

Being Salt and Light

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[0 : 00] I'd like you to please open your Bibles to Matthew's Gospel, Chapter 5. And we'll be looking at verses 13 to 16.

Matthew, Chapter 5, is found on page 4 in the New Testament section of your Pew Bibles. And as you look for that passage, I want to congratulate all the youth who have recently graduated.

On behalf of St. John's, we want to congratulate you and pray that you continue in your academic journey to some higher places. You are the salt of the earth.

You are the light of the world. When I arrived here six years ago to serve as one of the clergy in this parish, I decided to get some understanding of our social context.

Who are the people that live here? And what do they look like? And so what I did was to speak to one of the older clergy here at St. John's.

[1 : 14] And I will never forget what he said to me. He said, Felix, behind these walls and elegant buildings are broken people.

Very, very broken people. They need help just like everyone else. And I've been here for the past six years.

And that is absolutely the truth. Behind the facade of high culture, behind the facade of common culture, people are essentially the same.

All of us are marked by vice and addictions. Our lives are surrounded by darkness and deceit and brokenness. Our lives are characterized by restlessness and boredom.

And there is a lot of disintegration and corruption. In high places and in low places. And there are no exceptions. And I think as Jesus looked over the multitudes of his own day, as he looked at his own social context of his own day, he saw the corruption.

[2 : 37] He saw the disintegration of life at every point. He saw the breakup and the spoilation of his society. And because of his love for his society, for the multitudes, he knew that they needed most, he knew that what they needed most was salt.

In order that the corruption should be arrested. He also saw the multitude wrapped in gloom and sitting in darkness, groping amid the mist and the fog.

And he knew that they needed most above everything, light. The world needs salt because it is corrupt and decaying morally and spiritually.

The world needs light because it is in spiritual, moral, social darkness. And you and I need salt and light.

In this church, the West End, the West Side, Vancouver, and all around the Lower Mainland, need salt and light because of corruption and spiritual darkness and ignorance.

[4 : 03] If that is the case, and I think it is the case from God's perspective, the obvious question then is this, who are the light and who are the salt?

Who is going to salt this corrupt world? Who is going to light this dark, dark world? And the answer is very clear.

Jesus said, you are the salt of the earth, you are the light of the world. And who is he talking to?

He is talking to you. He is talking to me. He is talking to the church. You as the church, you as Christians, are the salt of the earth. You are the light of the world.

And of course, you look at yourself. I remember what happened yesterday in the family. And you recoil at that. Me, the salt of the earth, the light of the world.

[5 : 12] And of course, people who know you look at you and are very skeptical. How could you be the salt of the earth? And how could you be the light of the world?

And they themselves recoil in absolute skepticism. But you see, Jesus does not share in your self-loathing or in the skepticism of the world.

He does not share in any of those. As far as he's concerned, he has redeemed you and I to be the salt of the earth. And to be the light of the world.

And that is why in Scripture, in this passage, the language is emphatic. You and only you are the salt of the earth. You and only you are the light of the world.

And I can say clearly this morning that that is thus says the Lord. You are the salt of the earth. You and only you are the salt of the earth.

[6 : 14] You and only you are the light of the world. Thus says the Lord. It is not a command. Jesus is not commanding you to be the salt of the earth or to be the light of the world.

It is not a command. It is a divine and cosmic affirmation of our distinctive vocation and influence in the world.

Jesus is saying who we are. He's not telling us to be the salt or to be the light. He says, you are the salt, you are the light. In other words, we are different.

We are peculiar and we are unique in the plan of God. I also want you to notice the breadth of this affirmation.

Jesus said, you are the salt of the earth, not the salt of Shaanasi or the salt of the west side or the salt of Canada.

[7 : 18] The Bible says, you are the salt of the earth and you are the light of the world. You and I are the salt of this nation and the nations beyond it.

We are the salt and the light of this world, of this church and the Anglican communion as well. And so the passage does not entertain any sort of parochial mentality, any sort of parochial boundaries with regard to what God has called us to be as his own people.

There are no boundaries. The church should not be a hiding place for the salt of the earth and the church should not be a hiding place for the light of the world.

As someone has said, there can be no secrecy, there can be no such thing as secret discipleship. For either the secrecy destroys the discipleship or the discipleship destroys the secrecy. In God's plan, there are no secret disciples.

[8 : 32] the secrecy will destroy the discipleship or the discipleship will destroy the secrecy. And so if you have aspirations about being a monk or a nun to hide somewhere, I encourage you to give it up.

God has called you to be the salt of the earth and the light of the world. And there is something glorious about it. There is something amazing about this.

That of all the institutions that God has set up, the family, the judiciary, politicians, the state, the economy, all of them are very important.

But God has chosen the church to be the salt of the earth and the light of the world. It is glorious. It is amazing.

And it is the plan and purpose of God. And so we must take it seriously no matter how we feel about it or what other people feel about it.

[9 : 42] This is thus says the Lord. That is the most important thing. Jesus said, you are the salt of the earth, you are the light of the world.

salt. And if you are the salt of the earth, what does that mean? What does it mean to be the salt of the earth? Salt is a very domestic image.

I don't think anybody can claim ignorance of this. All of us here have taken salt at some point or time until your doctor banned you from taking salt.

and you remain banned from taking salt if that is what your doctor said. But you know what salt is. It is very domestic. And so what do we use salt for?

We use salt to provide flavor and server to food. Those of you who enjoy eating salt, you know how wonderful it is when you put that salt on your food.

[10 : 47] You begin to enjoy it. It's delicious. Salt is also used to prevent decay, to preserve against agencies of decay in things like meat and fish.

When I was growing up in Nigeria we had no electricity in our house and therefore no refrigeration. And I remember my mother would go to the market, the open market, what you call flea market, and buy some fish and meat.

Of course there are nine of us so she needed to buy a lot of fish and meat. And so she would come home and pull out the salt and just pour a lot of salt on the meat or the fish and put it over the fireplace.

And of course the fish or that meat would stay for quite some time without decaying. salt preserves, salt prevents decay and corruption.

And I think this is what Jesus is calling us to be, to provide flavor for this world and to prevent decay and to preserve our society from moral corruption and disintegration.

[12:14] And of course that raises the question, how do you do this? How can you and I be salt on this earth? And I want to point out three ways that we can do that.

We can't be salt of the earth by living as Christians. Just live as a Christian. That's why it's not a command.

It is an affirmation of who you and I already are. And so to be the salt of the earth is to be a Christian on the earth. God has placed us in different places.

God has given us a vocation, our networks, our friends, our colleagues, and he wants us to be salt in these places by just being Christians.

And so Christian saltiness is living the Christian life, Christian character, and Christian conduct. And since the past few weeks we've been going through this in the Beatitudes.

[13:19] Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God. Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied. blessed are the merciful, blessed are the meek, blessed are the peacemakers.

That is what it means to be Christian. Humility and meekness and gentleness and kindness and mercy and the thirst for righteousness and holiness.

That is how to be the salt of the earth. And of course, the question therefore is this. Does your life, does your Christian life prevent moral corruption around you?

Is your Christian life a higher standard of morality in your workplace or is it lower? Is it a lower standard of morality? morality? What does your wife think about you?

[14:37] And what does your husband think about you? Not that it's too important, but it is important. What is the standard of your Christian character?

What does it do to the society, to the place, and to the networks that God has given to you? does it encourage more sin or does it encourage more faithfulness to Jesus Christ?

You see, as we live out our Christian life, the life that is enunciated in the Beatitudes, we are indeed being sold in our world.

when people are around you, are they comfortable telling off color jokes or are they uncomfortable? And so we are salt of the earth by living the Christian life, allowing Christian character and conduct to dominate our relationships and our conversation.

[15:44] Secondly, we are the salt of the earth by condemning or protesting against evil. We, as people of God, must be courageous and must be clear in protesting against moral and spiritual evil in our society.

That is our vocation. Someone has written that it is interesting that Jesus did not say that you are the honey of the world.

He said you are the salt of the earth. And when salt functions as salt, it can bite and sting.

One of the sins that my mother used to commit when she was still alive, and I want to confess her sin on her behalf, was that when we were playing as kids, there were nine of us, so we were very rough.

We jump and fall and crash into each other and get breezes, and then she would put salt on our wounds. Now, don't do that.

[17:05] And the salt was supposed to prevent contamination. It's kind of medicine. punishment. It wasn't punishment at all. That's what she said. But it did stop us from being too rough, because we didn't want salt on your wound.

But that is the function of salt. And I'm sure if the meat or the fish could cry out, when you put salt on the meat, it should cry out, if it had the ability to cry out. Because salt does stink and bite.

And so when you and I condemn evil and protest against evil, it does bite and stink in our society. Salt bites when it proclaims the message of God's judgment for the self-indulgent.

Salt bites when it proclaims the message of God's grace for the arrogant and self-righteous. us.

And whenever we present this gospel and live this gospel, it not only brings flavor, it can also cause pain in people's lives.

And that is necessary. And I need to say here that as salt of the earth, it is sinful for us to sit back and watch other people being destroyed in our society.

[18 : 33] as salt of the earth, it is our obligation and responsibility to protest and to condemn systemic evil in our society.

And whenever the church abandoned its responsibility, it has always not fared well. This is historically true. Thirdly, we are salt of the earth when we stand boldly for what is good. not only do we condemn evil, we also stand up boldly for what is good in deed and in words. Here in our congregation, we have what is called the Ratnak Foundation that Brian McConnicky is spearheading.

And some of us here, many of you here are involved in standing up boldly for what is good in our society and outside of here. I want to thank you for that.

That is what it means to be the salt of the earth. We must get involved in the life of our society. We must get involved. We are the salt of the earth, but we are also the light of the world.

[19 : 51] And what I find interesting here is that Jesus did not say that the intellectuals and the philosophers and the scholars of our society are the light of the world. He said, you are the light of the world.

And of course, when you think about the people he was speaking to, these were common people, peasants, fishermen. And Jesus said to them, you are the light of the world.

Now, if Jesus said this to St. John, you might feel, well, yeah, we've got intellectuals here. That's why Jesus is saying that. That's not why he said it. Jesus said to his church, that we are the light of the world because of our relationship with Jesus himself, who is the light of the world.

Jesus is the light of the world. He gives us light and makes us light. And so, as the light of the world, it is our privilege and our responsibility and pleasure to reflect and to transmit the light of Jesus Christ.

The light of his truth, the light of his holiness, the light of his life. And I think the world desperately needs the light of Christ.

[21 : 16] The world does not understand itself. The world does not understand its purpose. and it does not understand God at all.

It is our calling. It is our vocation to give light to the world. And how do we do that? First, we must expose the darkness of this world.

As the light of the world, we need to expose the darkness and the dirt in this world. The unbelief, the hypocrisy, the false religion, and the error in people's thinking and living.

And that's what Paul the Apostle meant in Ephesians chapter 5, verses 7 to 13. In verse 11, he says to Christians, take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them.

That is a function of light. Paul the Apostle says, do not take any part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose those unfruitful works of darkness.

[22 : 36] us. We must warn the world of their evil and remind them of the consequences of pursuing evil.

people. I think there is a strong desire in our culture to pretend that everything is fine. You can live your life the way you want to live it, gather as many toys as possible, and at the end of the day, whoever owns the most toys wins the day.

And it is our responsibility as the light of the world to say that is not true, that whoever owns the most toys does not necessarily win eventually.

It is God that will win at the end of the day, and people need to shape up to that reality. It is our calling to proclaim the message of Christ, the message of the word of God, against moral evil.

And lastly, we are light by pointing people to the light of the world himself. As the light of the world, we are called to point people, to show people Jesus, who is the light of the world.

[23 : 58] The fundamental problem of our society is not lack of knowledge, it is not lack of enlightenment, it is not lack of activism, we have got enough of that.

Our fundamental need is Jesus. He is the one who sets us free from our sins and our troubles.

We need a new nature and a new life, and new desires, and new aspirations. And it is only Jesus that can make this possible for us.

And so our function as light is to point people to Jesus and his word to proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ to those in darkness, so that they may begin to work in the light.

Jesus is the way, the truth, and the life. That is our message. Let me conclude. Lord, you are the light of the world, you are the salt of the earth.

[25 : 14] And I think this is the most important vocation of our lives, and we must not lose sight of it. Because if you are the salt of the earth, the only purpose that you have is to be salt.

And if you are the light of the world, your only purpose is to be light. Because salt has no other purpose apart from being salt. And light has no other purpose apart from being light.

And so the moment salt loses its saltiness, it becomes good for nothing. And the moment light loses its purpose and function of being light, it is good for nothing.

And that's the point that Jesus is making in this passage. Verse 11, sorry, verse 13. 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 to be thrown out and trodden on the foot. Verse 15, Nor do men light a lamp and put it under a bushel, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house.

[26 : 30] light must not be covered, and salt should not lose its saltiness. How do we lose our saltiness?

It is when we let our lives be contaminated by sin and worldliness and fear and the desire to be acceptable. We begin to lose our saltiness.

When we begin to compromise with the things around us and refuse to live the Christian life and proclaim the Christian message, we lose our saltiness. And that has happened to many Christians across the centuries.

That has happened to many churches through the centuries. And if the Anglican Church of Canada is not careful, and if the Episcopal Church of the United States is not careful, they will lose their saltiness and they will lose their light.

it may happen before, and it may happen again. I want to encourage us as a congregation not to lose our saltiness, not to hide our light, but to stand up for Jesus Christ by living the Christian life, the life of humility, the life of meekness, peace, of mercy and peace and purity and righteousness, a life that exposes moral evil and proclaims the good news and shows people the way to light.

[28 : 09] God has no other plan for the world. It is not the politicians, as wonderful as they are, but I think it's good to vote, but I think it is very clear that we are not going to appoint politicians who are going to be the salt of the earth or the light of the world, because God has not called them to be the salt of the earth.

God has not called them to be the light of the world. God has called you and me, the church, to be the salt of the earth and the light of the world.

There is no other plan. If you do not do your job, if I do not do my job, the earth will slide into moral eternal corruption, and the world will be further engulfed in darkness, no matter who you vote for tomorrow.

You are the salt of the earth. You are the light of the world. Let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.

Amen. Amen.