

Series: Heart of Worship	Reference: Matthew 5:13–16; Luke 10:29–37	Title: Preservative & Illuminating	Date: 09.19.2021
Website Writeup: Today we explore who we are in Christ further, and what that means to our worshipful witness.			

COLOR CHANGES IN TEXT INDICATE SLIDE CHANGES

This series focuses on the heart of worship, addressing the need to love God & others while daily living out an attitude of grateful worship. The way we live reveals what we value most. God calls for worship of our entire being, what we do in life reflects our worship of Christ. Worship is all-encompassing gratitude, overflowing to others.

Last week we looked at Mark 12 where Jesus is asked, “What’s the greatest commandment?” He answered quoting the Shema of Israel, Deuteronomy 6, stating worship means to love God with all our heart, soul, mind & strength, a love which overflows to others, practically reflecting God’s heart in how we live.

Proposition: To love others means we’ve learned who we are in Christ & how they fit into His plan. As a result, our actions towards others point to a heart of worship.

Today we’ll look at two passages leading deeper into this understanding. Let’s begin by looking at Matthew 5:13–16 (p659 in your pew Bibles) Jesus uses two illustrations here, salt & light. We’ll take them one at a time...*“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 & trampled underfoot.*

This says to us three things, that due to who we are in Christ, (1) we’ve become a preserving influence on others, (2) that influence is effective through a worshipful life reflective of holiness & purity (3) which mustn’t be diluted or polluted.

Salt for us has mostly to do with taste, but for original readers, it had to do with taste & food preservation. V13 can be confusing, let’s address it first. You may read it & have a thought like, “God might throw me out if I don’t produce.” As if there’s some tie between salvation & good works, or the earning or losing of my salvation.

Let me reassure you, it has nothing to do with assurance, or earning of salvation, and everything to do with effectiveness of witness as a result of salvation. Scripture teaches, good works follow salvation & are a grateful response in worship, never do we earn salvation by them. As it says in Eph 2:8-10...*For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith - and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God - not by works, so that no one can boast. 10For we are God’s handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.*

Jesus knows salt can’t lose its saltiness, even if unused for a long time. His expression refers to salt being diluted or mixed with other substances to the point it becomes

ineffective & undesirable. The root meaning of the verb is ‘make foolish’ or ‘show to be foolish’ as in 1 Cor 1:20. Or in the passive, ‘become foolish’ as in Rom 1:22. Only in this verse & Luke 14:34 do lexicons give the meaning for the passive as ‘become tasteless’.¹

Think of it this way, if you dropped a bag of salt on a really dirty floor & swept it with an old dustpan & brush, you wouldn’t use it! It’s still salty, but the impurities make it unsuitable for its intended purpose. You wouldn’t wash it, salt dissolves, you’d be left only with dirt & debris. So, you throw it out. Jesus is saying, don’t become foolish, speaking of that attitude of worship revealed in a grateful pursuit of holiness & purity.

If we imagine the Gospel as salt within us, He’s saying don’t mix it with worldly sin, pride & thoughts contradictory to His - keep your saltiness. As Romans 12:1-2 says, ‘*Do not conform any longer to the patterns of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind*’. He’s saying seek purity of heart, soul, mind & strength, through renewal in Him. Otherwise, your influence & ability to be Gospel salt, preservative in the lives of others will be hindered, becoming ineffective & undesirable.

One commentary said it this way...‘*this phrase refers to the world’s response to Christians if they do not function as they should...Christianity may make its peace with the world & avoid persecution, but it’s thereby rendered impotent to fulfill its divinely ordained role. It will thus ultimately be rejected even by those with whom it has sought compromise.*’² A prophetic word for today with many Christians ‘making peace’ with the world by twisting or turning away from God’s Word, by peer pressure or errant desire.

For instance, this week an article came out about the *Living Faith Church* in San Diego pastored by Stephen & Angela Dela Cruz. The problem is, Angela’s an active Porn Star. They tout themselves as a church for sinners by sinners, and the least judgmental out there. An extreme example of making peace with the world, which will be rejected in the long run when people finally see that it’s not of God. But it begs the question, where do we pollute our heart, soul, mind, strength & message?

Then Jesus gives this image of us being light...¹⁴“*You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden. ¹⁵Neither do people light a lamp & 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 & glorify your Father in heaven.*”

Pure salt, pure unhindered light. He’s the Light of the world as seen in John 8:12; 9:5. His followers reflect that light. Called to let our good works shine before others so they may praise God; like a city illuminating a dark countryside, or a lamp providing light to people in a house.

¹ Barclay Moon Newman and Philip C. Stine, [A Handbook on the Gospel of Matthew](#), UBS Handbook Series (New York: United Bible Societies, 1992), 118.

² Craig Blomberg, [Matthew](#), vol. 22, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1992), 102.

Good works are most naturally seen as the ‘fruits in keeping with repentance’ as found in Mt 3:8-9. It says, *“Produce fruit in keeping with repentance. ⁹And do not think you can say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham as our father.’ I tell you that out of these stones God can raise up children for Abraham.”* Our light’s hindered if we cover over it with the patterns, philosophies or sin of this world compromising its integrity. It stays pure as we live a life in keeping with repentance, submitting ourselves to Jesus lordship, allowing Him to lead us in what’s morally right & good for all peoples.

All these conversations were with religious law experts who took pride in their position as descendants of Abraham. As we also could take pride in calling ourselves Christians. But Jesus said, there must be evidence of true faith leading to a transformed life committed to repentance & reflective of God in witness to others.

Metaphors of salt & light raise important questions about Christian involvement in society regarding all forms of separatism & withdrawal. We’re not called to control secular power structures, or Christianize the worlds legislation & values. But we must remain active preservative agents, even irritants, in calling people to heed God’s standards.³ Neither should we form isolated Christian enclaves to which the world disregards as either prideful & arrogant, or fearful & cowardly. If we do, we cease to be salt & light. We’re salt & light when we worship God well in all ways, humbly walking in & proclaiming truth with sincere loving conviction.

We cease to be worshipful people of salt & light (1) if we cease to live in constant repentance of sin & pride. (2) If we politicize our message aligning it with any party. (3) Or, when we allow the world to define morality instead of God’s Word. (4) When we refuse to speak truth due to the fear of man. (5) Or, when we don’t speak truth since we care more for another’s sensitive nature, rather than the eternal good of their soul. Loving worship of God precedes the love we show neighbor precisely because He’s the source of all goodness & love, not the other way around. So, worship’s a response of love & gratitude for God shown in a transformed life full of salt & light. It’s who Jesus is & who we are in Him, which drives our worship of Him & witness to others.

Grateful worship of God with our entire person leads to listening well to what God wants for others. As we live in grateful worship, God opens our eyes & hearts to His desire for them. God intends the Church to care for one another, as seen in Acts 2 & 4 (2:42–47, 4:32–35). Deliberate actions which move towards neighbors in Acts 9–11. Jesus intended His followers to be salt & light, visible & engaged with the world in a preservative & illuminating way, commiserate with true worship as the greatest command to love God with all your heart, soul, mind & strength, and your neighbor as yourself.

With that in mind, let’s look at Luke 10:29–37 (p708 in your pew Bibles) Jesus is again questioned by an expert in the Law about how to obtain eternal life. Jesus asks, “What’s

³ Craig Blomberg, [Matthew](#), vol. 22, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1992), 103.

written in the Law?” The guy answers with the Shema of Israel, which Jesus has already stated is the greatest commandment. Jesus then says, “Do this & you will live.”

Again, the question becomes, is eternal life to be earned through behavior? Understand, Jesus is driving home - to love God with all your heart, soul, strength & mind isn't just adopting a code of behavior. Rather, it's a dynamic spiritual relationship with God, affecting all aspects of life.⁴ Gratitude for who we are in Christ ignites passion for loving action, holiness & purity, transforming behavior in the Christian.

The worshipful love & gratitude towards God leads to practical real love of others. But for a Jewish expert in the law, the natural question would be, “Who’s my neighbor?” Which he asks in v29. It says...*But he wanted to justify himself, so he asked Jesus, “And who is my neighbor?”*³⁰*In reply Jesus said: “A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, when he was attacked by robbers. They stripped him of his clothes, beat him & went away, leaving him half dead.*

³¹A priest happened to be going down the same road, and when he saw the man, he passed by on the other side. ³²So too, a Levite, when he came to the place & saw him, passed by on the other side. ³³But a Samaritan, as he traveled, came where the man was; and when he saw him, he took pity on him.

³⁴He went to him & bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil & wine. Then he put the man on his own donkey, brought him to an inn & took care of him. ³⁵The next day he took out two denarii [2 days wages] and gave them to the innkeeper. ‘Look after him,’ he said, ‘and when I return, I will reimburse you for any extra expense you may have.’

³⁶“Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?” ³⁷The expert in the law replied, “The one who had mercy on him.” Jesus told him, “Go & do likewise.”

So, Jesus follows the mans question with a parable & final question, challenging his overall intent. Jesus ends by asking, “[Who] was a neighbor?” (v. 36). He doesn't actually answer the man, but calls the man to answer the questions himself. Although, according to Jesus, there is a correct answer.

We know the steep descent of seventeen miles through a desolate rocky area, connecting two wealthy cities, offered ample opportunity for bandits. His audience would automatically assume the unidentified traveler to be Jewish.⁵ In Leviticus 19:18 the ‘neighbor’ is the one to be loved, and in that sense the ‘neighbor’ in the story should be the wounded man. But know that, Jews typically interpreted ‘neighbor’ as only fellow Jews.

⁴ R. T. France, [Luke](#), ed. Mark L. Strauss and John H. Walton, Teach the Text Commentary Series (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2013), 189.

⁵ R. T. France, [Luke](#), ed. Mark L. Strauss and John H. Walton, Teach the Text Commentary Series (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2013), 189.

But Jesus expands their view & pushes the neighborly relation to be reciprocal. A Jewish audience would regard it humiliating to receive such extravagant love from a Samaritan, due to their hatred of them. Therefore, Jesus's concept of neighborliness goes far beyond a patronizing benevolence shown by the chosen people to those less fortunate. So, it's significant that it's not a Jewish man helping a Samaritan, but the other way around. It's not in Jesus basic understanding of the law in which He was out on a limb, but in the radical way He applied it. This parable subverts not the ethical demand of the law, but the Jewish sense of ethnic superiority.

Given all these details, this parable isn't primarily a call to universal benevolence. Rather, it's a challenge to social & ethnic stereotyping. For a Jew to be kind to a Samaritan might be unnatural, but such an act *could* afford a smug sense of superior goodness. But to receive unconditional love *from* a Samaritan would take a Jew far outside his comfort zone - it challenges the basis of Jewish identity as the true people of God. This parable, properly understood, is one of the most powerful challenges to racism in the Bible.⁶ He's saying, "You guys aren't even close to following the Law of God. Loving God means loving & receiving love like a neighbor with even those you normally would hate!" He's just put all other peoples on equal footing with the Jew.

Let's recap what we've learned so far...In Christ (1) we've become a preserving influence on others - salt. (2) That influence is effective through a worshipful life reflecting holiness & purity - light. (3) That holiness & purity mustn't be diluted or polluted. It becomes polluted when we disagree with God in heart, soul, mind or strength. It's naive to think sin is just a few base actions, since it's shown in errant thought & attitude, as well.

And now we learn (4) worshipful love trumps feelings, natural affinities & personal desire. (5) It crosses societal & ethnic boundaries. (6) It's extremely practical in building others up in all ways. And (7) service to God naturally ends in service to others.

Living out the story of a good neighbor isn't always easy, we may find ourselves in a difficult stretching position. Sometimes we have to endure hardship to learn how to better serve. Our experiences teach us valuable lessons in generosity, kindness & hope.

When she was eighteen years old, singer-songwriter Jewel Kilcher was homeless. She'd lived in her car for some time, but it was stolen. So she walked the streets, wondering where she'd get her next meal. At one point, she even shoplifted for food. One evening, she noticed a \$39 dress in a window she desperately wanted. She contemplated stealing it. It was then she realized how alone she felt & the depths to which she'd sunk. It was an awakening which left a mark, especially as it relates to caring for others.

⁶ R. T. France, [Luke](#), ed. Mark L. Strauss and John H. Walton, Teach the Text Commentary Series (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2013), 190-191.

In the midst of that season of life, she penned the words for the song, *Hands*. Concerning that song, she said: “Years later, things turned around & this song became a hit. My husband & I went camping...in northern California & as we were coming back down, we noticed an American flag at half mast. We thought a fireman may have perished because fires aren’t uncommon. As we came further down, there were more flags at half mast. Finally, the radio worked & we learned the Twin Towers had come down. It was surreal. Then we heard the DJ dedicate *Hands*, a song I’d written at 18 at a dark time in my life, to America. It was an unbelievable experience.”⁷

You never know how your salt might preserve, or your light may shine; how God may use your story in Christ. Our lives were meant to be a concert of sorts. We were meant to sing of God’s mercy, grace, compassion & presence. *We don’t sing simply as an act of appreciation, but also as an act of proclamation. Our songs are made up of different parts - each of which point back to God. The verses are mixtures of experiences & attempts at expressing their power. The song’s both a cry of adoration from our hearts of this great God we serve & an invitation to those listening to come & sing with us. We sing loudest & clearest when we serve others. Our lives point to Jesus. Our service to others is among our greatest opportunity to worship. Which is why it’s imperative we know, not just the lyrics of the Gospel (the intellect of it), but also the melody (the love of it), because truth without love kills & love without truth lies.*

As 1 Corinthians 13:1 says...If I speak in the tongues of men or of angels, but do not have love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. ²If I have the gift of prophecy & can fathom all mysteries & all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. ³If I give all I possess to the poor & give over my body to hardship that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing.

It’s exciting to be able to show God’s love for others. We must be intentional & attentive to the needs of others so we can serve them as God intends. Let’s end with a communal reading of Romans 13:8-10 which says...*Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another, for whoever loves others has fulfilled the law. ⁹The commandments, “You shall not commit adultery,” “You shall not murder,” “You shall not steal,” “You shall not covet,” and whatever other command there may be, are summed up in this one command: “Love your neighbor as yourself.” ¹⁰Love does no harm to a neighbor. Therefore love is the fulfillment of the law.*

⁷ Jewel, “Hands,” in *The Story behind the Song: The Exclusive Personal Stories behind 101 of Your Favorite Songs*, ed. Jack Canfield, Mark Victor Hansen, and Jo-Ann Geffen, Chicken Soup for the Soul [Cos Cob, CT: Chicken Soup for the Soul Publishing, 2009], Kindle