

**You are the Salt of the Earth**  
**You are the Light of the World**

Immediately following the Beatitudes in His Sermon on the Mount, Jesus used figurative language to Old Testament Believers that they were “the salt” and “the light of the world.” What does that mean? How does this knowledge help us live today?

The wonderful benefit of having the gospels is that there may be more than one account of an event when Jesus is speaking. It provides more data to observe which helps us gain a fuller understanding of a passage, a better interpretation, and a more accurate application. Because similar beatitudes and content are recorded in Matthew 5:5-11 and Luke 6:20-26, they are seen as parallel accounts; but, there is debate whether they are of the same or different sermons.

One account indicates Jesus going up the mountain where His disciples join Him (Matt 5:1), and the other as Jesus coming down from the mountain with His disciples (Luke 6:12-17).

The nature of the content is perhaps the strongest evidence that these two sermons were presented on different occasions; the sermons are known as the Sermon on the Mount and the Sermon on the Plain. Regardless, the content and thrust of Jesus’ sermons are very similar, which helps in understanding the figures “salt” and “light.”

<b>Sermon on the Mount (Matt 5:1-11)</b>	<b>Sermon on the Plain (Luke 6:20-26)</b>
<p>When Jesus saw the crowds, He went up on the mountain; and after He sat down, His disciples came to Him. He opened His mouth and began to teach them, saying,</p> <p>Blessed are <b>the poor in spirit</b>, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.</p> <p>Blessed are <b>those who mourn</b>, for they shall be comforted.</p> <p>Blessed are <b>the gentle</b>, for they shall inherit the earth.</p> <p>Blessed are <b>those who hunger and thirst for righteousness</b>, for they shall be satisfied.</p> <p>Blessed are <b>the merciful</b>, for they shall receive mercy.</p> <p>Blessed are <b>the pure in heart</b>, for they shall see God.</p> <p>Blessed are <b>the peacemakers</b>, for they shall be called sons of God.</p> <p>Blessed are <b>those who have been persecuted for the sake of righteousness</b>, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.</p> <p>Blessed are <b>you when people insult you and persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of Me</b>. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward in heaven is great; for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.</p>	<p>And turning His gaze toward His disciples, He began to say,</p> <p>“Blessed are <b>you who are poor</b>, for yours is the kingdom of God.</p> <p>Blessed are <b>you who hunger now</b>, for you shall be satisfied.</p> <p>Blessed are <b>you who weep now</b>, for you shall laugh.</p> <p>Blessed are <b>you when men hate you, and ostracize you, and insult you, and scorn your name as evil, for the sake of the Son of Man</b>. Be glad in that day and leap for joy, for behold, your reward is great in heaven. For in the same way their fathers used to treat the prophets.</p> <p>But woe to you who are rich, for you are receiving your comfort in full.</p> <p>Woe to you who are well-fed now, for you shall be hungry.</p> <p>Woe to you who laugh now, for you shall mourn and weep.</p> <p>Woe to you when all men speak well of you, for their fathers used to treat the false prophets in the same way.</p>

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Comparing and contrasting the two sermons side by side provide an easier method of observing the text. What exactly is Jesus saying to these Believers?

One important observation to make is that these Old Testament Believers believed that Jesus was the Christ, the prophesized Messiah of the Old Testament.

Blessed are you when people insult you and persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil against you **because of Me**. (Matt 5:11)

Blessed are you when men hate you, and ostracize you, and insult you, and scorn your name as evil, **for the sake of the Son of Man**. (Luke 6:22)

Additionally, Luke 6:19 recorded that “all the people were trying to touch Him, for power was coming from Him and healing them all.” In another account, it appears that only those with faith in Jesus Christ can passively touch Him and be healed (Matt 9:20-22; Mark 5:25-34; Luke 8:3-48).

Another important observation is that the kingdom of God is for those who are “poor in spirit,” “mourn,” “gentle,” “hunger and thirst for righteousness,” “merciful,” “pure in heart,” “peacemakers,” “have been persecuted for the sake of righteousness,” and “when people hate, insult, persecute, ostracize you, and scorn your name as evil, and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of Me the Son of Man.”

This is a radical concept of a kingdom. In contrast to the Roman empire or past historical kingdoms, membership is not for the politically or militarily powerful or the wealthy.

In His beatitudes, Jesus’ “blessed” is an indication of what God favors – agapē love, which is an exclusive unique love for God.

“Poor in spirit” can be seen by example of the Jewish tax collector:

And He also told this parable to some people who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and viewed others with contempt: “Two men went up into the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee stood and was praying this to himself: ‘God, I thank You that I am not like other people: swindlers, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week; I pay tithes of all that I get.’ But the tax collector, standing some distance away, was even unwilling to lift up his eyes to heaven, but was beating his breast, saying, ‘God, be merciful to me, the sinner!’ (Luke 18:9-13)

“Mourn” can be seen by example of Mordecai when he heard of Haman’s plot against God’s people:

When Mordecai learned all that had been done, he tore his clothes, put on sackcloth and ashes, and went out into the midst of the city and wailed loudly and bitterly. He went as far as the king’s gate, for no one was to enter the king’s gate clothed in sackcloth. In each and every province where the command and decree of the king came, there was great mourning among the Jews, with fasting, weeping and wailing; and many lay on sackcloth and ashes. (Est 4:1-3)

“Gentle” can be seen by example of the Fruit of the Spirit:

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But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. Now those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. (Gal 5:22-23)

“Hunger and thirst for righteousness” can be seen by example of David:

Then Solomon said, “You have shown great lovingkindness to Your servant David my father, according as he walked before You in truth and righteousness and uprightness of heart toward You; and You have reserved for him this great lovingkindness, that You have given him a son to sit on his throne, as it is this day. Now, O Lord my God, You have made Your servant king in place of my father David, yet I am but a little child; I do not know how to go out or come in. Your servant is in the midst of Your people which You have chosen, a great people who are too many to be numbered or counted. So give Your servant an understanding heart to judge Your people to discern between good and evil. For who is able to judge this great people of Yours?” (1 Ki 3:6-9)

“Merciful” can be seen by example of the Good Samaritan:

Jesus replied and said, “A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among robbers, and they stripped him and beat him, and went away leaving him half dead. And by chance a priest was going down on that road, and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. Likewise a Levite also, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. But a Samaritan, who was on a journey, came upon him; and when he saw him, he felt compassion, and came to him and bandaged up his wounds, pouring oil and wine on them; and he put him on his own beast, and brought him to an inn and took care of him. On the next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper and said, ‘Take care of him; and whatever more you spend, when I return I will repay you.’ Which of these three do you think proved to be a neighbor to the man who fell into the robbers’ hands?” And he said, “The one who showed mercy toward him.” Then Jesus said to him, “Go and do the same.” (Luke 10:30-37)

“Pure in heart” can be seen by example of Paul’s instruction to Timothy:

Now in a large house there are not only gold and silver vessels, but also vessels of wood and of earthenware, and some to honor and some to dishonor. Therefore, if anyone cleanses himself from these things, he will be a vessel for honor, sanctified, useful to the Master, prepared for every good work. Now flee from youthful lusts and pursue righteousness, faith, love and peace, with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart. (2 Tim 2:20-22)

“Peacemakers” can be seen by example of James’ explanation of desires in interpersonal conflict:

What is the source of quarrels and conflicts among you? Is not the source your pleasures that wage war in your members? You lust and do not have; so you commit murder. You are envious and cannot obtain; so you fight and quarrel. You do not have because you do not ask. You ask and do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, so that you may spend it on your pleasures. (Jam 4:1-3)

“Have been persecuted for the sake of righteousness,” “when people hate, insult, persecute, ostracize you, and scorn your name as evil, and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of Me the Son of Man” can be seen by example of Saul who became the apostle Paul:

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But Ananias answered, "Lord, I have heard from many about this man, how much harm he did to Your saints at Jerusalem; and here he has authority from the chief priests to bind all who call on Your name." But the Lord said to him, "Go, for he is a chosen instrument of Mine, to bear My name before the Gentiles and kings and the sons of Israel; for I will show him how much he must suffer for My name's sake." (Acts 9:13-16)

When considered carefully, the focus of the Beatitudes is not on the characteristics or virtues of Believers; but, the desire that motivates those behaviors. James presents this same idea in a more pointed manner:

Or do you think that the Scripture speaks to no purpose: "He jealously desires the Spirit which He has made to dwell in us"? But He gives a greater grace. Therefore it says, "God is opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the humble." Submit therefore to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you. Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-minded. Be miserable and mourn and weep; let your laughter be turned into mourning and your joy to gloom. Humble yourselves in the presence of the Lord, and He will exalt you. (Jam 4:5-10)

Through His lovingkindness to Abraham, God expressed His agapē love for human beings by providing His Son to atone for the sins of mankind so that Believers may enter the Kingdom of God, the Promised Land. Through Jesus' Sermons on the Mount and on the Plain, God presents how Believers are part of the plan to enable others to enter the Kingdom of God.

Immediately following the Beatitudes of both sermons, Jesus speaks of a Believer's behavior figuratively and literally:

Matthew 5:13-16	Luke 6:27-38
<p><b>"You are the salt of the earth;</b> but if the salt has become tasteless, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled under foot by men.</p> <p><b>You are the light of the world.</b> A city set on a hill cannot be hidden; nor does anyone light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house. Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven."</p>	<p>"But I say to you who hear, love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you. Whoever hits you on the cheek, offer him the other also; and whoever takes away your coat, do not withhold your shirt from him either. Give to everyone who asks of you, and whoever takes away what is yours, do not demand it back. Treat others the same way you want them to treat you.</p> <p>If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them. If you do good to those who do good to you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners do the same. If you lend to those from whom you expect to receive, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners in order to receive back the same amount.</p> <p>But love your enemies, and do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return; and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High; for He Himself is kind to ungrateful and evil men. Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.</p> <p>Do not judge, and you will not be judged; and do not condemn, and you will not be condemned; pardon, and you will be pardoned. Give, and it will be given to you. They will pour into your lap a good measure—pressed down, shaken together, and running over. For by your standard of measure it will be measured to you in return."</p>

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**You are the salt of the earth**

Of the mineral salt, which tastes good, is essential, and preserves, the figure of speech (Matt 5:13) is in reference to agapē love towards fellow human beings (Luke 6:27-38).

Such behavior is unnatural and can only be modeled if one studies God's word and is obedient to Him. With a clearer understanding of this figure of speech, then it is easy to see how salt can become tasteless in a very tangible way. It is the lack of knowledge and / or disobedience to God's word. And the solution to become "salty" again is to study God's word and be obedient to Him.

**You are the light of the world**

To the Old Testament Believer, the motif of light was associated with the Messianic prophecies of the Old Testament as demonstrated by Simeon who was looking for the "consolation of Israel. Simeon associates the Light as God's salvation:

"Now Lord, You are releasing Your bond-servant to depart in peace,  
According to Your word;  
For my eyes have seen Your salvation,  
Which You have prepared in the presence of all peoples,  
A Light of revelation to the Gentiles,  
And the glory of Your people Israel." (Luke 2:26-32)

In reference to Old Testament prophecies, Jesus too associates light with salvation:

Now when Jesus heard that John had been taken into custody, He withdrew into Galilee; and leaving Nazareth, He came and settled in Capernaum, which is by the sea, in the region of Zebulun and Naphtali. This was to fulfill what was spoken through Isaiah the prophet:

"The land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali,  
By the way of the sea, beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles—  
The people who were sitting in darkness saw a great Light,  
And those who were sitting in the land and shadow of death,  
Upon them a Light dawned."

From that time Jesus began to preach and say, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." (Matt 4:12-17)

Now when John, while imprisoned, heard of the works of Christ, he sent word by his disciples and said to Him, "Are You the Expected One, or shall we look for someone else?" Jesus answered and said to them, "Go and report to John what you hear and see: the blind receive sight and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, and the poor have the gospel preached to them. And blessed is he who does not take offense at Me." (Matt 11:2-6)

How does Jesus' Sermon on the Mount and Sermon on the Plain cohesively encourage Believers to be the "salt" and "light" of the world? The best approach in answering this question is from the perspective of Divine Covenants.

In God's New Covenant, He promises the indwelling of the Holy Spirit (Isa 59:21; Jer 31:33; 32:40; Ezek 36:25-28).

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Peter said to them, "Repent, and each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. (Acts 2:38)

The Holy Spirit is a guarantee that Jesus Christ dwells within the Believer.

However, you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. But if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Him. (Rom 8:9)

Test yourselves to see if you are in the faith; examine yourselves! Or do you not recognize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you—unless indeed you fail the test? (2 Cor 13:5)

Although Jesus Christ has left the earth, through the agapē love of the Believer, His light of salvation is still readily seen.

And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to Myself." (John 12:32)

A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another." (John 13:34-35)

Paul and Barnabas spoke out boldly and said, "It was necessary that the word of God be spoken to you first; since you repudiate it and judge yourselves unworthy of eternal life, behold, we are turning to the Gentiles. For so the Lord has commanded us,

I have placed You as a light for the Gentiles,  
That You may bring salvation to the end of the earth.'" (Acts 13:46-47)

It is of no coincidence to observe that early in His teaching ministry with the Sermon on the Mount and on the Plain, Jesus is already alluding to the two greatest commandments:

"Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?" And He said to him, "'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.' This is the great and foremost commandment. The second is like it, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' On these two commandments depend the whole Law and the Prophets." (Matt 22:36-40)