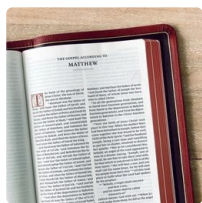


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Matthew 5:11 - 5:13



Gospel of Matthew - Steve Gregg

Steve Gregg continues his analysis of the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew chapter 5, focusing on verses 11-13. He emphasizes that the Beatitudes describe the character of a citizen in the kingdom of God and that faith must be accompanied by a certain state of mind. Gregg also explores the metaphor of salt and highlights the importance of being separate from the morally putrefied world. He notes that once salt loses its savor, it is worthless and cannot be restored, likening this to the irreversible loss of a believer's faith.

Transcript

Having looked at the Beatitudes found in the Sermon on the Mount in our previous several sessions, we want now to continue in the Sermon on the Mount found in Matthew chapter 5. And Jesus has, of course, in the first 10 verses, or I should say in verses 3-10, described the character of the citizen of the kingdom of God. This character was to be that of the disciples. Now, it's not necessarily the case that all of the disciples of Jesus at the time he spoke fit this description well, but Jesus was certainly teaching the ideal that the disciples should strive to be.

They should be poor in spirit. They should be those who mourn over sin. They should be those who are meek or gentle.

They should hunger and thirst for righteousness and be merciful. They need to be pure in heart and they need to be peacemakers. And they could count on it, they would be persecuted for righteousness sake.

These are the things that Jesus said in these Beatitudes. And he also said that there were certain rewards for being in this class. For example, he said, theirs will be the kingdom of heaven.

They will be comforted. They will inherit the earth. He said, they will be satisfied.

Their thirst will be satisfied and they shall obtain mercy. He said, they shall see God and be called the sons of God. So, there's great privilege in being a disciple of Jesus, but

there's also qualification.

To follow Jesus, to be one of his, one must strive to be those things which Jesus described here in order to obtain and qualify to take part in this kingdom. Now, I want to make something very clear here. Some people say, well, Steve, it sounds like you're saying that we are saved by being meek or by being a peacemaker or by being pure in heart or by being poor in spirit.

That we're saved by being or achieving these conditions. No, we're not saved by achieving these conditions. We are saved by faith, but that faith is accompanied by these states of mind.

A faith that saves will be a faith that humbly is poor in spirit. A faith that leads us to be meek and that causes us to be pure in heart and to be peacemakers and so forth. The faith that saves us is accompanied by certain changes in our lives.

If these changes are not present, then that is good evidence that that faith is not present. And so, Jesus is simply describing the character of those who have a saving faith. And he outlines some of the benefits that they can expect because of that.

Now, speaking to them, the disciples, he says, as we continue in verses 13 through 16. This is Matthew chapter 5, verses 13 through 16. You are the salt of the earth, but if the salt loses its flavor, how shall it be seasoned? It is then good for nothing but to be thrown out and trampled underfoot by men.

You are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden, nor do they light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house. Let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works and glorify your Father which is in heaven.

Now, quite obviously, speaking to those who are striving to be, or are in some measure, the ones described in the Beatitudes, those who are his followers, he says to them that they provide a service to the world around them. The church is not some cloistered, retiring group that goes off to some monastery or off into some desert to separate themselves from society in order that they might remain pure and untainted from the world. To remain pure and untainted from the world is a requirement.

We are to be that. James said, pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, to visit fatherless and widows in their affliction and to keep himself unspotted from the world. But being unspotted from the world to the Christian does not mean that we physically separate ourselves from the world.

You know, it says in the book of Hebrews about Jesus that he was holy and harmless and separate from sinners, but he was not at all physically or geographically separate from sinners, because, in fact, he hung out with sinners to such an extent that he was

accused of being one of them. He was accused of being a winebibber and a glutton and a friend of tax collectors and sinners. This is because he was not physically separate from them.

And yet the scripture says he was holy, he was harmless, and he was separate from sinners. Separate morally. He was of a different character than sinners.

And because of that, he could reach them. Now, it's important to note that the church here is described as salt of the earth and light of the world. This suggests that the earth needs salt and the world needs light.

And if the church is not among unbelievers, it cannot function in these roles. It cannot provide light for the world or salt for the earth. Now, salt is a potent stuff.

It was used in biblical times for a number of purposes, even as it is now. Of course, it was used for seasoning of food, as it is now. It also was used for preservation of certain foods that would otherwise rot quickly.

In a day where there is no refrigeration, if you slaughtered an animal, for example, you would possibly have to eat it very quickly unless you could find some way to preserve it, or else it would putrefy and be of no use to you. However, early on, man discovered that if he packed meat in salt, he would find that it would retard putrefaction. It would cause the meat not to rot so quickly.

And we still find this to be true in the preparation of certain things, like beef jerky or whatever. Where you're not going to refrigerate it, salt is sometimes used to help retard decay. Now, when Jesus talked about salt, it's not entirely clear how he meant it.

Salt, as I said, could be seasoning. Salt could even be something that they put into wounds to prevent infection. Or it could be something that is used to keep meat from rotting.

Most scholars believe, and I think that the arguments are best, for the suggestion that Jesus was thinking of salt here in its use as a retardant of putrefaction or of rot, and that the Church in the world, that is, the disciples of Jesus in the world, are the salt, or that which prevents moral decay from advancing. Now, you might say, well, the Church has been in the world for 2,000 years now, and look how much decay there is. Look how much the world has putrefied morally.

In fact, the Church is very strong right here in North America. And yet, look how much evil prevails in North America. Look how much crime there is.

Look how much murdering of babies. Look how much profanity. Look how much forgetting of God.

Look how much pornography. How is it that the Church can be said to retard putrefaction? Well, Jesus addressed that issue directly. He said, if the salt loses its savor, well, then how will it be seasoned again? It will be useless.

It will not perform its function. It will be good for nothing but to toss it out and have people walk all over it. I dare say that that would be a good description of the Church today.

It is tossed out. It is rejected by men. It is being walked on.

Even though some churches, of course, are doing quite well in terms of attendance, and they're having a large number of people who come to their meetings, yet in very few cases do we find that the large attendance at the Church is having a great impact on the society around them or retarding putrefaction in a moral sense. If this is so, then we should be able to deduce from what Jesus said that the salt has lost its savor. Now, what does that mean? Now, what we think of as salt today, sodium, what is it, chloride that we buy at the store, that salt cannot lose its saltiness.

And the reason is because it is, by the nature of its composition, salty. And you can't take salt that you buy at the store and somehow make it unsalty. But in biblical times, it was very rare for people to have pure salt.

In our modern high-tech times, they have found ways, of course, to get pure salt. But salt was found often mixed with other minerals and so forth in biblical times, and they didn't have any perfect way to separate the salt from the minerals in which it was found. So when you bought salt, you often were getting really a mixture of various minerals, a fair bit of dirt along with the salt.

Now, this dirt or this dirty salt, if it happened to get wet, for example, often the salt would leach out of the dirt, and all that would be left of your so-called salt would be what was left other than the salt. The salt would be gone, and what had been your salt would just be the residual minerals that were left behind after the leaching process, so it wouldn't be salty anymore. And there was really no way that they had to make it salty again.

And that's why Jesus said, if the salt loses its savor, how will it be seasoned again? The question is rhetorical. He's saying it can't be. Once it's lost its saltiness, it can't be restored, and it is worthless.

Now, what is saltiness? Let me suggest to you that the character that Jesus described in the Beatitudes is the saltiness. It is those who are so described in the Beatitudes who are the salt of the earth. But if the church loses its distinctive character, that character described by Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount and in the Beatitudes, then the church does not have any power to retard decay in the world, and therefore the church ceases

to function in the way it was supposed to function.

You see, the church is not just here for us to get into it and then get out of the world. A lot of people think that way, you know. They think that the reason that you become a Christian is so that you can go to heaven when you die.

And some Christians look forward to nothing else but going to heaven. And they don't realize that the reason God has a church in the world is that the world needs us, that there is a function the church is to have toward the world, and that function has not always been done well. In fact, in the Middle Ages, the world was so much in the church that there was hardly any witness for Christ at all, and corruption just ran rampant.

There have been seasons of revival in the days of people like, oh, Wesley and Finney and Jonathan Edwards and others, which have revolutionized the society because the true saltiness of the church was in evidence, and society began to feel convicted about those things of God. There were times after Finney or Moody or Wesley had preached that the whole community, even those who were not converted, were God-fearing, and they had convictions. They didn't get drunk, and they didn't beat their wives and so forth, because the moral climate was elevated by the presence of a holy people in the area.

Now, Jesus does not say that the whole world is going to become salt. That is, the whole world is not going to become Christian. But salt, it only takes a little salt compared to the amount of meat that it takes to restore it.

But the reason that salt can do this is because it's not meat. Salt has its own distinctive characteristics that the meat does not have, and for that reason, it can prevent decay. But if the salt becomes like the meat, it cannot do anything for the meat.

The meat can do nothing for itself. It needs something different from itself. The world cannot save itself from decay.

Because of the fall of man, there is this tendency toward evil in all men. It takes some external element introduced to elevate the moral standards of the world and the spiritual standards. That external element is that which God provides by bringing about the church, and that church is supposed to, of course, keep that decay from taking place.

Now, here we have, in our day, a phenomenon that I think is to be regretted, and that is that many churches, many of the largest churches, in fact, have become large by ceasing to be salty. That is to say, they don't stand for what Jesus stood for. They don't preach what Jesus preached.

Instead, they have decided that they can be more successful by catering to the world in its own carnal tastes. For example, Jesus indicated that the salt of the earth must be poor in spirit. Now, to be a beggar in spirit is not exactly the same thing as high self-esteem, is it? And yet, some of the largest churches there are, and the best-selling

Christian books, are those that advocate self-esteem.

And, of course, our society loves to see advocacy of self-esteem because people like to be flattered, people like to think well of themselves. The gospel itself does not flatter people. It calls them sinners.

It calls us children of hell. It calls us children of the devil until we're converted. But any church today that preaches that people are children of hell is not going to be one of the larger churches in the community because the world doesn't like to hear that.

And so, when churches want to become big, they often will simply resort to accommodating the world, imitating the world. Changing the worship service into an entertainment session, or changing the sermons, which should be calling people to repentance, into a feel-good kind of a lecture. Now, not all churches do this, obviously, but I think anyone who's visited modern churches knows that this happens only too often.

And churches often become very big by catering to the tastes of the carnal and the unsaved. Well, this catering to their tastes gets them into church. And some people say, well, that's good, isn't it? These people are now in church.

Well, is it good? Not necessarily. To fill a church with carnal and unsaved people is something Jesus never really had any interest in doing. In fact, he could have done that quite easily.

After he fed the multitudes, he had several thousand people ready to follow him all the time. That's a pretty big church. Jesus had something like 15,000 people following him when he fed the multitudes.

These people would have continued to follow him if he had played his cards right and kept them happy. But he didn't want to have a megachurch made up of people who were uncommitted. And so in John chapter 6, we read that Jesus began to tell them what it really meant to follow him and to announce things that were actually offensive to them because he challenged their carnality.

And these people didn't want their carnality challenged. They just wanted to follow him to be fed and to be part of a happening movement. But Jesus didn't have any concern about keeping them on board with him if they were not committed to following God with all their hearts.

And so in John chapter 6, Jesus gave a lengthy discourse that offended a great number of them, and only 12 were left. And he turned to them, too. He wondered if they were going to stay.

And he said, Will you 12 leave also? And Peter spoke for them and said, Where shall we

go? You alone have the words of eternal life. Now think about that for a moment. Jesus had a congregation of about 15,000 one day.

The next day, after he preached one sermon to them, he had 12 left in his congregation. Imagine if one of these megachurches today that had 15,000 people in it called a new pastor and hired him on. And he preached one sermon, and the congregation the next Sunday had only 12 people in it.

And he lost almost 15,000 people. I imagine most churches, the pulpit committee that called him, or the church board that he answered to, would probably fire him. Well, he would be in the company of Jesus, in that he did not... You know, if he preached the truth, and only 12 people wanted the truth, Jesus had rather have 12 people who wanted the truth than 15,000 who didn't.

And so Jesus' mentality was that the church should stand for the truth. Paul said that also when he wrote to Timothy, he says, The church is the pillar and the ground of the truth. In 1 Timothy chapter 3, I think it's verse 16.

And so, the church is supposed to be the pillar and ground of the truth. You want to know something? The truth is not flattering to man. And most people don't want the truth.

How do I know this? Because Paul said so, for one thing, in Romans chapter 1 and verse 18, where he said, The wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in their unrighteousness. They don't like the truth. It condemns their unrighteousness, so they suppress it.

Or in 2 Thessalonians chapter 2, Paul said that when the man of sin comes, he will become with the deceivableness of Satan to deceive all those who have not received the love of the truth. This is apparently a large number of people. The truth is not well loved by the carnal, by the unbeliever, by the sinner who loves his sin.

I think you will fall into one of two categories, whoever you may be. You will either love the truth more than all other things, or you will not. You'll love something more than you love the truth.

Those who do not love the truth are not worthy of it. The Bible says of those who do not love the truth, in 2 Thessalonians chapter 2, Paul says, Therefore God will send them strong delusion that they will believe the lie. The church needs to stand for the truth, even if it's unpopular, even if it's not loved, and even if the church will not be as large for doing so.

There are real people out there who really do love the truth and who really love God. Many of them are very dissatisfied with the current offerings of religious institutions for them to join. And it's because a large number of churches have abandoned truth, have abandoned Jesus' teachings in order to get larger numbers.

This was not what Jesus had in mind for the church, and it is an example of the church losing its saltiness. If the church ceases to preach the distinctive truth that Jesus preached, it has lost its saltiness. And if it loses its saltiness, it has no impact of the right kind on society.

And if you want to look at North America right now, the cultural scene, we find churches that are huge with thousands of members, but we find no evident impact, in many cases, upon the moral environment. If anything, the moral climate in many places where there are many large churches is getting worse. This is what Jesus said would happen if the church, if the salt, loses its savor.

So, what are we to do? We are to be courageously committed to the truth, courageously committed to what Jesus said, no matter how unpopular it is, no matter how small the following is that enjoys hearing what Jesus had to say. This would take a tremendous amount of courage on the part of a pastor, especially a pastor who might have a large congregation, because if he really preaches what Jesus preached uncompromisingly, there's not very many churches that would do this that will continue to have a large number there. I mean, most of the larger churches attract people who do not want to die to themselves.

They don't want to forsake all that they have. And yet Jesus said, in Luke chapter 14 and verse 33, he said, unless you forsake all that you have, you cannot be my disciple. Unless you hate your father and your mother and your wife and children and your own life also, he said, you cannot be my disciple.

Is this popular teaching? No, I doubt it. I doubt if it ever will be popular teaching. And where you see a large church with a lot of expensive cars in the parking lot, you're not likely to hear that kind of teaching there.

At least, if you do, there's not likely to be such a crowd there the next week. Yet, better it is for the church to speak the truth faithfully and have few followers, as, for instance, Jesus did, than to become popular by compromise. Because those who are committed to the preaching of the word are going to have to answer to God for whether they preached faithfully.

And James said, Be not many teachers, for we, meaning we teachers, shall receive the stricter judgment. I have a feeling there's a lot of pastors, a lot of teachers, who do not take that as seriously as I would want to and as they should. And I think there's going to be some real disappointments on the Day of Judgment, when the preaching of the gospel has lost its saltiness and the church has become impotent and despised and trodden underfoot of men.

We'll talk about the light of the world next time we're out of time today. Thanks for joining us. Tune in again tomorrow.