

OPENING SENTENCE:

When one door of Happiness closes, another opens, but often we look so long at the closed door that we do not see the one that has been opened for us.

Sermon: "Salt, Light, and Law"

Scripture: Matthew 5:13-20

ILLUMINATION:

O Lord, your word is a lamp to our feet and a light to our path. Give us grace to receive your truth in faith and love, and strength to follow on the path you set before us; through Jesus Christ, AMEN.

"You are the salt of the earth; but if salt has lost it's taste, how can it's saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything, but is thrown out and trampled underfoot. "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 the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven. "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. 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; but whoever does them and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.

When Jesus said this, he provided us with an expression which has become the greatest compliment that can be paid to anyone. When we wish to stress someone's solid worth and usefulness, we say, "People like that are the salt of the earth.

Salt is connected to purity, no doubt its glistening whiteness made the connection easy. The Romans said that salt was the purest of all things, because it came from the purest of things, the sun and the sea. Salt was indeed the most primitive of all offerings to the God's, and to the end of the day the Jewish sacrifices were offered with salt. So if Christians are to be the salt of the earth, they must be examples of purity.

Also in the ancient world, salt was the commonest of all preservatives. It was used to keep things from going bad, and to hold putrefaction at bay. Salt preserves it and keeps it fresh. So, salt preserves from corruption. If Christians are to be the salt of the earth, they must have a certain antiseptic influence on life. Truth, Goodness, Justice.

Christians must be the cleaning antiseptic in any society in which they happen to be, they must be the ones who by their presence defeat corruption and make it easier for others to be good.

But the greatest and most obvious quality of salt is that salt lends flavor to things. Food without salt is a sadly dull, flat and even a sickening thing. Christianity is to life what salt is to food. Christianity lends flavor to life. The tragedy is that, so often, people have connected Christianity with precisely the opposite. They wrongly have connected Christianity with that which takes flavor out of life. Goody two shoes, honest, fair, truthful and just. We need to discover the lost radiance of Christian faith. In a worried world, Christians should be the only people who remain serene, calm. In a depressed world, Christians should be the only people who remain full of the joy of life. There should be a sheer sparkle about being Christians. Wherever they are, if they are to be the salt of the earth, Christians must be the diffusers of joy. Jesus went on to say that, if the salt had become flat, it was fit only to be thrown out and trampled on. This is difficult, because salt does not ever lose its flavor and it's saltiness.

In Palestine, the ordinary oven was built outside on a base of tiles. In order to retain the heat, a thick bed of salt was laid under the tiled floor. After a certain amount of time the salt perishes. The tiles are taken up, the salt removed and thrown on the road, (reduce weeds) It had lost it's power to heat the tiles and was thrown out. That may be the picture in this verse.

But the essential point remains whatever the picture, and it is a point made over and over again in the New Testament – uselessness invites disaster. If Christians are not fulfilling their purpose as Christians, then they are on the way to disaster. We are meant to be the salt of the earth, and if we do not bring to life the purity, the antiseptic power, the radiance that we ought, then we invite disaster.

“You are the Light of the world.” It may well be said that this is the greatest compliment that was ever paid to the individual Christian, for in it Jesus commands the Christian to be what he himself claimed to be. Jesus said; “As long as I am in the world, I am light of the world” (John 9:5).

When Jesus commanded his followers to be the lights of the world, he demanded nothing less than that they should be like himself. When Jesus spoke these words, he was using an expression that was quite familiar to the Jews who heard it for the first time. They themselves spoke of Jerusalem as ‘a light to the Gentiles’. But the way in which the Jews used this expression will give us a key to the way in which Jesus also used it.

Of one thing the Jews were very sure – people never kindled their own light. Jerusalem was indeed a light to the Gentiles, but “God lit Israel’s lamp.” The light with which the nation or the people of God shone was a borrowed light. It must be so with the Christian. It is not the demand of Jesus that we should, as it were, produce our own light. We must shine with the reflection of his light. The radiance which shines from the Christian comes from the presence of Christ within the Christian’s heart. The radiance which shines from us comes from the love which has been born in our heart.

When Jesus said that Christians must be the light of the world, what did he mean?

A light is first and foremost is something which is meant to be seen. The houses in Palestine were very dark, with only one little circular window perhaps not more than 18 inches across. The lamp was like a sauce boat filled with oil with the wick floating in it. It was not so easy to rekindle the flame, and matches didn’t exist. Normally the lamp stood on a lamp stand, but when people went out, they took it from the lamp stand and put it under an earthen bushel basket, so that it might burn without risk of extinguishing till they got back. The primary duty of the light of the lamp was to be seen. So, Christianity is something which is meant to be seen. Our Christianity should be perfectly visible to everyone. This Christianity should be visible not only within the Church. A Christianity whose effect stop at the church door is not much use to anyone. It should be even more visible in our ordinary activities of the world. Our Christianity should be visible in the way we treat a shop assistant across the counter, in the way we order a meal in a restaurant, in the way we treat our employees or serve our employer, in the way we play a game or drive a car, in the daily language we use, in the literature we read.

As Christians, we should be just as much a Christian in the factory, the workshop, the shipyard, the mine, the schoolroom, the surgery, the kitchen, and the golf course, as we are in church. Jesus did not say: “You are the light of the Church”; he said: “You are the light of the world” – and in our lives in the world our Christianity should be evident to all.

The good deeds of the Christian must be not only **good**; they must also be **attractive**. There must be a certain charm in Christian goodness. There is a goodness which attracts and a goodness that repels evil. There is a charm in true Christian goodness which makes it a lovely thing. It should be noted that our good deeds ought to draw attention not to ourselves but to God. That goodness, which is conscious, which draws attention to itself, is not the Christian goodness. Christians never think of what they have done, but of what God has enabled them to do. They never seek to draw attention of others to themselves, but always direct them to God. As long as people are thinking of the praise, the thanks and the prestige which they will get for what they have done, they have not really even begun on the Christian way.

The Eternal Law. Again and again, Jesus broke what the Jews called the law. He did not observe the handwashing’s that the law laid down; he healed sick people on the Sabbath, although the law forbade such healings; he was in fact condemned and crucified as a law breaker; and yet he seems to speak of the law with a veneration and a reverence that no Rabbi or Pharisee could exceed. The smallest letter – the letter called the jot – was the Hebrew letter *iodh*. In form it was like an apostrophe

-‘-; not even a letter much bigger than a dot was to pass away. The smallest part of the letter was the *tittle* – is what we call the *serif*, the little projecting part at the foot of a letter, the little line on either side of the foot of, for example “I”. Jesus seems to lay it down that the law is so sacred that not the smallest detail of it will ever pass away.

The Jews used the expression “The Law” in four different ways. They used it to mean the ten commandments. They used it to mean the first five books of the Bible. (Pentateuch). They used the phrase *the law and the prophets* to mean the whole Scripture, what we would call the Old Testament. They used it to mean the *oral or scribal law*. In the time of Jesus, the last was commonest. Both Jesus and Paul condemned it.

In the Old Testament itself, we find very few rules and regulations; what we do find are great, broad principles which people must take and interpret for themselves under God’s guidance and apply to the individual situations in life. In the Ten Commandments, we find no rules and regulations at all; they are each one of them great principles out of which people must find their own rules for life.

The scribes and pharisees therefore argued that out of the law it must be possible to deduce a rule and a regulation for every possible situation in life. So, they reduced the great principles of law into thousands and thousands of rules and regulations. The law lays it down that the Sabbath Day is to be kept holy, and that on it no work is to be done. That is the great principle. But the Jewish legalist asked, “what is work?”

The scribes were the men who worked out these rules and regulations. The Pharisees were the men who had separated themselves from all the ordinary activities of life to keep all these rules and regulations. X

For many generations, this scribal law was never written down; it was oral law, and it was handed down in the memory of generations of scribes. In the middle of the third century AD, a summary of it was made and written down. That summary is the *Mishnah*, in English it is a book of almost 800 pages. Clearly, Jesus did not mean that not one of these rules and regulations was to pass away; repeatedly he broke them himself and repeatedly condemned them; that is certainly not what Jesus meant by the law.

What then did Jesus mean by the law? He said that he had come not to destroy the law, but to fulfil the law. That is to say, he came really to bring out the real meaning of the law. The one great principle was that in all things people must seek God’s will, and that, when they know it, they must dedicate their whole life to obeying it.

When we look at the Ten Commandments, which are the essence and the foundation of all law, we can see that their whole meaning can be summed up in, Respect or reverence. Reverence for God and for the name of God, reverence for God’s Day, respect for parents, respect for life, respect for property, respect for personality,

respect for the truth and for another person’s good name, respect for oneself so that wrong desires may never overpower us – these are the fundamental principles behind the Ten Commandments, principles of reverence for God, and respect for our neighbors and for ourselves. That reverence and respect Jesus came to fulfil. He came to show us in actual life what reverence for God and respect for another are like. That reverence did not consist in obeying petty rules and regulations. They consisted not in sacrifice but in mercy; not in legalism but in love; not in prohibitions and not doing things, but in the instruction to mold their lives on the positive commandment to love.

There had to be the law before the Gospel could come. People had to learn the difference between right and wrong; they had to become aware of a sense of sin and unworthiness and inadequacy. Jesus warns the disciples not to think Christianity is easy. Jesus set before us not the law of God, but the love of God.

All kinds of things were classified as work: To carry a burden on the Sabbath Day is to work. A burden is food equal to a dried fig, enough wine for mixing in a goblet, milk enough for one swallow, honey enough to put upon a wound, oil enough to anoint a small member, water enough to moisten an eye, paper enough to write a common house notice upon, ink enough to write two letters of the alphabet, reed enough to make a pen, and so on endlessly. A lamp could not be lifted from one place to another on the Sabbath, a tailor could commit a sin if he went out with a needle in his robe, could a woman wear a brooch or false hair, is it permissible to go out on the Sabbath with false teeth or artificial limb, can a parent lift a small child on the Sabbath.

To write: He who writes two letters of the alphabet with his right or left hand, if they are written with different inks, is guilty. Also he who writes on two walls that form an angle, or two tablets, so that they can be read together, is guilty. To heal: Healing was allowed when there was danger to life. Steps could

be taken only to keep the patient from becoming worse; no steps could be taken to make the patient better, no ointment, plain wadding, no medical wadding.

Benediction:

Human righteousness is about being the salt of the earth and the light of the world. As the salt of the earth, we are disciples of Jesus when we allow our characters to be formed by God's blessings. As the light of the world, we are followers of Jesus when we accept the covenantal blessings as a call into relationship with despised groups because of what we believe, even if it means we may be persecuted. As disciples of the Jesus who came not to abolish but to fulfill the law and the prophets.

ADORATION:

Our God is an awesome God. He is kind, tenderhearted, and merciful. Our father loves us with an everlasting love, and He is always concerned about our welfare. All that we need, He provides through Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit. God should always be revered and adored. He should have our utmost respect. Let us lift up our praises to the One who is the living God, our God who is our Father. AMEN.