

Salt and Light: A Kingdom Perspective on Jesus' Followers in the World

SCOTT HOEZEE

What are we to be like as Jesus' disciples out in the world? How should we act? How should we interact? What should the shape of our lives be when others look at us? Well, in the Sermon on the Mount, following a series of blessings, Jesus makes two quick, declarative statements that told the disciples then...and that tell us also now...quite simply, who we are. We are salt; we are light. These simple statements pack a punch; and today on *Groundwork*, we will explore what this should look like for us. So, stay tuned.

DARRELL DELANEY

Welcome to *Groundwork*, where we dig into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives. I am Darrell Delaney.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And I am Scott Hoezee; and Darrell, this is now our second program of a planned six-part series on Jesus' Sermon on the Mount, as we find it in Matthew Chapter 5, 6, and 7. We covered very quickly all of the Beatitudes from Matthew 5 in the first episode of this series. So, now we are going to move on to what comes next, and it is just four short verses.

DARRELL DELANEY

And the verses read as follows: 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 underfoot. ¹⁴You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden. ¹⁵Neither 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. ¹⁶In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.”

SCOTT HOEZEE

You are salt; you are light; and Darrell, as we said in the intro to this program, Jesus isn't suggesting this, right? He isn't telling the disciples to *become* this. He isn't giving tips on how to be salty or how to be bright. He just said you *are* this—this is what you are. And the implication is: Well, now you have to act like it. Probably it was a bit of a shock to the disciples. They probably didn't mostly feel like salt or light, especially this early in their time of following Jesus; and yet, that is what Jesus says. So, it naturally leads to the question: How am I salty in the world? How am I light?

DARRELL DELANEY

Well, it is beautiful because these are declarative statements that are of their identity in the Father and in the family of God. They are not based on performance. They don't have to attain to this. You don't have to aspire to this, but this is actually your being—this is who you are. Therefore, you must live a certain way based on who you are. In the world that we live in, and I am sure in a part of where they lived in, is that they thought that if they attained a certain status, that would make them someone, that would give them value, but Christ is saying they have a value before that; but then, out of that value, they live a certain way.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Exactly; so, in this first part of this program, we are going to focus on the salt image, and then we will pick up on the light in the second part of this program, Darrell; but salt...or as some of us learned in chemistry class in the periodic table of elements: NaCl—sodium chloride. Darrell, it is the only mineral that we human beings can take directly from the earth and eat. All other minerals and vitamins and stuff need refinement and so forth. Salt...you can take it right and eat it. We would die without it. Too much salt isn't good, but...

DARRELL DELANEY

Sure.

SCOTT HOEZEE

No salt, and you are dead. So, we would die without it. Food would be very bland without it; and so, really, salt has been important all through history. Cultures used to exchange salt as money. Some of the earliest roads were built to transport salt. Some of the earliest taxes were levied on salt. Whole military campaigns were launched to secure salt. Salt, all through history, has been pretty important.

DARRELL DELANEY

It is interesting to me that if you take those two elements apart, sodium and chlorine, they are both deadly until you put them together...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DARRELL DELANEY

And they become something that you cannot live without, which is interesting. I do also think that because of what you said about wars and about these things that were being built to trade salt and use it as a form of currency, I think that is where the saying, know your weight in salt, comes from.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right, yes.

DARRELL DELANEY

You have to be worth your weight in salt; and it is really interesting that those things will stick out. They have very distinct qualities, and I think you are going to get into that. It is important that Jesus uses this. He doesn't make a mistake when he uses salt intentionally; and let's break down why.

SCOTT HOEZEE

I mean, you know, in a sense, Jesus is getting at something that is very, very important, but very, very basic. I watch a lot of these competition cooking shows on TV, Darrell...Food Network, and the like; and I have seen it again and again where really talented chefs get thrown off the program...they lose the competition...because of one of two things: They totally forgot to add salt to their dish or they added way too much; and they might be incredible chefs who can cook some of the best food in the world, but you mess up the salt, you're done. It is that basic, you know; it is just that basic.

Jesus says something odd here that we need to explore real quickly. He says: But if salt loses its saltiness, what good is it? We don't really understand that when we think of a can of Morton's salt in our kitchen, but Jesus was referring to something that people in his day did know about.

DARRELL DELANEY

We have salt in a pretty pure form...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DARRELL DELANEY

Because we have machines and we have manufacturing and all these other things, but Jesus knew, and the people whom he was talking to knew, that there are other minerals and other things involved in the salt that actually could contaminate the flavor of the salt; and if you just let it sit, then you are probably going to get some sedentary things that are happening in the salt that will not allow the pure flavor of the salt shine through; and these minerals can be seen as contaminants. They can be harmful.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes; so, if you didn't use your salt and it got wet...you know, it got wet in the dew overnight or you spilled some water on it, the salt part would wash away and then you would be left with these minerals that you couldn't eat. You just had to literally throw them out the window; and that is what Jesus meant. But you have to use salt for it to be useful. If you are a cook, you cannot serve food and have people say: Oh, this is kind of flat. Don't you have any salt? And you say: Yeah, I had salt. Its right next to the stove. Did you use it? No; but it was there. It is like, you gotta use it. You gotta mix it in. And I think that is what Jesus is saying here, Darrell. We have to...if we are the salt of the earth, we as disciples need to get out into society and mix in, to bring out life's true flavor and beauty. It is a beautiful world God made. Help people savor it, Jesus is saying. Witness in the world to how God made life beautiful, and that is how you can be the salt of the earth.

DARRELL DELANEY

I think the trick is to mix but not lose your saltiness...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Exactly.

DARRELL DELANEY

And that is something that, you know, a lot of Christians and a lot of believers over history have struggled with, is it too much salt, not enough salt; where in that equation do I actually find myself and how do I live as salt in this world? That is one of the challenges that we have been answering and challenged with for years.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Richard Mouw, a former president of Fuller Theological Seminary, wrote years ago that when we think of ourselves as Christians and the world, we think we have to go into the world only in the prophetic mode. In other words, condemning the world. Saying: Here is what is wrong. Here is what is sinful. But Mouw says if we are going to be the salt of the earth, we have to embrace also our priestly role, which brings God and people together; and being the salt of the earth means getting out of the saltshaker, getting out into the world, and bringing out life's beauty; serving people by showing them the true beauty of God's design for living, because when you live the way God wants you to live, life is a beautiful thing, and it leads to flourishing and to delight.

DARRELL DELANEY

And that is the flavor that we have been called to be in this world; but salt is only one part of what we want to talk about. In the next moment, we are going to talk about being light, so stay tuned.

Segment 2

SCOTT HOEZEE

I am Scott Hoezee, along with Darrell Delaney, and you are listening to *Groundwork*, in this second program of a six-part series on Jesus's Sermon on the Mount from Matthew 5, 6 and 7. Today, we are in Matthew 5; Darrell, we just looked at the image of salt, but Jesus has another image. In verse 14: "You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden. ¹⁵Neither 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. ¹⁶In the same way, let your light

shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.”

DARRELL DELANEY

It is really interesting to see that Matthew is picking up on this *light* image that you pretty much can see in a lot of places in scripture; even defining the very character of God being light. It is not a surprise to a lot of people.

SCOTT HOEZEE

I looked up the word *light* on the Bible Gateway, and found out that the word *light* occurs in all sixty-six books of the Bible; and it occurs a lot in some of them, and it begins in Genesis 1. Light is the first thing God made, even before he made the sun...

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Or the stars, he just made light: Let there be light; and that is the beginning of it. Light goes all through scripture as a positive thing, and it is always, Darrell, opposed to darkness...

DARRELL DELANEY

Right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And it doesn't matter what culture or civilization or era of history you lived in, people have perennially been afraid of the dark, right? We are afraid of things that go bump in the night; we are afraid of crimes committed under the cover of darkness...

DARRELL DELANEY

Right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Star Wars, the dark side of the Force. The valley of the shadow of death in Psalm 23. Things that only the Shadow knows, you know, all these scary programs and movies...

DARRELL DELANEY

Right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Darkness is threatening. That is why God created light first; and actually, this becomes important also in the New Testament.

DARRELL DELANEY

John picks this up in Chapter 1, the character of light. It is like a retelling of Genesis in a different way. It says: In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ²He was with God in the beginning. ³Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. ⁴In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind. ⁵The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

SCOTT HOEZEE

So, we love the light; we need the light; we feel safer in the light; Jesus is the light; and now, in Matthew 5, he tells the disciples: You are the light, too. So, if you are in me, then I, who am the light of the world, shine through you. The main thing Jesus says, of course, when he starts to talk about this is, obviously, what is the sense of having a light if all you do is cover it up, right? I mean, there is no sense. Why would you turn on a

lamp in a room...right...today we would say: You flip the switch, turn on the lamp, and then, what sense would it be to take a dark blanket and cover the lamp? That doesn't make any sense at all. Why turn it on in the first place? Light exists to shine.

DARRELL DELANEY

It's our character...it's who we are and what we are made to do; and the actual practice of us living into shining, there will always be a temptation to dampen the light or dim the light...I would say turn the wattage down in the lights. The spirit of compromise will always be testing us, but it is our true witness to the gospel and to who we are as Christians to let our light shine in the way that we have been called to.

SCOTT HOEZEE

You just gave me a new image...a spiritual dimmer switch...don't turn down the dimmer, Jesus says. Keep it on bright. One of the main things Jesus says, Darrell, interestingly enough is, we want the light to shine; we want other people in the world to see the light of Jesus in us—yes; but Jesus goes on to say: What is one of the big things that is going to happen when you do that? People can see your good deeds; and maybe when they see you doing good, in the light that comes from me through you, they will give glory to God the Father in heaven.

DARRELL DELANEY

The light is not designed for you to look at the light and say: What an amazing light!

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DARRELL DELANEY

The light is designed to illuminate so that you can see what you are really supposed to be looking at; and if we do the works that we are called to do and let our light shine...people are not supposed to look at us and say: Wow, look at that person! They are supposed to say: Look at that person's heavenly Father, who gave them the ability to get that light shining. So, if we are who we say we are, and we shine as we are called to shine, the attention will not go to us, it will go to the Father, because that is who we are illuminating when we walk like he walked, when we talk like he talked, when we demonstrate the love that he demonstrated. That is exactly what we are called to do.

SCOTT HOEZEE

We said in the first part of the program that if you are going to be the salt of the earth, you cannot stay in the saltshaker, you've got to get out; you've got to mix in with the world and bring out its savor and beauty. The same thing with the light. You cannot keep a light hidden, Jesus says. It's got to get out there; and when it does, people see your good deeds. And Jesus doesn't define good deeds here. Of course, we know we are not saved by our works, but we are not saved without them either; because when you get saved by grace, you get saved, but then you get transformed; and so, you are going to act differently. Jesus doesn't define it, but I think, Darrell, it is pretty obvious, and you just said it...I think you alluded to it...what are our good works? It is whenever we act like Jesus, right? Whenever we reach out to the outcast, to the marginalized, to the people that even some of the religious people shunned and sent away, right? Be merciful, be kind, be gracious, be loving, as Jesus was. When you go deeper into the New Testament, bear the fruit of the Spirit: Gentleness, kindness, goodness, self-control, peace, love, joy, patience...all of it. These are the good deeds that we want people to see so they can glorify God in heaven.

DARRELL DELANEY

And the good deeds are not self-seeking; the good deeds are not attention-drawing; the good deeds are actually emanating from a light that we are, and we don't do them to earn good graces with God; we don't do them to look spiritually pious to others; we do them because that is our character, and the character of Christ that is actually being put on display in us, and that is why we do good deeds; and it is the difference between saved by grace through faith in Ephesians and also James, where it says that faith without works is dead.

There is a difference there, and one is before salvation and one is after; and we thank God that he gives us the ability to do good deeds out of gratitude for what he has already done for us; and so, we don't need to earn our status, because that is who we are: the light and the salt.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And that is what shines from us, or to go to that classic summary from the prophecy of Micah in the Old Testament: How does the light of God—that first light of creation—the light of Jesus that is the life of all people, as you read a bit ago from John 1...what is it? Micah said it: It is to seek justice, love mercy, walk humbly with our God. This gets back to the Beatitudes we looked in the previous program in this series.

DARRELL DELANEY

Right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Blessed are the merciful, right? Blessed are those who mourn. Blessed are those who seek righteousness. That is what it is...that is what it is to let the light of God shine through us so that others can see that and become more interested in God and give glory to God. But as we get ready to close out the program, let's think a little bit more about how to be salt and light, as well as some of the tendencies or temptations we might face that might make us lose our saltiness or hide our light after all. So, let's think about that. Stay tuned.

Segment 3

DARRELL DELANEY

You are listening to *Groundwork*, where we are digging into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives. I am Darrell Delaney.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And I am Scott Hoezee; and Darrell, as we have said on this episode so far, for salt to be of use, it has to be used. It has to get out of its container, into the world, where it can help bring out life's true flavors and joys and beauties; and as the light of the world, we need to let Jesus shine through us, even by the Spirit of God as we do those good works in imitation of Jesus, that others can see and give glory to God; but before we think a little bit more about how all that can happen, Darrell, maybe we could think about some things that tempt us to prevent us from being the salt and the light Jesus wants us to be.

DARRELL DELANEY

Well, we know that being the salt and the light are our identity in Christ, and it is always going to be a temptation to go against our identity; and if we try that, it would actually be extremely difficult to maintain going contrary to the character that God is actually trying to display in us. There have been Christians for thousands of years who have wrestled with where are we in the culture? There is a book by Richard Niebuhr called *Christ and Culture* that talks about different ways that Christians over the years have interacted with creation and with culture; and it is interesting to see that there could be extremes there, but there is a tricky way—the way that actually we are called to—it can be tricky, but it can also be achievable with God's help.

SCOTT HOEZEE

How can you be *in* the world but not *of* the world? How can you participate in society, hold down a job, shop, work, go to entertainment venues, travel, do the things that non-Christians do, too, and yet don't do them as though you are not a Christian? So, how can you be in the world and not of the world? It is such a difficult prospect—it is such a difficult balancing act, that...we know, Darrell, that in Church history, some have just opted to hide from the world. They have withdrawn, they disengage culture almost a hundred percent. They have just completely withdrawn. That is one extreme. I suppose the other extreme would be Christians who give so little thought to how it is to be distinctly Christian while you work or shop or go to the entertainment venues that there is no difference between Christian person A and non-Christian B; you cannot tell them apart. That is a problem, too.

DARRELL DELANEY

We just need to remember the fact that Jesus said in his priestly prayer in John 17 that he is not taking them *out* of the world, but he is teaching them how to navigate *in* the world; and in those two ditches that you talked about earlier—those two extremes—the fact that culture isn't going anywhere is something that challenges us to think carefully about how we might navigate it. I could tell you I don't believe in Halloween and close my door and turn my light off, but it is not like Halloween is going to disappear because I did that; so, how do I navigate things like that, where the culture is manifesting in a way, but I am called to be salt and light anyway?

SCOTT HOEZEE

Shunning the culture and hiding away is not going to work. Salt is no good if it just stays in our kitchens. Light is no good, Jesus says, if you hide it under a bowl. So, you have to get out there; but the second thing that might hinder our being proper salt and light the way Jesus wants us to be, is looping back to something we said from the theologian Richard Mouw, and that is the temptation that when we are in the world, we are ever and only negative; we are ever and only wagging fingers in people's faces; we are in the prophetic voice only: You're wrong; you're bad; you're evil; you're going to hell. So, if we are in the world only as a negative presence, I don't think that is what Jesus had in mind either, in terms of being salt and light.

DARRELL DELANEY

So, when I went to community college, there was a guy who used to go on campus; he had a hat on that said: Don't sin; and he had a big sign, and he would stand up on this little pedestal and he would say: You are all going to hell! You are all going to hell! This and that. And he got a lot of opposition from people at that time; and he walked away thinking: Oh, they are persecuting me because of righteousness, but actually I think that that was the extreme you are talking about, where his presentation wasn't winsome and it wasn't seasoned with salt. I think he thought because he was teaching fire and brimstone, that he was going to convict people; and maybe that would have worked for some, but there is another way to go about this that doesn't have to send everybody to hell in a handbasket...it doesn't have to condemn everybody. There is a winsome way to do this; and Paul the apostle has plenty of ways that he did that didn't go that way. We could learn a lot from that.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Sometimes when my wife and I are in Chicago or some bigger city, you will see those street preachers, you know, standing on a turned over 5-gallon plastic pail and screaming damnation at everybody; and every once in a while, my wife will say: Do you ever think they are right? Maybe that is how we are supposed to be. And it is like: Oh, I hope not! I don't think so. They are doing what they think is right, and they are bearing witness in their own way; but I think, right, winsomeness...or you know, we talked about this in another program on *Groundwork* a while back from 1 Peter, you know, where Peter says: Look, always be ready to give a defense of your faith, but you do it politely...

DARRELL DELANEY

Right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

You do it with respect. Treat people well; and that is the priestly function. If it is the prophetic function to always be wagging fingers and announcing damnation, the priestly function, Richard Mouw said, is important, too. And you know what? Jesus was the perfect prophet, priest and king...

DARRELL DELANEY

Right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And if Jesus is calling us to a difficult balancing act here, and I think he is, being salt and light, Jesus is himself our model. Jesus did it.

DARRELL DELANEY

And he showed us the way to do it. Did you ever notice that he never interrupts a Pharisee, even though they are dead wrong sometimes? He will wait until they are finished talking and then he will correct them in a way that is actually honest and authentic; and sometimes when we share our faith, we haven't been as polite, or we haven't been as respectful in that way, but being salt and light the way Jesus showed us is something that the Holy Spirit can give us the power to do. So, sometimes we are afraid because, hey, listen; I don't want to be persecuted; I don't want to go through hard times; I don't want people to corner me with questions I cannot answer; but the Holy Spirit is actually the one you could ask to help you to become the power and the witness to be able to be that salt and light. So, we do have help, even though we are out here trying to do it.

SCOTT HOEZEE

We have the Spirit of Jesus within us; and Jesus...people liked Jesus. They were attracted to him. Jesus was aware of every sin around him, but he wasn't grumpy; he wasn't the world's biggest crank. People invited him to weddings and parties and dinners. Sinners were attracted to him. So, Jesus knew how it was to be salt and light. He was himself. It wasn't easy, but he did it; and now he shares with us his Holy Spirit that he sent to us on Pentecost so that by the grace of that Spirit we too can be salt and light; bringing out life's beauty; showing people the right way to live; helping them to give glory to our Father in heaven for what they see; thanks be to God.

DARRELL DELANEY

Well, thanks for listening and digging deeply into scripture with *Groundwork*. We are your hosts, Darrell Delaney with Scott Hoezee, and we hope you will join us again as we seek to gain a better understanding of God's law in our lives by studying what Jesus thought and taught about God's law in the Sermon on the Mount.

Connect with us at groundworkonline.com to share what *Groundwork* means to you, or to tell us what you would like to hear discussed next on *Groundwork*.

SCOTT HOEZEE

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