

Matthew 5:13-20 Feb.9th, 2014 The Savior's sermon: salt & shine!

13 "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 by men. **14** "You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. **15** 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. **16** In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven. **17** "Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. **18** I tell you the truth, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished. **19** Anyone who 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 practices and teaches these commands will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. **20** For I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven.

[Invite kids forward.] [Put out One candle. Light candle.]

We're using this one candle to remind us of Jesus. He said: *"I am the Light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life."* At another time Jesus very simply explained: *"Put your trust in the Light... so that you may become sons of light."* Your parents/grandparents have brought you here because they want you to have eternal life. They know the way you have that is to be baptized, and to hear/learn about Jesus. In these ways you are brought to trust in Him. He is the only Way to heaven.

[Hand out small mirrors to each child.]

Ok, here's what we want to do next with our Light. Hold the mirror down in front of yourself, and tilt the mirror so that you can see the candle's light in your mirror.

Now take a look around. You are all children of light! Do you see? There is only one candle, but each of you is reflecting the candle's light. So, when I look at you, I see children of light.

Jesus calls believers in him: light in the world. But you see: the light we shine to the world doesn't come from us. It comes from Jesus. Just like your mirror is reflecting the light of the candle, we – believers – reflect Jesus' light. That means: 1. we share the truth about Jesus, and 2. we share His love! As you return to your seats, keep listening. We're going to talk more about this. **[kids return to seats]**

Older Kids: I really want you to think how... in very simple, important ways, you – and I – can reflect Jesus to others. The only way that is possible is if you focus on Him.

- Think about, for instance, the truth about Who He is: God! So let's say you're sitting at lunch with classmates and the topic of religion comes up. Someone says, "What's the big deal about Jesus, anyway? Wasn't he just some guy who lived a long time ago?" You can say, "I believe what He said & showed about himself. He's the Son of God, who came to save us from our sins." There... you are reflecting Jesus.
- Continue to think of just what it is that Jesus has done for you: What has He done with all your sins? Forgiven them! When we understand how many ugly sins we've thought, said, and done - which Jesus has forgiven -, it's possible to forgive others who sin against us. So when you forgive someone - for example, for saying something mean about you -, you are reflecting Jesus.

- Everything Jesus did for you, shows how He feels about you: He loves you! He is kind and caring to you. When you show that you care about other people - say, when you see one of the kids at school being picked on, and you speak up to defend him or her -, you are reflecting Jesus.
- Just think of how much His love and His forgiveness and His care mean to you! You don't wrestle with the questions that worry the deepest parts of kids' hearts these days: Does anyone really care about me? What will happen to me when I die? You have the answer: Jesus will always be there for you! So when you see someone going through a tough time and you write her a note that says, "You are special to God - Jesus cares about you," you are reflecting Jesus.
- Think of what His promise to be with you means to you! When your dad is getting deployed and you express, "I'll miss him, but I know God will take care of us" - you are reflecting what Jesus' peace is like.

And think about it! When you reflect Jesus - his forgiveness, his love, his peace -, people do notice! "I'd like to know what makes you want to be so nice to me... I'd like to have the comfort you have, when things don't go well in my life."

Adults, by now you've grasped that everything we've talked about so far applies just as much in our lives.

These next 3 Sundays we are occupied with Matthew ch.5. How important is this section of the Bible? (*pause*) To put it another way: If the truth here is lost, if we allow its meaning to be distorted, how much do we lose? (*pause*) I find Martin Luther's answer to that rather eye-opening:

"... We know what the devil has in mind, especially his intention to distort this fifth chapter of St. Matthew, and thereby to **exterminate** pure Christian teaching. ... So long as the devil lives and the world stands, he will not stop **attacking** this chapter. His aim is in this way to **suppress good works** altogether, ... or to **institute false good works** and fictitious holiness, ... full of greed, pride, and finally every kind of devil. May Christ, our dear Lord and Master, who has opened up the true meaning for us, increase and strengthen it for us, and may He help us to live and act according to it. To Him be praise and thanks, with the Father and the Holy Spirit forever. Amen." [Luther, vol.21: the Sermon on the Mount. Luther's Works. Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House.]

- Why is the devil attacking this chapter?

Answer: to get as many people as possible to buy into "fictional holiness," and to get believers to ditch out on doing good works.

- What is the devil's ultimate goal?

Answer: to exterminate pure Christian teaching.

- We want to now focus on the damage done when the devil accomplishes his goal: to get people to put their hope of salvation in "false good works"; or the flip side: to keep believers from doing true good works.

Let's take Luther's prayer as our own as we continue our study: May Christ, our dear Lord and Master, who has opened up the true meaning of His teaching to us, increase and strengthen it in us, and may He help us to live and act according to it. To Him be praise and thanks, with the Father and the Holy Spirit forever. Amen.

So just what are “false good works?” Jesus leads us to an answer through his words in vs.20... “*For I tell you unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven.*” The point? Your good works will never be a way into heaven!

Jesus’ words eliminate any & all hope placed in “false good works.”

This is important **for us** to take to heart. You may remember the times Jesus spoke this truth directly to the Pharisees and the teachers of the law. They were falsely trying to earn their way to heaven - trying to be righteous by their own works. Jesus, time and again, says to anyone who holds that belief: you are shut out of heaven, you are walking straight to the pit of hell, and if others listen to you they’ll end up in hell with you. This time, though, look to whom Jesus addresses these words. He is speaking to his followers, who trust in Him. Why? We constantly need to be on the watch for two-faced attitudes which come from our sinful nature. You know the pride that pops-up in you and me: “I’m not that bad after all” - “Look at all I’ve done for my church” – “Sure glad I’m not like...”

If we don’t address such attitudes – whatever variation they erupt in -, if we don’t crush them down, what can ultimately happen?

To the Word! To God’s Word! Here we are able to see our pride for the sin that it is, so we repent, “Lord, I am sorry. What was I thinking!” And we are built up/encouraged in our trust in Jesus, who alone fulfilled all righteousness: for Jesus’ words clear our hearts of any notion of placing our hope in our own works.

And yet, we don’t want to drop “good works” from our vocabulary, or our lives. In this same section here today we see Jesus speak of the good works of believers.

You see, such good works aren’t bad. Just the opposite. Good good works are those done out of thanks - that come naturally from “just wanting to be like the one who did so much for me and who loves me so much.” Think of the child who loves his dad so much ~ he wants to be just like him. It may start with copying daddy when he’s little, to sharing his interests and following in his footsteps regarding career choice, to mannerisms and convictions that cause people to say, “He’s just like his father!” as an adult. I’m sure you’ve all seen that, or maybe even done that yourself.

Like I told the kids earlier: when we reflect God’s light, people get the chance to see who our God is and what he is like. That’s profound! And in some cases... “They will praise your Father in heaven.”

Think of what you are: you are a walking, talking display of God’s truth. You, and I, reflect: “here is a sinner washed & made holy by Jesus - here is someone who wants to live to thank him in every way I can.” A Chris Dreisbach song, which one of the kids was singing, captures this: “I’m just a nobody, telling [& showing] everybody about somebody [Jesus], who can save anybody.”

So bring on the salt! That we “salt” the earth, means that we hold onto & out God’s truth in the world.

But be warned. Are you ready to live and to die on the truth that we discussed today, the fact the Bible shows throughout: you cannot earn heaven by your works? For listen to Luther regarding this point:

“No other teaching is so dangerous. Others preach what people enjoy hearing and what reason can accept... But this teaching meets *universal opposition*, because its intention is to step forward and to show up the worthlessness of the world’s light and teaching. Therefore, the world tries in all sorts of

ways to *extinguish* this light or to *shove it over* into a corner or to *put it under* a bushel. It wants us to forget about our doctrine or [it wants us] to recant and let ourselves be twisted and turned the way it chooses. But we will not let ourselves be driven from our stand this way. We will remain as a city on a hill, a light on a candlestick in the house. Surely He who has made us the light will also preserve us as the light." [Ibid - Luther's Works: vol.21.]

So keep shining. Keep shining even when people react negatively. And they will. Just look at what happened to Jesus! Jesus warned in the verses just before what we have today in Matthew ch.5: "*people [will] insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me.*"

And this is where the devil wants to squelch our light ~ He wants us to fear. He wants us to care more for acceptance from others than to share the truth – which saves – with the world.

Just look at the reaction you can get if you *dare to share*. Recently I watched a Christian try to share the truth with famous TV educational personality for children: Bill Nye the Science Guy. This is how Bill Nye responded at one point:

"I don't know how much time you've spent talking to strangers, but they're not sanguine about that [- not ok -], to have you tell them that they are inherently lost or misguided. It is very troubling!"

This is what the world can't tolerate, for you see: as we hold out God's truth the "wisdom" of the world is shown to be foolishness - the place the world loves to take "refuge," which is in all their best deeds, is shown to be a worthless & damning retreat.

You see, then, what is at stake. And I know you care about people. Christian, pray with me: "God, it is your truth – not our truth. Strengthen and keep us by your truth. Your word is truth. Amen."

I'll leave you with God's encouragement in Philippians 2:15: "*Shine like stars in the universe as you hold out the Word of life.*"