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The taste and sight of the Kingdom: The people of God as physical witnesses to the Kingdom

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Author:
Alistair I. Wilson[1,2]

Affiliations:
[1]Centre for Mission, Edinburgh Theological Seminary, Edinburgh, United Kingdom

[2]Department of Christian Spirituality, Church History and Missiology, College of Human Sciences, University of South Africa, Pretoria, South Africa

Corresponding author:
Alistair Wilson,
awilson@ets.ac.uk

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I offer a 'missional reading' of Matthew 5:13–16 within the context of 'the Sermon on the Mount' and the Gospel of Matthew as a whole.

Contribution: I have argued that Jesus's words offer support for an 'integral mission' understanding of the calling of God's people. This approach, I have argued, does not advocate an over-realised 'transformational' understanding of the calling of the people of God. Followers of Jesus are not called to 'change the world' but rather to be embodied witnesses to the transforming presence of the kingdom in their lives and in the common life of the community of disciples. This demonstration of the power of the kingdom in the lives of communities of Jesus-followers has a 'missional' intent in that it will lead to the glorification of the Father as the source of any good that is evident in the lives of believers.

Keywords: Sermon; Mount; salt; light; integral; mission.

Introduction

In his plenary address to the Lausanne Congress on World Evangelization, Lausanne, Switzerland, on 17 July 1974, John Stott (1974) explained his understanding of the word *mission*:

> 'Mission', then, is not a word for everything the church does (including, for example, worship). 'The church is mission' sounds fine, but it's an overstatement. Nor does 'mission' cover everything God does in the world. For God is the Creator and is constantly active in the world in providence and in common grace, quite apart from the purposes for which he sent his Son, his Spirit, his apostles, and his church into the world. 'Mission' rather describes everything the church is sent into the world to do. 'Mission' embraces the church's double vocation to be 'the salt of the earth' and 'the light of the world'. For Christ *sends* the church into the earth to be its salt and *sends* the church into the world to be its light. (n.p.)

The metaphors of 'salt' and 'light' which Stott refers to are applied by Jesus to his disciples in Matthew 5:13–16, early in the so-called 'Sermon on the Mount'. They are among the most familiar images used by Jesus and are frequently used in discussions of discipleship, and more specifically, mission.

Francois Viljoen (2021) writes:

> The beatitudes are followed by an exhortation where the metaphors of τὸ ἅλας τῆς γῆς (the salt of the earth – probably referring to the influence within one's own community) and τὸ φῶς τοῦ κόσμου (the light of the world – probably referring to the influence outside one's own community) are used to depict the distinctive life of Jesus' followers (Mt 5:17–20). People become salt and light when they practise the principle Jesus teaches in the beatitudes. Jesus' followers should make a positive contribution to the earth and the world. (p. 3)

I intend to consider this passage in a way that both builds on Viljoen's statement and modifies it somewhat in the light of the concept of 'integral mission'. I offer this article in gratitude for the friendship and academic work of Francois Viljoen.

Main argument

In this article, I offer a 'missional reading' of Matthew 5:13–16 within the context of 'the Sermon on the Mount' and the Gospel of Matthew as a whole. I will argue that Jesus's words offer support for an 'integral mission' understanding of the calling of God's people. This approach, I will argue, does not advocate an over-realised 'transformational' understanding of the calling of the people of God. Followers of Jesus are not called to 'change the world' but rather to be embodied witnesses

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to the transforming presence of the kingdom in their lives and in the common life of the community of disciples. This demonstration of the power of the kingdom in the lives of communities of Jesus-followers has a 'missional' intent in that it will lead to the glorification of the Father as the source of any good that is evident in the lives of believers.

Before engaging in a detailed analysis of the biblical text, it is necessary to define some key terminology.

A 'missional reading'

A missional reading of Scripture is a manner of approaching the biblical text with questions raised by the academic study of mission. There is now a substantial body of literature which discusses 'missional readings' and the nature of a 'missional hermeneutic' (see especially Goheen 2016; Wright 2006 [2nd ed. 2025]; Wright 2023; Barram & Franke 2024). Various scholars have different emphases in working out a missional reading of Scripture. Several features of a missional reading may, however, be highlighted. Firstly, a missional reading draws particular attention to the plan and purpose of God (God's 'mission') as revealed in the whole of Scripture or in a specific biblical document. A missional reading typically rejects a restriction of biblical material relevant to mission to a few 'missionary texts' (such as Mt 28:16–20, the so-called 'Great Commission'). Secondly, a missional reading considers what God calls his people to be and to do in the world. God, as the primary actor in mission throughout Scripture, works out his purposes not only in the activity of people but also in their character, as they display the transforming power of God in their lives. Thirdly, a missional reading of Scripture will focus on how God gathers his people 'from every nation, tribe, people, and language' (Rv 7:9). This will involve not only paying careful attention to this theme in Scripture, but also deliberately listening to voices in that global family. As a scholarly exercise, a 'missional reading' of Scripture should draw on the best of biblical scholarship, but also on theological and missiological works that examine the Scriptures with their distinctive questions in mind. Too often, biblical scholars have not listened sufficiently closely to missiologists, and likewise, missiologists have not listened sufficiently closely to biblical scholars. A missional reading of Scripture is intended to give due attention to both groups of interpreters (and other relevant scholarship).

Integral mission

The concept of *Integral Mission* was developed in Latin America, and the English expression derives from the Spanish phrase, *misión integral*. The Spanish term, *integral*, has the sense of 'whole' or 'complete', so that *pan integral* means 'whole (grain) bread'. Integral mission is 'whole mission'. An important statement on 'Integral Mission' was produced in 2001 by the Micah Network, now known as Micah Global. The Micah declaration on integral mission (Micah Global 2001) provides a clear explanation of the significance of the term:

> Integral mission or holistic transformation is the proclamation and demonstration of the gospel. It is not simply that evangelism and social involvement are to be done alongside each other. Rather, in integral mission our proclamation has social consequences as we call people to love and repentance in all areas of life. And our social involvement has evangelistic consequences as we bear witness to the transforming grace of Jesus Christ. (p. 1)

While the use of the phrase *holistic transformation* may cause some readers to hesitate (as we shall see below), the statement makes clear that it is the grace of Jesus Christ that transforms. René Padilla (1932–2021), one of the key figures in the development of the concept of integral mission, comments on the Micah Network and its emphasis on integral mission in 2010:

> By bringing together the New Testament call to 'make disciples of all nations' (Matt 28:19) and the Old Testament call 'to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God' (Mic 6:8), the Micah Network is an encouraging sign of the emerging missionary paradigm that the world needs today. (p. 18)

Heaney (2008) also emphasises the connection between integral mission and biblical theology:

> *[M]isión integral* is being developed in light of the purpose of God. The primary focus of the purpose of God, as understood in biblical theology, is the redemption of the whole of creation. This is indispensable, therefore, to a faithful evangelical understanding of the mission of the church. (p. 238)

A missional reading of Scripture attempts to do justice to this biblical-theological approach to mission.

Over-realised transformationalist' approach to mission

I have used the phrase, *over-realised transformationalist*, to describe an approach to mission which I believe is not in keeping either with biblical theology or an appropriate attitude of Christian discipleship. The language of transformationalism has been used by J. Leeman. Leeman (2017) writes, referring to a chapter written by C. Wright:

> I am concerned, however, about the lack of nuance anytime people talk about a holistic mission. … The gospel will ultimately accomplish everything, but it doesn't accomplish everything right now. Wright acknowledges that this salvation will not be complete until the consummation of the ages, yet nothing in this chapter concretely discourages a thoroughgoing transformationalism. (p. 95)

Transformationalism, according to Leeman, is the expectation that what God intends to accomplish in the future may be experienced in the present. I am not convinced that Leeman is fair to Wright, who, it seems from Leeman's own words, provides precisely the kind of nuance that Leeman believes is absent 'anytime people talk about a holistic mission'. Nonetheless, Leeman helps us to understand what 'transformationalism' means.

With the phrase, *over-realized*, I highlight the same basic point, drawing on the term made familiar by A. Thiselton, with respect to the church in Corinth. The idea that 1 Corinthians was intended to combat 'over-realized eschatology', has somewhat fallen out of favour due to several significant challenges (see Schreiner 2018:14; Ciampa & Rosner 2010:179). Nonetheless, the phrase itself is valuable as a concise and memorable expression of the view that what God promises as an ultimate reality may be fully (or almost-fully) experienced in the present.

DeYoung and Gilbert (2011) illustrate examples of this kind of approach as follows:

> Mission statements like 'Transform the City and the World' and 'Change the City, Change the World' express a commendable desire, but simply go too far beyond what the Bible tells us we should expect to see in the world during this age, before Jesus returns. (pp. 129–130)

DeYoung and Gilbert express their concern that such statements may lead to discouragement of Christians when social problems remain over time. That is a reasonable concern, though it is important to note that something can be transformed without being perfected. Talks of transformation may indicate substantial and noticeable change (such as a new leader may bring about in an organisation) without implying that such change removes all need for further change.

I do not believe, however, that an 'over-realized transformationalist' approach is a necessary feature of 'integral mission'. While I am reluctant to identify individuals who represent this approach, some quotations from introductory materials for a recent edition of the *Lausanne Covenant* may illustrate my point by describing the opposite of such an approach. Firstly, C. J. H. Wright (2009) comments (with, I suggest, appropriate nuance):

> We see a final beautiful balance in The Lausanne Covenant between its confident trust in God (with strong, positive, urgent affirmation of God's ultimate goal of bringing the whole world to the knowledge and worship of the Lord Jesus Christ) and its lack of triumphalism (in what Christian mission has already accomplished), or arrogant, self-confident optimism (about what Christian mission has yet to accomplish). (p. 14)

Similarly, in his Introduction to the *Lausanne Covenant*, John Stott (2009) wrote:

> It is always difficult to express a mood in words. Yet 'the spirit of Lausanne' was almost tangible. We have tried to capture it in the choice of phrases. Several speakers voiced the hope that the Congress would be marked more by penitence than by triumphalism. Self-confidence and self-congratulation are never appropriate in God's children. The spirit of Lausanne was a spirit of humility and a spirit of penitence. When we sense past failures and God's present action, this leads to a look forward with hope. (p. 20)

Particularly significant are the words of Section 15 ('The Return of Christ') of the *Lausanne Covenant* itself (2009):

> We believe that the interim period between Christ's ascension and return is to be filled with the mission of the people of God, who have no liberty to stop before the end. We also remember his warning that false Christs and false prophets will arise as precursors of the final Antichrist. We therefore reject as a proud, self-confident dream the notion that people can ever build a utopia on earth. Our Christian confidence is that God will perfect his kingdom, and we look forward with eager anticipation to that day, and to the new heaven and earth in which righteousness will dwell and God will reign forever. Meanwhile, we re-dedicate ourselves to the service of Christ and of people in joyful submission to his authority over the whole of our lives. (p. 82)

The Study Guide to Section 15 (2009), written by John Stott, includes the following comments:

> What exactly is the Church's expectation or hope? Some speak in terms of the world situation getting better and better with material prosperity, international peace, social justice, political freedom and personal fulfilment, as if this were equivalent to establishing the kingdom of God. It is our duty to work for justice and freedom (as in section 5), and in God's providence and common grace we can expect some success. But Jesus gave us no expectation that everything would get steadily better. On the contrary, he warns that his coming will be preceded by the Antichrist, and that we will see false Christs and false prophets (Mark 13:21–23; 1 John 2:18; 4:1–3). We will never be able to build a just society on earth. Jesus always spoke of the kingdom as God's gift, not our achievement (Luke 12:32). (p. 87)

In these statements by leaders in the Lausanne Movement, we see an explicit rejection of the 'over-realized transformationalism' that some authors believe is tied to 'integral mission'.

Reading the Sermon on the Mount 'missionally'

The Sermon on the Mount (hereafter, SOTM) as recorded in Matthew 5–7, is a major block of Jesus's teaching on the nature of discipleship. This section of Matthew's Gospel has received a vast amount of attention from writers at both popular and academic levels.

Although 'missional readings' of Scripture have become increasingly common during the past decade or so, however, to my knowledge, there has been no specifically missional reading of the SOTM, or of Matthew 5:13–16 in particular. Some books on mission make passing reference to the passage. For example, in answering the question, 'Did Jesus foresee a Gentile mission?' Peskett and Ramachandra (2003:177–178) cite Matthew 5:13–16 with the simple assertion, 'Jesus' disciples are the salt of the earth, the light of the world', but provide no further explanation of the significance of this statement. Similarly, Niringiye (2020:225) cites Matthew 5:1–16 as part of his chapter but does not explain what he regards as the particular significance of the salt and light language other than with a brief reference to 5:16 (2020:229).

More than 40 years ago, Robert Guelich provided one of the most specific discussions of the significance of these verses

for 'mission'. Guelich (1982:119–133) devotes more than 14 pages of his book to this short section of the biblical text. More recently, Rupen Das (2016) refers to the *salt* and *light* metaphors in his book, *Compassion and the mission of God*. For example, Das (2016) writes:

> There are times when the church needs to protect itself to survive. But too often the walls keep the world out and prevent the church from influencing society, from being salt and light, and from being a witness for the kingdom of God and the King. This has a huge impact on what the role of the church should be. (p. 5)

Graham Joseph Hill draws on the words of Matthew 5:13–16 for the title of his two-volume work, *Salt, light, and a city* (2017). Apart from a brief reference to the passage in his Introduction, however, this work does not devote significant attention to the meaning of the biblical text. His opening words are, however, important for this article. Hill (2017) states:

> In Matthew 5:13–16 Jesus provides three striking missional images of the church – salt, light, and a city. Jesus confronts his listeners with a missional depiction of the church. […] The purpose of the church's missional nature is the glorification and worship of the Father. (p. 1)

The remainder of Hill's work (2017:2) is comprised of a discussion of the contributions of various theologians to a 'missional ecclesiology'.

The biblical metaphors of *salt* and *light* are employed in various discussions of mission, but do they play a key role in major mission documents? The answer, surprisingly, appears to be 'no'. The key statements of the Lausanne Movement provide an important reference point for the contemporary discussions of mission, thinking from an evangelical perspective. The metaphors do not appear in the *Lausanne Covenant* (1974), despite their use elsewhere by John Stott, a key contributor to the final form of the document. Neither do they appear in the *Manila manifesto* (1989), nor in the *Cape Town commitment* of 2010 (Cameron 2011).

Although there is no explicit reference to the metaphors of *salt* and *light*, as Jesus uses them in Matthew 5:13–16, in the text of the first three Lausanne statements, Matthew 5:13 is included in a list of biblical passages which form the foundation for Section 7 of the *Manila manifesto*.

There is one reference to Matthew 5:13 in the *Seoul statement* (2024):

> Jesus urged his disciples to see the powerful influence of their *presence* in the world by describing them as 'the salt of the earth' that must maintain its integrity and so never lose its potency. The apostle Paul explained how the gospel-inspired Christian is the very 'aroma of Christ among those who are being saved and those who are perishing'. This makes the presence of a Christian individual or community in any society – in families, neighbourhoods, schools, the workplace, or the public square – a cause for hope, as God uses his redeemed people to signal his favour and make known his nearness to a world long alienated from him. (Mt 1:23; 5:13; 2 Cor 2:15–16)

Turning to the document produced by the World Council of Churches, titled *Together towards life* (2013), there is, once again, no explicit reference to Matthew 5:13–16 in the document.[1]

This survey of literature suggests a strange paradox: Jesus's words regarding the disciples being *salt* and *light* are frequently assumed to have relevance for discussions of mission, yet rarely receive sufficient attention in studies of mission.

This article is intended to contribute to a greater interaction between biblical scholarship and missiological research. The SOTM, and Matthew 5:13–16 in particular, has frequently been associated with 'discipleship', or 'ethics', rather than with mission (see the discussions in Guelich 1982:131; Talbert 2006:27–31). One of the strengths of a 'missional reading' is that different approaches to the text may be integrated into a more holistic reading.

The literary context

Matthew 5:13–16 has several partial parallels within the canonical Gospels (Mk 4:21; 9:50; Lk 14:34–35; 8:16). None of these texts, however, makes the explicit identification of the disciples *as being* salt and light.

The scriptures of Israel supply a vital conceptual and theological framework for the interpretation of Jesus's words. Brown and Roberts (2018:59) suggest that 'Jesus's hearers would have connected these words with Israel's covenantal identity and mission from their scriptures.' While we should be cautious in claiming to know what Jesus's hearers would have done, this instinct seems fundamentally correct. Both images are found in the Old Testament. According to Garland (2001):

> In the Hebrew Scriptures, salt was used in the binding of covenants to suggest their permanence and was likened to the covenant (Exod 30:35–36; Lev 2:13; Num 18:19; 2 Chron 13:5; 11QTemple 20:13–14). (p. 61)

Several Old Testament texts associate light with various aspects of the Lord's activity (Pennington 2017:164–165). As Pennington (2017:165), among others, points out, the metaphor plays a particularly important role in the prophecy of Isaiah (see especially Is 9:2; 42:6; 49:6). The latter two texts speak of the Lord's servant as 'a light to/for the nations', thus having a distinctly missional character.

The immediate context

I will devote particular attention to Matthew 5:13–16, but it is essential to understand these verses in the context of the surrounding text.

The SOTM is the description given to Chapters 5–7 of Matthew's Gospel. The limits of the section are quite easily

1. Footnote 12 in the document does refer to a collection of reports bearing the title, *You are the light of the world*.

identified. It begins with a reference to a change of location (5:1, 'When he [*Jesus*] saw the crowds, he went up on the mountain'.[2]) The beginning of a new section is further confirmed by the summary statement which Matthew provides in 4:23–25 to draw the concluding section of his Gospel to a close. The end of the sermon is similarly easy to identify as 8:1 reads: 'When he came down from the mountain, large crowds followed him.' The references to going up a mountain (5:1) and then coming down from the mountain (8:1), clearly imply a single teaching occasion. Some scholars have questioned whether this is the case since similar material in Luke's Gospel is placed in several different settings. Luz believes that the author has created the SOTM from his sources, particularly the Gospel of Luke. Luz (2007:174) comments, 'He [*the author of the Gospel*] has inserted into the plan of the Sermon on the Plain additional, thematically appropriate material, as he did in other discourses.' While it is legitimate to recognise a measure of editorial shaping of material, there is no need to assume extensive creative insertions on the part of Matthew, as Luz appears to do.

Matthew provides further information about the opening scene, stating with: 'after he [*Jesus*] sat down, his disciples came to him' (5:1). Matthew distinguises between Jesus's proclamation to the crowds and his instruction of his followers. As France (2007) notes:

> The focus of these chapters is not then the wider proclamation of the 'good news of the kingdom' (4:23) but the instruction of those who have already responded to that proclamation, and now need to learn what life in the 'kingdom of heaven' is really about. (p. 152)

This is an important interpretative key to the SOTM, and will shape our interpretation of 5:13–16. France (2007:153) helpfully suggests 'Discourse on Discipleship' as an alternative to the traditional title for this section of Matthew's Gospel.

The first section of Jesus's teaching recorded by Matthew is the series of so-called 'beatitudes'. These balanced, proverb-like sayings provide an important theological frame for all that follows, including the passage which immediately follows, and which concerns us. There is a coherence to 5:3–10, evident from the regular form of each statement and also from the inclusion formed by reference to 'the kingdom of heaven' (5:3, 10). This inclusion places the content of the sermon in the context of the 'kingdom of heaven'. Although 5:11–12 do not follow the precise structure of 5:3–10, they are clearly closely related (effectively providing an exposition of the final statement of 'blessedness' in 5:10, as is evident from the repetition of the key terms μακάριοι [blessed] and forms of the verb διώκω [to persecute]).

Verses 13 to 16 form a clear unit of text, which is introduced rather abruptly without any connecting particle. The text reads as follows:

> [13] "You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt should lose its taste, how can it be made salty? It's no longer good for anything but to be thrown out and trampled under people's feet.
>
> [14] You are the light of the world. A city situated on a hill cannot be hidden.
>
> [15] No one lights a lamp and puts it under a basket, but rather on a lampstand, and it gives light for all who are 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 in heaven.[3]

Luz (2007) points out that:

> This section is linked to vv. 11–12 with an emphatic 'you' [ὑμεῖς]. Thus again, the subject is especially the disciples. Often, and correctly, the concluding verse 16 is regarded as a title of sorts for vv. 17–48: it is explained there what 'good works' are. (p. 203)

The repetition of the emphatic pronoun draws attention to the disciples as those who are persecuted (Nolland 2005:211).

The structure of the passage is evident (see the discussions in Guelich 1982:119; Talbert 2006:55). In two broadly parallel constructions, an initial declaration (you are, [Ὑμεῖς ἐστε]) is followed by a qualifying statement of problematic circumstances.

The second construction is more developed than the first in several ways. In the first instance, the image of a city on a hill is used to reinforce the fundamental statement, 'you are the light of the world'. This leads to a form of chiastic structure depicted in Box 1.

BOX 1: Chiastic structure.

A: The image of light (v.14a) B: The image of a city on a hill (v.14b) B': The impossibility of hiding a city on a hill (v.14c) A': The foolishness of hiding a lamp under a basket (v.15a) or the sense of placing a lamp on a stand so that it gives light to the household (v.15b)

Additionally, following the statement of problematic circumstances in the case of the light, a direct application is drawn: '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' (v.16). This application relates primarily to the metaphor of light ('In the same way, let your light shine before others'), but it also serves implicitly as the application of both of the parallel 'you are' statements. In both cases, the disciples are to make a positive impact on their context in a way that leads observers to give praise to their heavenly Father.

The power and challenge of the metaphor

In Matthew 5:13–16, Jesus uses two striking metaphors, but he does not explain why he chooses the metaphors, or what

2.Scripture quotations are from the *Christian Standard Bible* (2020), unless otherwise indicated.

3.The Greek text (Nestle-Aland 28th edition) reads:
[13] Ὑμεῖς ἐστε τὸ ἅλας τῆς γῆς· ἐὰν δὲ τὸ ἅλας μωρανθῇ, ἐν τίνι ἁλισθήσεται; εἰς οὐδὲν ἰσχύει ἔτι εἰ μὴ βληθὲν ἔξω καταπατεῖσθαι ὑπὸ τῶν ἀνθρώπων.
[14] Ὑμεῖς ἐστε τὸ φῶς τοῦ κόσμου. οὐ δύναται πόλις κρυβῆναι ἐπάνω ὄρους κειμένη·
[15] οὐδὲ καίουσιν λύχνον καὶ τιθέασιν αὐτὸν ὑπὸ τὸν μόδιον ἀλλ' ἐπὶ τὴν λυχνίαν, καὶ λάμπει πᾶσιν τοῖς ἐν τῇ οἰκίᾳ.
[16] οὕτως λαμψάτω τὸ φῶς ὑμῶν ἔμπροσθεν τῶν ἀνθρώπων, ὅπως ἴδωσιν ὑμῶν τὰ καλὰ ἔργα καὶ δοξάσωσιν τὸν πατέρα ὑμῶν τὸν ἐν τοῖς οὐρανοῖς.
There are no significant textual issues in these verses (see Nolland 2005:210–211).

he understands their significance to be. In what ways are the disciples 'salt' and in what ways are they 'light'? This is both the power and challenge of the metaphor. The power of a metaphor lies in its potential to resonate with any particular hearer or reader in a striking and personal manner. The challenge of a metaphor is that a measure of ambiguity is inevitable.

With respect to salt, Keener (2009:172) notes that commentators 'attribute to salt a variety of uses'. Davis and Allison (2004) suggest, that:

> Given the various uses for salt (cf. Pliny, *Nat. hist.* 31:73–92, 98–105) and its several symbolic associations, it is quite impossible to decide what one characteristic is to the fore in Mt 5:13. (p. 473)

This need not, however, limit our ability to hear the meaning of the text. I agree with Davis and Allison (2004:473) that 'salt is, like light, a symbol which should not be delimited to any one referent'. Nonetheless, such appropriate caution should not lead us to despair of understanding the fundamental nature of the metaphors.

Both salt and light are realities in the natural world that are intended to have an impact on their context, not the other way round. Wright (2010:125) expresses this in terms of 'the call to distinctiveness'. Wright explains, 'Salt and light are distinctive, penetrating, transforming – utterly contrasting to corruption and darkness.' Wright further argues that Jesus's words express the principle of holiness found in Leviticus 19. According to Wright (2010:125–126), 'an essential aspect of the mission of God's people is nothing other than to be what they are – by living out the holiness of God in practical everyday living'. Like the physical realities of salt and light, the disciples are to be physical witnesses to the character of the kingdom of heaven.

Being disciples and disciple-making in the wider context of the Gospel of Matthew

The reference to the disciples in 5:1 places the SOTM in the context of discipleship. This is the first use of the noun μαθητής [disciple] in the Gospel of Matthew. While the term is used in diverse ways in the remainder of the Gospel, it is notable that the final pericope, the so-called 'Great Commission', also refers to the disciples coming to Jesus on a mountain. The common features of the two passages suggest a possible inclusion (see Box 2).

BOX 2: Inclusion suggested for the two passages.

Ἰδὼν δὲ τοὺς ὄχλους ἀνέβη **εἰς τὸ ὄρος**, καὶ καθίσαντος αὐτοῦ προσῆλθαν αὐτῷ **οἱ μαθηταὶ** αὐτοῦ·
Οἱ δὲ ἕνδεκα **μαθηταὶ** ἐπορεύθησαν εἰς τὴν Γαλιλαίαν **εἰς τὸ ὄρος** οὗ ἐτάξατο αὐτοῖς ὁ Ἰησοῦς

Note: Greek text is from Aland, K., Aland, B., Karavidopoulos, J., Martini, C.M. & Metzger, B.M., 2012, *Novum Testamentum Graece*, 28th edn., Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, Stuttgart.

Although the verbs that describe the movement of the disciples are different, there is a striking connection between the two passages, particularly with respect to the mountain setting. Regarding the Great Commission passage, Osborne (2010) notes the connection between these two passages, among others:

> This, of course, is the final mountain scene in Matthew, and it both concludes his emphasis and sums up his theology on 'the mountain' [τὸ ὄρος] (see 4:8; 5:1; 14:23; 15:29; 17:1, 9; 21:1; 24:3). (p. 1077)

Not only are Jesus's followers described as disciples in Matthew 28:16, but the commission that Jesus gives to them is to 'make disciples' [μαθητεύσατε] (28:19). This verb is the main verb in Jesus's instructions. Of the three participles which support the finite verb (*going*, *baptising*, *teaching*), the first provides limited information regarding what is involved in making disciples, other than that it is a deliberate act which requires the initiative of the disciples. *Baptising*, on the other hand, suggests an act of formal initiation into the community of Jesus's followers. The final participle, *teaching*, requires that the process of 'making disciples' involves 'teaching them to observe everything I have commanded you' (28:20). This aspect of the task of making disciples includes (at least) everything that Matthew has recorded with respect to the teaching of Jesus, including the SOTM and other fundamental instruction, such as his words regarding the 'greatest commandment(s)' (Mt 22:34–40).

Paying attention to the connections between Matthew 5:1–16 and Matthew 28:16–20 highlights the connection between being disciples and making disciples in Matthew's Gospel. If we regard the 'Great Commission' as a foundational statement of the 'mission' of Jesus's disciples, then to be in relationship with Jesus as one of his disciples is a fundamental requirement ('I am with you always, to the end of the age', 28:20) and to have been instructed in the full range of Jesus's teaching is necessary before one can teach others.

Salt, light, and the Kingdom of God

Our discussion so far has indicated that the metaphors of salt and light should be understood with reference to the disciples of Jesus, the group being instructed in the SOTM, and that they should be understood in the context of the kingdom of Heaven. Jesus laid out the values of the kingdom in 5:3–10(12). Now, in 5:13–16, he indicates that these values are to be embodied in the disciples in a way that has an impact on their context. Here, I wish to respectfully differ from the wording Viljoen uses in the quotation cited at the beginning of my chapter. Viljoen writes (2021:3), 'People become salt and light when they practise the principle Jesus teaches in the beatitudes'. Jesus does not say that the disciples *become* salt and light. Rather, they *are* salt and light (Tizon 2018:95). The question is whether they allow this reality to be significant in their context. As Ladd (1959) states:

> The sons of the Kingdom cannot help but exercise an influence in human history for they are the light of the world and the salt of the earth (Matt. 5:13–16). So long as light is light, it must shine; and so long as salt is salt, it must preserve. (p. 121)

Similarly, Bonhoeffer (2003) states:

> 'You *are* the salt' – not 'you should be the salt'! The disciples are given no choice whether they want to be salt or not. No appeal is

> made to them to become salt of the earth. Rather, they just are salt, whether they want to be or not, by the power of the call which has reached them. (p. 111)

Some commentators emphasise the warning character of Jesus's words in these verses. For example, Davis and Allison (2004:473) state that 'The disciples, like salt, have several characteristic qualities, qualities without which they would cease to be what they are and instead become useless.' There is, of course, an element of warning in Jesus's words. While stating that the disciples are salt and light, he also suggests possible ways in which the intended impact of salt and light might be negated (somewhat vaguely in the case of salt; somewhat bizarrely in the case of a lamp). Yet, I suggest, the primary purpose of the metaphors is to point to a potential influence for good. Both salt and light are to bring a positive impact to their surroundings.

The purpose of salt-and-light disciples

The positive sense of the metaphors is reinforced by the final statement of application in 5:16: 'In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven.' Although this statement relates specifically to the metaphor of light, it applies by extension to the metaphor of salt.

Blomberg (2012:403) rejects some popular interpretations of the 'salt and light' language, 'in terms of modern uses of salt and light (e.g. adding flavor or color)' as anachronistic. He claims: 'Above all else, Jesus is teaching that disciples must arrest corruption and illuminate darkness.' This is legitimate, but we may nonetheless say that these are positive functions in that they maintain goodness and brightness. Likewise, disciples of Jesus are to be influences for good in their communities.

Those who are disciples of Jesus are, by that fact, salt and light. Their purpose (their 'mission', we might say) is to bring 'glory' to the Father (5:16). While it is doubtless true that many people come to glorify the Father through a spoken testimony, and indeed this is an essential aspect of the calling of disciples, it is not what Jesus emphasises in this text here. Here, 'your good works' [ὑμῶν τὰ καλὰ ἔργα], namely acts that reflect the character of the kingdom, as described in 5:3–10), cause others to give praise [δοξάσωσιν] to God as the One who calls for and enables such works. A strikingly similar statement is made in 1 Peter 2:11–12: 'Conduct yourselves honorably among the Gentiles, so that when they slander you as evildoers, they will observe your good works and will glorify God on the day he visits'. Note the similar Greek phrases, ἐκ τῶν καλῶν ἔργων and δοξάσωσιν, in 1 Peter 2:12. In 1 Peter 2:12, the glorification of God is linked to the anticipation of God's eschatological visitation.

If a disciple should allow his salt to lose its saltiness, or her light to be hidden, that does not change who the disciple is (how can one change the essence of salt and light?), but rather it restricts the effectiveness of the disciple as the means to bring about what Jesus seeks to accomplish through that person. Because Jesus calls his disciples to action with 'all authority' (Mt 28:18), the disciples dare not take this danger lightly.

The extent and limits of 'Integral Mission'

Some people are reticent regarding 'integral mission' because they fear that it places responsibility on the church to 'transform' society. This, they claim, requires the church to be distracted from its primary calling. DeYoung and Gilbert (2011) define 'the mission of the church' as follows:

> The mission of the church is to go into the world and make disciples by declaring the gospel of Jesus Christ in the power of the Spirit and gathering those disciples into churches, that they might worship the Lord and obey his commands now and in eternity to the glory of God the Father. (p. 62)

They further comment (2011:62), 'This mission is a specific set of things Jesus has sent his church into the world to accomplish and is significantly narrower than "everything God commands." Again, they explain (2011:63): 'Making disciples – that's our task.' Yet they also state (2011):

> We are of the strong opinion that the Bible teaches that we Christians are to be a people of both declaration and demonstration, and that our churches are to be communities of both declaration and demonstration. (p. 223)

It appears that DeYoung and Gilbert are determined to reject a 'transformationalist' approach. They ask (2011):

> If 'building for the kingdom', 'proclaiming the gospel without words', and 'joining God in his work of making all things new' are not the correct motivations for good works, what are? (p. 224)

The phrases in quotation marks are examples of approaches to mission which DeYoung and Gilbert find inadequate, and we may agree to some greater or lesser extent with their concerns, but these phrases do not seem to me to be of the essence of 'integral mission'. On the other hand, the 'declaration and demonstration' of the gospel does seem of the essence of integral mission (as defined in the *Micah declaration*) and is affirmed by DeYoung and Gilbert.

Several points may be made. The task Jesus gives to his disciples in these verses is, firstly, to *be* rather than to *do*. Secondly, the calling to be salt and light is addressed to the community of disciples, the people of God. Stephen I. Wright (2019:111) correctly highlights this, noting that 'Jesus seeks to establish a group identity among the disciples (as in Mt 5:13 [*You are the salt of the earth*]; and Mt 5:14, [*You are the light of the world*]'. Thirdly, it is the 'good works' of the community of disciples that have the missional impact of bringing glory to God.

David Bosch (1980:227) argues that it is impossible to determine which of the images Jesus uses here, referring to proclamation and which to service. A healthy understanding of integral mission enables us to see proclamation and service as integrated and inseparable in kingdom discipleship.

Similarly, Moreau, Corwin and McGee (2015) claim that the mission of the church must be understood as multi-faceted:

> The mission of the church is that it be used by God (1) to witness to people about the reconciliation offered in Christ; (2) to invite people to worship their creator by leading them to Christ; (3) to incorporate those led to Christ into local church contexts; and (4) to teach them, as people reconciled to God, to obey all that Christ commanded in being salt and light in the world. All four components are necessary and integral to the mission of the church. (p. 83)

I believe that this is correct and does justice to both Matthew 5:13–16 and 28:16–20. Each text should be read in the light of the other, with each describing a form of discipleship that does full justice to the calling Jesus places on his followers.

Conclusion

I have argued in this article that a 'missional reading' of Matthew 5:13–16, understood in the light of relevant Old Testament texts and Matthew's concluding narrative in Matthew 28:16–20 may legitimately be understood to provide support for an understanding of 'integral mission' when the latter phrase is carefully defined.

The primary calling on disciples in Jesus's words is not to 'change the world' in a naïve 'transformationalist' sense, but rather to be physical embodiments of the kingdom of heaven (God) in such a way that their actions and attitudes lead to praise being given to God. Their role is thoroughly missional in that their lives should lead others to acknowledge the glorious character of the disciples' Father in heaven. This understanding is in keeping with standard definitions of 'integral mission'. As salt and light are physical realities that influence their contexts for good, so followers of Jesus are physical embodiments of the character of the kingdom. They are salt and light because of their entrance into the kingdom. Only if they disguise that reality by their inconsistency of life will their missional impact be diminished.

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