ESSENCE

You yourselves are the salt of the earth. But if salt loses its taste, how can it become salty again? It is worth nothing anymore except to be thrown out and to be trampled upon by people. You yourselves are the light of the world. It is not possible for a city positioned on a hill to be hidden. Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a measuring vessel; they put it upon a lampstand, and it shines upon everyone in the house. Thus let your light shine before others so that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father who is in heaven.
Matthew 5:13-16

The Sermon on the Mount has been set by means of the Beatitudes and their blessed proclamation that the Kingdom has arrived. Matthew now presents two comprehensive statements about the necessity of living in a way that reflects this good news of the Kingdom.

Thus, following the Beatitudes, is a statement concerning the ethical demands of the Kingdom, *the very essence of discipleship.*

Salt and light are Kingdom ethics, that is, instructions for those who are recipients and representatives of the Kingdom on how they should conduct their lives.

It is particularly important to note that the kingdom precedes the ethics: there is no insistence that people are to live this way <u>in order to receive the kingdom</u>. The disciples are first identified as salt and light, and even here "being" proceeds "doing." It is because they are salt and light that they are expected to act in appropriate ways.
Hagner – Matthew, page 98

<u>You yourselves</u> are the salt of the earth. But if salt loses its taste, how can it become salty again? It is worth nothing anymore except to be thrown out and to be trampled upon by people.
Matthew 5:13

The first thing to note is that Jesus calls his disciples *"you yourselves"* which is emphatic.
"YOU YOURSELVES ARE THE SALT OF THE EARTH."

We are not told what natural quality of salt is in mind here. Is it the quality of
preserving, purifying, seasoning, or *fertilizing?*

Salt is also used as a metaphor for wisdom as well as other various associations: *sacrifice*

You shall season <u>all your grain offerings with salt</u>. You shall not let the salt of the covenant with your God be missing from your grain offering; with all your grain offerings you shall offer salt.
Leviticus 2:13

You shall present them before the LORD, and the priests shall sprinkle salt on them and offer them up as burnt offerings to the LORD.
Ezekiel 43:24

Covenant

All the holy contributions that the people of Israel present to the LORD I give to you, and to your sons and daughters with you, as a perpetual due. It is a covenant of salt forever before the LORD for you and for your offspring with you.
Numbers 18:19

Also, *moral.*

But if salt loses its taste – this is an interesting question and one that needs to be mentioned when considering the various natural qualities of salt as a metaphor for discipleship. It's interesting since pure salt is a chemically stable compound and not likely to lose its saltiness.

Given this and all the qualities of natural salt that are mentioned above, it would seem that there is no reason to suggest just one of these qualities of salt would be in view. To focus on a single quality would surpass the text itself and lean toward much allegorizing.

It would be best to simply take the salt metaphors at a wider view and conclude that the meaning is that salt is something vitally important to the world in a religious sense just as it was important to the world at the time of Matthew.

The basic needs of life are these: water, fire, iron, and salt, flour, honey, and milk, wine, clothing, and oil.
Sirach 39:26

In this sense, the disciples are vitally significant to the world in their witness to God and his Kingdom.

Let your speech be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer each person.
Colossians 4:6

But if salt loses its taste – the Greek verb for this phrase means *to become or to make foolish.* Since Jesus is using salt as a metaphor for the disciples, this makes sense. For the disciples, being the *"salt of the earth"* to lose their saltiness would be equivalent to them becoming foolish. In effect, they would lose their identity.

It is worth nothing anymore except to be thrown out and to be trampled upon by people.

The only other place Matthew uses such language is in Matthew 7:6 and as here, the act of those doing the trampling refers to people.

Do not give to dogs what is holy, and do not throw your pearls before swine, lest they trample them underfoot and turn to attack you.
Matthew 7:6

You yourselves are the light of the world. It is not possible for a city positioned on a hill to be hidden.
Matthew 5:14

Matthew again addresses the disciples with phrasing verbatim to the metaphor of salt address.

You yourselves are the salt of the earth.
You yourselves are the light of the world.

Light is a very important metaphor in the Scriptures.

God is light. Christ is the light of the world. God is eschatological light.

This is the message we have heard from him and proclaim to you, that God is light, and in him there is no darkness at all.
1 John 1:5

Agan, Jesus spoke to them saying, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.
John 8:12

The sun shall no more be your light by day, nor for brightness shall the moon give you light, but the LORD will be your everlasting light, and your God will be your glory.
Isaiah 60:19

Even more, God has come in Christ to bring light into the darkness/

In him was life, and the life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness and the darkness has not overcome it.
John 1:4-5

The LORD is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear?
Psalm 27:1

The people dwelling in darkness have seen a great light, and for those dwelling in the region of the shadow of death, on them a light has dawned.
Matthew 4:16

This metaphor also extends to believers in Christ.

for at one time you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light.
Ephesians 5:8

Israel was to be a light to the nations.

> *I am the LORD; I have called you in righteousness; I will take you by the hand and keep you; I will give you as a covenant for the people, a light for the nations.*
> *Isaiah 42:6*

Therefore, *light* is associated with *God, his Messiah, his people, the law, the temple, Jerusalem, and the accomplishment and experience of salvation.*

> *In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.*
> *2 Corinthains 4:4*

You yourselves are the light of the world. – When Jesus declared this to his disciples, he was saying that they are the recipients of the Kingdom. They represent the *Word of Truth* that salvation has come to the world through the Kingdom of God.

It is not possible for a city positioned on a hill to be hidden. – The point being made here to the disciples is clear: a city on a hill *cannot be hidden*. The follower of Christ who is truly a disciple of Christ likewise *cannot keep himself hidden.*

> *Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a measuring vessel; they put it upon a lampstand, and it shines upon everyone in the house.*
> *Matthew 5:15*

The purpose of a lamp of course is to offer light to the household *without measure.*

Just as the salt that lost its saltiness was thrown out to be trampled by people, the light here is not restrictive. Matthew may be using it in a parallel fashion regarding people: light is either seen or not seen.

The people who trample the salt are most likely to be the ones who cannot receive the light as well. Therefore, could these metaphors of *"salt and light"*, rather than simply focusing on *"those who lose* or *those who hide"* also include a warning to *"those who will not receive?"*

In other words, is Matthew suggesting that the disciples should be careful not to *lose their saltiness*, or that the disciples should be careful *not to hide their light*?

Or could he also be suggesting that the salt will not often be received regardless of its stable quality and that the light will oftentimes not be recognized regardless of its brightness because there are those who choose to keep it hidden from themselves?

> *Thus let your light shine before others so that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father who is in heaven.*
> *Matthew 5:13-16*

This verse serves as the culmination of today's passage.

The disciples are the light of the world thus they should let that light shine to accomplish its purpose.

To let one's light shine is to live in such a way as to manifest the presence of the Kingdom. Letting one's light shine is living in accord to the perfection of the Kingdom and thus manifesting the righteousness of Torah according to the correct interpretations.

To live in such a way is why Jesus began this sermon with the Beatitudes which we have seen, are the wisdom of Torah with their proper interpretation by Jesus. They are also the announcement that the eschatological Kingdom has commenced, bringing with it a way to live that is conducive to that Kingdom.

This Kingdom is manifested in the *good deeds* of those who receive it which are born out of the Living God who gives one the ability to do so.

> *And he said to them, "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 first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the Law (Torah) and the Prophets (writings).*
> *Matthew 22:37-40*

> *The emphasis here on doing good works "before people," so that they will see them appears to stand in some tension with the warning of 6:1-6 not to do one's good works "before people." In the latter instance, however, it is obvious that the almsgiving and praying are performed deliberately for self-glorification. But to let one's light shine is to call attention not to oneself but to the kingdom's presence and thus to glorify God for his gracious fulfillment of the promises.*
> *Hagner – Matthew, page 101*

so that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father who is in heaven. – note that the focus of the "*good deeds"* is so that God would be glorified. Matthew used John the Baptist as an example of such deeds.

> *The purpose of our lives (or in Hebrew, our "good works") is to remove the veil from the Father's face and to display something of God's glory to the world. It should no longer be necessary to ask the purpose of life. The purpose of life is the glory of God.*
> *Brunner – A Commentary, Matthew, page 193*

Don't miss the affectionate term so often used by Matthew *"Father in heaven." Father* implies intimacy and *heaven* implies transcendence. To the disciples, God is both.

What is foundational to understand is that the manifestation of righteousness demanded in the Sermon on the Mount comes through the disciples due to a unique and abiding relation to their heavenly Father.

A ‘signal’ or deed – spoken or acted out – which points to the relationship to God, which is so critical to the practice of the Sermon on the Mount, flashes out like a great lighthouse beacon to a blind, lost, deaf, and starving world.

> *Virtually nothing in Jesus’ teachings is unprecedented in Judaism. There is nothing that a Jew could not have concluded from a diligent study and meditation on the law. When Jesus says that we are not to hate, He is echoing Leviticus (Leviticus 19:17-18). When Jesus says, “love your enemy,” He generalizes from the law (Exodus 23:4-5) and repeats Solomon (Proverbs 25:21-22). When he teaches us that lust is a form of adultery, He’s saying no more than what the Tenth Commandment required (Exodus 20:17). Jesus is not correcting the law but the practical and pedagogical distortions of the law that were widespread in Judaism.* *Peter J. Leithart – Jesus as Israel, page 107*

If the Beatitudes reveal the state of the believer’s attitude for holy living in this world, with a vision for the blessings of Kingdom promises in the new heaven and earth, then the metaphors of *salt and light* reveal the conduct or responsibility of that vision in this world against those Kingdom promises.

What Matthew reveals to us in this passage of *salt and light* is the unique identity of the disciples. It is an identity that depends on the gracious activity of their heavenly Father. They alone are the *salt of the earth* and *the light of world* through the Father.

> *The disciples – the blessed recipients of the kingdom – are thus of vital importance for the accomplishment of God’s purpose in the world. They constitute the salt and light without which the earth cannot survive and remains in darkness. Their mission is accomplished, however, not only in word but in the deeds of their daily existence. Others observing their conduct will know that the priorities of the these persons have changed – that before them is something of inestimable value, something that gives light and results in the glorifying of God. But to accomplish their purpose, salt must be salt and light must be light. The kinds of good deeds that enable light to be seen as light are now to be elaborated in the course of the sermon that follows. They are shown to be nothing other than the faithful living out of the commandments, the righteousness of the Torah as interpreted by Jesus.* *Hagner – Matthew, page 102*