comfortable with God; imagine if instead grizzling about governmental blunders and incompetencies we decided to do something ourselves – not a great thing – but a small thing – a little bit of light in a dark dark room. We are light friends. Let us shine as brightly as we can.