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The Revolutionary Disciple: Conspicuous Matthew 5:13-16

Okay, let's just get this over with. I pulled my finger over a razor knife in the toolbox on Friday, wrapped it up with duct tape in hopes that it would fix itself, worked in the yard for five hours, still had a bad cut when I peeked inside the bandage, tried super-gluing the cut together and finally listened to my wife and went to the hospital and got six stitches. My typing is screwed up and I won't be playing piano or guitar for a while. But, I was such a good boy at the hospital that they gave me Sour Patch kids.

We are focusing this morning on the question, "What does it mean to be a **conspicuous** disciple of Jesus?" Not a Christian incognito. As you reflect upon your own witness, is it obvious to others—friends, family, co-workers, fellow students—that there is something different about you? This morning, as we continue in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus has something to say about that.

Let's remember the context. Jesus has been preaching, teaching, healing and casting out evil spirits. A huge and hopeful crowd is following him wherever he goes. Matthew describes them as "...ill with various diseases, those suffering severe pain, the demon-possessed, those having seizures, and the paralyzed..." This was the motley crew that sat down on a hillside to hear the opening words of Jesus' inaugural sermon: "Blessed are you—you spiritual nobodies, you mourners, you who are stuck in the middle, you who are humiliated because you follow me—God's hand of blessing is upon you even in your pitiful state. The world may say you are losers. Your religion may say you are God-abandoned. But I say that you are the blessed and beloved of Almighty God!"

That was revolutionary. After all, it was believed that only the wealthy, healthy and powerful were really blessed by God. The rest had either been forgotten... or worse, were getting payback because God didn't like them. Jesus' words turned the world of God's blessing upside down. But he was just getting started.

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 by men. ¹⁴"You are the light of the world. A city 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 men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.

I admit it; I love salt. I put it on everything. I salt lemons and eat them raw. I salt cantaloupe and watermelon. (Anyone else do that?) Everything we eat has salt in it, so much that we take it for granted. But in the time of Christ, salt was a precious essential of life. It made things taste better, of course. But this was the time before refrigeration and it was a very hot climate. Salt was more important as a preservative. If you didn't salt your meat, soon it would be a nursery for a litter of bouncing baby maggots. Salt was a necessity to prevent things from going putrid.

Jesus has already pronounced "blessing" upon a crowd of people that the world would consider anything but blessed. But now he goes on to say, to that same unlikely crowd, "If you receive my blessing, if you believe my teaching, if you trust and follow me...you are the salt of the earth! By your presence, life should taste better. And more importantly, you will be a preservative. Your presence, your influence will help keep the world from going putrid; will hold rot at bay."

I was with a friend the other day, and he mentioned something about his reputation in town. I asked what his reputation was? He said he was known for being a tough negotiator who did well for his clients at the expense of the opposition. I said, "So... you would not describe your style as win-win?" He said, "No. More like win-incinerate! I win and my opponents are incinerated." So I said: "I know this is a cliché, but let me ask this: if Jesus were standing with you as you negotiated your deals, how would He feel about it?" "He wouldn't like it," my friend replied.

It was such an honest answer, and we have been carrying on with that conversation since. He is asking himself how he can do his job well yet not contribute to the cultural rot. Because this world, even beautiful Gig Harbor, is going putrid. I heard this week of an active "swinging" community in one part of our town; a club of people that trade spouses to spice up their sex lives. It is the inclination of our culture to rot. Things deteriorate. And if you do not think so, just look back fifty years and ask yourself: Are our world, our culture, our schools and businesses better, safer, happier places to be or not?

Why? Because we have a contagion called "sin." Sin is the Ebola of the spiritual world. I heard from a doctor friend this week who has just been appointed the medical officer for his health system's Ebola Incident Command. Fun job, but in fact every one of us has that job. Sin, left to itself, degrades and deteriorates whatever it touches. One day, God will restore this world to its uncorrupted state. But meantime, do you know God's plan for stemming the tide of moral and spiritual decay? You! Me! We are the salt of the earth. The more we imitate Jesus, the saltier we are. The obvious question then is this: because of your presence is

your world a tastier, cleaner, purer place to be? Or are you contributing to the rot? Are you tasteless salt?

And did you notice what happens to tasteless salt? Jesus said, "It is no longer good for anything except to be thrown out and trampled by men." Jesus offered stark warnings at the end of the Sermon on the Mount. "Trees that do not bear good fruit are cut down... those who do not obey the Father's will do not enter the Kingdom of Heaven... those who do not put into practice my teachings are building their lives upon a foundation of sand... with disastrous consequences..."

Well, these words near the beginning of the Sermon aren't exactly sugar-coated. Jesus leads with grace in the Beatitudes. He says that God has placed his hand of blessing upon his people, even in their hopeless state. But Jesus expects us to respond to that grace! "You are [now] the salt of the earth. Your presence should add flavor to those around you; your presence should help prevent the world from rotting. That is what I expect of my disciples... and if you are unsalty salt, what good are you?"

"And...[he continues] you are the light of the world." When we were in Paris this summer, we planned on not being impressed by the Eiffel Tower. We couldn't help it. It was impressive. And when the sun went down and it began to strobe—lights shimmering everywhere—it was spectacular. As we walked around Paris at night, we could not help but see it. It shone too brilliantly to be missed.

You are the light of the world. The light of your witness as a disciple should bring clarity to confusion, truth to falsehood, security to places of peril. A disciple of Jesus is a beacon to whom people look when they are wavering or puzzled or frightened. And if you have the light of Christ shining in you, why in the world would you cover that up? Lift the lid! Jesus says. After Pearl Harbor, most of Washington, D.C. was in blackout. But Franklin Roosevelt ordered that the White House lights and Christmas ornaments be allowed to shine brightly as a beacon of hope to the country.

And notice the ultimate reason we are to be lights. "...that others may see your good deeds and praise your father in heaven." Isn't that exactly what Paul says in our memory verse: Colossians 3:17: "Whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him."

But here is an essential thing to understand: Saltiness and light are not something for you to try to be. If you belong to Christ, you are already the salt and light of the world. You don't have to try to be something you aren't. You just need to live into what Christ has saved you to be! Stay salty. Some of our ninth grade boys were studying this text this week. Here is what they wrote to me: "The only time salt gets unsalty is when it gets diluted by mixing with other stuff; when it is attracted by other molecules. Don't let the things of this world—job, relationship,

online temptations—dilute our flavor that we have in Christ. Don't let these things, although they are attractive, pull apart our molecular bond with our Lord and Savior." Ninth graders! Wow!

You are already salty, and you are already light. So lift the lid. Let your light shine. My business friend whom I mentioned earlier (and by the way, I share this with his permission) accepted my challenge to read one chapter of the gospels every day for 90 days and write down what he learns about Jesus and what Jesus tells him to do. Three days into that challenge, I saw him and he said, "Guess what? I did something last night I've never done before. I talked to my kids about the Bible!" He was so excited. Do you know what he was doing? Lifting the lid! He was letting his light shine.

The closer you get to Jesus, the saltier and lighter you will be. The more you read his Word and pray to Him and imitate Him, the more you treat these weekly reunions in the salt shaker as essential instead of optional, the more accountable you are to others inside this salt shaker the more flavor you will bring to this world. Our presence, our words, our deeds should hold rot at bay. Our presence, our words, our deeds should provide light in an increasingly dark world. You are the salt of the earth. You are the light of the world. Be what you are!

So what does it look like to be salty and light? It can be simple. Last week your staff built hundreds of school packs for poor children. Or it can be asking the waitress her name, conversing with her and encouraging her to take a Sabbath when she tells you she works 7 days a week. Or it can be teasing the nurse in the ER and bragging on the doctor for how she puts needles in your finger... adding a little flavor to life, adding a little light. Not necessarily "religious" but who knows where kindness leads?

Back to my original question, then: Are you a conspicuous disciple of Jesus? Not obnoxious... no one likes obnoxious. Conspicuous is unashamed of who you are. Conspicuous is grateful for what Christ has done and believes He can do something for their friends, too. And conspicuous has a very sober view of the state of the world without Jesus... a world that, left to its own devices is bland, decaying, unsafe, uncertain and dreary. The conspicuous disciple cares enough about the world to be salt and light and does so not to make a show of themselves but to direct attention to God.

This whole journey through the Sermon on the Mount is about asking the same thing over and over and over again. What kind of disciple am I? Does anyone around me know? Would anyone around me have a clue that Jesus is my boss, that I am his apprentice, and that He is at work, changing me into a new kind of person. Or to put it differently, if I was on trial for being a Christian, would there be any evidence to convict me?

We come this morning to the Lord's Table. This is more than a ritual... more than a memorial. This is a Table of power! When we partake of the body and blood of Christ, He nourishes us, inspires us, fills and strengthens us. He salts us and lights us. As you receive the elements this day, we are going to remind you of what Christ died to make you into: As you receive them, we will say, "You are the salt of the earth..." and "you are the light of the world."

Sermon Questions

- REFLECT & APPLY TOGETHER: Share your thoughts. Don't teach! Listen and reflect on God's word together; grapple with what God is calling us to do and be through this passage.
- PRAY TOGETHER: Tell the Lord one thing you are thankful for, and lay one concern before the Lord.
- DIG DEEPER
 1. The title of this sermon is "The Revolutionary Disciple: Conspicuous." Is that a good interpretation of this text? Why or why not?
 2. What happens to salt that doesn't flavor or preserve things, according to Jesus? How is the harshness of this warning similar to the Matthew 7 language?
 3. Are **you** a conspicuous disciple of Jesus? How? How do we walk the line between conspicuous and obnoxious? How do we make sure that our good works "give glory to your Father in heaven?"