

What's unique about Matthew's gospel? Being Salt and Light -- Matthew 5:13 – 16.¹

13 "You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled underfoot. 14 "You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. 15 Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. 16 In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven."

Through this parable Jesus teaches that we can either fulfil or fail in our role as his agents of transformation in this world. In response to Christ's teaching, author Richard Keyes has written to warn us about two tendencies he has observed that can diminish Christians' effectiveness as Christ's salt and light. In his book 'Chameleon or Tribe?' Keyes asserts that the first of these two tendencies is to become overly defensive towards the world. To illustrate this, Keyes uses the example of musk oxen that, when feeling threatened, huddle together and use their hind legs to kick out at approaching enemies. Secondly, Keyes compares overly-compromising and worldly Christians to chameleons that blend with their environment so as not to stand out and be noticed. In other words, Christians can slowly but surely adopt worldly ways of thinking and acting until we lose our Christ-like distinctiveness. Or we can spend so much time talking about the world as if it were our mortal enemy that we can forget that God so loved the people of this world that he sent his only Son to die for us.

Jesus brought us salvation by taking on our mortal flesh and becoming 'Immanuel – God With Us' (For example, read the story of Matthew's call in Matthew 9:9 – 13). Now Jesus has commissioned his followers to continue his transforming work by living like him among the people of this world.

1. What does it mean to be the salt of the earth?
2. What does it mean to be the light of the world?
3. Do you notice either a 'musk ox' or 'chameleon' tendency in your own Christian life or in the life of your church? Explain.
4. How do we maintain our Christ-likeness while living in this world?
5. How do we build meaningful relationships with the people of this world so that we can point them to Christ?

¹ In Mark and Luke's gospel record similar parables about salt (Mark 9:49 – 50 and Luke 14:34 – 35) and light (Luke 8:16 – 17). But only in Matthew's gospel does Jesus combine the two symbols and explicitly explain to his disciples that we are the salt of the earth and the light of the world.