

Matthew 5B

- We're studying Jesus' Sermon on the Mount
 - Last week, we began with Jesus' remarkable opening, called the Beatitudes, or the blessings
 - Jesus makes nine statements that collectively typify the person who will inherit the Kingdom
 - It's a character sketch of those being saved by God, both from out of Israel and from among the Gentiles
 - Jesus' character sketch of the Kingdom-bound person was very different than the character of the religious leaders of Jesus' day
 - In fact, it was a 180° opposite view from the Pharisees
 - Pharisees weren't poor in spirit...they were proud of their spiritual accomplishments
 - They weren't mourning over their sin...they celebrated their piety
 - They weren't gentle or merciful or peacemakers...
 - The Pharisees were arrogant power brokers who schemed and conspired to maintain their hold on authority and privilege within the culture
 - They decided for the average Jew what they must believe and how they were to live
 - They set themselves apart from everyone else, claiming to be a perfect example of what pleases God
 - And they burdened the people with manmade rules, which they themselves would not always follow, that distracted them from knowing the love and mercy of God
- So to the ear of a first century Jew, who knew only the Pharisees' view of the Kingdom, Jesus' declarations were stunning and revolutionary
 - Jesus wasn't just contradicting the Pharisees' teaching...he was invalidating their authority

- He was declaring that the Pharisees' approach to God and to establishing godliness was as corrupt as Satan himself
- Jesus declared their teaching to be false
- But more than that, He declared these men to be false teachers who lacked the very thing they claimed to offer others
- Jesus' teaching exposed Israel's religious leaders to be counterfeits who said and did literally the opposite of what God desired
- Luke, in his Gospel, records a few additional statements Jesus made at the end of the Beatitudes, which were directed at the Pharisees

Luke 6:24 "But woe to you who are rich, for you are receiving your comfort in full.

Luke 6:25 "Woe to you who are well-fed now, for you shall be hungry. Woe to you who laugh now, for you shall mourn and weep.

Luke 6:26 "Woe to you when all men speak well of you, for their fathers used to treat the false prophets in the same way.

- It's clear Jesus was thinking of Israel's religious leaders as He spoke these words of condemnation
 - Pharisees were rich men living in comfort and splendor, enjoying the life they created for themselves at the expense of the people
 - They sought the approval of men by pandering to the peoples' interests
 - Yet Jesus said these traits have always been characteristics of false prophets, not true men of God
- So it's no surprise that the tension between Jesus and the Pharisees becomes a major storyline in the Gospels
 - Jesus is rocking their boat
 - He came to reveal spiritual truth that was so different, so opposite of what the Pharisees taught
 - Therefore, conflict with these men was inevitable
 - So, early in His ministry, Jesus fires the first shot with the Beatitudes

- Jesus says the Kingdom could not be obtained by following the Pharisees' example
 - Instead, God will call to Himself a very different kind of soul, one reborn in God's image
 - One that yearns for the Kingdom to come, rather than desiring the world as it is
- So now, having thrown down the gauntlet, Jesus moves to explaining how God's true disciples shall live during the time they await the Kingdom

Matt. 5:13 “You are the salt of the earth; but if the salt has become tasteless, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled under foot by men.

Matt. 5:14 “You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden;

Matt. 5:15 nor does anyone light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house.

Matt. 5:16 “Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven.

- Jesus turns to address those who are Kingdom-bound, those who share in the nine traits He just listed
 - And He commands His disciples to live according to two metaphors
 - Jesus says those who await the Kingdom, those who have been saved by their faith in Messiah, shall be like salt and light
 - We've all heard Jesus' comparison before
 - It's so well known, it's become axiomatic
 - And you've also probably heard teaching on what these metaphors mean in the context of Christian witnessing
 - You've heard how salt enhances the taste of food, making the taste stand out
 - And therefore, so should the Christian live in such a way that we stand apart from the world
 - Likewise, as light illuminates and exposes things hidden in darkness, so are we called to bring truth to the world, etc.

- These explanations are largely accurate and somewhat helpful, but they don't tell the whole story, because Jesus' analogy goes a step deeper
 - The added details come from a better understanding of how salt was used in Jesus' day
 - Though today, we use salt principally to enhance the flavor of food, in Jesus' day, the most common use of salt was as a preservative
 - In an age before refrigeration, salt was essential as a preservative, to prevent food from spoiling
 - So, for a Jew of Jesus' day, this would have been the first and most obvious way to understand the comparison
- Jesus says that those who are the blessed, those who are Kingdom-bound, we are to serve a spiritual purpose as they await the Kingdom
 - While we live on earth, we live like salt, meaning we are a preservative
 - Now for those of Israel, Jesus was speaking about the believing remnant
 - The Old Testament declares repeatedly, that God will always preserve a small number of believers within Israel by grace
 - This remnant will be the means by which God preserves His promises to Israel
 - In that sense, those believers within Israel were salt to the rest of Israel, preserving God's people from complete destruction
 - As Isaiah says

**Is. 1:9 Unless the LORD of hosts
Had left us a few survivors,
We would be like Sodom,
We would be like Gomorrah.**

- And for Gentile believers, we too have a mission to live as a preservative
 - As the temple of God, we are the means by which God tabernacles among men during this age

- So God sprinkles Gentile believers among the nations of the world to preserve the world against self-destruction and runaway evil
- And in that sense, we are salt, bringing a Godly perspective into an utterly sinful world
 - We exhibit the character of God, to the extent we live out the Beatitudes
 - By the Spirit working in us, we may demonstrate some degree of mercy, humility, purity, peacemaking, etc.
 - By standing for righteousness, we militate against runaway sin and depravity
 - We won't put an end to sin, of course, and the world is destined to become increasingly sinful
 - But nevertheless, we're called to live as salt, preserving the world by slowing the decay
- Most importantly, we give opportunity for the Lord to rescue some people out of this world, through our witness
 - The Church is the ultimate preservative
 - We preserve men and women from the fires of Hell, as we witness to the Gospel of Jesus Christ
 - In that way, more than any other, Kingdom-bound people are to be salt to this world
 - And once again, our target is the Beatitudes...they are the gold standard in place of the Pharisees
- But in the second half of v.13, Jesus challenges His disciples to consider whether we are truly living up to that expectation
 - Jesus asks, what good is salt when it is no longer salty?
 - Here again, Jesus isn't speaking simply about salt's dietary benefits
 - He's referring to its work as a preservative in retarding the growth of harmful bacteria

- But first, we need to ask how does salt cease to be salty, how does it become ineffective as a preservative?
 - Sodium chloride doesn't change...it's a stable compound
 - The key to interpreting Jesus' words is understanding how salt was obtained in His day
 - Pure salt was hard to obtain, so it was not generally used as a preservative...it was reserved for table use
- The salt used for preserving food was usually mined from sediment in salt marshes or in other similar deposits
 - The salt from these deposits included other minerals or impurities, which degraded the quality of the salt
 - This rendered the salt too poor for use in cooking, but it was still acceptable for preserving food
 - So the type of salt Jesus was speaking about was a preserving salt, this lower quality salt, contaminated with impurities
- We know this, because of what Jesus says next
 - Jesus refers to the salt losing its saltiness
 - Pure salt cannot lose its saltiness, because sodium chloride doesn't change...it's a stable compound
- But the impure salt used for preservation can lose its saltiness
 - If these salt deposits became wet, the water-soluble salt crystals dissolve and wash away, leaving behind only the impurities
 - The impurities left behind were useless, so they would be thrown out on the ground
 - In that sense, what was once called "salt" loses its saltiness
 - The salt itself hasn't changed...it's simply washed away
- That's Jesus' concern for His disciples...that we would lose our saltiness
 - But Jesus is not talking about our being table salt, of standing out from the world, being distinctive
 - Isn't that the interpretation we've all heard?

- That Jesus is saying be table salt! Maintain your "Christian" distinction
 - That may be a valuable lesson as well, but at best, I think it's a narrow view of Jesus' teaching
 - And at worst, it can lead to Pharisaical thinking
 - I've seen that interpretation used to defend Christians living in strange ways, isolating themselves in compounds
 - Or acting holier than thou and calling it, "being salt"
 - But that's not what Jesus wanted of His disciples
 - He didn't ask us to segregate ourselves or wear our faith on our sleeves in such a way that no one can relate to us
 - To say it another way, if your efforts at being "salt" lead the world to thinking you're a religious weirdo, then you're doing it wrong
 - The goal isn't merely to stand out *from* the world, in the sense of table salt
 - Jesus is asking us to be a blessing *to* the world, in the sense of preserving them from evil
 - When we let the Spirit live through us, we will bless the world by demonstrating humility and mercy and gentleness and purity
 - We will be peacemakers, while everyone else is at war; we will mourn over our mistakes while the world celebrates its depravity
 - By pursuing righteousness, we may become a preservative God will use to counteract the world's descent into corruption
- But if we refuse to live out these traits, if we cease being useful to God for that purpose...we fail to serve Him now, even as we await the Kingdom
 - It's like the preservative salt that's mixed with impurities
 - As long as that deposit has salt in it, the lump is useful to preserve food
 - The impurities add no benefit, but since they are combined with salt, the whole thing works to produce something good

- But take the salt out, and the impurities are worthless and will be thrown out
- If we fail to exhibit those nine characteristics of the Beatitudes, we forfeit the potential we had to be an influence in this world, to be a blessing to those with whom we interact
- Likewise, as a Christian, if you live out your blessedness, seeking to exhibit the nine characteristics Jesus gave us, then you have a powerful potential
 - God can use you to bring a blessing to those you "combine" with
 - Your unsaved friends, neighbors, workmates, schoolmates are struggling in a world that is rushing headlong over the cliff
 - We live in a world that is tearing itself apart with violence, hatred, crudeness, depravity, drug addiction, all manner of evil
 - And into that world, we go as salt bringing humility, gentleness, mercy, peace
- Think about the many opportunities you have in the course of your day to bring a blessing to those you meet, simply by living out one or more of the Beatitudes
 - As the Church body collectively demonstrates our Kingdom traits in society, we militate against the consequences of the world's sin
 - And on a personal level, God may use our humility or gentleness or purity to bring individual souls into the Kingdom through faith in Jesus
 - So we can be a preservative on a worldwide basis and we can make an impact in the life of a single individual
 - That's being salt in the world
- But if you, as a Christian, fail to be salt when you combine with the world, what good are you then?
 - If you combine with the impurities of the world, yet do not live out your Kingdom traits in the Spirit, then it's like you've melted away
 - All that remains are impurities...the world's impurities and your own

- And what good is that to God?
- Jesus' warning acknowledges that a believer can fail to live out the Beatitudes
 - The fact is, that while every Kingdom-bound individual possesses these qualities in their spirit...
 - Not every believer exhibits them consistently...and some don't exhibit them at all
- Don't take Jesus' concern lightly, because these qualities don't materialize without focus
 - Your flesh is a powerful force in your life
 - And if you are not focused on disciplining your flesh and yielding to the Spirit so He may produce better things in your character, then don't expect to see much spiritual fruit in your life
- That's our choice...we have a choice between two paths in our life as a disciple
 - Either we're obedient to Jesus' call to living as salt, as a preservative in the world, which leads to a blessing for the world and for us
 - Or we are disobedient to His call, in which case, we are indistinguishable from the impurities of the world
 - Leaving us no better than pavement to be trampled under foot
 - Jesus' point is, that we will be put to use one way or another, either as a blessing to the world or a warning to other believers
- And Jesus is not ambivalent about our choice
 - He wants us to serve diligently, which is why He adds the second metaphor in v.14
 - Jesus says we are to be light in the world
 - Here again, Jesus' analogy is simple, yet profound, and many have taken it out of context to tell us what it means
 - They say that as light chases away darkness, so should a believer be light to the world as a witness to the truth of Jesus

- Once again, while this interpretation is true, it ignores the context and as a result, it misses the full sense of Jesus' meaning
 - Look at the progression of the context
 - First, Jesus defined the behaviors that mark a Kingdom-bound person
 - Then, Jesus said that living according to these standards is like being salt in the world
 - Which means we must discipline our flesh so that Christ living in us may bring a blessing to the world through us
- Now it's in that context that Jesus adds His second analogy of light
 - To understand what He's saying here, we need to appreciate that lighting a lamp in Jesus' day was no casual endeavor
 - First, light was created by burning oil in a lamp, and oil was an expensive commodity
 - So people generally didn't pay to light up their entire house at night
 - You only turned on a lamp when it was important and necessary
- Secondly, even when a person did need to light a lamp, it required effort to get it started
 - You didn't just flip a switch and forget about it
 - Or if you're under 30, ask Alexa to turn on the light
 - Or if you're over 65, clap your hands
 - The person had to find a source for the fire or create a new fire
 - In other words, lighting a lamp required effort and money
- So the point Jesus is making is, that when someone goes to the time and effort and expense to light a lamp, they won't then hide it under a blanket
 - We expect that light to give us something we need in return
 - So since the Lord has placed a light inside each of us, His Holy Spirit, He expects it to pay off, so to speak

- We're not supposed to hide that light, to blend in, to lose our saltiness
- But being salt in the world, living out the Beatitudes, will require effort and cost on our part
 - We must discipline the flesh and yield to the Spirit so that we can reflect Christ to the world
 - It's like the effort required to light a lamp...God didn't just flip a switch in our hearts and instantly we think and act like Jesus
 - We all have the potential to think and act like Him, but we have to make an effort to discipline the sin nature of our flesh
- And that effort Jesus described as, "good works"
 - Notice in v.16, Jesus says that letting our light shine is doing good works before men
 - The light inside us, the Spirit living in us, is invisible unless it comes out of us in some tangible way
 - That "light" can only be seen through a demonstration of spiritual fruit or good works
 - Which leads us to the key conclusion...the good works Jesus expects are a living-out of the Kingdom traits Jesus defined for us in the Beatitudes
 - Good works aren't simply doing nice things for other people
 - Good works is being more godly
 - And that's a tough standard
- You know, you may have been challenged when you learned that believers are called to do good works
 - You thought about serving in soup kitchens or building houses for the poor
 - Or maybe you thought of offering up prayers for the sick
 - Or maybe volunteering in the children's area
 - Or helping little old ladies across the street, etc.
 - And you thought that's pretty demanding...Jesus is asking a lot

- But then you thought, I can do that and you signed up
- But if that's how you thought you let your light shine, how you become salt, then you're actually thinking a little bit like a Pharisee
 - You're rigging the game
 - You're setting the bar low enough that you can feel good about yourself without actually making the difficult sacrifices that are truly required
 - Later in this Gospel, Jesus says this to the Pharisees

Matt. 23:13 “But woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, because you shut off the kingdom of heaven from people; for you do not enter in yourselves, nor do you allow those who are entering to go in.

Matt. 23:14 [“Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, because you devour widows' houses, and for a pretense you make long prayers; therefore you will receive greater condemnation.]

- Here's the point: if doing good works were merely about doing acts of kindness, then any hypocrite could do good works
 - The Pharisees did many so-called good things, but in their hearts, they were as evil as ever
 - So Jesus says, such people are not those destined for the Kingdom
- Kingdom-bound people will demonstrate an inward spiritual change
 - And that inward change is our salt, our light to the world
 - These character traits are the good works we must do
 - Those nine qualities in the Beatitudes are supposed to shine forth in the new, Godly character Christ is making inside us
- And as we adopt these spiritual qualities, they will inform our words and actions
 - For example, as we discipline our fleshly pride, we allow our Spirit-produced humility to shine forth
 - And as we discipline our flesh's self-righteousness, we will mourn our sin and repent of it

- And as we discipline our flesh's desire for conflict and revenge and lust, Christ shines forth in us producing gentleness, mercy and purity
- These are the good works that Christ is calling us to display before men, like a lamp or a city set on a hill, drawing attention to God's grace
 - In this case, that attention brings glory to our Heavenly Father, because He rightly receives credit for that spiritual work
 - Because let's face it, we're not humble or merciful and pure by nature
 - Every good thing comes from above, as James says
 - If we miss this point, we're likely to think that doing good things for other people is enough to bring Christ to the world
 - But if that were the case, then Christ wouldn't need the Church
 - He could use the Salvation Army or the United Way or the Federal Government
 - They all do good works for people
 - No, that's not the work Jesus wants...it's a work in your heart
 - And that's a much harder work, isn't it?
 - The prospect of serving in soup kitchens seems pretty easy compared to demonstrating mercy and gentleness on a consistent basis, doesn't it?
 - How many Christians do you suppose have driven downtown to serve in a soup kitchen and cursed at other drivers along the way? Or cut them off in traffic? Or driven faster than the speed limit?
 - How many people do that on their way to church?
 - That's being a Pharisee...someone who looks the part in public yet in their heart, they are someone very different
 - Jesus' point is, being salt is a process of inward change, one that requires forethought and effort and it comes at a cost, like lighting a lamp

- Glorify the Father by your good works, which means contending with those parts of your character that don't look like Kingdom qualities
- You have to battle against yourself in a sense, and it's the opposite of how a Pharisee thinks
- So let's stand back and review Jesus' teaching in vs.1-16
 - He starts with a character-sketch of the Kingdom-bound individual, the person saved by faith and sanctified by the Spirit
 - That person thinks and acts in ways very differently than the world
 - They maintain eyes for eternity, keeping a perspective that reward will be found in the Kingdom
 - They know they're only passing through this world, yet God has placed them here for a time to be a blessing
 - So they long to show God's heart before a world that doesn't know Him
 - They act as a preservative, demonstrating their Kingdom-qualities to hold back the destructive power of sin, both in themselves and in the world
 - They do these good works to bring attention to the power of Christ living in them, and in that way, they bring glory to the Father in Heaven as a witness
 - That's who Jesus calls His disciples to be...we're to be living billboards for the Kingdom
 - And not just in our words of proclamation
 - But in our attitudes and character
 - We cannot mimic these things in the strength of our flesh
 - You cannot fake mercy or gentleness...either you are these things by the grace of God or you are not
 - But a Christian can hide these qualities...
 - You came here tonight, to this church, because you knew you would hear the Word of God preached

- And since you did, then you are obligated by what you've heard to set your mind on obeying what it commands
- Take an inventory of these nine qualities...give some thought on where you fall short
- And in your prayer time, ask the Lord to help you exhibit them
- He won't ignore you – that's what He wants
- But it won't happen, unless you pursue it