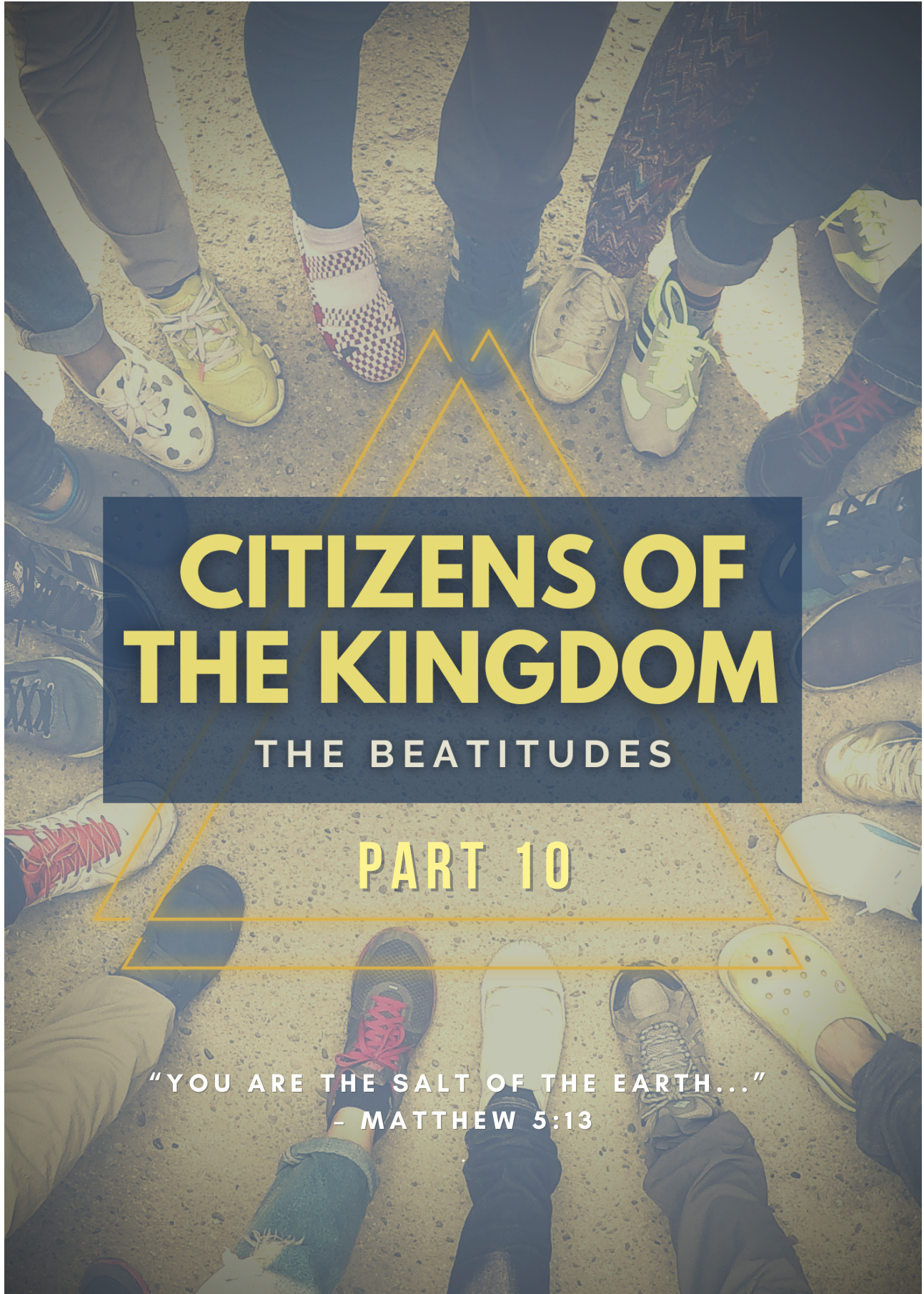


AUGUST 29, 2021 | STUDY GUIDE |



CITIZENS OF THE KINGDOM

THE BEATITUDES

PART 10

"YOU ARE THE SALT OF THE EARTH..."
- MATTHEW 5:13



Citizens of the Kingdom: “You are the Salt of the Earth”

David Fields

“You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is not longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled underfoot.” – Matthew 5:13

I. Initial Observations:

1. We hold the metaphors of “salt” and “light” together:

“The effects of salt and light are complimentary. The function of salt is largely negative: it prevents decay. The function of light is positive: it illuminates the darkness. For it is one thing to stop the spread of evil; it is another to promote the spread of truth, beauty and goodness. Jesus calls us to do both.”

- John Stott

2. Taken together, being ‘salt’ *and* ‘light’, will ultimately have the effect that the world around us will “see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.” The goal is always God’s glory.



3. The “you - s” are plural.

“The address is in the second person plural [like, “You’z guys; Y’all”]...because it is the corporate impact of the disciple community, as an alternative society, which is here in view.”

- R.T. France

Each of us plays our part. But it’s the combined effect of many, many ‘candles’ together that make the city on a hill aglow with light.

II. Salt of the Earth

1. The primary purpose for salt in the ancient world was a preservative. So when Jesus says, “You are the salt of the earth”, most scholars agree that the effect of preserving the world from the decay of evil is core to the meaning.

“In the first metaphor Jesus likens his disciples to salt. Implicitly he is saying that apart from his disciples the world turns even more rotten: Christians have the effect of delaying moral and spiritual putrefaction. If their lives conform to the norms of verses 3-12 [the Beatitudes], they cannot help but be an influence for good in society”

- D.A. Carson

2. Salt is an essential component for human life.

Jesus is saying his disciples “will provide a God-enhanced, kingdom seasoning to the world”

- Michael Wilkins



3. Salt was also used in small quantities as a fertilizer – which some have taken makes sense of Jesus saying his followers are the “salt of the *earth*.” In this sense, Jesus’ followers enhance God’s work in this world.

“Jesus indicates with this metaphor that his disciples themselves (“you are the salt) are necessary for the welfare of the world. That is, the disciples have experienced a transformation in their lives as they have come into contact with the kingdom of heaven. They are now different from the people of this earth, and their presence is necessary as God’s means of influencing the world for good.”

– Michael Wilkins

III. Salt ‘Losing’ its Saltiness?

1. Strictly speaking, salt cannot lose its saltiness. What was referred to as ‘salt’ in Jesus’ time was a white powder that contained sodium chloride, yes, but also a whole lot of other components.

Jesus is saying “This powder might look like “salt” but was so diluted that it didn’t actually have the effect of preserving food or enhancing the flavor. It’s really just road dust.”

2. The word translated here as “loses its saltiness” is the word “*moraino*” (Gk). It can be translated “become *tasteless*,” or “become *foolish*,” “become *moronic*.”

In Hebrew thought “foolishness” is not ignorance *per se* – though that can be part of it. Foolishness it is a moral category – it’s a posture toward life. It’s a willful arrogance against God’s ways.

“The apparently inappropriate verb [“moronic”, it] points to the metaphorical role of salt here, to symbolize the wholesome flavor of wisdom which disciples are to contribute.” – R.T. France

Jesus’ disciples are to do our work of preserving and enhancing goodness in the world – by bringing the wisdom of God into the public sphere.

3. To become “tasteless” is to lose our *distinctiveness* from the rest of the world.

“God had called Israel to be the ‘salt’ of the earth; but Israel was behaving like everyone else, with its power politics, its factional squabbles, its military revolutions. How could God keep the world from going bad – the main function of salt in the ancient world – if Israel, his chosen ‘salt,’ had lost its distinctive taste?”

– N.T. Wright

Indeed, and the same is true for today. How can God keep the world from going bad if his people, the Jesus-Community have lost *our* distinctive flavor?

IV. What is the ‘distinctiveness’ in God’s people?

The distinction comes as Citizens of the Kingdom live in conformity to the norms of the kingdom – with meekness and mercy, with purity of heart and in ways that make peace in the world. And it’s what the rest of Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount will be about – living out the ways of the kingdom in all our relationships.

“The church is to be distinct from the world, for the sake of the world.” – Tim Keller



1. The Sphere of Salt

Where and how do we as God’s people have the most influence in the world? Not by being seen as spectacular, as ‘non-average’, but by being a transformed person in the midst of the very ordinary, concrete, day-to-day of life – rubbing shoulders with our co-workers and neighbors. That’s always the starting place.

Being “the salt of the earth” is about our combined impact on the world. It’s about how we, through our life together, through our joined efforts change the world.

2. Live the way of God's Wisdom Together

"Therefore, do not be foolish, but understand what the Lord's will is." – Ephesians 5:17

When you speak out on a controversial issue, imagine God quizzing you about it. He knows the issue better than you do, and He knows your motives.

- A) Are you being wise and helpful?
- B) Have you made your most careful, fair-minded effort to find out what is really true – no matter how complicated? Or did you take on a controversial opinion just because you want to feel like a rebel?
- C) Are you promoting selfishness...rather than loving your neighbor?
- D) If you are mistaken, do you want to know?
- E) Do you even know what you are talking about?

Do you have enough information to have an informed opinion and answer questions from real experts? If not, don't run your mouth.

"Everyone should be 'quick to listen, slow to speak – there it is, don't run your mouth – and slow to become angry" – James 1:19

- F) The Bible says it is wrong to "bear false witness" (accuse people of wrongdoing without good evidence and a good reason for being involved)
- G) The Bible does not say you have the "right to your own opinion" if that means a right to believe things that aren't true. "Let not arrogance come from your mouth; for the Lord is a God of knowledge, and by his actions are weighed" (1 Samuel 2:3)



Being the "salt of the earth" means being wise. And that 'wisdom' is most perfectly displayed in Jesus own life and teaching.

But the wisdom of God, in Jesus, we find is actually most perfectly expressed, as Paul says, in the cross of Christ.

"...to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ is the power of God and the wisdom of God." 1 Corinthians 1:24b.

To be "the salt of the earth" – who Jesus says we are to be – we do that as we engender a life shaped by the cross, in our life together, and for the world.

Life Group and Reflection Questions

Open: Talk about the most delicious meal you have ever had. What role did the seasoning play in that experience?

Read Matthew 5:1-16

“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.” – Matthew 5:13

1. In the ancient world salt had the functions of both preserving and enhancing food.

What are some ways that you have seen the church as a community acting in ways that enhance or preserve the goodness in the world? What impact do you think that had?

2. What are some ways that the community of Jesus’ follower can work in our moment in terms of preserving and enhancing the goodness that is in the world?

3. Are there ways that God may be calling you specifically to deepen your involvement in these ways? What about as a Life Group?

4. The section on being “salt” and “light” is connected to the Beatitudes (vv.3-12). Why does that matter for how the community of faith approaches how we live in the world in acting as salt and light?

5. When Jesus speaks of salt ‘losing its saltiness’ it refers to God’s people no longer being ‘distinct’ from the world and acting in foolishness.

a. What are some ways that the Christian community can maintain our distinctiveness from the world, for the sake of the world?

b. Why does living with wisdom as a community matter in our witness to the world?

6. How can you pray for our community to maintain our distinctiveness while being deeply engaged in the world?

Prayer: Take some time to pray for our community in these ways. Share the ways you need God’s power in you to be ‘salt’ in your work place or neighborhood and take time to lift each other up in prayer.