



## Kirkcaldy and East Calder Parish Church of Scotland

**Minister: Rev Dr André J Groenewald**

8 Manse Court, East Calder, Livingston, EH53 0HF

Tel: 01506 884585, Mob: 075 888 458 14, email: groenstes@yahoo.com

[www.knec4jesus.org.uk](http://www.knec4jesus.org.uk)



**Date:** 6<sup>th</sup> February 2011

**Sermon:** Rev Dr André J Groenewald

**Reading :** Matthew 5:13-20

### Background to the reading

OUR reading this morning deals with two different issues with the same message. In metaphorical language Jesus is telling his disciples what He expects them to be and do in the world.

To them the metaphors meant a lot and they understood the meaning behind them. Salt was very important in Biblical times and they used it for a variety of things such as:

- A preservative to keep meat fresh in the absence of fridges,
- as a flavouring agent in food,
- As a token of friendship you would hand someone a bag of salt. Covenants were generally confirmed by sacrificial meals and salt was always present. Since, too, salt is a preservative, it would easily become symbolic of an enduring covenant. David received his kingdom forever from God by a “covenant of salt” according to 2 Chronicles 13:5.
- All meat-offerings were seasoned with salt,
- For cleansing purposes,
- To eat salt with one was to partake of his hospitality,
- Even new-born children were rubbed with salt;

But the salt Jesus is talking about is most probably salt that they got from the Dead Sea which lost its essence by exposure, and became asphalt, with which pavements and roads were made. So the salt Jesus is referring to was impure and not salty any more. It was worthless and could only be used to make roads. It could not be made into salt ever again!

I think the second metaphor must have been a surprise to the first listeners of Matthew’s Gospel. Usually in the Old Testament light was associated with God and his word, with salvation, with goodness, with truth, with life. The New Testament supports these themes, so that the holiness of God is presented in such a way that it is said that God “lives in unapproachable light”. The Jews also regarded themselves as the people of the Light and Jerusalem as the city of Light. Jesus is saying to his disciples, his *followers* that they are the Light of the world and that they must show the world openly that they have received the Light. The city that cannot be hidden

was most probably Jerusalem or it may be any elevated city at night, whose torch lights would make it visible to the surrounding countryside.

They must let their Light shine everywhere like a lamp that gives light to the whole house. Jesus is referring to wick oil lamps which gave little light in the average home, which had few windows. They were more effective by being set on a lamp stand. Something large placed over them would presumably extinguish the light altogether.

The meaning: A disciple of the kingdom who does not live like a disciple of the kingdom is worth about as much as tasteless salt or invisible light. Christians have been illuminated by the light that is Christ, who dwells within his people. If they ignore the illumination he brings and live like those in the dark, then indeed they are in deep darkness. They are worse than others because they know what light is and what it can mean to them, and have turned away from it.

In verses 17-20 Jesus is referring to Himself as the One who came to fulfill the Law and obey God's will and because the disciples are his followers, they are also able to do the will of God. Jesus did not say the Law of Moses was no longer valid. He asked for a new interpretation of the Law and asked more of his disciples. Since they were the Light of the world they must be more committed than the Pharisees in their following.

In those days Jewish teachers argued that one "abolished" the law by disobeying it, because one thereby rejected its authority. Such highhanded rebellion against the law resulted in social and spiritual expulsion from the Jewish community. The charge of openly persuading others that the law was no longer in force would be even worse. The Jewish teachers also said that no-one was allowed even to omit the smallest letter which was the "yod" or any punctuation mark in the Hebrew text of the Law of Moses. Jesus says the same but changes the meaning. He says anyone who ignores the fact that He fulfilled each and every letter and punctuation mark of the Law of Moses, will not enter the Kingdom of God.

The Pharisees were the most respected religious people of the day, and the scribes the supreme experts in the law. The Pharisees had no political power in Jesus' day but were highly respected and thus influential among the larger population. They emphasized their own version of purity rules and looked forward to the resurrection of the dead. The scribes were local executors of legal documents. In Jewish Palestine these would be the people who also taught children how to read the Scriptures; many of them were experts in the legal issues contained in the Law of Moses and some of them were Pharisees.

The meaning of verses 17-20 is clear: Jesus wanted more of his followers than just a legalistic, narrow obeying of each and every letter of the Law of Moses. Instead He wanted a commitment of faith, a conversion of heart and a life changing following of His followers who are the salt of the earth and the Light to the world!

Amen

## **Sermon**

Jesus is expecting us to be the Light of the world and the salt of the earth. He wants

more of us than just a promise of words. He wants us to commit our whole lives to Him, obeying Him in everything we say and do!

I read on the internet an amusing story told by Randy Bennett:

A minister was making a wooden trellis to support a climbing vine. As he was pounding away, he noticed a little boy who was watching him. The youngster didn't say a word, so the preacher kept on working, thinking the lad would leave; but he didn't. Pleased at the thought that his work was being admired, the minister finally said, "Are you trying to pick up some pointers on gardening?" "No," the little boy replied. "I'm just waiting to hear what a preacher says when he hits his thumb with a hammer.

But I must confess this morning I have never come across one human being in all my 16 years as a minister who could honestly say that they have done everything right in the eyes of the Lord, and had never said one bad word in all their existence.

So what is the meaning then of our text?

Well I think Jesus knows we are not perfect and fulfilled the Law of Moses on our behalf. God knew that we would never ever be able to have a meaningful relationship with Him unless He did something to make it possible. And of course He did it through Jesus' death, resurrection from the dead and His ascension to heaven.

God expects us to travel with him and although we do *get lost* and do not always keep the speed limit and do not rest as frequently as prescribed, we are still travelling on our way to God's Eternal Kingdom through faith alone. Yes although there are many challenges and struggles on this journey we know at least three things:

1. God is travelling with us because in Jesus He made it possible for us to have a relationship with Him;
2. God gave us His Holy Spirit to help us on our journey;
3. We are on our way to the Eternal Kingdom of God!

God does not expect us to be perfect because we are not. He expects us to know our own faults and flaws and acknowledge Him as our Lord and Saviour. The Lord God only wants us to obey and follow him as best as we can. We have to be like Lights shining in the darkest of places. We have to give taste to the word "Christians!

I want to conclude with another story told by Jose Marin:

The story is told of a man who had been made responsible for warning trains that a bridge down the tracks had been damaged by waving a lamp. One night a train came, the man showed his lamp but the train went right into the ditch. The man was taken to court where a judge asked the man, "Were you on duty on the night the train had the accident?" The man answered, "Yes." "Did you have your lamp with you?" Again the answer was, "Yes." "Did you wave your lamp at the train?" Again the man answered, "Yes." The man was not held responsible. Later as the man went home he told his friend, "I am glad the judge didn't ask me if my lamp was on."

We have to turn our lamps on to let our light shine!

Amen