

You Are Salt and Light

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[0:00] If you would open up your Bibles to Matthew chapter 5, we're going to be looking at verses 13 through 16 this morning, and let me read for you this morning these words of our Lord and Savior Jesus.

He says, You, you are the salt of the earth, but if salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored?

It's no longer good for anything except to be thrown out and trampled under people's feet. You, you are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden, nor do people light a lamp and put under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house.

In the same way, let your light shine before others so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.

Amen. Blend in or bail out. Sooner or later, as a Christian, you're going to have to figure out what God is calling you to in terms of your relationship to the world.

[1:29] Now, the world, biblically understood, is not so much the planet, though the Bible does talk about the planet, but in passages like in 1 John 2, when we learn about the world, here's what is being said.

It's the group of non-Christians who are living their lifestyles, and it creates currents. Currents of ungodliness.

And so we've got to figure out, as Christians called out from the world, how are we to live in relationship to the world? Because we used to be numbered with them.

And the classic polar opposites are blend in or bail out. And both are mistakes. So the blend in approach is this.

Hey, you know, in the name of relevance, I'm just going to kind of blend in with the world and look like them and talk like them and do what they do, you know, with the hope of having some kind of influence.

[2:37] But Jesus doesn't allow that. He's going to call us this morning to be distinct from the world. And when we're distinct from the world, we're able to make a lasting difference for Christ in the world.

But if you blend in, you're not going to make a difference for Jesus. So mistake number one is blend in. Mistake number two is bail out. And that's the idea like, okay, I'm a Christian.

I don't want to have anything to do with the world. I don't want to have any dealings with the world. So I'm cutting out. I'm going to call my best Christian friends and we're going to find a beautiful place in the valley and the Rockies and set up a little compound with big walls and not let anybody in.

Bail out. Jesus doesn't allow that either. He calls us to be distinct from the world, but to remain in the world so that we can make a lasting difference for Him in the world.

And this morning, the words that we just read out of Matthew, He guides us. He shows us how to live in this world for the glory of God.

[3:57] He shows us how to be distinct from the world yet remaining in the world and making a difference for Him. And so right here in this passage, Jesus is going to help us to see how we're to be in this world as Christians.

He says, you are the salt of the earth. You are the light of the world. Our distinctly Christian, Christ-like lives are to be salt and light in a decaying and dark world.

And I want you to see it in the words of Jesus. I want you to see this in Jesus' words. So this morning, we're going to look at four words. I pulled them right out of this passage.

It's the word you. We've got to be clear on who that is. You, salt, light, and the word that. Jesus is getting at purpose.

You, salt, light, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in Heaven.

[5:26] So, let's turn our attention to the word you. We see that in Matthew chapter 5 verse 13. That first word, you are the salt of the earth.

And then look at verse 14. You are the light of the world. Remember those iconic recruiting posters from World War II? Uncle Sam, I want you!

Remember that? Jesus is basically saying to us this morning, you. You! I've called you to something. You.

This word is emphatic, which means like in the original language, it's glowing. It actually means you and you only.

So, Jesus is talking to His disciples and He's saying, you guys are the light of the world. You guys are the salt of the earth. Not the Roman government.

[6:26] Not the religious leaders here. Not the police. Not the school system. You are my salt. You are my light.

So, we've got to be clear on who He's talking about. So, if you remember, this is the Sermon on the Mount. And if you turn and you look at Matthew 5, verse 1, it starts giving you some clues.

Jesus is on this mountainside talking to His disciples who have come to Him. Now, who are His disciples? If you look at the end of Matthew 4, He's already called some.

Simon, Peter, and Andrew who are fishermen. And then He also calls James and John. You see that in Matthew 4, verses 18-22.

And they followed after Him. So, here we have Jesus talking to His early disciples. Ordinary Joes. Just like you and me. These guys were Galilean peasants.

[7:30] Seriously, there was nothing impressive about them. We've got a lot to relate to them. I hope that wasn't an insult. It's just kind of where we are, isn't it? Just ordinary people following after an extraordinary Savior.

And so, what I want to remind you of is that these are real people Jesus is speaking to back in the first century. This is a real sermon spoken on a real mountainside to real disciples of His, His first disciples.

And what He just got done saying at the beginning of the sermon out is what we've been talking about. The Beatitudes. And so, what He's been saying is this. These are the kingdom traits of my citizens.

These eight Beatitudes are to mark in increasing measure my followers. Christians. These eight beautiful traits in God's eyes are true of those people I've called out of the domain of darkness and brought into the kingdom that I am bringing about.

The kingdom of heaven. Who is this you? Early disciples and Jesus already covered the ground of you're to be beautiful in God's sight.

[8:51] All eight of these Beatitudes are going to be true of you. And here's why He's saying this. The Beatitudes have an effect. If you are living out the Beatitudes, if you're living them out, you're going to have an influence on the world around you.

It's automatic. It's going to happen. If you are growing in Christlikeness as the Beatitudes are a profile of, you are going to influence others around you.

And Jesus says, if you live like this, if this is your character, you're going to be salt and light in the people around you. You can't hold it back.

And so what Jesus is doing here is saying, hey, if these Beatitudes are true of you, and they are if you belong to Jesus, it's all by His grace.

grace, you can't make yourself beautiful in God's eyes. Only His grace does that. But as He does that in growing measure, it makes you stand out in a world that's decaying and dark.

[10:08] You. He's telling His disciples, you are the salt. You are the light. Don't look around you. Nobody else is going to be that. You will be that for me in this dark place.

So now the question we've got to ask is, okay, Jesus is talking to His disciples in the first century. Okay, He's on a mountainside. How does that apply to us? Who likes roller coasters?

I have some friends who are going to go on a roller coaster fest here pretty soon. They're really excited. I personally don't like roller coasters. I don't like paying for getting jostled around.

It's just old man disease, I guess. Have you been driving down 94 and you see the screaming eagle, six flags?

That's an impressive, impressive roller coaster. This morning I want to talk to you about another roller coaster. It's called the roller coaster of discipleship. And on this roller coaster, there's two tracks.

[11:14] And they're Jesus' words. follow me as a disciple and go make disciples of the nations. And Jesus leads us on this track of discipleship.

We go up and down. Loop de loop. Highs, lows, stomach in your throat, down through the dark tunnels, all the way out. So here's what I want you to imagine with me.

We're all on the platform of the roller coaster called discipleship. And we're waiting for the car to come in so we can get on. And so we're looking down the line and here comes the car.

And you know, you've seen this. They come really fast and then they slow down real quick and people's hair goes in front of them and then they look kind of dazed. Do you know what I'm talking about? This car comes in and we're noticing that there's a whole bunch of Galilean peasants on board.

And emblazoned on the side of this roller coaster car is a three letter word in bright red called you. You.

[12:22] And it pulls up the safety bar goes up and all of these first century disciples get out. They get out on the platform on the other side and they turn around and you know who they're looking at?

They're looking at us. Do you know why? Because it's our turn to get into the you. to get into the you. You are the salt.

You are the light. This is part of following Jesus and for generation to generation, faithful Christians before us have been on this coaster.

They have followed Jesus faithfully. They have run their course and now it's our turn. it's our turn to get into this roller coaster car in this city of Kenosha and to be salt and to be light.

You are a citizen of heaven, brother, sister in Christ. God's grace has busted into your life and he's radically changed you. You were dead and he made you alive.

[13:31] You were in the domain of darkness, now you're the kingdom of light. You were living for the world, now you've been called out of the world yet to remain in the world for Jesus' sake.

So make no mistake, brothers and sisters, Jesus today is calling you to follow him. To be salt and to be light in our little slice of the darkness.

us. He's calling us to live distinct lives for the glory of God. So let's, we looked at the word you, and I hope you're feeling the weight of that.

You are the salt of the earth. You are the salt of the earth. salt of the earth.

If they're the essential marks of a Christian, salt and light are the metaphors that describe our impact. salt. You are the salt of the earth.

[14:47] What's the primary function of salt? Anyone? Anyone? Anyone? Anyone? Bueller? Bueller? Bueller? Did someone say dessert?

Preserve. That's right. Now remember, Jesus is speaking to a people back in the first century in the ancient Near East, and Jesus, on his itinerant preaching, he didn't stay in Super 8's.

He wouldn't walk in from the heat, turn on the air conditioning, and open up his little mini fridge.

They didn't have refrigerators. So how did they preserve meat?

They packed it in salt. And that salt served as a preservative. It kept it from decaying. It slowed down the rot process.

The primary function of salt in the first century was to be a preservative. We use it for flavor.

[15:50] And throwing on ice, they used it to preserve meat. I hope you see what Jesus is implying about the world.

You see it? Jesus is saying that there is a moral decay among the inhabitants of the earth.

A moral decay. A spiritual decay. A spiritual rot. And at its heart is called sin. Now, if you left this building today and you pulled somebody aside on the street and you asked them, hey, what's the source of all the world's problems, you might get something like this.

Well, it's ignorance, so we need to educate. Or you might hear something like this. You know what? There is some socioeconomic inequality. So we need to spread out what the haves have to the have-nots.

What Jesus is saying here is this, and he's not pulling any punches. Jesus is saying that the problem, the source of this decay is in the heart of every human being that walks the earth.

[17:14] This problem in the human heart is the equivalent of decaying meat. The problem is sin. You all experienced the rot-out, decaying effect of sin.

whether that's in your own character, or in your relationship with your spouse, or in your family, or with your friendships, or in a city, or in a county, or in a state, or in a nation.

Sin rots stuff out. It brings decay. It disintegrates. Jesus is implying something very serious here about the real source of human problems.

And so what Jesus is calling us to, he's saying this, I have made you beautiful by my grace. I've called you out of darkness into the light.

You were in the devil's kingdom, now you're in my kingdom. And now that I've saved you, I've positioned you, and I am packing you into your city like salt.

[18:33] To be a preservative presence. To slow down the moral decay happening all around us. I'm not sure if you guys notice this, but there's a bit of a warning here too.

You are the salt of the earth, but if salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored. It's no longer good for anything except to be thrown out and trampled under people's feet.

That word if is a huge clue. Salt losing its taste. Do you know what Jesus is saying for us? It's when a Christian loses his or her distinctiveness.

When a Christian strays from the beatitudes. When there's no longer a hunger and thirst for righteousness that governs all things.

When a purity of heart means nothing more to you anymore. What Jesus is saying here is if we lose our distinctiveness, it's like salt that's lost its taste.

[19:48] It becomes useless. And in that day, useless salt was thrown into the first century garbage heap, which was the street, and got trampled on.

How does a Christian lose his or her saltiness, distinctiveness? Because it does happen. maybe you're sitting there right now and the heat's starting to turn up.

And I'm not talking about the temperature here. When we start blending in with the world, that's when we start to lose our saltiness, our distinctiveness.

Instead of becoming more and more Christ-like, instead of day after day making choices based on God's word, I'm going to believe this, God. I'm going to trust you for this, God.

You're telling me to live this way, God, and I'm going to because I want to bring glory to your name, God. Instead of that, what happens is it becomes one compromise after another. And you compromise into being indistinguishable from the decay around us.

[21:09] According to Jesus, our witness rises or falls on being distinct from the decay of our culture. Our impact on the world depends on the saltiness of our presence.

We cannot blend into the decay of the world. We've got to be distinct from it. That's why he called us to himself to begin with. Now, if you know you're sitting here and you're like, I've professed Christ but I am, I know it, I'm indistinguishable from the rest of the world, I blend in great.

If you know that's you, you know what Jesus would say to you? He'd say this, blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are those who mourn their sin for they shall be comforted. Come to me. Come to me. Turn from your sin, turn to me.

And I will make you salty again. when a Christian slips into worldliness, they become very acute of their own unhappiness.

[22:37] But what I need to tell you today, if you're in that spot, there's much more riding on your character and on your witness than just your happiness.

Your life is making a statement about the kingdom of heaven, about what Jesus has done. Turn to him. I'm not sure if this is a confession, but I like DC talk.

I grew up listening to them. In the 90s, they released an album called Jesus Freak. And in one of the tracks called What If I Stumble, Brennan Manning, who is a Christian speaker at the time, he's recorded.

And this is what he said. The greatest single cause of atheism today is Christians who acknowledge Jesus with their lips, but walk out the door and deny Him by their lifestyle.

And then he says, this is what an unbelieving world simply finds unbelievable. people. There's more riding on your witness than just your happiness.

[23:56] So now the question becomes, how does a Christian stay salty? You stay close to Jesus. You get in close to Him.

You come real close and you abide in Him and He bears His fruit through you. Are you lacking salt? Go to Jesus. He'll make you beautiful again. What should you expect?

if you're living for Jesus and you're living out the Beatitudes by faith, trusting in Him and growing measure, what should you expect?

How does this salt actually show up? What will happen? Well, you probably already experienced. I tried to point out some of them. Here's one. Conversations.

[24:57] Have you ever experienced this? You're among non-Christians and they start opening cans of cuss. It's all over you and they realize they're cussing in your presence and they say things like, oh, I'm so sorry.

I'm so sorry for swearing. I'm so sorry. I'm so sorry. I'll try not to swear around you. You're being salt. You're having an effect.

The cleanness of your speech is having a salt effect on their decaying speech. or another kind of conversation salt.

This is when you walk into a group of people and they're obviously talking about something and when you walk in, their faces drop and they're looking at their feet and they start talking about the weather.

Your salty presence has brought about a topic change in conversation. who knows what they are talking about. That's good. That's being salty.

[26:06] They might not like it, but you're being salty. Entertainment. When was the last time you walked out of a movie?

Because it was just rank. When was the last time you're driving with your kids and you're like, I've got to turn this off or turn the station because this is just decay.

Mom, dad, be salty. Be salt in your family. Workplace. Jesus is calling us to speak truth.

To work hard. To not cut corners. To speak the truth in love. In the workplace, your salt shows up big time.

When you don't gossip, when you don't lie, when you don't cheat, when you insist on doing it the right way, and when you work hard. Just a quick word about politics.

[27:09] Jesus isn't going to bring in the kingdom through the Republican or Democratic party. Can we all agree on that? You are the salt. You are the light.

It's us. And so we will work through the democratic process to be salt and light. But here's how I want you to help you think in terms of the presidential cycle that we're in.

Think about it this way. You are a citizen of heaven with American voting rights. That's who you are. So vote your conscience. Live for Jesus. Make the most of the opportunities we have to influence politics for Jesus' name.

We are to be a preservative presence for Jesus. You are the salt of the earth. You are the light of the world.

[28:14] You see this in 14. You are the light of the world. What's the primary function of light? Let me tell you. It's to help people see in darkness.

That's it. Light helps people see in darkness. When it's dark, you can't see. When there's light, you can see in darkness. Jesus uses a couple illustrations here.

He says, you are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. The picture there is an elevated city, maybe even the city of Jerusalem on Mount Zion. A city set on a hill, elevated, and in the windows lit up with oil lamps.

They didn't have light switches, Edison not yet, no LEDs, oil lamps. But a city at night elevated with oil lamps lights it up.

You'll see it. It gives you, it helps people in darkness to see. You don't light a lamp and put under a basket, no.

[29:26] You put on a stand, elevated, distinct, so everybody can see. Light enables people to see in darkness.

And so what is Jesus implying about the world? The world is in darkness. darkness. darkness. What does he mean by that? Well, it's decaying because of sin, right?

Darkness is a nice cover for decay. And if you were to open up your Bibles to John 3, would you just go over there real quick? John 3. You know John 3.16.

Look at verse 19. And this is the judgment. The light has come into the world and the people love the darkness rather than the light because their deeds were evil.

For everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come to light lest his deeds should be exposed. The darkness is the sinful concealing of the decaying sin.

[30:33] Jesus doesn't pull any punches. Not only is the world decaying, the world is in darkness.

It likes its own rot. It keeps it hidden. It keeps it out of sight. And if you were recently converted or converted as an adult, you know what he's talking about.

You know what it was like to hide your sin. You know it. You didn't want to be exposed. And so what is Jesus calling us to do here? We are to stand out.

We are to be his light. You know that elevation theme? A city on a hill, a light on a lampstand? That simply means being distinct from yet present in.

If we're living out the beatitudes, our presence is going to have a shining exposing effect on the sin of people around us. We're not trying to be self-righteous.

[31:39] We're not trying to be the police. It's going to have an effect because it's a real change that he's affected in us. People will know. People will feel it.

And so there's this moral dimension to our shining as lights. darkness. But there's more here.

Not only do our lives light up the darkness and expose people's sin which they may not like, but some may appreciate it.

We are to be shining the light of the gospel so that when a sinner's sin is exposed, we get to point them to the light of life.

Jesus. The light of the world. John 8.12. Do you know what a marquee sign is? If you drive out 50 and you're like, I wonder what's showing at Tinseltown tonight.

[32:47] And you look on top of the building, there's a big lit up sign that says all the movies being shown, that's a marquee. And it's lit up at night to shine in the darkness.

You are an incarnate living marquee for Jesus. Your life says something. It points to something. It lights up the darkness for Jesus. You're a living marquee sign. And might I add, you and you only. We can't expect the Kenosha Unified School District to be a light shining in the darkness for Jesus. We can't expect that. We can't expect the Kenosha Police Department to do that.

Jesus has called us to that. And so we'll work within these things to be salt and light for Him. Now there's a warning here.

[33:46] this little light of mine, I'm going to let it shine. This little light of mine, I'm going to let it shine. Don't put a bushel over it.

No. No. That's the warning. You don't put baskets over lights. Why not? Because that's not what they're meant for. They're meant to shine.

So here are a couple baskets that we put over our light. we are blending into the world. It's like a dimmer to our light. It makes us less and less brilliant. And then there's the fear.

You know what I'm talking about? Fear. You don't want to open your mouth and tell other people about Jesus because you're afraid of something. And what are you afraid of? It's what I'm afraid of. It's afraid of rejection.

That I'm going to say something about Jesus and they're going to turn around and walk out of my life. It's a basket. Don't put that basket over your light.

[34:49] Remember, Jesus has already told us about that. Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness sake. Blessed are you when you're reviled and persecuted and charged with false things on account of me.

He's already covered that. It may happen. But we're to be rejoicing and being glad for our reward is in heaven. There's one other basket.

Unbelief. That's a snuffer. Here's what happens. You're like, I want to let my light shine, but that guy is so smart, there is no way he would ever believe in Jesus.

He's too smart for that. That's unbelief. He's not. He's not. Or, oh man, this guy is so just mired in addictions, there's no way he was going to ever believe in Jesus and be pulled out of that.

Unbelief. Do you remember Romans 1.16? Paul says, I'm not ashamed of the gospel, let your light shine.

[36:02] Why? Because it is the power of God unto salvation for all who believe. The power of the gospel is not limited by intellect.

It's not limited by depth of sin. No, no, no, no. It is the power of God. How do you stay bright? How does a Christian stay bright in the darkness? Let me illustrate. You see this watch? See it? There's a minute hand and an hour hand. Do you know what it does in the darkness? It glows. It's awesome. I was watching and looking at it last night. I'm like, this is awesome.

Do you know why it glows? During the day, there's some kind of chemical reaction in which it energizes these hands.

[37:02] And at night it glows. Exposure to the source of light makes it glow. How do you stay bright? How do you grow in brilliance?

How do you kind of turn up that dimmer switch so it's brighter and brighter and brighter? You get close to Jesus. That's it.

You get close to Him. And when you're around Him, you're going to be compelled to be more salty and be more brilliant and it's going to affect those people around you.

One last thing. We've looked at you. We've looked at salt. We've looked at light. Now let's look at the word that. Verse 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 who is in heaven.

That. It's a purpose clause. It means what you're aiming at. You're not just trying to be salt and light to be salt and light. You're salt and light in order to show what God has done in you and point to Him.

[38:22] Ultimately, this is about God's glory. Glory. Let me try to make one connection for you then I'll close.

close. I need to make two connections for you then I'll close. First one is this. Notice in Matthew 16, in the same way, let your light shine before others so that they may see your good works.

Shining is the equivalent of good works. Your good works is what shines. Okay? That's point number one. Point number two is this. It's a question.

How does someone, how does someone who's in darkness watching your life, how do they go from seeing your good works and then knowing that they should glorify God in heaven?

How does that happen? How does that happen? You tell them. You tell them.

[39:32] Mike, you're such a hard worker. Why do you work so hard? How do you do that? I could say, my dad's a hard worker and I come from a line of hard workers.

I buy into the Protestant work ethic. That's one approach, which is true, but you want to know what's really true? when I first became a Christian, I had a brother who came up to me because he saw laziness in me and he pointed me to Colossians 3.23.

Whatever you put your hand to, do wholeheartedly as unto the Lord. So to be honest with you, if you see hard work in me, it's because I'm trying to work for my king.

Now you're given glory. Now you're given glory. Take the opportunity. And what I just want you to see here is our witness is a combination of word and deed.

Our lives are a springboard to the gospel. Because we're distinct and present. The goal is is the worship of God.

[40:54] Your distinct life is a salt and light to an unbelieving world of a great and gracious God.

We don't blend in. We don't bail out. We're distinct from and remain in to the glory of God.

Let me pray. God in heaven, God, would you do a work in us and that we would be more salty and we would be more brilliant ultimately for the glory of your name.

Would you make our lights shine? in Jesus' name, amen. Amen.