Jesus Teaches about Salt and Light



Scripture Reference: Matthew 5:13-16

Suggested Theme: Our actions and lives can be a positive influence on our world and point people to God.

Memory Verse: Our actions and lives can be a positive influence on our world and point people to God.

Story Overview:

Jesus told the crowd how to live Godly lives in the Sermon on the Mount. He illustrated the significance of followers displaying Godly lives by saying, “You are the salt of the earth” and “You are the light of the world”.

Background Study:

Jesus used the illustration of salt and light in the Sermon on the Mount and repeated it in other contexts (Mark 4:21-22 and Luke 8:16; 11:33).

Rock salt came from underground mines. The Dead Sea produced salt, but it was considered inferior. Nevertheless, it was easy to get, so it was often used.

Salt was used for flavouring and preserving. Another use of salt was to prevent infection. It was rubbed on the skin of newborn babies for that reason (an example of this being neglected is in Ezekiel 16:4). Salt was also added to sacrificial offerings (Ezekiel 43:24).

When Jesus called His disciples the salt of the earth, He could have been referring to the preservation aspect of salt. Christians bring salvation and eternal life to those around them by sharing the word of God. Their lives are preserved.

Also, salt makes a difference in flavour. Can you imagine a world where there was no Christian influence? Constitutions, laws, benevolence, human rights, justice, love, joy and peace are all products of Judeo-Christian influence. Christians, like salt, are to make a difference in the society around them.

In early times, lamps were stone bowls filled with melted animal fat, which floated a wick of twisted plant fibres. Later lamps were small clay saucers with a part of their rims pinched to form a spout. Wicks were placed in the pinched section so they could soak up the oil in the saucer. During the time of Jesus, people used small clay lamps that burned olive oil drawn up by a wick. Olive oil gives off less smoke than animal

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fat. Lamps were placed inside homes in niches on the wall or on stands.

Common lamps used in the first century were small, about the size of a hand. They were made from clay and were like shallow, covered dishes with two holes in the top. Olive oil was poured through the larger holes, and a wick was placed in the smaller holes. Special care was taken to keep the wick trimmed. If it burned down too low, then it would smoke and finally go out.

There are many references to light throughout the Bible. All good things to do with God are light, while sin is often paralleled with darkness. Read these verses for your study:

- Psalm 18:28; 27:1; 119:130.
- Isaiah 42:6 and 49:6.
- John 1:1-9; 8:12; and 12:44-46.
- 1 Thessalonians 5:4-8
- 1 John 1:5-7

Christians are a reflection of the Light of God. When we do not let God work through us, His Light will not reach the world. Trying to keep God to ourselves is like hiding a light under a bowl. Do you let your light shine? Is your life a reflection of God's Glory?

Children meet people at home, school, church, sports, and more. Help them see how they can be lights for God.

Way to Introduce the Story:

Ask a volunteer to place a blindfold on their eyes. Now, ask them to go to the chalkboard and draw a simple picture. You might have them draw a house with a tree outside. They could add children, clouds, flowers, and anything else you can think of. Have the child remove the blindfold and then draw the same thing.

Discuss how simple things like drawing can be very difficult if we are in the dark. If we we tried to do our school assignments in the dark, we would have a difficult time of it. We would be so happy if someone turned a light on for us. In today's story, we are going to learn about a very important kind of light.

The Story:

Many, many people wanted to hear Jesus speak. He went to the side of a hill and sat down so that everyone could gather and listen. Then, He began to tell them how they could follow God. He told them about heaven. He told them they should be kind to other people even if other people were not kind to them. He told them that they should help poor people and that they should not judge others.

To help people understand something very important, Jesus explained something using items that they were very familiar with.

Jesus looked at the people and said, "You are the salt of the earth. But if 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 by men."

What do you think Jesus meant? Do you think He was saying that we are not human, but we are salt instead? Of course not. Jesus was saying something very important, but He was trying to make it simple to understand. He was using the example of salt.

Do you like salt? What does food taste like when there is no salt in it? (Let the children answer). When salt is added to some foods, they taste much better. God put Christians in this world so that we can make the world better. Are you salt? Do you make this world better? Tell me some ways you can make your school better. (Let the children answer and then go on to talk about ways they can make a home, sports, etc., better by living a Christian life.)

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After Jesus told the people the parable about the salt, He told them another parable.

Jesus said, “You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. 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. In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.”

What do you think Jesus meant when He said: “You are the light of the world”? Did He mean we are not human but that we are light bulbs? Of course not. He was saying a parable to tell the people something very important.

Many people in this world do not know about God. Jesus said that it is like they are in a very dark place. They need someone to give them some light so that they can see. When Christians obey God, then it is like a light is shining. People see Christians doing good things, making them want to follow God.

If we do good, it is like our light is shining. If people never see us do or say good things, then it is like we are putting a big bowl over our light. No one can see a light under a bowl.

Sometimes, we get embarrassed or shamed, and we don’t want people to know that we are Christians. Has that ever happened to you? If we are ashamed to do good things, then it is like putting our light under a bowl.

How many of you are going to let your light shine this week?

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Ways to Tell the Story:

This story can be told using various methods. Always remain true to the facts found in the Bible, but help children connect to its meaning by using drama, visual aids, voice inflection or other group participation.

Be selective. Each teacher is unique, so only use the illustrations that best relate to how YOU tell the story in THIS lesson. Too many illustrations can be confusing, so eliminate any that cover other stories or details you do not wish to emphasise in this lesson.

Click here for visual aids and more storytelling methods.

View this slideshow and download it from the original source: https://freebibleimages.org/illustrations/gnpi-034-salt-light/

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Review and Reflection Questions:

Review questions help children remember and know the facts of a story. Reflection questions encourage them to internalise the meaning and implications for their lives. Asking at least one of each type of question can help strengthen a child’s spiritual development and help them connect to God. Click here to learn more about review and reflection questions.

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Review:

- Jesus said that we are the _____ of the earth. (Salt)
- Jesus said that we are the _____ of the world. (Light)

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- Jesus said it was like hiding your light under something if no one sees you do or say good things. Hiding it under what? (A bowl)
- What does it mean to be ‘salt’ for God? (We can help the world be a more Godly place by being kind, loving people, fighting for justice, etc.)
- What does it mean to be a ‘light’ for God? (We can help bring God and His love to people and places that need it)
- What does this story show us about God or people?

Reflection:

- Which idea do you like more, that Christians are like salt or light? Why?
- What are some of the things that are evil or bad in the world?
- What are some of the things that are good or Godly in the world?
- Sometimes we stand out when we are ‘lights’ simply because the people around us do not know God or His love. Is it hard for you to stand out?
- How can you ‘be a light’ and show God’s love to your friends or family this week?
- How can you ‘be a light’ and show God’s love to any other people you know?
- What is a big way you want to change the world for the better? (This can be anything from ending world hunger to making sure everyone has friends to being a doctor. Let the kids share their dreams)

Prayer:

It is important to guide children in learning how to pray. In prayer, children can connect with God and learn that He hears and answers them. God can become a lifelong friend who is with them every moment of their lives. Try using a variety of prayer methods from time to time so that the children can learn to connect with God in different ways. Note that you can pray at any time throughout your lesson. A variety of prayer methods are found here.

Song Suggestions:

- I am a C-H-R-I-S-T-I-A-N (Song)
- If You’re Happy and You Know It Song
- I’m in the Lord’s Army Song
- This Little Light of Mine
- Goodbye World Song
- Choose songs about light from a church hymnal. Examples might be “Send the Light” and “Shine Jesus Shine.”
- Refer to the Song Page on this website for more song options.

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Activities and Crafts:

- How to choose the best learning activities for my teaching situation.
- Visit the activities and songs pages for additional activities and crafts.

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Activities:

- Guide children in drawing illustrations to go along with the story.
- Fill a few cups with water or juice. Dissolve salt in one of them. Now, mix up the cups and let the children choose a cup for each. Who will get the salty drink? Talk about the fact that we can notice salt. Salt can make a big difference in whatever it is added to.
- It would be great to do this lesson at night or to black out windows with paper. Each child can be given a glow-in-the-dark stick, artificial or even a real candle to hold. If using a real candle, you could poke the bottom of the candle through a paper plate or thick cardboard. This will prevent hot wax from dripping. Light your candle and tell today's story. Talk about how we make the world brighter when we live a Christian life. Place a large metal bowl over your candle and talk about how no one sees the light if we do not share our faith. Now, uncover the candle. As you talk about sharing the gospel, you can light a child's candle. That child can light another's candle. Continue until light fills the room. Discuss the difference Christians can make in the world. Of course, real candles should only be used with older children and under supervision.
- One website user, Sherri, suggests this review idea for 3-4-year-olds:
  - Write general answers like "yes" and "no" on paper and place the papers on the table or somewhere in the room. Make sure the words are visible.
  - Partially darken the room, and then at least one child should be given a flashlight/torch to hold (or a few could do this at the same time).
  - When you ask a review question, the child(ren) shines the light on the correct answer.
- Play a simple word game. Bible Wordz Game is an adaptable game where children form words from letter tiles. The words relate to words found in the Bible lesson.

Invite the children to respond to this story using the adaptable "God's Story" printable reflection page. Free printables for this story.

Crafts:

- Obtain paraffin/wax and string to make candles. You will probably be able to find directions in a craft shop, in a library book or on the Internet.
- Make a first-century lamp using salt dough. For dough: Mix 2 cups flour, 1 cup salt, and 1 cup water. Roll out on board using more flour if needed. If the shapes that the children make are not too thick, then the dough can be baked in a 150°Celcius oven for 40 minutes to harden. When cool, it can be painted and sealed with varnish if desired.

Print and use these free bookmarks, trading cards or timelines. Free printables for this story.

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Other Online Resources:

- Craft: Paper lantern (sundayschoolcrafts.net)
- Craft: Salt painting (jojoebi.blogspot.co.nz)
- Online article with facts about light (sciencekids.co.nz)
- Video: “Understanding the Sermon on the Mount” by Messages of Christ. Youtube video is just over 10 minutes in length. One section (starting at 3.22) is a good explanation of salt and light.

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