

New Year; New You 5) Set Free from the Law

Matthew 5:13-21 • 2020-02-09 • Epiphany Series: New Year, New You



I love it when a child is just learning to draw things. It's kind of like when they are just learning to talk. You can only make out some of the words. It takes the special skill of mom or dad to know exactly what a beginning talker is saying. It's the same with their drawings, isn't it? Only I think for most children the drawings take a little longer to become clear. You might not always see it, but they are sure to tell you what they drew. "Nice horse drawing. Oh sorry, I see. Yes, that's a nice dinosaur." Not all of us outgrow this stage in drawing. I still need to explain myself to students when drawing for Bible classes. "No that's not just a chair it is supposed to be a throne. Obviously, they couldn't afford a strait throne. And this is a man with his hands up in prayer. He's a priest... a stick-man priest. And that squiggly line –you know what that is right? That's a serpent, the devil, the Father of lies. He's always been crooked." When it comes down to what things are, the author and creator gets to decide. Take that to the bigger picture now. Isaiah says of God, "You are our Father, we are the clay, you are the potter, we are the work of your hands." So, what are we? Well, the author gets to decide. We need to ask God to find out the best answer. In our series, "New Year; New You" we've been looking at how God has made us new as believers. This morning as we continue reading Jesus' sermon on the mount in Matthew 5 for another picture of how we are made new.

Jesus gives two pictures to describe his disciples. Each makes our purpose in life very clear. To begin with he says, "You are the salt of the earth." Notice he doesn't say, "Be the salt of the earth." He simply tells us what we are, "You *are* the salt of the earth." We don't particularly value salt today as much as people may have in years past, but salt is indispensable. Jesus' first hearers highly valued it as one of the few ways they had for preserving some foods. Like salt all of Jesus' disciples give the earth its value and preserve it. Without them the world would be like a rotten piece of leftovers only fit for disposal. Recall what the Lord did when the world had only eight believer's left? He destroyed it all and spared only those eight. Recall how he rained down fire from heaven on Sodom, Gomorrah, and all the cities of the plain of Sodom? He wouldn't have done it if there would have been at least ten believers found there. Still today the cry goes out from the Christian church, "Lord, have mercy on us and on this dying world." And daily God answers that prayer as he patiently and mercifully allows this world more time. The unbelieving world might not appreciate this fact. But they have to notice how Christians stand out. When Christians preach and teach the law of God it stings the heart of every sinner – including the unbelieving world around us. And as salt we bring a most valuable influence as we share the gospel.

"But if it should lose its taste, the salt is worthless, good for nothing but being tossed out and trampled." Jesus, of course, knows that salt is salt. It doesn't change its nature. That fact heightens the spiritual impact of what happens when Christians cease to be what they are made to be. Should a Christian congregation ever try to make itself more palatable to the world around it? Should it change the taste of the law so that unbelievers find it easier to swallow God's Word? Still some churches try to blend in with the world instead being different. But their plan fails, and the unbelieving world doesn't benefit at all. History shows that when Christianity ceases to be different from the world it is replaced by something else. To lose what makes us different is to lose our faith. It's no wonder the world tramples over Christians when they dismiss the Word of God. How could anyone respect a religion that sells out in order to gain converts?

Each one of us is in danger of tossing aside our purpose as salt of the earth. This happens when we begin to toss aside what makes us different, God's Word. We can toss aside the great influence and position we are given by living godless lives. Instead of being someone who changes the world, we are changed by it. We might want to talk, dress, and act like the world around us and blend in instead of standing out. We might begin to praise sinful acts in the name of tolerance. We might fear that being salt will sting a dangerous and festering wound of sin. When a Christian says, "The law of God doesn't apply to me. I'm special," that Christian ceases to be anything special. They toss aside something which God gave them to make them stand out. We dare not let our great influence be lost because we neglect God's word and become tasteless salt. Discarding what our God has given us, we sometimes seek to gain something rotten –the world's favor and the world's flavor. Our purpose in life is lost. And so are we if we don't want to be the salt of the world.

A second picture describes Jesus' disciples. "You are the light of the world." Notice he doesn't say, "You ought to be the light." He says, "You *are* the light." God has made us to stand out as light. And make no mistake: this world is lost in the darkness of sin. As spiritually blind and enemies of God, the whole world fumbles in the dark. Peter describes the unbelieving world around him as "a crooked and depraved generation." Just as a city on a hill can't hide its location so it is with you. Everyone knows this is a Christian congregation. Everyone looks at what you do as you bear the name "Christian." You will at times be in the spotlight. "A city on a hill can't be hidden." You can't say, "I'm going to just believe in Jesus and keep it to myself." It is impossible for living faith to hide. Living faith speaks. You don't turn on a light and then try to cover it up. "No one lights a candle and then places it under a bowl...they put in on a lamp stand for all to see."

Can you picture how ridiculous it is for a Christian to have the light of the gospel –the knowledge of sins forgiven in Jesus, and not let it shine? Or could you imagine a Christian who didn't walk in the light of God's word and seek guidance from the Word of his God? If a Christian parent sees his child stumbling in darkness and sin –he shines on it with the light. The light exposes the darkness of the human heart. And the light also shines with the gospel of forgiveness for those who trust

in Jesus. Could you imagine a Christian parent who sees their child blindly stumbling in sin, but says nothing? Or could you imagine a Christian parent who sees their child caught in the web of sin and aching for relief and forgiveness and yet that parent shares nothing of the gospel? Could you imagine a Christian home where the Bible is placed on the bottom shelf and never sees the light of day? "You are the light of the world." It starts in the home, and it goes out into every faucet of your life. And if it doesn't, how long will you remain a disciple of Jesus? Like a candle struggling for oxygen under a bowl, your light will go out if not fed by the Spirit. As the light you have influence, purpose, and meaning. Don't lose sight of that which God made you to be in Christ! You may be the only light the people of this world see. When you argue, complain, grumble, and live in selfishness, you put out the Spirit's fire, and you begin to put out the light that would shine on others, and lead others to the light of Christ and hear the gospel. Your purpose in life is lost. And so are you if we don't want to be the light of the world.

Our purpose in life is to make a difference by being salt and light and lead others to know God. "Let your good deeds shine before others that they may see them and praise your father in heaven." God has created you to reflect his image. But if someone were to look at the canvass of your life, what would they see? Would they see someone who is different and points to a God who is altogether above this world in splendor, holiness, and compassion? Or would they see you as no different in your life, making no real influence on the world but only influenced by it?

It's not easy to be the salt and light of the world. And make no mistake, Jesus does say this just wishing for us to do better. He didn't teach us "Just love, that's all you have to do to make me happy." No, he warns that he didn't come to abolish or change the law at all. In fact, he warns that not the smallest letter or even the little hook on the letter (like the line on our capital Q in the English alphabet) –none of these will disappear from God's law. We can't change the law of God. If we think we can be the salt by simply making God's laws easier to follow, we miss the point. Salt isn't changed by the world around it, it changes the world. And if we think we can be the light by giving in to the darkness and blotting out parts of God's Word we are mistaken. Light shines on the darkness, it changes the darkness. Christians need to consider this important truth when looking for a church home. Does my church stand on the unchanging truths of God's Word or does it sway and change at the world's urging? Jesus warns, "anyone who breaks even the least of my commandments and teaches others to do so will be called least in the kingdom of heaven. The one who practices and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven." He wants the salt and light to take his law very seriously.

And if we take his law seriously, we recognize we don't deserve to be called salt and light. Brothers and sisters, we are not called the salt and light of the world because we keep deserve it. Nor are we the salt and light because we have watered-down God's Word so that we fool ourselves into thinking we are keeping it as we ought. We cannot keep his law as we ought. *"I tell you the truth, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the Scribes and Pharisees, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of God."* The Scribes and Pharisees took God's law down to the very dot and least stroke of the pen. They added laws on top of laws. Someone once tallied over 600 laws they made in order to better keep God's laws. How can we be saltier and brighter than they? The point is we can't. Not if we are relying on ourselves.

Just as we must take the law seriously, we must take the gospel seriously. What makes us so different is the only one who made an eternal and lasting influence on this world. There is only one who could keep and fulfill all of God's will. Jesus said, "I have not come to abolish the law and prophets, but to fulfill them." Jesus came to live a perfect and righteous life. His influence on this world is indeed world changing. He came to preserve the world and save it from perishing. He made the light of the law of God shine brightly as he preached the truth perfectly –even the least of the commands. And he didn't just teach them, he lived them out perfectly. He had a purpose in life that we could not attain on our own: fulfill all righteousness. For all the times we failed to be what God our potter created us his clay to be, he did not fail. In perfect obedience he changed the world. He took away all our unrighteousness. We are forever valuable and preserved by his blood shed for the world. He has made us "radiant, without blemish" (Eph 5) and, "brought us from darkness into his wonderful light." (1 Peter 2) He made us fit for his kingdom by giving his righteousness to us. God has made you new!

You have been freed from the burden and curse of the law. Not so that you can turn back to loving sin, but so you can show the love and glory of God. In Jesus, "You are the salt. You are the light." Don't hide it. Publicly gather for worship of Jesus. And let your private life stand out. Live a new life as forgiven and credited as righteous in Jesus. It doesn't matter if you are a bus driver or a banker, as a Christian you view those you serve as valuable and needing the influence of salt and light. When a Christian proclaims the gospel and shows love to a dying world –they change it. When you honor marriage by living in God's love you stand out in a dark world. When you seek peace instead of compromise with sin, you stand out as light. When you chose to stand out for the sake of giving glory to God you are sanding out as the salt of the earth. When you discipline and love your children so that they are not just like the world but salted and seasoned you influence this rotten world. When you share the light of the gospel and forgiveness with the world, you change it to last for good. That is who God made you to be -freed from the curse of the law to live a new life that influences this world. *"Do everything without complaining or arguing, so that you may become blameless and pure, children of God without fault in a crooked and depraved generation, in which you shine like stars in the universe."* (Php 2:14–15).

I don't know how you view your own art creations. But I do know how God sees you. He sees you as different. He made you to be different as salt and light. It's a new you, free from the law's curse, free to keep the law and proclaim the gospel as you shine to God's glory.