

## Matthew 5:13-20 Exegesis

**:13 "You are the salt of the earth but if the salt loses it's saltiness by what will it be made salty for it is not powerful (useful) yet except that having been thrown outside to tread down under men."**

- You are the salt of the earth
  - Here becomes increasingly obvious that Christ is directly describing the believer who is living on the earth. The subjects and meaning of the beatitudes have been debated by scholars for many centuries. Some think that they have an eschatological meaning while others some unreachable moral standards. These verses, however, provide even stronger support that Christ's words are applicable to the life of every believer here and now.
  - Christ describes the believer as "salt of the earth." What exactly does that mean? Christ is obviously using symbolic language in His description of believers. Like He had done so often before, Christ uses aspects of everyday living to teach important truths about God. The believer is like the salt of the earth. Earth salt is an impure salt, commonly used in Christ's day, that could be used for flavoring and preserving meat. Since earth salt is impure, the sodium chloride could come out of it and leave behind a limestone powder that had no taste and thus no use (Louw, 1:51).
    - Do believers are likened to the commonly used earth salt
- the salt loses it's saltiness by what will it be made salty
  - Once the earth salt lost the sodium chloride compound it failed to be of any use. The normal person in that day would not have any way of introducing the sodium chloride back into the earth salt. So Christ is stating that once it has lost it's saltiness (sodium chloride) it cannot regain it's saltiness. The listeners would have understood this easily. It is quite possible that they would have to throw away earth salt after a time because it would be of no household use anymore. Also as an interesting note, the word  $\mu\omega\rho\alpha\acute{\iota}\nu\omega$  "to lose" used here can also mean to become foolish or cause to become nonsense. (Louw, 79.44) So losing saltiness has a negative connotation in the other translations of the verb as well.
- except that having been thrown outside to tread down under men
  - The only real use of the limestone substance left in the earth salt substance is to be thrown down as a walk way for men. This would be the ultimate degradation of the rock salt which was once an integral part of the life of it's user. It preserved meat and provided a flavor to the food being eaten. Once it failed to provide saltiness it became useless and therefore was reduced to common dirt being used to provide a pathway for the feet of men.
- The believer as the salt
  - In the first words of this metaphor Christ pronounces that the believer is like earth salt. It seems likely, based on this and the following verse that Christ's words can be taken in both a spiritual and practical way. He spoke of the impossibility of adding saltiness back into the barren earth salt and likewise, who is able to restore the faith of a faithless believer except God Himself? The believer relies on God to reveal Himself through the Holy Spirit and to sanctify his soul each passing moment. When the believer does not exhibit faith and thus loses his saltiness, or his purpose as a believer here on earth, what good is he? At one time he was reserved by God to do His special work here on earth. When he loses his faith and thus cannot fulfill his reason for existence he is no longer useful and can therefore be thrown out of his honored position in the family. Special consideration should be given to  $\beta\acute{\alpha}\lambda\lambda\omega$  "to throw". This verb means to violently throw something and in this case, it means to violently throw outside of the home. So the faithless believer who does not fulfill his use on earth would be thrown out from his special position to a lowly one.
  - The believer should read this and understand it is not talking about losing one's salvation but about the importance of remembering why he is here. If the believer fails to perform his role here on earth for God then he in his role as a member of the kingdom
  - Jamieson considers the likening of the Christian to salt to be quite literal. He writes that the Christian is like salt in that he is to "preserve it from corruption, to season its insipidity, to freshen and sweeten it." (Jamieson, Matt. 5:13) While the Christian does exist on the earth to act as a moral example to the world it is too forward to state that he will somehow season the evilness of the world. Outside of his role in the church, the Christian exists to be used by the Lord to draw others to faith in Christ. God does not see the world as one continuous group of people but as two groups which are those who are justified

through faith in Jesus Christ and those who are not and therefore destined for an eternity in hell. So the Christian group does not somehow lessen the offence of the lost group because of their faith in Christ.

**:14 "You are the light of the world, a city (is) not able to hide resting upon a mountain."**

- You are the light of the world
  - φῶς appears 70 times in the NT and has several different translated meanings. This use of the word "light" is much like Jesus' statement in John 9:5 "I am the light of the world..." Throughout the NT light and darkness are symbols of good and evil. It is accepted that there is no holiness in light rays themselves or evil in the lack of light rays or darkness but that these are simply symbols of good and evil. God came down as Jesus Christ as the Light of the κόσμος "world" or the perfect holy one of the world to save the world.
  - Κόσμος can be defined several ways in the NT. In some cases it represents the earth and in others it represents the evil world system. In this instance, it seems accurate to say that the "world" is the entire human race both saved and lost. Louw does not define κόσμος in this way but it seems like the most plausible definition in this instance. The believer is the holy and righteous one in the world, or God's created universe. Now that Christ has ascended and is no longer physically in this world, believers are called by Christ to fulfill their purpose (Matt. 28:19). :13 reminds the believer that he must remain faithful to his calling as a believer while this verse states how this will be done. The believer is earth salt, which can become useless if it loses its defining quality. The believer is the light of the world, living as an example of God's grace through Jesus Christ to the lost because he is the holy and righteous one in the world.
- A city is not able to hide resting upon a mountain
  - A city that rests on a mountain is unable κρύπτω "to hide" its illuminating presence to the cities around it. The grammar context in this infinitive verb "to hide" suggests that the city is not attempting and unable to hide its radiance but that because of the radiance of its light and its location the city cannot help but stand out among the other cities around it. It seems evident that it is not necessarily the πόλις itself but the location of the city. It is its resting place on the mountain that provides the opportunity for the city to illuminate the world around it.
  - Christ is obviously likening the city to the believer. It is not the innate righteousness of each man that is impossible to hide but the righteousness of each man because of his location. His location is on the foundation of faith in Christ. The believer resting on the foundation of Christ cannot help but radiate that hope to those around him. A true believer, who is actively seeking God's will in his life cannot stifle the hope and happiness brought by Christ.
    - Walvoord states that "individuals Jesus described in verses 3-10 would obviously radiate and point others to the proper path. Their influence would be evident, like a city on a hill." (Walvoord, Matt. 5:14) In this statement, Walvoord illustrates the one defining quality of light which is its ability to penetrate darkness and illuminate that area. So must the believer dispel darkness through the example of his life and point others towards Christ.

**:15 "And neither do they ignite a lamp and place it under a bowl but upon a lampstand and then it shines on everyone in the house."**

- And neither do they ignite a lamp and place it under a bowl but upon a lampstand
  - Just as it is preposterous to imagine a city resting on a mountain to be hidden from the view of those surrounding it on the plains, Jesus points out the illogical reasoning behind igniting a lamp and covering it with a bowl. Here again in this verse Jesus likens the believer to a source of light to others. In a practical sense, a lamp is lit in order to disperse light to those in a dark area. That is the purpose of the lamp, to give light. The lamp must be used, however, in a correct manner or it will not fulfill its purpose. Here in this verse, the lamp can be used in one of two ways. It could be lit and placed under a bowl (μόδιος). Louw states that the μόδιος was a container used to hold about 2 gallons of dry matter. (Louw, 6.151) It was probably a common storage device used in many households. In fact the article placed before "lamp" and "bowl" suggests that these were very common household utensils. (Jamieson, Matt. 5:15) Placing the lamp under the bowl would obviously keep any light from radiating out to dispel the darkness around it. The second way it could be used would be by placing it upon a λυχνία

(lampstand). The lampstand was a device on which the lamp would be placed so that it was elevated in the air and could give light to a greater area around it. (Louw, 6.105)

- And then it shines on everyone in the house
  - The second of the two ways in which a lamp can be used is obviously the correct one. To put the lamp under a basket would keep the lamp from fulfilling its purpose of giving light to those around it. To put the lamp on a lampstand would allow it to dispel light to all those in the area. The purpose of a lamp is λάμπω (to shine). So if a lamp is used in any way that keeps it from shining then it ceases to fulfill its purpose.
- The 2 uses of a believer
  - Christ likens the believer to earth salt, a city on a hill, and now a lamp. The believer, like the lamp, has a purpose which is to shine or to dispel the hope that he has in Jesus Christ. While the lamp is covered with the bowl it does not cease to shine but it does cease to fulfill its purpose of shining for people to see. The believer must radiate his hope for all to see. While he may never cease to be a believer because he fails to spread his light (which is the gospel message) to others, he does cease to fulfill his purpose of spreading his light. Instead, the believer is to stand up tall, uninfluenced by the world around him to spread the hope of Jesus Christ to all who would have eyes to see His light. This is commanded by Jesus in the following verse: "In this way, shine your light in the presence of man..."

**:16 “In this way, shine your light in the presence of man so that they might see your good work and might praise your father in heaven.”**

- In this way, shine your light in the presence of man
  - Having discussed one of the purposes for the believer on earth which is to live in a way that teaches others about his faith in Jesus Christ, it is now important to discuss the method by which he does this. To understand this, it is essential to refer to the previous verse. Christ illustrates that a lamp is only fully used when it is placed on a lampstand from which it can emit the most light possible to all those around it. In this way, a believer is completely fulfilling his purpose when he shines his light ἔμπροσθεν (in the presence) of man. The context and grammar of this one preposition teaches volumes about how a believer should live out his Christian faith. Does the believer shut himself off from the world? Does he hide the hope he has in Christ for himself? No, his faith in Christ emits from him in an outpouring of gratitude. The believer's "light" should blind the world in such a way that it is unmistakable from whom the light gets its source. The world will see this light and know that it is due to the downpouring of God's grace in the life of the believer.
- So that they might see your good work and might praise your father in heaven
  - Christ points out cause and effect relationship in this verse that resembles his statements in the beatitudes (:1-:12). The cause is that men might see the good works of believers and the effect is that they might praise God.
    - Cause: they might see your good work
      - This verse could very easily be taken out of context and interpreted as a works based theology. Remember, however, that this is addressed to the believer. So it works are not done to obtain salvation or keep it but to draw others to it. The good work of the believer is used by God for some greater purpose. Special attention needs to be given to εἶδον meaning "to see." A literal reading of this verse can be understood too simply to indicate that the purpose of the believer is to do good works in the presence of others just so that they will see or witness the good works. The particular use of εἶδον indicates that the good work of the believer is much more than seen like one would see a red car on the street but experienced. The believer's act is experienced by the world in a way that personally affects others. (Louw, 30.45) The experience causes the world to attribute the believer's works to God
    - Effect: and might praise your father in heaven
      - The ultimate purpose of Christ and thus the ultimate purpose of the believer is to bring glory to God. So it is logical that God's glory would be the ultimate end to the good works of a believer. When the believer lives out his faith in Christ by doing good works in the presence of others, the ultimate end is that everyone affected by that work will

δοξάζω (praise) God. The use of this verb signifies that God is recognized as one deserving honor. He is set apart as someone unlike any other. (Louw, 33.357) This is not insinuating that those affected by the good work of the believer will necessarily come to a faith in Christ but that they will recognize that the works of the believer are Godly. The unveiling of the eyes of the unbeliever and faith in Christ are brought by the grace of God alone but the good work done by the believer may be used as a channel of that grace.

**:17 “(Do) not consider that I came to abolish the Law nor the Prophets, I have not come to abolish but to give true meaning.”**

- Intro:
  - Christ spent the preceding 16 verses making positive statements about what the life of a believer is all about. He began with 12 attributes that should characterize the personality and actions of a believer. Next, he likened the believer to some common household items that were essential to the existence of his listeners including salt, food containers, and light. In this verse, however, Christ shifts the focus from the believer to Himself and does this not by saying why He has come but why he has not come.
- Do not consider that I came to abolish the Law nor the Prophets
  - Christ was accused many times throughout the Gospels of living and teaching against the Law (Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy) and the prophets (Isaiah, Jeremiah, Lamentations, Ezekiel, Daniel, Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi). (CARM, Bible Books) Here in this passage He explains exactly what His role is inside of the Law of God. First, He states that He has not come καταλύω (to abolish) the Law or the Prophets. Louw points out that abolish would also mean to completely invalidate something that has been used. (Louw, 76.23). So Christ is stating that He didn't come to strip the Law and the words of the Prophets of their meaning and importance. This statement by Christ reinforces the belief that the O.T. does in fact have an important place in the life of a believer. If one does not understand the O.T., then he cannot understand the N.T.
- I have not come to abolish but to give true meaning
  - Christ came πληρώω (to give true meaning) to the Law and the Prophets. How He gave true meaning to both the Law and the Prophets should be investigated separately.
    - Law (νόμος)
      - Louw states: "In speaking of 'true meaning,' it may be useful in some languages to use a phrase meaning 'real intent' or 'real purpose.'" (Louw, 33.144) This sums up the entire purpose for the Law. The Law was God's gift to the Israelite people which enabled them to have a relationship with Him. What Christ is saying here, however, is that the Law was not an end in itself. The Law was a part of the process of the coming of Jesus Christ who would be the only one to completely fulfill the Law and therefore justify those who were under the Law through faith in Him and His work on the cross. Christ did not come to abolish or invalidate the Law but to give it its full meaning.
    - Prophets (προφήτης)
      - The prophetic books in the OT are littered with Messianic prophecies which speak of the coming of the Messiah and many detailed events in His life. Christ came to fulfill, to bring truth, to what the prophets stated so many years ago. He did not come to abolish or invalidate their utterances but to fulfill them.
  - Christ is the ultimate culmination of the Law and the Prophetic words spoken about in the OT. Both the Law and the Prophetic writings exist to point towards Christ. Christ is the ultimate end not in contradiction to the Law and the Prophets but in fulfillment of them.

**:18 “For truly I say (to) you until heaven and earth might pass away one iota or one stroke (part of a letter) might not pass away from the Law until all things might come to pass.”**

- For truly I say to you
  - Christ begins this verse with the word ἀμὴν which would have been a verbal hint to His listeners that He was expelling some sort of important truth. This doesn't disqualify His other statements as being equally

true, but would have suggested to His listeners that they pay close attention to the following words. This verse is a qualifying verse from the previous statement that He just made.

- Until heaven and earth might pass away
  - Reality as it is known can be divided into two broad categories: οὐρανός (heaven) and γῆ (earth). The heaven of which Christ is speaking about has been interpreted in other passages as both the sky or universe above the earth and the Heaven where God abides. In this passage, the context suggests that Christ is referring to the Heaven where God abides. The earth is obviously the physical planet earth. Christ is speaking literally about an actual time when Heaven and earth will παρέρχομαι (pass away) or cease to exist as they had in the past.
- One iota or one stroke might not pass away from the Law
  - From the moment of creation until Heaven and earth pass away the importance and meaning of the Law will continue to be valid. The iota is the smallest letter in the Greek alphabet and the κεραία is the least stroke of a pen. (Louw, 33.37) So even the smallest and most minute details of the Law will not be invalid or unimportant until Heaven and the earth pass away.
- Until all things might come to pass
  - When will Heaven and earth pass away? Christ tells us that this will occur when all things γίνονται (come into being or happen). This means that God has sovereignly chosen an end for the world as it is now known and that end will occur at some point in the future when a certain number of things have occurred. Until that time, nothing that God has ordained in His Law and through the Prophets will be abolished or forgotten.
    - Carson states: "But the fulfilment of the law does not mean its abolition; it remains wholly authoritative and demands the fullest respect of the disciple." (Carson, Matt. 5:18) As Carson indicates here, the Law was not abolished by Christ but fulfilled by Christ and in fulfilling it, Christ reinforced it's importance in the eyes of God.

**:19 “Therefore, whosoever might transgress one of the least of these commandments and might teach a man in this way he will be called least important in the kingdom of heaven but whosoever might do and might teach this he will be called important in the kingdom of heaven.”**

- Therefore, whosoever might transgress one of the least of these commandments and might teach a man in this way he will be called least important in the kingdom of heaven
  - Christ again begins to directly teach the believers who are listening to Him. In this first part of the passage, Christ teaches the importance of the Law. Here again in this passage there is a cause and effect relationship.
    - Cause 1: Whosoever λύω (coming from the verb: to loose but here meaning to fail to conform) one of the least of these commandments
      - Even the smallest commandment is not insignificant in the eyes of Christ.
    - Cause 2: and might διδάσκω (to teach) a man in this way
      - Christ's warning is not only against those openly disregarding the Law but also against those believers who may have been or will teach others to disregard it. It is important to realize here that Christ is not supporting the legalistic attitudes of the religious leaders of the day but supporting His claim that He did not come to abolish the Law and the Prophets but to fulfill them.
    - Effect: he will be called least important in the kingdom of heaven but whosoever might do and might teach this will be called important in the kingdom of heaven
      - The effect of disregarding the importance of the Law and teaching others to do the same is the loss of importance among the kingdom of Heaven. Notice that Christ does not say that it is a sign of apostasy but a mistake by the believer. There are other places in the NT when sinning and teaching others to do so is pointed out as a particularly heinous action. The reward for doing and teaching the validity of the Law is μέγας which best translates as important or great in status. So the believer is promised to have more importance or increased status among others in the kingdom of heaven for his obedience to Christ's teaching in this passage.

- Jamieson supports this claim and speaks about one of the audiences to which Jesus is directly teaching against who are the religious leaders of the day. He states: "As the thing spoken of is not the practical breaking, or disobeying, of the law, but annulling or enervating its obligation by a vicious system of interpretation, and teaching others to do the same; so the thing threatened is not exclusion from heaven, and still less the lowest place in it, but a degraded and contemptuous position in the present stage of the kingdom of God. In other words, they shall be reduced by the retributive providence that overtakes them, to the same condition of dishonor to which, by their system and their teaching, they have brought down those eternal principles of God's law." (Jamieson, Matt. 5:19)

**:20 “For I say (to) you that if you do not exceed the great righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees you might not enter into the kingdom of heaven.”**

- Intro:
  - Here in this verse, Christ concludes His discussion about the lasting importance of the Law and the Prophets by speaking against the religious groups who were not obeying and teaching the Law in a truthful way. This verse is constructed in a popular If...Then statement. The second section of the verse is dependent on the condition stated at the beginning.
- If...if you do not exceed the great righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees
  - The Scribes and Pharisees believed that through their own works of righteousness they could be pure in the eyes of God. In this verse, Christ isn't necessarily stating that others must work harder than the Scribes and Pharisees to be righteous but that the Scribes and Pharisees could not be righteous based on their system of worship. The believer must περισσεύω (exceed to a very great degree) the δικαιοσύνη (righteousness) of the Scribes and Pharisees. This is a statement that the belief system of the Scribes and Pharisees is unable to produce righteousness in God's eyes and therefore is wrong. Christ is showing the believer that He is the only way to heaven and that no legalistic system of worship solely based on works will be enough to obtain righteousness. To do more than the Pharisees (meaning to separate symbolizing their intent to stand apart from others in righteousness), who believed themselves to be the most obedient Jews, would be nearly impossible, so Christ's point is driven home.
- Then...you might not enter into the kingdom of heaven
  - The penalty for failing to earn one's righteousness in the eyes of God is inability to go to heaven. One must understand the magnitude of what Christ is saying here to the listener. By stating that the belief system of the Scribes and Pharisees is invalid, He is stating that they will not be allowed into heaven. This was a very bold statement against the ruling religious group of the day and would not go unnoticed. This helps to explain the hatred that many of the Jewish leaders had for Jesus and why they yearned to murder Him.
    - Walvoord supports this conclusion by stating that Christ demanded more than just outward actions to achieve righteousness but also required an inner righteousness based on faith in Himself. (Walvoord, Matt. 5:20)

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