

## Scripture Lesson – Matthew 5:1-16 – February 21, 2021

5 When Jesus<sup>[a]</sup> saw the crowds, he went up the mountain; and after he sat down, his disciples came to him. <sup>2</sup> Then he began to speak, and taught them, saying:

<sup>3</sup> “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

<sup>4</sup> “Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.

<sup>5</sup> “Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.

<sup>6</sup> “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.

<sup>7</sup> “Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy.

<sup>8</sup> “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.

<sup>9</sup> “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.

<sup>10</sup> “Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

<sup>11</sup> “Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely<sup>[b]</sup> on my account. <sup>12</sup> Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

<sup>13</sup> “You are the salt of the earth; but if salt has lost its taste, how can its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything, but is thrown out and trampled under foot.

<sup>14</sup> “You are the light of the world. A city built on a hill cannot be hid. <sup>15</sup> No one after lighting a lamp puts it under the bushel basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all in the house. <sup>16</sup> In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven.

## **“Stay Focused” by Eric Arndt**

Way back at the beginning of my journey in the world of machining and Tool and Die, I worked at a local shop called Reed Manufacturing. I was what was known as a “Setup – Operator” in the CNC department. During those years, I worked on 2<sup>nd</sup> shift with a really great group of guys that I remember quite fondly. And it wasn’t just the guys on 2nd shift, but there were several of us spread out among all the shifts that I’ll always remember.

Anyways, one Saturday in particular found me working an overtime shift. They were in need of several thousand handles for a particular style of plastic pipe shears, and they had them running on several different machines. I happened to be working in the tool room, milling slots in these handles, with a tool called an endmill, on a machine known as a Bridgeport. An endmill is like a drill bit with sharp sides. And a Bridgeport is a very versatile manual milling machine. It’s so versatile, that it’s been said that a Bridgeport is the only machine that could be used to recreate itself.

So I was manually milling slots in these handles, and I was in a groove, that is I had found a rhythm. There was an auto-feed feature on the Bridgeport which I used. You could set bolts at either end of the worktable, and the auto-feed function would move the table. It would move until a sensor made contact with these bolts, which would then switch off the auto-feed. And I would blow off the last part, unclamp it from the vice sitting on the worktable, move an aluminum block in the vice back into position, clamp a new piece in, and switch on the auto-feed. The tool would mill a slot in the handle, the sensor would make contact with the bolt and switch off the auto-feed. And I would repeat the whole process I described, and auto-feed the table back in the opposite direction. So I’m moving at a good pace, back and forth, getting parts done. And I’m thinking about my cousin Chris. Are we going to still get wings tonight at the Fireside? What time? Is he working today too? Are friends of ours Brandon and Andy going with us? Just trying to plan out my day and my evening, so when my shift is over I could hit the ground running.

And you know how when you’re doing something that doesn’t require much thinking, you kind of go into an autopilot mode? You know, menial tasks such as raking, or gardening, or washing the car. Well that was me in that moment. And at one point during this auto-pilot moment, something went horribly wrong.

Now it didn't help that there were a few safety issues with running this job to begin with; issues that would've caused a very different outcome to this story. But that's another story.

Anyways, I don't know if anyone here has ever experienced what I'm talking about, but have you ever gotten hurt, and it seemed to happen in slow motion? Even though it happened in an instant, in the blink of an eye you can almost see it happen frame by frame. Well that was this moment for me. I slowly saw the endmill grab my finger between itself and the vice, and pull it through. And that's why I'm missing the end of my middle finger on my left hand. I wasn't staying focused, on what I should've been most focused on. And I paid a heavy price for it.

As a result of that accident, I had several surgeries, and was unable to do my job for some time. I was hired to perform a specific function, a specific duty; but my inability to stay focused had rendered me useless to my employer.

Losing focus can sometimes cause trouble in our lives. Some of it so small we don't bat an eyelash: too much water for the plant and it dies, forgetting to add sugar and the dish doesn't turn out. Other times losing focus can bring harm to others or ourselves, as it did in my story a few moments ago... and learning to stay focused is just as important to our Christian lives, as it is to our daily activities.

The scripture lesson today is an excerpt from Jesus' Sermon on the Mount. It's the sermon that Jesus gave in **Matthew** chapters 5-7.

Verses 1 and 2 are the reason it's known as the Sermon on the Mount: ***"Now when He saw the crowds, He went up on a mountainside and sat down. His disciples came to Him, and He began to teach them..."*** The Sermon on the Mount is the most famous sermon Jesus ever gave.

But to begin with, let's talk about salt. Humans have used salt for thousands of years for two purposes; first as a preservative, and second as a seasoning. That's not to say it's not needed for anything else - it's actually required for life. Sodium ions help the body perform a number of tasks, such as maintaining the fluid in blood cells and helping the small intestine absorb nutrients. We can't make salt in our own bodies, so we've always had to rely on our surrounding environments to fill the need; whether from eating meat, or natural salt deposits.

When it's used as a preservative Sodium draws the bacteria-causing moisture out of foods, drying them and making it possible to store meat without refrigeration for

lengthy periods of time. Egyptians knew this. Not only did they use it to preserve food, but mummies were packed in salt too.

Secondly, salt was used then, as now, as a flavor enhancer. It can intensify aromas, or balance flavors. It enhances foods by essentially turning up the volume of their salty flavors.

And just as salt is used as a preservative, believers in Christ are to be preservatives to the world. That is, we preserve it from the evil that runs rampant through a fallen society full of ungodly men whose unredeemed natures are corrupted by sin. And it's not because we're better than anyone else, or being judgmental and thinking we're better; it's because as believers and followers of Jesus Christ have the Holy Spirit working in and through us. **Ephesians 1: 13-14** tells us how we came to have the Holy Spirit in us:

***<sup>13</sup> And you also were included in Christ when you heard the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation. When you believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, <sup>14</sup> who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession—to the praise of his glory.***

And as we look at how salt is used to enhance the flavor of food, or have a positive influence on the flavor of food, we compare the followers of Christ and how they enhance the "flavor" of life. As we live out our lives obedient to Christ, and under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, Christians have the power to influence good in the world around us. Where there is conflict, the Christian is to be a peacemaker; where there is hatred or sorrow, we are to be the representatives of Christ, showing God's love and grace. And sometimes that means to be that way with those you would consider enemies, or just don't like to be around.

Luke describes this type of living in **Luke 6:35-36**

***<sup>35</sup> But love your enemies, do good to them, and lend to them without expecting to get anything back. Then your reward will be great, and you will be children of the Most High, because he is kind to the ungrateful and wicked. <sup>36</sup> Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.***

In the analogy of light to the world, our good works, as believers and followers of Christ with the Holy Spirit working through us, are to shine for everyone to see. The last couple of verses in **Matthew 5** spell this out: ***"You are the light of the world"*** it

says. We are to ***“Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven”***. The presence of light in darkness is unmistakable. And the presence of Christians in the world must be unmistakable. And more to the point, our deeds as Christians need to shine like a light in the darkness.

And they will shine and be evident if we keep in mind some of the other principles that Jesus specifically mentions at the beginning of this particular scripture known as the “Beatitudes”; for example the meek, those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, the merciful, the pure in heart, the peacemakers. And these deeds are not for our own sake but for those who might see them as they glorify our Father in heaven.

But here’s a problem, the salt and light go together. It’s a symbiotic relationship. And if we don’t have the salt, how can we possibly be the light? in **Mark 9:50** Jesus tells us that: ***“Salt is good, but if it loses its saltiness, how can you make it salty again? Have salt among yourselves, and be at peace with each other.”*** His teaching suggests that saltiness can be lost specifically through a lack of peace with one another. But how can we retain our saltiness in order to be lights for the world?

**Hebrews 12:1** tells us how. There we’re told to: ***“run with perseverance the race marked out for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith.”*** We can be lights for Christ by fixing our eyes on Jesus, by staying focused on our relationship with Him.

I would think it safe to say that 2020 was the most divisive year I have seen in my life. The news was filled with daily doses of crime, disease, political tensions, rioting, and protests. And while there were many issues, I would say the top 2 were: disease, and political tension. Or more to the point: Covid and the presidential election. And it was so easy to get caught up in the daily negative grind of it all; to become distracted and lose our focus on the worship and love of Jesus Christ and of being the salt and light to the Earth.

We have to remember that the difference between Christians and the world must be preserved. While we are here, we were given a job to do, a specific duty to perform. And that is to be the salt and light for the world. And not putting God first in our lives, not staying focused on our relationship with Jesus Christ can render us completely ineffective.

Any choice we make, that causes our inattention to our walk with God, is a step in the wrong direction. And these choices can be made consciously, or sub-consciously. It can happen as easily as accepting the ways of the world for the sake of comfort or convenience; or by getting caught up in the fervor of diseases and elections.

We see it all the time in relationships. Maybe it's happened to us or someone we know. Neglect, emotional neglect; is the failure to notice, attend, or respond to the other half of your relationship. What happens in those relationships? They fail. The neglect elicits anger **or** withdrawal because of feelings of being unloved, and/or unwanted. When we neglect our relationship with God, how do you think He feels? Unloved or unwanted maybe? God may be the omnipotent being that created the heavens and the earth, but that doesn't mean He doesn't have feelings; He created feelings! And He's not going to hang around while we abuse or neglect our relationship with Him.

Now I want to be clear on 2 very important points here:

The first is that, God's grace is strong enough to carry our relationship with Him. It never breaks, He never collects up His things and leaves for good. And He confirms this for us in The Bible. Let's look at a couple verses.

Roman's chapter 3: ***"What if some were unfaithful? Does their faithlessness nullify the faithfulness of God? By no means! Let God be true though every man be false,"*** (Romans 3:3-4a)

2 Timothy chapter 2: ***"if we are faithless, he remains faithful—for he cannot deny himself."*** 2 (Timothy 2:13)

Or in 1 John chapter 1: ***"If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just, and will forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness."*** (1 John 1:9)

When we sin and form idols in our life and we neglect God, we push God out of our lives and we break our fellowship with Him. But He's not gone for good. We've only put Him outside on the porch and shut the door so to speak. He is always faithfully waiting to be invited back into our lives. And just like that last verse from 1 John tells us, if we confess our sins to Him and invite Him back into our lives, He will faithfully forgive us every time, and step right back into our relationship. As if nothing happened. And this also answers the question posed in the book of Mark, How do you regain your saltiness? By confessing your sins to God alone, and asking Him who remains forever faithful for forgiveness, and then receiving it.

And this rolls us into the second point that needs to be made. When we break off our relationship with God, it has no effect on our salvation; it is never lost.

And He drives this point home in John 6:

***“And this is the will of Him who sent Me, that I shall lose none of all those He has given Me, but raise them up at the last day. For it is My Father’s will that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in Him shall have eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day.”(John 6:39-40).***

Anyone coming to faith in Jesus Christ, and subsequently marked with the Holy Spirit, will never be forgotten about. Sheep wander off all the time, but it’s the shepherd’s responsibility to bring them back. And our “Good Shepherd” has promised to never lose any of us. Never means never. Salvation is a free gift given once, and lasting forever.

So to recap the 2 points I wanted to make here: God’s grace is strong enough to carry our relationship, and our salvation can never be lost.

But in order for us to do the job given to us, it’s imperative that we remain in fellowship with God. If we don’t, we run the risk of pushing God away, and losing our saltiness. The Holy Spirit dwelling in us needs to preserve the world around us, to restrain the evil that runs rampant through the world. And the deeds that the Holy Spirit prompts us to do, is how that happens. These deeds are seen as beacons of light, beacons of hope for a fallen and lost world that can’t see an end to the misery and pain that has grown exponentially from political, racial, or pandemic divides.

And now more than ever, we need to show the world that the story doesn’t end here, this way. There is something much greater, much better, more beautiful than what anyone can imagine waiting for all who will accept God’s gift of salvation.

**1 Corinthians 2:9:**

***“But as it is written: “Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, Nor have entered into the heart of man The things which God has prepared for those who love Him.”***

We need to show the world there is another path, rather narrow, leading somewhere rather special, where He is waiting for us to walk with Him.

If we want our light to shine bright, we need to live a life that is dedicated and pleasing to God, free from hypocrisy, full of love and grace, we need to be merciful peacemakers. And if we lose sight of what we're supposed to be doing, we run the risk of becoming useless or even causing harm to others or ourselves. We need to be the salt and light of the world. And in order to do that, we need to pay attention to God and remember to "Stay Focused".