

IV. THE ROLE OF DISCIPLESHIP

Matthew 5:13-16

Translation

Literary Analysis

The unit of 5:13-16 consists of two metaphors (5:13a, 14a), two parables (5:13b, 15), and a paranetic conclusion (5:16). The paranetic conclusion, "Let your light shine . . ." (5:16), focuses on the light motif .

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The source(s) behind this unit are not at all clear. . . . most view it as being the redactional work of the evangelist. The parable of the salt . . . it is probable that this saying comes from the Q tradition. The reference to a city on a hill (5:14b) has no parallel in the New Testament, but its appearance in a more developed form in *Gos Thom* 32 and Pap Oxy 1:7 demonstrates its traditional character.

Notes

5:13. *You are.* For Matthew, the *you* suffering for Christ's sake of 5:11 are the *poor in spirit* of 5:3, *the persecuted for righteousness' sake* of 5:10. Having applied the Beatitudes to his own community of *disciples* (see Note of 5:2), the evangelist takes the occasion to bring together several sayings (5:13-16) to address his community concerning their role in the world, . . .

. . . the theme of 5:12 most likely triggered Matthew's expansion of the Sermon material with this section on the disciple's role in the world.

the salt. Salt had several functions in the ancient world. Apart from its cultic use in sacrifices, . . . as a seasoning, . . . a preservative, . . . a means of purification.

. . . the sense of the metaphor comes from the ensuing parable. The disciples are to the earth what salt is to everyday life.

of the earth. . . . to the realm of human existence that stands under God's sovereign rule through the coming of the person and work of Christ.

becomes worthless. Literally means to become *foolish* (Greek). The Hebrew verb *tpl* has a double meaning, "to become unsavory," "insipid" and a "fool" (Black, *Aramaic*, 166; Jeremias, *Parables*, 168). Since salt cannot lose its chemical properties and remain salt, the literal meaning of the phrase is no longer certain. It doubtless referred to the adulteration of salt in some fashion.

restore its value. Mark 9:50 ends with the question whose answer is obvious. Nothing!

It has no value.

except being thrown out. This phrase expresses the common practice of discarding one's trash by throwing it out. But the verb (Greek) has an eschatological ring to it in Matthew.

to be walked on by people. To be *walked on* (greek) connotes disdain and judgment (cf. Hos 5:11, LXX).

5:14. *You are the light.* This metaphor introduces the theme of the following traditional units. In the Old Testament, light used as a metaphor applies to God (Ps 18:28; Mic 7:8), the servant (Isa 42:6; 49:6), and Zion/Israel (Isa 60:1-3). In Judaism, Israel, the Law, the Temple, and Jerusalem are the light (Str-B 1:237). . . . Matthew has just introduced Jesus' public ministry in Galilee (4:15-16) as the fulfillment of Isa 9:1-2, the great light for those who sit in darkness. Although these metaphors have various referents, each points to God's revealing light, the light that illumines the way for those in darkness.

of the world. (1) distinction to heaven . . . (2) where human events take place . . . (3) comparable to "this age" . . .

A city situated on a hill. This saying may have been an allusion to the Old Testament role of Jerusalem. For example, Isa 2:2-4 and Mic 4:1-3 speak of the "mountain of the house of the Lord," the city of Jerusalem, towering above all others and depicting God's redemptive

work for the nations in the day of salvation. Furthermore, the prophet in Isa 60:1 addresses Zion with the command, "Arise and shine, for your light has come and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you.

cannot be hidden.

5:15. *Nor does one keep a lamp burning.* Nor does one (greek) is Matthew's redactional bridge . . .

place it under a basket. . . . word for basket (greek) . . . a Latin term for a measure that contained about one peck. . . . a common utensil in the average farm household . . . Luke 11:33 refers to placing the lamp in a "cellar," indicating a different architecture setting from the one-room Palestinian farmhouse. . . . the focus is on the appropriate use . . .

to give light for all in the house. . . . implies a one-room house . . .

5:16. *in such a manner.* Matthew frequently uses it to draw an application from a previous parable . . .

let your light shine.

for others. . . . before (greek) . . . with men (greek) denotes the personal focus of the disciple's mission . . .

your good deeds. The same phrase and motif behind the context of 5:16 also underlies 1 Pet. 2:12b. . . . indicates a common tradition reworked . . . Behind this tradition may lie a *verbum Christi*. . . . good deeds, fruits, and righteousness are all interrelated for Matthew. . . . a totally different starting point and appearance. Such a life bears witness to the transforming power of God . . .

Yet to limit *good deeds* merely to one's actions would hardly be fair to Matthew.

give the glory to your Heavenly Father. To *glorify* God in the mission setting of 5:13-16 implies that the disciple becomes the agent (light) through whom others come to recognize and acknowledge God as Father.

Comments

A. Discipleship

. . . 5:13-16 takes up the subject ("you") and the focus (the disciple in the world) of the transitional Beatitude (5:11-12). . . . dealt with the negative consequences . . . [now] the positive aspect of the disciple's role in mission (5:16a).

1. Salt of the Earth: Matt 5:13

The strength of the metaphor lies in its being a common household ingredient and in its vital role in everyday life.

. . . independent existence in the tradition. The only common denominator in the three Gospels is the parable's application to discipleship. . . . this statement simply asserts that salt can lose its value as salt. To venture an explanation goes beyond the purpose and limits of the parable itself. A disciple who ceases to function as a disciple has indeed become "foolish," has lost his "meaning" as a disciple.

Discipleship and mission are integral, not optional elements for Matthew. To fail in mission is to fail in discipleship.

2. Light of the World: Matt 5:14-15

. . . focuses on the role of the disciple . . . Whereas the Jewish background variously compared Israel, the Servant, and the blessings of Israel such as the Law, Temple, and Jerusalem with the light, Matthew is most likely alluding to the comparison of Jesus' ministry with the "light" of Isa 9:1-2 found in Matt 4:16. In 10:6-8 . . . the disciple, as did Jesus, fulfills the various eschatological expectations symbolized by light in the Old Testament.

The city may well be an allusion to Jerusalem situated on the "mount of the house of God," that was to have a particular role among the nations according to Old Testament prophecy (cf. Isa 2:2-5; Mic 4:1-3). Isa 60:1-3 also applies the light metaphor to Zion, "Arise and shine, for your light has come . . . And nations shall come to your light . . ." If this application is correct then Matthew has deliberately placed the disciples in the light of Israel's future role for the nations. The disciples in their mission fulfill the Old Testament promises for Israel in a way not unlike Jesus' ministry as seen in the preceding Beatitudes.

Matthew, who has the earlier form of the tradition . . . has applied it to the disciple's role in the world. . . . independent traditional saying

with its various usages by the respective evangelist. What that light is, the evangelist develops in the paranesis of 5:16.

3. Let Your Light Shine: Matt 5:16

Perhaps the location of this section on mission at the outset of Jesus' teaching ministry (5:13-16) is more than coincidentally related to his final instructions for his disciples in 28:18-20. Disciples are not only those who hear and respond to the good news but become by the very nature of discipleship messengers of this good news. . . . the more concrete language of *good deeds*. In other words, the disciple "shines" by means of corresponding life and conduct.

This role of mission is how the Kingdom, God's sovereign rule, become a reality in the world of people (28:19-20).

B. Matt 5:13-16: Parenthesis or Pivot?

. . . 5:13-16 plays a much larger role within the Sermon than such a parenthesis would allow. *First*, . . . reminds us of the larger structure Matthew 5-9, which presents Jesus as Messiah of word and deed, and Matthew 10, which presents the disciples as carrying out that ministry in mission. The same pattern concludes the Gospel. Therefore, the redactional shaping of the Beatitudes to set Jesus as the fulfillment of Isaiah 61 is followed by the stress on the disciple's corresponding role in mission.

Second . . . With the coming of Messiah as fulfillment (christology) comes the focus on the People of God (ecclesiology), the fulfillment of God's redemptive promises for his own. Therefore, 5:13-16 with 5:3-12 illustrates the tandem relationship of christology and ecclesiology for Matthew.

Third, 5:13-16 plays a pivotal role in the structure of the Sermon by bridging between the Beatitudes and the demands of 5:17-7:12.

Thus, rather than an interlude or parenthesis, the ecclesiology of 5:13-16 represents a necessary counterpart to the christology of 5:3-12 and offers the discipleship-mission context for what follows in the Sermon.

C. Matt 5:13-16 and the Nature of Mission

. . . mission has long suffered under the dichotomy of word and deed.

The "gospel" on the one hand, connotes the proclamation of the good news about what God has done for us in Jesus Christ.

The "gospel," on the other hand, connotes change for the improvement of another's lot or station in life.

In Matt 5:13, 14 the evangelist shatters these illusions about discipleship. *First*, mission belongs to the essence of discipleship;

Second, Matthew clearly identifies one's life and conduct with mission . . .

Third, it would be most unfair to Matthew to limit his understanding of mission even within this context to *good deeds*. To become one of the People of God is to become a part of God's redemptive plan of creation, the world. The nature of these implications is spelled out more specifically in the sections that follow pertaining to one's relationship to others (5:21-48) and to God (6:1-7:12). The focus now turns to the life one is to live before others and God which illuminates those who sit in darkness.