

Being Salt and Light

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[0 : 00] The scripture reading this morning is taken from Psalm chapter 27.! Psalm chapter 27 and then Matthew chapter 5 verses 13 to 16.

! Psalm 27. The Lord is my light and my salvation. Whom shall I fear?

The Lord is the stronghold of my life. Of whom shall I be afraid? When evildoers assail me and eat up my flesh, my adversaries and foes, it is they who stumble and fall.

Though an army encamp against me, my heart shall not fear. Though war rise up against me, yet I will be confident.

One thing have I asked of the Lord, that will I seek after, that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to gaze upon the beauty of the Lord and to inquire in his temple.

[1 : 15] For he will hide me in his shelter in the day of trouble. He will conceal me under the cover of his tent.

He will lift me high upon a rock. And now my head shall be lifted up above my enemies all around me.

And I will offer in his tent sacrifices with shouts of joy. I will sing and make melody to the Lord.

Hear, O Lord, when I cry aloud. Be gracious to me and answer me. You have said, seek my face.

My heart says to you, your face, Lord, do I seek. Hide not your face from me. Turn not your servant away in anger.

[2 : 10] Father, O you who have been my help. Cast me not off. Forsake me not, O God of my salvation. For my father and my mother have forsaken me.

For the Lord will take me in. Teach me your way, O Lord, and lead me on a level path because of my enemies.

Give me not up to the will of my adversaries. For false witnesses have risen against me, and they breathe out violence.

I believe that I shall look upon the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living. Wait for the Lord. Be strong.

And let your heart take courage. Wait for the Lord. Matthew 5, 13 to 16.

[3 : 13] Sorry. You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything except to be thrown out and trampled under people's feet.

You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do people light a lamp and put it 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.

Thank you very much, Fay. Okay. This morning, we are continuing our sermon series in the Sermon on the Mount. And good morning, Alex.

I thought you were supposed to be here. I thought I saw you, then I didn't see you. It is good to see you this morning. Where is Alexander? Okay. Okay.

[4 : 30] All right. We'll get to talking afterwards. So we are continuing our sermon series this morning in the Sermon on the Mount. And if we bear in mind the three verses we considered last week, as we considered these four verses this morning, I think we can't help but acknowledge that a life of following Christ is a life of dying to self.

A life of following Christ is a life of dying to self. In an ongoing way, from the moment we come to Christ until the day we leave this earth, every single day is a day of dying to self.

These two sets of verses, the three we covered last week, and the four we are covering this morning, bring this truth into direct focus.

Now, the reason I say this is because last week we considered the last beatitude, and we heard Jesus say that those who follow him are going to be persecuted for righteousness' sake.

He said, you're going to be reviled. People are going to utter all kinds of things against you falsely on my account. You're going to be persecuted.

[6 : 02] And now we come to these verses this morning, and Jesus is addressing the very same people, and he now says to them, you are to relate to those same people in the world who persecute you and who revile you and who utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account.

You are to relate to them in a beneficial way by being salt and light to them. That's in essence what Jesus is doing.

He doesn't skip a beat in transitioning from one to the other. The world is going to hate you and persecute you and revile you and utter all kinds of evil against you, and then he says, you are the salt of the earth, and you're the light of the world.

You're to be of beneficial influence to those same people who will revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely.

And I think naturally the question should arise in all of our hearts, how are we able to bless and be a blessing to those who hate us? This world that hates us, this world that will persecute us, how can we do that?

[7 : 30] And this is what I want us to consider this morning in our remaining time. So let's take a moment, let me pray for us before we begin. Lord, will you continue to speak to us from these ancient words?

Lord, these words are both timeless and timely, and you and your wisdom have preserved them for our good.

Would you give us ears to hear and eyes to see? Would you help us to see the wonder and the beauty contained in these words of life?

And we ask, Lord, that you would use your word to transform our lives for the glory of your great name.

In Christ's name we pray. So we see Jesus saying to his disciples, saying to those who follow him, that instead of the world valuing their godly character, the world will hate them and persecute them and reject them as irrelevant.

[8 : 49] And obviously the natural reaction to that is to want to persecute them back or want to withdraw from them at least. Jesus says that we are to do something very different.

And if I were to summarize what Jesus says to us, what he said to them, I'd summarize it this way. Despite the world's treatment of them, this is what he says to his disciples, despite the world's treatment of them, followers of Christ are called to be the salt of the earth and the light of the world, deterring its decay and dispelling its darkness.

Despite the maltreatment, despite the mistreatment, this is what followers of Christ are called to. Be salt and be light to those very same people.

These words of Jesus really are pregnant with implications for us. It's not just information for us to take in and it goes no further.

We have to take it in and we have to consider what are the implications for me, someone who professes to follow the Lord Jesus Christ.

[10 : 15] We need to consider this. Because we live in a fallen world and so I know to one degree or another, at one time or another, we're all facing the mistreatment of this world and those who are a part of it.

And so this morning, we begin to consider this together, but each of us needs to think about this in a very personal way. In your personal sphere, your personal life, where you are living life and where you're experiencing life in a fallen world.

Now when Jesus describes his followers as the salt of the earth and the light of the world, what he does is he uses a figure of speech called metaphor.

A metaphor is a figure of speech in which a word or a phrase is applied to someone or something which it is not literally the case.

So we're not literally salt, we're not literally light. It's just a matter of speaking. And what I'd like to do in our remaining time is I'd like to take these two metaphors that Jesus uses to describe his followers, who they are and what they're like.

[11 : 35] And I want us to consider the implications for our lives. So the first one is the salt of the earth.

This is the first public sermon of Jesus. And when Jesus thought about his followers, when he thought about who they are, he intentionally used these words to describe them.

The first description of those who follow Jesus Christ is salt of the earth. The salt of the earth. And I think this is a very critical description for us to bear in mind because it is Christ's first description of those who follow him.

And in biblical interpretation, there's a principle that when we encounter something in scripture for the very first time, we should pay attention because it generally tends to take on the meaning that we will see that word or that phrase take on throughout the rest of scripture.

Not always the case, but a lot of times that is the case. Now it's interesting that Jesus uses this metaphor and he doesn't elaborate to say what he actually meant.

[12 : 52] And he didn't have to. When Jesus said, you're the salt of the earth, they understood what Jesus was saying to them because they were hearing in their original context.

It's not the same for us. When we think about salt, we tend not to think about it in the way that the original hearers would have heard about it.

In ancient Palestine, salt was a preservative and a seasoning and was of great importance. It was an important commodity.

You may have heard someone say something like, if that person is worth their salt, people used to get paid in salt. It was that important of a commodity in that time.

They didn't have refrigerators as we do today to preserve things and help them to not spoil on us. And so when we consider what Jesus was saying in that context, without refrigerators, it was very hot, couldn't preserve things like meat, for example, he was essentially saying to them, his disciples, you are to the world like what salt is to meat.

[14 : 10] You have that same preserving influence to the world, towards the world, as salt does to meat.

That is the way you are to affect those around you the same way that salt affects meat. It's natural course.

The natural course is towards corruption and towards decay, and only salt can have this preserving effect on it. So Jesus is making the application to the function of his followers followers in the world, that they have the same ability to arrest corruption and to deter decay.

Now I think we all understand that this doesn't happen automatically. I mean, salt does not automatically have this preserving effect. It needs to make contact with whatever it's intended to preserve.

If it's not applied, it's not going to, it's not going to work. And so, when we apply salt to meat, what happens? Does the salt get meaty?

[15 : 29] No. The salt salts the meat, and the meat becomes salty. Or when we put salt in water, we don't talk about the water making the salt watery, we talk about the salt making the water salty.

And salt functions in the same way as a seasoning. There are some foods that would be impossible to eat or unpleasant to eat without salt.

And what Jesus is saying is that his followers, those who are truly living for him, those who are following him, they function in society in this seasoning kind of way, making things palatable.

They have this positive, preserving, seasoning influence on society. And this is the outworking of the kingdom of God through their lives as citizens of the kingdom.

But notice in verse 13 that Jesus goes on to give a warning to his followers. He says that in the same way salt can become ineffective and useless, his followers can become ineffective and useless.

[16 : 48] And what Jesus does is he alerts us to the problem of salt losing its saltiness. he says, if salt has lost its taste, how is it able to be restored?

Now, I'm told that the important chemical in salt is sodium chloride. That's the most important chemical in it.

And it's very stable. It's hard to get it to become corrupted, but sometimes it can become corrupted and contaminated by impurities, and when that happens, it becomes useless.

It doesn't function anymore as salt. And this is very prevalent in the land of Palestine where Jesus would have been uttering these words.

In the day of Jesus, there was something called fake salt. It looked like salt, but it was not true salt because the sodium chloride had been washed out of it.

[17 : 56] The salt became contaminated and had impurities in it, and the sodium chloride was the easiest thing to be washed out of it.

Once it was washed out, you had this residue, but it was no longer functioning like salt. And I think the same application, Jesus is making an application that that can happen to us as those who follow him.

That we can become contaminated and we can lose our saltiness and when we do, we're useless. We have no other purpose, he says, other than to be thrown on the downhill or to be trampled under the feet of men.

And brothers and sisters, my best assessment of what is the greatest contaminant for those of us who follow Jesus Christ is the contaminant of worldliness.

The contaminant of the world shaping our lives and affecting our hearts in such a way that we no longer can have a salting, a seasoning effect on the world around us.

[19 : 21] One of the clearest and most insightful definitions I've ever heard about worldliness, I read in a book, *Evangelicalism Divided* by Ian Murray.

Worldliness and I grew up believing worldliness was primarily about how you dress, the music you listen to, and those kinds of externals.

And it's not to say that they don't say things about worldliness, they do. But that's not what worldliness is primarily about. Those are more manifestations of worldliness.

But here's how Ian Murray defines worldliness in what I find to be a very helpful way. He writes, worldliness is departing from God. It is a man-centered way of thinking.

It proposes objectives that demand no radical breach with man's fallen nature. It judges the importance of things by the present and material results.

[20 : 23] It weighs success by numbers. Worldliness covets human esteem and wants no unpopularity. It knows no truth for which it is worth suffering.

It declines to be a fool for Christ's sake. Worldliness is the mindset of the unregenerate. It adopts idols and it is at war with God.

Those are strong words and it doesn't even begin to get to the externals of clothing and music and places we may go or not go. But brothers and sisters worldliness causes us to lose our saltiness.

It causes us to lose the ability to bring the saltiness of the kingdom to bear in our societies and in the world around us.

And when we lose our saltiness we are rejected we are marginalized we are disregarded and trampled upon by the world.

[21 : 29] On the other hand when we retain our saltiness when we are faithful to follow Christ and we refuse to be conformed to this world and contaminated by this world we can have that very positive influence upon the world.

deceased theologian Dr. Martin Lloyd Jones he was very insightful he was a very insightful man and spoke about things long before they were seen on the landscape of the church and one of his concerns was the necessity of believers being different from the world and here's what he said the glory of the gospel is that when the church is absolutely different from the world she invariably attracts it it is then that the world is made to listen to a message though it may hate it at first and one more last quote from someone more at our times and this is Dr.

Mark Dever in a sermon false conversions the suicide of the church he was sharing his burden for the fact that churches are filled with people who are not genuinely converted they have this false assurance that they belong to Christ and he said that this trend this increasing trend of so many people sitting in churches not genuinely converted but misled to believe that they are is really the suicide of the church and here's what he said referring to followers of Christ he said we have become so much like the world they have no questions for us they have no questions they want to ask us it appears we have no hope that's any better than theirs we have no hope of a better a more humane a more

God honoring life to hold out to them when the world is in the church the church begins to disappear in the world and so while worldliness is a contaminant and it would dilute our influence and effect on those around us when we think about the church in a corporate sense our influence is also diluted by false conversions by those who profess to be what they are not but they will be what they are in the church and they will have a contaminating effect upon the church brothers and sisters our lives are to be distinct from the world and remember Jesus said I don't pray that you are taken out of it so we have to be in the world yet distinct from it we have to be going to our job places we have to be going into all the different spheres of life engaging and living life and yet be distinct from it we should live lives in such a way brothers and sisters that even if people don't out loud ask the question about why we are different they should at least be thinking it in their hearts they should at least be thinking

I wonder why she said that that's different I wonder why he did not retaliate most people would well she owned up to her mistake that's unusual she didn't have to I wonder why she did that or they may wonder they should wonder I notice that he doesn't join in when his fellow classmates are teasing the other students and disrespecting the teacher I wonder why and here brothers and sisters I'm not talking about moralism I'm not talking about just having moral lives in a vacuum because I think we all know that we can be good moral people on our way to hell moralism doesn't save us but here's what's certain those who belong to

[26 : 30] Jesus Christ live lives that are morally different from the decadent world in which we live and the difference is quite obvious it's obvious to the world and it should be obvious to us and so brothers and sisters I think you would agree with me that by and large the church and society has become contaminated by the world our saltiness has been lost is being lost being disregarded marginalized in so many ways we're not deterring the moral decay the corruption in the world as we should and I pray this would not be the case for us individually and corporately as a local church I pray that our presence will make a difference I pray that our presence around co-workers and family members would cause them to act in ways that are more

God honoring than they would have had we not been present whether that is not gossiping because we're around or not cracking crude jokes because we are around or not using profanity or blaspheming the name of the Lord because we are there having a preserving effect and if they do that they would be convicted and reminded that such things are wrong such things are not right now as powerful as this metaphor of the salt of the earth is it doesn't fully communicate who Christ's disciples are and how they are to function in the world and so Jesus uses a second metaphor second metaphor as the light of the world he uses it beginning in verse 14 while the metaphor salt of the earth speaks to the issue of decay the metaphor light of the world speaks to the issue of darkness and again to appreciate the second metaphor we have to hear it in the context of Palestine and so for example if someone were to turn on a flashlight right now it would serve no purpose because the room is well lit but if we were to lose power and he would become very very dark and if someone were to turn on a phone light or do a flashlight we'd appreciate that light because it is in darkness in Jesus day the primary light that people had was sunlight and they ordered their lives around the sun they got up when the sun rose and they went to bed when the sun set and the only thing they had to give artificial light were these flax lanterns very primitive lanterns that gave them some light in a very small area or space light but because we have light 24-7 we can be doing all manner of things and we tend not to appreciate light as they would have appreciated light sunlight to get things done or that little bit of light that they would have had at night but the light is very similar to the salt if the light is not put in a situation of darkness then it really has no real purpose it will not dispel any darkness if there is no darkness and so in essence what Jesus is saying with this second metaphor is the world is a dark place you are the light of it you are the light of the world now Jesus very similar to what he did with the first metaphor salt of the earth he does with this second one and he warns us he warns us about what can happen when light is not properly applied the way it is supposed to be applied he reminds us what happens when we don't use the influence that we have in the way that we should notice what he says in verse 14 he says a city set on a hill cannot be hidden cannot be hidden essentially saying light can't be hidden anymore your light can't be hidden anymore than a light that is lit can be hidden a city that is

set on a hill cannot be hidden and so Jesus is calling us to function in this same way but here's the contradiction of verse 15 he talks about people who will light a lamp and then put a basket over it instead of on the stand putting it on the stand instead where people can see it and it will give light to those around it and Jesus is warning us about how a light can be hidden and what he speaks about is someone intentionally doing it lighting a light and then putting a basket over it and there are ways that we can do that with our lives those of us who are followers of Christ those of us who are supposed to be bearing light to the world we can hide our lights one of the reasons I think is very obvious from the passage is because of persecution because of persecution we may be afraid and lack courage to let the light of our lives shine not even to shine it just to let it shine to be who we are to be who

Christ has called us to be sometimes we do it because we are ashamed of Christ we are ashamed of him and his gospel and this is my experience as a young Christian as a young Christian I sadly was ashamed of Christ which is a form of worldliness because you want to be identified more with the world than with Christ and I say this I mean all of us are subject to peer pressure none of us in this room is exempt from peer pressure when we grow older peer pressure just looks differently than it did in our youth and so the children in school may face peer pressure with their friends in a certain way not wanting to stand and be a light for Christ we face it in a more adult way and all of us are called to do the same but here's what we should remember from what

Jesus is saying to us Jesus is not calling us to light the whole world light doesn't work like that light works in a local context and so each of us is called to light the world where God places us sovereignly at any given time wherever he places us simply be light and when we think about it if you have light in a room those who are in that room they're going to benefit from that light more than the other people in another room and so when we live as lights in this world those who are near to us are the ones who are going to see the light in our lives this is saying that light burns brightest at home and so we have this responsibility to let our light shine wherever we may find ourselves and so

[35 : 04] I want to ask you this morning all of you all of us who profess to know Jesus Christ this morning as we live our lives day by day are we living our lives and allowing the light of Christ in us to shine to those around us are we allowing it to be seen or are we doing anything to diminish it anything to hide it in some way and if we are we're forgetting how vital this light is to those who are in darkness and here I'm not advocating that you walk around and preach oh I'm a Christian and quote scriptures especially when you should be working I'm just echoing the words of Jesus and encouraging us who profess to know Jesus

Christ to be light to be light in a dark world and to courageously shine and trust the Lord to use the light to bring those in darkness to himself so how do we live as light I think it's important for us to remember that light does not originate with us the first scripture we read this morning in Psalm 27 the psalm it says the Lord is my light and my salvation Psalm 27 is about a man who has come to God's light and you read it and this is this is someone living life surrounded by enemies facing difficulties and he's resolved as what he's going to do to serve the Lord and to desire one thing of the Lord to dwell with the

Lord and to stay close to the Lord and in so doing his light will shine that light that is God's light will shine through his life in John 8 verse 12 Jesus said I am the light of the world and I think we all should know that Jesus being the light of the world is very different from you and I being the light of the world when Jesus says to us in Matthew 5 14 you are the light of the world he doesn't mean in the same way that he is the light of the world and we can see that as we follow through down to verse 16 what he says he says in verse 16 when his followers let their light shine the shining of their light doesn't point to them the shining of their light and the good works that they do doesn't point to them it points to the father it points to the father and he is the one who is glorified

James 1 17 tells us that God is the father of lights and so what Jesus is speaking about is the evangelistic effect of us living as his followers in this world in this dark world if we do that as we do that faithfully it's going to be this reflected light from the father to the world this is a humbling truth when we really consider it that God the God of the universe the father of lights has chosen you and me who belong to him to be the means by which he is glorified in a dark and a fallen world by those who bear his light in this world God could have directly reflected his light into the world without you and without me but he has chosen to let us be the means through which his light is born to this world when we live as we ought to live and we do good works before a watching world

Jesus makes it very clear when we go into chapter 6 that the good works that he's talking about they're not things that we broadcast we don't go out and call Z and S and call the newspapers to come and we're doing something good we're called to simply give to the needy we're called to simply let our light shine as we live out the gospel not doing mechanical things good works don't save us but because we are saved we do good works our lives are marked by good works that's just a natural part of being someone who genuinely belongs to Christ because we are saved our lives will produce good works from a sincere heart not with any motive to put on a show or to draw attention to ourselves the attention is drawn to the

[40 : 44] Lord God now that I was primarily addressing this message to those of us who are followers of Jesus Christ these words this morning really are directed to all of us because in this room as in the world we are either solved or we're not we are solved or we are that which needs to be solved we are light or that which needs the light we are in the darkness or we are in the light and so in that sense everyone is being addressed this morning and I think we all know where we stand we know whether we stand on the side of being salt and light in this world because we have a relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ or we recognize that we're not there and the only other option is to be on the other side and so I pray that we would all reflect on these things this morning and if you would acknowledge in your heart whether you're present or you're watching online or listening online that you know you're not salt you know you're not light the good news is that

Jesus Christ has come into the world to save sinners sinners the good news is that all those who come to him he says he will never turn away turn away none not just the first time not ever not ever and so I said to you this morning that if you recognize that you are not salt you are not light come to Jesus come to Jesus and he will transform your life and he will cause you to be salt he will cause you to be light to the very world that he has brought you out of and to those of us who are believers this is what we have called we've been called to be and to do to function in these essential ways to the world to those who hate us those who may persecute us we're to be salt to them we're to be light to them let's pray dear lord would you cause us to not just hear this morning but to respond rather we would be those identified as salt and light help us to be faithful to function as such in our needy world and rather it would be those who are present and don't know you lord we ask that you would move on their hearts by your spirit and you would save them that likewise they can be called the salt of the earth and the light of the world we ask these things in Jesus name amen