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Our Kingdom Roles
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KINGDOM LIVING

Good morning, my name is Ricky and I serve on staff as the Youth Pastor. I'm grateful to get to preach our text to you all this morning. We are concluding our series "A Month in Matthew" by looking at Matthew 5:13-16. Pastor Brad has taken us on a journey through most of the Sermon on the Mount and this morning we'll be looking at a passage that many of you are likely familiar with, but no doubt our familiarity with it makes it no less powerful and applicable in our lives today.

The Sermon on the Mount is about kingdom living and our text today will show us the roles our lives play as Jesus' followers in his kingdom. But, before we look at the roles our lives play in the Kingdom of God, we should first be reminded of what characterizes the life of a person who follows Jesus. Jesus begins the Sermon on the Mount by listing characteristics of his followers in the Beatitudes, which Pastor Brad taught on January 7th. I encourage you to check out the audio or manuscript on our website if you were not here.

In the Beatitudes, we read things like God's kingdom people are poor in spirit, they mourn the effects of sin in our world, and they are a meek people who hunger and thirst for righteousness. Those who are a part of God's kingdom are merciful, pure in heart, and are peacemakers. However, not everyone welcomes and accepts God's kingdom people who live this way because they don't like weakness and they think the message of the kingdom is foolishness. Therefore, some persecute those who are a part of God's kingdom, but God's people are okay with it, because their King too was persecuted, and they know their reward awaits them in heaven.

KINGDOM ROLES

The kingdom of God is a kingdom that is present in this world but is not of this world. The kingdom of God exists where God rules, and if you submit your heart, and therefore your life, to his rule, then it's your heart and your life that he will rule, and you will be a part of his kingdom. Jesus welcomes those who know they are inadequate, weak, and just aren't so sure of themselves, because it's those who have given up on themselves who are poor in spirit, who are able to enter the kingdom of God. It's a joyful submission to God's rule and it's such a relief!

So, what now? If you are a part of God's kingdom, what now? To be a part of a kingdom is to be a part of something bigger than yourself. God doesn't save you and stick you in a cubicle in the basement alone. Guess what? Since it's your heart that God rules, you remain living here, on earth, after becoming a part of God's kingdom. Therefore, you are still in the world, though you are no longer of the world. Why does God not immediately zap you up to heaven when you become a part of his kingdom? He doesn't immediately zap you up because those who are a part of God's kingdom bear witness to that kingdom with their lives, namely, by being salt and light as they live out the Beatitudes in this world.

So, sitting on the mountain, teaching to his followers, **Jesus says his followers bear witness to his kingdom with their lives by being salt and light in the world.** The same is true for us today, **If you are part of God's kingdom, then you are to bear witness to his kingdom with your life by being salt and light in the world.**

These are our kingdom roles! Let's turn to our text, Matthew 5:13-16, to read about the roles we have in being witnesses to the Kingdom. Let's stand together, as is our custom, and read Matthew 5:13-16.

[13] "You are the salt of the earth, but if salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything except to be thrown out and trampled under people's feet.

[14] "You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. [15] Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. [16] In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.

THE ROLE OF SALT

[Pray] I grew up outside of Birmingham, AL, in a town called Pell City. After graduating high school, my twin brother and I moved to Birmingham together for him to go to school and for me to be closer to the golf course where I worked as a greensman. While living in Birmingham, I met a couple of missionaries who came and shared with the college ministry I was in about their work in Belize, Central America. These two guys had taken an old school bus and turned it into an RV. It was the ultimate mobile man-cave. They had driven this bus into the jungles of Belize and had driven it back to Birmingham to restock on supplies and to recruit a couple of interns. I was just working a job and was praying about being a missionary and this was my chance to explore that option to see if it would be God's will. So, I headed back with them on the old school bus from Birmingham, through Mississippi, Louisiana, Texas, Mexico, and down to the southern part of Belize. It was wild and incredible. I would love to tell you more about it sometime.

Anyway, during my time in Belize, I learned a good bit about how to live life without electricity because there was no electricity and it took some getting used to. Like in Jesus' day, obviously, there was no electricity either, so you didn't have the choice of kitchen appliances like we do today. So, no choosing stainless, white, or black. There was no choosing if you wanted LED lighting in your fridge, a built-in Keurig, speakers for your music while you put away the groceries (from Aldi, am I right?), or a built-in camera so you can check your stock while you are at Aldi. Pretty much, it seems that you have to have an engineering degree if you want to figure out how to work the refrigerators of today, right?

In Belize, when there was any kind of special celebration, the family celebrating would usually kill a pig if they could afford it. Since there was no electricity, and therefore, no refrigeration, you didn't eat up and put the leftovers in the fridge for another meal. No! The only way to preserve the meat was to continuously cook it for days or cure it by rubbing salt all over it. You may be asking what does this have to do with our role in God's kingdom? Let's look at Matthew 5:13 again.

[13] "You are the salt of the earth, but if salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything except to be thrown out and trampled under people's feet."

Let me ask you, why did the Belizeans either cook the meat for days or pack it with salt? To keep it from rotting! When Jesus gave his sermon, he used an analogy that everyone would know. Jesus used the simple and accessible to make his points. Though you need a college degree to figure out our refrigerators of today, you would not have one to understand Jesus when he was teaching. He uses two of the most basic things used in a house to explain the kingdom roles of his followers; salt and light. I love it!

Jesus' listeners would have understood some implied application to his analogy that his followers are salt in the world that we may not pick up on right away. So, I want to tell you 4 things about salt.

The first thing I want you to know about salt is that it preserves. Jesus is implying the world is dying, and we can slow the rotting and decaying! Jesus is telling his disciples that we are his salt that must be rubbed into the world so that others will be made aware of the preservation offered through Jesus, but we should also bring some preservation to a spiritually dying world, stopping the evil as we are able with our presence. Salt takes what is good in the world and keeps it wholesome.

The second thing I want you to know about salt is that it cleanses. Salt acts as an antiseptic. Have you ever cut your foot on a shell on the beach? What do you do to clean it? You run and put your foot in the ocean! Salt acts as an antiseptic.

Guys, does your presence bring healing to the people you are around? As Christians, we should not be infected by the world, but be instruments of God to bring healing in the world. When you walk up on a conversation at work or school that is not pleasing to the Lord, do they change the subject when you join the circle? If so, this is even a part of cleansing, even if it's just the conversation! Not because they think you are self-righteous, but because they are reminded of the story's inappropriateness by your presence. People should know how Jesus impacts your life and he will therefore impact theirs too—through your life!

The third thing about salt is that it flavors. As Christians, we are salt and have the flavor the world needs. If you were to look back to the beatitudes and read those to a non-Christian, they wouldn't understand! Only a Christian would consider themselves blessed to have those attitudes. Because Christians are salt, we have a different outlook and purpose for life that makes life more enjoyable!

Therefore, we should be the best at our jobs—the hardest workers, the best students, everyone's favorite customers, and the most dependable friends. We should be making beautiful art, composing spectacular music, telling redeeming stories, and writing excellent books. This is flavoring the world, and if we are who God says we are—salt—then people should want the flavor Christians have.

The fourth thing about salt is that it causes thirst. Have you ever been to the movies, bought popcorn, and then decided to skip the drink so you can save like ten bucks? If you have, then you likely went back and got a coke anyway. If not, then you are a beast, because salt makes you thirsty! When people met Jesus, they became thirsty for God. You and I aren't Jesus, but he does say we are the salt of the earth. When people are around you, do they begin thirsting for God? If they get a taste of Jesus in you and the hope you have, people will thirst for who you have.

Guys, listen, the Christian life is not meant to be lived separate from the world, and that is why God leaves his kingdom people in the world. Of all people, Jesus was in the world, but he wasn't of the world. The world is sick and dying and we have the cure—Jesus. Just as salt is rubbed into meat, the kingdom role for followers of Jesus is to be salt that is rubbed into the world, so they may know the preservation, cleansing, healing, and satisfaction that comes through Jesus!

How about you? Are you filling your kingdom role of being salt? Are you being used by God to stop the rotting around you? Are you bringing cleansing and healing to situations around you? Are you flavoring life so that others must have Jesus too? And is your presence causing others to thirst for God? **If you are part of God's kingdom, then you are to bear witness to his kingdom with your life by being salt in the world.**

THE WITNESS OF LIGHT

When in Belize, I would only go to town about once a month, so I was in the village for long periods of time. But to go to town, you had to catch a bus that only ran through the village two days a week. The village buses that took people to town were old school buses and they were worn slap out. The trip to town would take a few hours because it was like riding trails on school buses. The roads were gravel and dirt, narrow, and washed out many times. To begin the trek, I had to wake up at 4:00 a.m. to catch the bus at 4:30.

I loved waking up that early because you would smell the fires being started across the village, so you knew people were up and you would see faint lights across the sky. However, these weren't stars, but they were candles lit in the thatched-roof village houses. The village where I stayed was in the Mayan Mountains, so you would look across and you could see families were waking up because lights would appear on the mountains.

The thing is, it is very hard to hide light. The faintest candle on the side of the mountain could be seen in the darkness to help give perspective. Well, the same way followers of Jesus have the role of being salt, they have the role of being light as well. Let's look at Matthew 5:14-16.

[14] "You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. [15] Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. [16] In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.

Two things I want you to know about light. **First, light reveals the false reality of darkness.**

Maybe you have been lying in bed before and you see something through the open door in your closet. The more you look at it, the more it begins to look like a creepy clown face or something. Maybe this has happened to you? Finally, you turn on the light and it's just a piece of clothing hanging halfway off of a hanger.

Followers of Jesus, as the light, will show what the darkness skews or covers up. Light helps reveal to us what is reality, and our kingdom role of being light reveals to the world the darkness they are in and how it skews reality.

Second, light reveals the reality of God. Remember, we're not zapped to heaven when we become a part of the kingdom of God, but we are left in the world for our kingdom roles of salt and light. If you are a follower of Jesus, God wants you to shine right where you are, where you work, in your neighborhood, and with your family. As light, we not only make others aware of the darkness they are in by our presence, but they also see the light from our good works and give glory to our Father who is in heaven.

Just as salt has an effect on the dying earth, light has an effect on the lost world. Our kingdom role of light pushes back the darkness. Jesus uses his followers to push back the darkness and illuminate the way to the kingdom of God so the lost world can be saved. **If you are part of God's kingdom, then you are to bear witness to his kingdom with your life by being light in the world.**

Now listen, I know some of you are hearing this and are starting to feel uneasy. Maybe some of you aren't so sure how bright you're shining, or if at all. Maybe you're not sure if your life is showing people the reality of God. Honestly, a secret disciple is of no more use in the world than one who has lost his distinctiveness. Maybe you are blending in too well with the darkness because you are not spending time with the Light.

We had a glow in the dark football when I worked at TVR. It was a neat ball and we kept it in a closet in the back corner of the gym. If we wanted to play with the glow in the dark football, you couldn't go and just grab it at night and expect it to glow. You had to put it in the light first and charge it because it had been sitting in the dark closet all day.

To be a light, you must be charged with the Light. Jesus says in John 8:12 that he is the Light, Paul says in Ephesians 5:8 that we ourselves have become light, and Peter says in 2 Peter 1:4 that we are partakers of the divine nature. This is a mystery, but we can know for sure that to be a light, you must have the Light.

So what is the goal of being light? What is the goal of pushing back the darkness, revealing the kingdom of God? The goal is that others will glorify our Father who is in heaven. The hope is that they look straight through us to the one who rules us, Jesus! After noticing our good works, we want them to look past our externals to see what drives us internally and say, "I want what is in you! I want what you have. I want who you have! I want to be ruled by Jesus." And so, they give glory to our Father in heaven, who out of his love for the world, gave his only Son so that we can be saved.

CHOOSING A KINGDOM

Here's the deal though, let me warn you. Hear John 3:19.

[19] "And this is the judgment: that light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil."

Not everyone is going to love who you are. What happens when you put salt water on a cut? It stings! What happens when someone flips the lights after a long night's sleep? It burns your eyes! Jesus' children are not always accepted by the world because man's nature is to love darkness more than light. The world won't always welcome the salt because even though it cleanses, it may sting at first. The world will not always like what the light reveals, because they may want to stay in the darkness.

Guys, some of you are at war on the inside and you are miserable. You're trying to figure out which kingdom you belong to. Some of you want to appear as Christians, being part of the kingdom of God, but you're not fulfilling the kingdom roles of being salt and light. So, you are salt without savor and you don't want light to ruin what you are enjoying in the darkness – you are a glow in the dark football buried in the closet – useless.

You know enough about Christianity to spoil the world for you because you know how you should live, so you don't go all-in with the world. You don't fit in with the world because you aren't all-in with them and you don't fit in with Christians because you aren't all-in with them. You're just in the middle and you're miserable.

ENTERING THE KINGDOM

Now, imagine you are listening to Jesus' sermon on that mountainside. You're feeling the breeze as he teaches on the characteristics of his followers in the Beatitudes and the roles of his followers as salt and light. You are tuned in and you might begin to think, "Might I become a part of his kingdom?" But then you are brought back to your reality of, "Well, I never measure up, so I'm sure I won't make the team. I'm never confident enough. I tend to let people take advantage of me. I'm too soft, never aggressive enough. I'm always rejected. Who am I to think I'll get to be a part of the kingdom of God?"

But you hear Jesus say those who belong to the kingdom of God are poor in spirit. They are completely at the end of themselves, knowing they'll never measure up. Those who belong to the kingdom of God confess to God that if anything good is going to come out of this life, then he's going to have to do it, because they just don't have it in them to live a good life. You hear that those who belong to the kingdom of God are abused. And you start to realize, "It sounds like the kingdom of God is made up from the rejects of the world, like me!"

So as you realize the kingdom of God sounds like it's made up of rejects, the thought hits your mind, "What if I can actually, somehow be a part of this kingdom?" However, you've learned to keep yourself from dreaming of the impossible, but you feel compelled to believe that this might just be something you can be a part of.

Listen, my 4-year-old son, Olson, will sometimes chase after me saying, "Daddy, I want you." And it is always my pleasure to swoop him up into my arms, press his cheek against mine and say, "Bud, you have me. You don't have to want me, because I am yours, and nothing will ever change that." If you desire to be a part of the kingdom of God, then chase after him and cry out to him, "I want you," and it will be his pleasure to swoop you up into his arms, press his heart into yours and say, "I am yours." Guys, if it's Jesus you want, then it's him you'll get. No tricks, no disappointments. Forever!

But entering the kingdom of God requires total surrender to his rule, which makes the kingdom of God offensive to many. It's offensive because you aren't good enough to enter it, you can't do enough to earn it, and you might just flat out think it's unfair. To enter the kingdom of God, you must be poor enough in spirit to know you don't deserve it. You must mourn your sin so much that you know you have no chance of earning it. You must be meek enough to be okay not ruling your own life anymore. If you're being drawn by God to enter his kingdom today, you will be blown-away-grateful that Jesus has the audacity to want to rule your life!

So, if you have not entered the kingdom of God and are ready to today, then pray to God right now, in your heart, confessing to him that you have no hope of being good enough to enter his kingdom. Thank him for sending Jesus to meet all of the requirements for you in his substitutionary life and death on the cross, so that you can be a part of his kingdom. Thank God that for the resurrection of Jesus, so that you too can have a new life, ruled by King Jesus, with new roles, to be salt and light for the kingdom of God. And then I want you to tell somebody who you know loves Jesus. If you don't know who to tell, then just right outside standing in the Welcome Room of the foyer, we'll have two people who love Jesus you can tell.

SERVING THE KINGDOM

For those of you who are a part of the kingdom of God, let us not forget our kingdom roles of being salt and light. You are salt, so do not lose your tang. You are light, so do not conceal it, whether it be by compromise, laziness or fear. Do not conceal who you are, but be salt and light, so that others will see your good works and glorify our God who is in heaven, knowing that it is only by the grace of God that we are who we are.

And how do we do this? We live out the Beatitudes: depend on God alone for your strength. Ask him for the grace you need to be salt when someone pridefully rejects you. Ask him for the mercy you need to be light when someone who has made life difficult for you sees their error and tries to apologize. The beauty of being in the kingdom of God is that his shelves are stocked with all that we need for what he has called us to.

Jesus says later in chapter 7 to ask, seek, and knock. Literally, this means to keep on asking, keep on seeking, and keep on knocking for what you need. God's love is for the world and if we ask him to enable us to live the Beatitudes and fulfill our kingdom roles of salt and light, for his glory, why would he not answer that? If being salt and light is who God wants us to be, then he will give us the supply we need!

So, tell the people in your life that they too can be a part of this kingdom. They too can have new life, with a new nature that loves the light and hates the darkness. They can be under new rule, have a new purpose, and enjoy a new forever. This is what we as followers of Jesus do because this is who we are! Jesus says we are salt and that we are light. **If you are part of God's kingdom, then you are to bear witness to his kingdom with your life by being salt and light in the world.** These are our Kingdom roles. Let's pray.

HOME GROUP QUESTIONS

1. *Even though our focus was on Matthew 5:13-16, begin your time reading Matthew 5:1-16 as a group.*
2. *Ask everyone to take a moment and reflect on whose life had an impact on their coming to Christ. Ask any who are willing to share who had an impact and in what way. As the leader, take just a moment to say a quick prayer and thank the Lord for these saints who were salt and light in their lives. Encourage your group to write a note or send a message to their person, telling of their impact, if they have not done so before.*
3. **Have someone read 5:13. As individuals, how can we practically have an impact for the kingdom through preservation, cleansing, and flavoring, causing others to thirst for God? As the church, how can we practically have an impact for the kingdom in the same ways?**
4. **Have someone read 5:14-15. In what ways might we as individuals sometimes be tempted to conceal our light? Why?**
5. **Have someone read 5:16. How can we do this well?** *Other verses you may want your group to look at are Ephesians 2:8-9; Galatians 5:16-26; Ephesians 4:1-7; 1 John 2:1-6; Hebrews 10:24; 1 Peter 2:12, 15.*
6. **Have someone read John 3:19. Have you experienced this personally? Is anyone willing to share how the Lord saved them from darkness?**
7. *Ask everyone to take a moment and ask the Lord silently to show them who in their life is living in darkness and how the Lord is calling them to be salt and light in their life. Ask everyone to commit to pray for the person the Lord brought to their mind at least once a day until you meet again.*
8. *End your time praying together by having as many who are willing to participate pray out loud for your group. Ask for volunteers to pray each Beatitude for your group (vv. 3-12, up to 8 people, some may take more than one if needed, one person can take vv. 10-12). As the leader, conclude the prayer by praying for the group to be salt and light (vv. 13-16).*