

**WHO I AM****MATTHEW 5:13 – 16***by Elaine Poproski*

Who are you?

Probably most of us can answer that question at least in part. We all have a name. We all live somewhere. We all have an age. Some of us might include information about our jobs or our education or our favourite activities. Some of us might talk about our personality quirks or our families or our political preferences. Some of us might focus on things or people we love and/or hate, things we're passionate about, or ideas we're thinking through. Maybe we talk about things we're good at, or things we'd like to get good at. There's really no limit to the things we might say in answer to the question.

But have you ever had someone tell you who you are? If they know you well and love you, it's probably a good thing. I've had times in my life when I needed a friend to remind me of the good things about who I am. I've also had times in my life when I needed a friend to call out the less good things about who I am. Of course, when those things come from a trusted friend, it's important to have someone to tell you, or at least remind you, of who you are. But there are all sorts of other people out there who try to tell us who we are, who may be well-intentioned, but are wrong. I remember, years ago, visiting the home of some kids in a youth group I led. The parents gave me a tour of the house, proudly pointing to the sports themed bedrooms of each of their boys. The thing was, of the three boys, only one had any interest in sports. The other two had rooms that looked like they belonged to kids I'd never met.

Sometimes there are people who aren't well-intentioned who try to define who we are, and who are wrong. Sometimes their words and actions get in our heads and we start to wonder if maybe they're actually right. Sometimes they cause us to question our own knowledge of who we are. That's when we need someone who loves us to speak up and remind us of the truth.

And no one loves us more than Jesus. No one knows us more than Jesus. And this is what Jesus said: You are the salt of the earth. You are the light of the world.

When Jesus spoke these words, he wasn't just speaking to a bunch of individuals; he was speaking to the group as a whole. He was speaking to the disciples as a group who would become the church. This whole Sermon on the Mount has a communal focus. If we were translating these words in the American south, we might translate them to read: Y'all are the salt of the earth. Y'all are the light of the world. There's something really comforting – really encouraging in that. It means it's not all on you or all on me to be the salt of the earth or the light of the world. It means when I forget who I am or you forget who you are, we remind each other who we are. Together, we are the salt of the earth. Together, we are the light of the world.

Salt is probably one of the most common items found in kitchens around the world. We likely think of it as a seasoning, but it's also been used as an effective food preserver for thousands of years. In China, there's a salt lake in the north over which people have been fighting since as early as 8,000 years ago. Since as early as 3 or 4,000 years ago, Egyptians used salt to dry out and mummify the dead. (In the category of things you thought you never needed to know... when mummies were shipped down the Nile as cargo, they were apparently taxed in the 'salted meat' bracket.<sup>1</sup>)

Salt is a mineral essential for the human body's survival and health. When not overused, it balances fluid levels, helping you stay hydrated and thus helping prevent against muscle cramps, headaches, and generalized weakness. If you rinse your mouth with salt water, it promotes healing and prevents disease. All in all, despite warnings against overconsumption, salt is necessary and beneficial. Unless it loses its saltiness.

Salt doesn't go bad. It doesn't get stale. But imagine if it did. Imagine if salt lost its saltiness. All its benefits as a flavour enhancer and a food preserver and in helping keep our bodies healthy and functioning as they should, would be gone. It would be useless. There'd be absolutely no point to it. It simply wouldn't be salt anymore.

Jesus said, "You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt has lost its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It's no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled underfoot."

Jesus also said, "You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden. 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."

The power and the importance of light is in its contrast to the dark. Its purpose is to be seen. We might use very bright lights to fully illuminate something or much dimmer lights if we're trying to set a mood of some sort. People put nightlights in their homes so they don't stumble into walls or trip over furniture in the middle of the night. We use spotlights in theatres to draw attention to specific parts of the stage or to particular actors or objects. Sunlight is essential for all living things on earth, not just because of the warmth it creates, but because of the light itself. Even us human beings need sunlight to live; nothing makes that more apparent than living through a Canadian winter. But if you put the light under a bowl, where it can't be seen, it's useless. There's no point to it. It simply isn't light anymore.

Jesus said, "You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness...it is no longer good for anything... You are the light of the world...Let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven."

How's your saltiness these days? How's your light these days?

Both salt and light have purpose. It is the purpose of salt to enhance flavour, to preserve food, to help keep our bodies healthy. It is the purpose of light to shine, to illuminate, to help make things grow and keep people healthy. Jesus said, "You are salt... You are light..." What's your purpose? What's our purpose?

Salt and light, to be useful, must be different – distinct – from their surroundings if they are to be of use. Is the same not true of Jesus' disciples? Are we not called to be different – to be distinct – from the world in which we live?

Salt and light, to be useful, must be in the food, in the body, in the world. Is this not also true of Jesus' disciples? Are we not called to be in the world – among the people of the world in which we live?

How's your saltiness these days? How's your light these days?

Let's take a bit of time this morning to reflect on that question. We'll just take about 5 minutes. It might be helpful to come get some salt to hold or taste as you reflect. Or get some paper and markers from the back table. Do whatever you find helpful this morning.

How's your saltiness these days? How's your light these days?

*Pause to reflect. (5 minutes)*

When I was thinking this sermon through, I thought that I might spend some time talking about how we restore our saltiness and our light. Except, here's the thing. Jesus didn't say, "You have salt" or "You have light." He didn't say, "There's light inside you." He said, "You are the salt of the earth... You are the light of the world." It's who we are.

Sometimes in our lives, especially when we're trying to figure out who we are, we try on different masks as it were. Teen agers are particularly known for this. After all, a big part of what teenagers are doing is figuring out who they are. So they try different things until they discover what fits. It's possible to go through life denying who we are or hiding who we are. It's possible to go through life never really even knowing who we are. But none of that changes the facts of who we are. And Jesus said to his disciples – to everyone who's done like those first disciples and said 'yes' to following Jesus – "You are the salt of the earth... You are the light of the world." "You are salt. You are light." That's a fact of who we are. The only real question is whether we'll hide or shine. Will we accept that we are different – distinct – from the world? Will we accept that we are, at the same time, called to be distinct in the world – among the people of the world?

Who are you?

You may have lots of answers to that questions and all those answers might be true. Jesus said, "You are salt" and "You are light." He said even more than that. And he said it all as facts – as undeniable, unarguable truth. I'm going to read a number of these truths out loud, and what I'd like you to do, if you are able, is to repeat them after me. But where I say, "we are," I'd like you to say "I am."

We are Jesus' friends. (John 15:15)

We are God's children. (Rom. 8:17; John 1:12; Gal. 4:7)

We are the image of God. (Gen. 1:27)

We are God's temple – the dwelling place of the Holy Spirit. (1 Cor. 6:19)

We are a new creation. (2 Cor. 5:17)

We are fearfully and wonderfully made. (Psalm 139:14)

We are loved by God. (John 3:16; Col. 3:12; 1 John 4:10)

We are members of Christ's body. (Eph. 3:6; 5:30)

We are citizens of God's kingdom. (Phil. 3:20)

We are redeemed. (Eph. 1:7)

We are forgiven. (Eph. 1:7)

We are God's workmanship. (Eph. 2:10)

We are the salt of the earth.

We are the light of the world.

Whatever comes your way this week, whether you're able to believe these statements about yourself or not, they are true. God has declared: This is who you are.

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<sup>i</sup> Stephanie Butler. "[Off the Spice Rack: The Story of Salt.](#)" *History Stories*, Aug. 22, 2018.