

# Salt and Light

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[0:00] Matthew chapter 5. Let me begin reading, if I may, in chapter 5, verse 1, and you follow along in your copy of the Scriptures. Seeing the crowds, he went up on the mountain, and when he sat down, his disciples came to him.

And he opened his mouth and taught them, saying, Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.

Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied. Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy.

Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God. Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God. Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are you, when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven.

[1:15] For so they persecuted the prophets who were before you. You are the salt of the earth. But if salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored?

It is no longer good for anything except be thrown out and trampled under people's feet. You're 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 to give 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.

Let's pray. Our Father, this morning we are very thankful that you have given to us your word which is settled in the heavens.

It is sure. It is valuable and reliable. And it is the means whereby we who are blessed by salvation can know exactly how to live in the day and the hour in which you've placed us.

[2:25] We confess in advance this morning that we are dependent, both me in preaching and your dear people in hearing the word, on the enabling of the Spirit of God that your word would have free course and bear fruit in our lives.

We want to be humble listeners and allow what your scriptures have to say in the ministry of the Spirit of God to resonate in our heart, to form and shape us to be more like the Lord Jesus Christ. And we thank you in advance for what you will do in us. And we pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. As I take this passage in hand this morning, I am mindful of a conversation that I had several months ago in the process.

And you know that we are in the process of looking for a man that eventually will call to be one of our pastors here and hopefully prepare him for someday a transition in our fellowship.

And in the process of one of the interviews, I had an individual comment on, he was curious about how preaching has taken place in this fellowship.

[3:34] And part of the reason was, is he was thinking, so if I come in and am involved in preaching from week to week, how does that look or what's it like and what governs what we do in our fellowship, particularly in the pulpit.

And he asked me questions about national holidays. And I said, absolutely. I take advantage of those days, whether it's Mother's Day or Father's Day or Christmas or whatever else.

The holiday becomes a moment to reflect that day against the backdrop of Scripture. And so today is a day that we celebrate our nation's birthday.

And you couldn't miss that, could you? I mean, Judith and I, for the last two nights, and we normally go to bed, when the lights turn off, we're gone. You know, it's like, that's a good time. And in our neighborhood, I don't know what possessed them other than wild abandon.

But people felt required to shoot off bottle rockets and firecrackers way past my bedtime. Okay? And so I didn't miss the fact that the 4th of July was being celebrated in our neighborhood.

[4:41] I did not go down to Red, White, and Boom. I remember someone in my neighborhood, I said, hey, are you going to Red, White, and Boom? And he says, no, I've done that. That was enough. Something about the crowds and all that kind of stuff.

But you can watch from a distance and get quite the eyeful. It goes on. And so I want to tell you that I look at an opportunity such as today as a wonderful opportunity to draw attention to what the Scriptures have to say to us as citizens of our nation, and in particular as representatives of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Today really is the Lord's Day. It's a day that belongs to Him. And it's also a day that, in a sense, we celebrate our nation's birthday. And as we think about our nation, I would imagine that many of us sitting here this morning would probably recognize that there's something, a shift, and things are changing in our country.

And there's a little bit of concern in the midst of all of that. What's happening? Where are we going? What's going on? And so what I want us to do this morning is remind ourselves, first of all, that the Lord is not the least bit surprised by what is taking place.

And He is not scrambling, trying to put together another plan for what we do as His people. And so I want us to focus this morning on what the Scriptures give to us as clear instruction for how we respond in the culture and the day that we live.

[6:06] And so I want you to look in particular at verses 13 through 16 where Jesus makes this statement. He says, Let me put it another way and kind of have you mark this in your notes or at least think this in your own heart.

You are proof of His power. You are proof of His power. Can you imagine someone selling a medical product or a pharmaceutical product and say, Well, this is going to be a wonderful thing. You take this for 30 days and here you are. You're going to be changed radically. And if there is not evidence of that product producing anything of significance, guess what's going to happen to its market share?

It's going to fade away pretty quickly, isn't it? If it doesn't perform according to promise, there's an outcome to that. And so this morning I want you to understand what it means to be a believer and how that is to play out in the community and in the nation in which we've been put.

So let's look first of all at the big picture. Our lesson is eventually going to touch on what Jesus said in relationship to our role in this world. And He describes us there in verse 13 and again in verse 14 He calls us salt and light.

[7:27] Given that American Christianity is only in the early stages of testing, I think there are still many professing believers who really are uncertain about what it means to be a Christian.

But I believe the day is coming when those issues are going to be quite clear and those who stand for Christ and believe truly in the power of the gospel are going to be an exception to the rule. They will be salt and light.

And so as you think about this, I want you to recognize that what we see in verse 13 through 16 or 15 actually is premised on what has proceeded in the text.

And so let's go up just for a moment and look in broad terms on several overarching truths that we find in the Beatitudes. The blessed are, blessed are, blessed are. For one, I want you to recognize that the true believer is utterly different from the unbelieving world.

The true believer is utterly different from the unbelieving world. That doesn't mean that we don't pay our taxes or mow our lawns, but it is saying that there is something different about us and it's something that is recognizable.

[8:34] Let me give you a couple points from the Beatitudes and have you track them with me. Our view of self is different than the world's. Look

there, if you will, in verse 2, 3, and 4, it says, I have verse 3 rather, it says, Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are those who mourn. Blessed are the meek. Now, what value does the world put in mourning and meekness and in poverty? Does the world value those things?

When you go to school and people say, what do you want to become eventually? Well, I would like to be a person who mourns. I would like to be a person who is poor. I would like to be an incredibly humble person.

How many of you have had anyone at any place say something like that and not kind of be viewed kind of rather cynically? Well, what's the deal with you? You see, the world's value structure puts no benefit or value on issues of humility, on issues of recognizing the moral bankruptcy of our soul, and understanding the needs of our heart.

And those are things that are pushed away to the side. Not only is our view of self different from the world's, but also our longings, ambitions, and ambitions are different from the world.

[9:51] Look down there, if you will, just for a moment, what it says there in verse 6. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness. I want you to put your finger on that word righteousness.

Think with me just a moment. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst after righteousness. How many of you in this last week have been hungry? I mean, go ahead, raise your hand.

Really hungry. Here's what most of us think hunger looks like. It's we eat at 12, and it's 12.15. Or we eat at 12, and it's gotten all the way until 12.45, and our stomach just gives a little bit of a wrinkle and an announcement that it's waiting for something, right?

Do you follow me? A little grumbling downstairs, and we're, I am famished. The term that is used here to speak about hunger and thirst is something that goes far beyond the person who's been NPO since midnight.

How many of you have been there? Nothing by mouth. You're waiting for a surgery, and you are told that you're going to have surgery at 7.30. You think to yourself, I'm good.

[11:00] I'm good. I'm all right. I can take it. And then they come in. You've been NPO since midnight, and they come in and say, oh, guess what? The doctor is delayed. He won't be here till 1 o'clock in the afternoon.

What goes through your mind? You're freaking out. It's like, well, I don't think I can do that. I may pass out here on the gurney. It's like, I got to eat. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst after righteousness.

The image that is being used here is a person who is just absolutely wrapped up in a desire for something. Remember what Jesus said over there in the Scriptures about the business of the things that the world worries about?

Possessions, clothing, the issues that God knows we need and takes care of? You see, believers are different from the unbelieving world because the things we really care about are His righteousness and our own walk with Christ.

If that's true, listen, does it govern the things that we invest our energy in early in the morning? And the answer is what?

[12:17] Does it? Yeah. How many of you like coffee? Just curious. The coffee affectionados, those people who actually really...

Okay, I'm going to ask a second question. How many of you are marginally dependent on coffee? I'm in that camp too, you know. It's like the first thing I do in the morning before all other things take place is I come down and I move the little button that begins the process so that when I come down 30 minutes later, bright-eyed and bushy-tailed, guess what's waiting for me?

A full pot, you know, that I share with my wife. So here, blessed are those who hunger and thirst, not after coffee but after righteousness.

We're different. The things that we care about reflect an affection for things of eternity. You see, we're not obsessed with our possessions.

We're not obsessed with our kids or their accomplishments. We're not obsessed with things that have no eternal value. Our interests are in the things of God. Our view of self is also different because what we long for, the way we treat others, is a reflection of our affection for the Lord Jesus Christ.

[13:32] And so when you stop and think this morning about that opening statement, remember, it says we're salt and light. The underlying supposition, the assumption is that we're different from the unbelieving world.

And so if you're sitting out here recognizing, hey, the Spirit of God says I am salt and light, you have to recognize that in order to be salt and light, you have to be different from the unbelieving world. Secondly, I want you to understand that we are here on temporary assignment from our coming King.

Why am I here? How many of you would rather be in heaven, truthfully? I mean, honestly. Heaven is a wonderful place and I look forward to the day that I will be in the presence of the Lord Jesus Christ.

And yet, I am here on temporary assignment and I'm here for one reason. I am here at the appointment of the King for His glory and for His gospel.

And so as you think about the matter of your assignment, you recognize that you're a temporary visitor in a foreign land. Now, are we citizens of this nation? Yes, we are.

[14:39] But we recognize that this world is not our home and we are only short timers here. And so as a result of that, we recognize that because we are His ambassadors, our assignment and our responsibility is to represent Him fairly and clearly in an unbelieving world.

And I want you to understand as Jesus spoke about this business of the role that we play, He made it very clear to us that those who played the role that He assigned to them would face some adversity.

Look back, if you will. You're in verse 13, salt. Verse 14, light. But look back, if you will, just for a moment to verse 10. It says, Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake. Blessed are those who are... And by the way, do you know what the word blessed means here? Pencil it in if you're not sure. It means happy. Happy. I mean, I'm not talking about giddy, but I am talking about happy.

I'm glad. I'm happy. I'm enthused. Jesus makes this. He makes this statement. He says, Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake.

[15:52] He goes on in verse 11. Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely. Is that something that you anticipate is going to come in the future when you make it clear where your faith leads you to stand in our culture?

The answer is yes. I want to encourage you. God doesn't call us to go out of our way to be snarky and argumentative, kind of the Westboro Baptist Church type of deal.

That is not of God. But on the other hand, there come points in every one of our lives where we have to stand and say, That's what I believe the Scripture says. Here's what God has to say about that matter.

And here's what the Scriptures teach. And when that happens, we shouldn't be surprised at persecution that will come because Jesus made it clear that those kind of things would happen. Let me make one point clear in regards to this, and I think it's important for us to understand. The characteristic of the genuine believer that we've seen pictured in this passage so far is one that helps us minister in the culture and community we are without being unduly abrasive and argumentative.

[17:06] So I want you to recognize at the heart of what we are is that we are different because of the work of Christ. And so the believer is different because Christ does a work in salvation that is supernatural.

It's not something that just kind of happens because I grew up in a particular kind of home or I had a particular kind of education. It was the grace of God that found me and found you in the absolute moral bankruptcy of the place you were in and got a hold of you and dragged you out of that pit and gave you new hope and new life.

And I want you to think with me just for a moment about what that means. I think about the passage over in 2 Corinthians 5, verse 17, where it says this, If any man be in Christ Jesus, he is a new creation.

I had a conversation not too long ago with a young man in which he alluded to the fact that he grew up in a Christian home. And the truth of the matter is that when he was in Sunday school, he made one of those professions.

But he said, you know, I never saw the power of God changing any part of my life. Can you identify with that? Watching, learning, picking up all the vocabulary of spirituality, but never ever seeing the power of the cross which transforms the life of a believer and changes him from where he used to be to where he is going to be, moving him by grace and the power of God.

[18:40] And he says, you know, I never saw any of the power of God at work in my life. And then later on, about 21 or so, he came to faith. He realized the bankruptcy of his heart and he trusted in Christ.

And he says, you know what? I have the power of Christ at work in me and I'm not the same today as I used to be. So I want you to recognize this morning, salvation is the work of Christ that makes us different.

And that difference is something that is evident to the unbelieving world. Well, let's step now from the larger picture of the fact that we're different to understanding our particular role.

When Jesus announced to his followers that they are salt and light, he wasn't just saying something about what we ought to be. He was saying what we are.

We are. Look at the passage again. You are the salt of the earth. You are the light of the world. I want you to recognize that salt and light were precious commodities in the ancient world.

[19:46] Salt was something that was valued to the point that the Roman soldier was actually paid with salt in some case. Have you ever heard the phrase, he's worth his salt?

Ever heard that one? It's actually a reference to value. And salt was so highly prized that receiving... How many of you like food without salt?

Anybody here on Mrs. Dash or anything like that? You know, it's like the best way to live life is with Mrs. Dash, right? No salt additives. It's like... Hello?

Salt is very important to flavor. Would you agree with that? Salt was not only valuable for flavoring things, but it was also something that kept...

I want to use a real nice word here, putrefaction. How many... Get with rotting. Okay? You didn't have refrigeration in the good old days. You had brining or salt curing.

[20:49] Talk about blood pressure problems. You know, it was right up there. But anyway, you relied upon salt to preserve things. It was something that was an antiseptic in a sense.

And so when Jesus said, you're the salt of the earth, he was commenting on the fact that that highly prized and valuable functioning in a very particular way to add flavor and preservation.

And light, what's the sense of light? We take light for granted. What happens when you don't have light and God turns the big ones off? Huh?

How many of you are very careful walking at night when you don't have light? Huh? You ever done that? Creeping around very carefully hoping nobody moved furniture into your path? Because without light, you're in trouble.

Jesus says you are salt and light because your ministry is one of protecting, of blessing with flavor, and also of dealing with the putrefaction of the culture.

[21:51] So understand this. The world, this is another thing that Jesus says when he says you're salt and light. He is commenting on the fact that the world is really a putrid in a dark place. I don't mean that there aren't beautiful places.

I remember noticing over on the side on my computer the other day 20 beautiful places to visit in the world. You know, I was like, oh, wow, that's great.

And we all have been to places that are pretty spectacular, right? Niagara Falls, wherever it is. You know, we're out there in nature, and man, that's beautiful. Man, look what God did.

But I want you to understand when Jesus says that the world is what it is, he's recognizing just the darkness and the depravity of human existence. We've all read the news, and we read about the horrible things that happen in the world.

And we recognize that those things happen because of the heart of darkness in mankind. And we recognize that those things don't just exist apart from the struggle and the depravity of man.

[22:57] And since the world is absolutely filled with cruelty and darkness, it is important to remember that we've been put here to be salt and light. By virtue of being a believer, by virtue of coming to faith, you are without question salt and light in this world.

To be more specific, being salt has to do with adding flavor and preserving something. We've been appointed to salvation to be a wholesome and winsome example of Christ, and our words and our behavior is to draw people to our Savior.

I can't help but think of Paul's ministry to unbelievers and notice how he was far more focused on the gospel hope than he was on anything else. I want you to know that the ancient world was even more immoral and godless than the world we live in today.

We think it's pretty bad sometimes, but recognize that when Paul wrote what he did, he wrote to a church that lived in Rome, which was absolutely the armpit of the moral catastrophe of the world at that time.

And he writes to them and says, Listen, I have confidence in the power of the gospel. So I want you to know that the ruling of the Supreme Court on marriage has not made marriage or sexual behavior more important than the gospel, and we should not get sidetracked from that primary issue.

[24:20] Unless people are changed by the grace of God and salvation, they will perish and go to hell regardless of where they stand on the marital issues, and I think it's important for us to remember that.

Our gospel appeals should be gentle and winsome, and by that I mean kind and spirited in a sweet way rather than argumentative like Westboro Baptist Church.

I am embarrassed. I am embarrassed when I hear about those people that carry the name Baptist and are showing up at all different kinds of places and just absolutely making godless wretches of themselves and dishonoring Christ.

The believer is to be an illustration of the kindness and mercy of God, not to play Jonah. And by the way, do you know what Jonah's problem was in part? How many of you ever stopped and thought about why Jonah really wrote the book?

I know God instructed him, right? But Jonah also makes himself a clear illustration of what a wrong heart looks like and how God uses a wrong heart despite the wrong heart.

[25:23] So do we want to be Jonah's? The answer is no, no. We want to be faithful to our high calling and to be gracious in doing it. I want you to recognize that the early church silenced its critics far more by the kindness and mercy that they displayed than by anything else, and we are in the same situation and need to do the same.

It is no accident that while abortion has been the law of our land since 1970, that the attitude of our culture towards abortion has shifted significantly, not as a result of legislation, but because of the kindness and mercy of believers that are exercising mercy towards those who have been snared by Satan.

And so we've got to be careful that we're involved in being salt and adding flavor and preserving rather than just being belligerent and argumentative. The second description that Jesus gives of the believer here is he says we're called to be light, and I want you to understand that what he's saying here is we're called to shed light and truth on the darkness around us.

That doesn't mean that we just kind of sit quietly by ourselves and we kind of hold back and don't have anything to say at all, but it does mean this, that when we do it, we do it with a gentle spirit. We don't join the debauchery in sin. We don't agree with the moral perversion that is going around, but our nature in doing that is not belligerent and argumentative.

[26:58] There is rottenness in our culture. There is sin that is affecting every fiber of our nation, and we as believers are called to be, first of all, a holy example of what the Spirit of God does in salvation, and secondly, illustrating that to give opportunity to speak to it when it comes to our attention or we have opportunity.

That means that against the bitterness and the cruelty that we see when men mistreat one another, we are to be examples of mercy and grace.

That means that in place of the greed that possesses our nation and drives so much of our business, that we are individuals who are examples of charity and kindness, that instead of the dishonesty that just absolutely floods our politics and the world that we live in, we are examples that our yes means yes and our no means no.

Let me draw a couple other pictures here of the issue of what it means to be salt and light. One is negative and one is positive. I want you to recognize, going back up there into verse 13, Jesus makes it clear that when salt loses its savor, it's discarded as worthless.

Let me read the passage to you. It says, If a salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored? If you know anything about salt, and I'm not a chemist, but I do understand that salt remains salt.

[28:28] But what can happen to salt is it can be diluted with other products. Much of the salt that was used in Jesus' day was salt that was gathered by evaporation or gathered from sources where it had appeared naturally.

And as a result, many of the times that salt was diluted with a variety of other things. And the more it was diluted, the less salty it tasted. And when it reached the point that its saltiness was just overwhelmed by its dilution, the product was thrown out and was used and just trampled under feet. What do we use salt for today primarily? I mean, forget the food. The greatest amount of salt that we use here at this church is not used in our church dinners. Do you know where it's used? It's in the parking lot. I mean, people come walking in and say, Oh, we need more salt out there. No, throw it down. Lots of it. We buy it by the ton. It gets trampled on.

Jesus is saying, Hey, listen, if you lose your saltiness by diluting the sweetness of the gospel with unholy living, don't be surprised if the outcome is not pretty.

[29:43] And I want you to understand that compromising your mission doesn't go well. Doesn't go well for a believer. Look at another illustration here. In the passage in verse 15, it says here, People don't light a lamp and put it under a basket.

Now, who lit us? Why are you a light? Well, I made a career decision. I thought I'd be a good Christian. Huh? Really? No.

God in His grace found me in my moral bankruptcy and brokenness, and He drew me out of the pit, and He lit me for His glory. And do you know what He's going to do with the candle that He lights? He's going to put it in an obvious place. Every one of you are in places that God has put you, and He puts you there as a candle to be an illustration of His grace.

And all you have to do is be who He made you, and the result is other people notice the difference, and they ask questions for what's going on. So I want you to recognize that Jesus saved us and left us here to show His light.

[30:49] And that's our appointment in this perverse and wicked world. So let's close with thinking about living with confidence in the world that we live in. We become salt and light by the power of God.

We become salt and light by the power of God. How is it that I came to faith? How is it that you have become salt and light? Right? Remind yourself that you are who you are as salt and light because of the power of God that found you in your darkness and gave you light in the Lord Jesus Christ. Secondly, I want you to recognize that He has given you specific instructions for how to live your life. There's no reason to go floundering along with an indifference to what your principal purpose in this life is.

He's called you, and He's given you explicit and specific instructions. I want you to take just a moment and turn over to Philippians. You're there in Matthew, but turn to Philippians chapter 2. Philippians chapter 2, verse 14 and 15.

Do all things without grumbling or questioning, that you may be blameless and innocent children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation among whom you shine as lights in the world.

[32:10] Hey, Monday's coming. Lord willing. And when you arrive on the job, I'm going to venture to say that a lot of people are going to have kind of a moral or mental hangover from the long weekend.

Am I right? How many of you go to work and have everybody else walking in the day saying, Monday, it's here. I get to work. How many of you have that kind of thing happen? How many? And complaining, grumbling, unhappy, unsettled, their lives in turmoil, chaos because they're living apart from the grace and the purposes of God.

And in the midst of that, guess what you are? Go back to that passage again. What's it say? That you may be blameless, innocent children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation.

So ask yourself the question. Does your life, your humility, your truthfulness, your kindness, your joy, lift up the character of Christ and help other people who are broken by the unintended consequences of sin to wonder what it is in you that's different?

[33:46] Peter says this, that we're to be ready to give an answer for the hope that lies within us. Let me tell you something. People won't ask about the hope if you don't live the hope.

Let's close in prayer. Gracious Father, this morning as we consider the high and holy calling that we have as believers, we want to be faithful to what you have done in saving us and calling us to be salt and light.

And as we think about the responsibility we have, Father, I am confident that there are some here today whose hearts have been diverted by this world from their holy calling.

And this morning they need to humble themselves and rededicate their lives to serving the King of kings, the Lord of glory, the Lord of lights. There are also some here today that do not know Christ as their personal Savior.

And this morning as they consider the reality of the darkness of their soul, they recognize that there is no hope in themselves. And the gospel is clear.

[35:00] Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners. And all who call upon His name receive everlasting life. And Lord, as we come to the close of the service this morning, we're thankful for the fact that Scriptures make it clear that our hope is in the Lord Jesus.

And let us display that as believers by the way we live. And let those that don't know Christ be drawn to Him. We ask in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen.