

The Little Things: PENCE, CENTS AND 50 CENT BOLTS **Matthew 5:13-16 [MW20-41]**
Sermon preached by Rev Wayne Thornton at Mangawhai & Wellsford, Sunday 08 November 2020

I was reading the other day about some of the advantages of living in a small town:

- you don't have to use your indicators because everybody knows where you're going
you dial a wrong number and talk for an hour anyway
you drive into a ditch 5 kilometres out of town and word gets back before you do
- you write a cheque on the wrong bank and it covers it for you
you miss a Sunday at church and receive a get well card
someone asks you how you feel, and then listens to what you say!
- ah, the little things in life.

Maybe you've heard someone - grandmother, school teacher, wise uncle say that

- "it's the little things in life"
"the little things in life that count"
- maybe like me you've often been told:
look after the pennies... and the pounds will look after themselves
- or if you started your banking career somewhat later
look after the cents ... and the dollars will look after themselves

Now at six you would probably believe that

- at sixteen you'd say "yeah right!"
how's that gonna get me an iPad, a Playstation, a 15 speed bike ...

However I'm here today to reassure you that trite as it may sound - it is true

- it is the little things in life that make all the difference
I'm with Jesus on this one
- it is most definitely, positively, encouragingly true
that what seem small, tiny, almost insignificant, easily overlooked things in life
turn out to be the most important
- far more important than we give them credit for

I was reading the other day about the 1962 Formula One World Championship

- it was going down to the wire between Jim Clarke and Graham Hill
everything was riding on the last race, whoever finished best in that would win
- Jim Clarke was not just finishing best, he was leading, and leading well
unfortunately for him a distributor bolt worked loose and his race was over
- there goes the world championship
all because a 50 cent (50 pence?) bolt failed
- sure engine, tyres, shock absorbers, brakes, aerodynamics are all very important
however a 50 cent bolt turned out to be more important than them all

The little things in life

- Jesus says these are more important than we give credit for
they are easily, perhaps usually, overlooked
which of course is why Jesus brings it to our attention in the first place

We preachers are pretty good at filling the air with "should" and "ought" and "must"

- however Jesus does not say to us today you ought or should or must anything
Jesus says simply "you are the salt of the earth"
"you are the light of the world"

You don't have to do anything or become anything

- you already are ... and what are you?
salt of the earth and light of the world

You know we consume huge quantities of salt in small amounts - why?

- the obvious answer is it makes the food taste better
salt seems to bring out the flavour
- however researchers have discovered
that salt actually obscures many flavours of food
yet we love it
- one theory is salt makes food taste so much better
because it masks the bitterness of some of our foods
- and yet they don't know why!

Can you imagine chips without salt?

- have you tasted salt free butter?
if you are or ever have been on a salt-reduced diet
you're probably all too aware of the amazing difference a little salt makes

Ruth Bell-Graham, wife of evangelist Billy Graham, includes this piece in her book *Legacy of a Magpie* (p.63)

It happened in one of those countries whose leaders deny the existence of God but allow the church to exist under a secretary for church affairs. In this case the secretary was not only a brilliant pastor, he was a medical doctor as well. One day he was called on the carpet by the authorities. Knowing there would be a new crackdown on the Christians, he started right in: "I know you gentlemen wish to interrogate me," he began. "But first may I say something?" Permission granted, he continued. "You know I am a medical doctor. I know the importance of salt in the human body: it should be maintained at about 2 percent. If it is less, a person gets sick. If it is eliminated altogether, he will die. Now Jesus Christ has said Christians are the salt of the earth." Then he paused. "That is all. And now gentlemen, what is it that you wish to say to me?" "Oh nothing, nothing ..." they agreed. And he was dismissed.

Jesus tells his followers that they are "the salt of the earth" - a little thing like salt

How many of you have ever been in total, absolute, all-encompassing darkness?

- no light at all
can't even see your hand in front of your nose - pretty scary
- like down a cave, or out in the bush
or a power cut on an overcast winter's night
- in that situation it's amazing what a difference one small candle makes
a single AA battery torch is like a spotlight
- when the darkness is particularly great
you don't need a huge amount of light to make a great difference

Jesus tells his followers they are "the light of the world"

- a fragile quality like light
isn't it interesting that when Jesus spoke of us, his followers
seizing upon some metaphor to characterise who we are
- he didn't say: "you are a great army marching on the world"
nor did he say: "you are a loudspeaker put up in the main street
to shout my message to every body"

Rather Jesus said that we are "salt" and we are "light"

- small, fragile
and yet both of these things go a long way
they can make all the difference
- they can make all the difference these little things in life
pence, cents, 50 cent bolts, salt, light

When I was at primary school, nearly all my classmates attended Sunday School

- a good number at the same church as me
by the time I reached the 4th form - I discovered to my embarrassment
during a lunchtime conversation that I was alone in admitting my belief in God
- however at assembly every morning we did have a reading from the Bible
and pray the Lord's Prayer
a tradition that sadly has long since stopped

Time was at Easter and Christmas there would be films and programmes

- in prime time television that at least alluded to the reason for the season
pretty hard to find them now
- and once - yes it's true - once it was indeed a good thing
even more than just "okay" to be a Christian, now it's a bit oddball, strange
something to be ridiculed, ignored or argued against with hostility

This is a record of a conversation on a university campus:

"So she says to me, 'Just because you're a Christian, that doesn't make you better than everybody else. Christians killed people in the Crusades. Religion is the cause of most of the world's problems.' So I said, 'Hold on! Back off! I didn't say I was better than anybody. I just said I was a Christian. A Christian isn't somebody who thinks he's better than everybody. He's just trying to follow Jesus.' Frankly I was surprised by her hostility. In a way, it hurt to hear her say those things, but then I thought to myself, 'She's got her point. To be a Christian is be somebody who is odd.'

How many of you have ever had children say something like:

- you know we're the only family in our street going to church?
or how come we have to go to church and they don't!
- it's a good question
in this context Jesus' words about 'salt' and 'light'
have a whole different ring to them
- perhaps our vocation as followers of Jesus always is to be salt and light
that seemingly insignificant, yet surprisingly powerful substance
set loose in the world, that makes a difference

Recall stories Jesus told in which something the world regards as small and insignificant

- is, when seen through the perspective of God's kingdom
full of power
- the one pearl of great price, the one lost coin, the one lost sheep
a tiny mustard seed - the little things in life
- pence, cents and 50 cent bolts

Is it perhaps that Jesus was warning us

- that it is our own peculiar vocation to seem small and insignificant to the world?
to work behind the scenes, secretly growing

I mean, how many of you drive golden chariots

- with the word "Christian" plastered in bold letters on the side ... ?

You enter quietly, you do your work

- you don't look that different from anyone else
however when you stuck up for that wayward child everyone else had given up on
when you spoke to that person everyone else ignored
- when you told your friend who was going through a rough patch
you would be there for them
- when you didn't react angrily
when you spoke out against harsh treatment
when you quietly and unobtrusively read your Bible in the lunchroom
- that was when you were salt and light!

Jesus has put a great deal of trust in us - making us his salt, his light

- of course we'd understand if Jesus had said:
I am the light
I am the salt
- the amazing thing is that he turns to ordinary people like us and says:
You are light
You are salt
- and by the grace of God you are!

It was a tense, very difficult meeting, growing more difficult. The committee had been dealing with the problem of an employee who had committed a theft.

"This business cannot function with people who are thieves," said one of the members of the committee. There was widespread agreement in the group. None of us wanted to work where people could not be trusted

"I think a rule is a rule. All of the employees will be watching us,"

"We must make an example of her as a warning to everyone," said another.

"As I see it, this is a cut and dried case. No need for agony over this one. She admitted that she stole the money. She knows that it is wrong. It as simple as that," chimed in a third.

At length, one of our colleagues spoke up, a rather quiet person, not known for her leadership. "I think our company ought to be the sort of place where people are more important even than good rules. As you say, she has admitted her guilt. There are mitigating circumstances - her marriage situation, her two children. None of that excuses this. But I don't think she is asking us to be excused. I think she is asking us to give her another chance. I would like all of our employees to know that this is the sort of company where someone can make a terrible, tragic mistake, and yet be given a second chance."

In that tension-filled darkened room, light shone. Some might say, in that light, there appeared a vision of the kingdom of God.

So there you are - the little things in life are the big things

- and the BIG question is:
are we, the followers of Jesus
salty enough to make people thirst for the water of life?