

# We Are Salt and Light

Matthew 5:13-16

In Matthew 5:1-12, Jesus begins this Sermon on the Mount but preaching the Beatitudes. These Blessings are each descriptions of the character that Christians MUST have. But from verse 13 on, we are told how we must function in the world as the church of Christ. In Matthew 5:13-16, Jesus tells his disciples, ***“You are the salt of the earth”*** and ***“You are the light of the world.”*** In our next few Sunday morning sermons, we will examine what it means to be salt and light.

## We Live In A Corrupt World

When one reads history, one finds that in the late nineteenth century there was a great sense of optimism which was fueled by revolutionary ideas. These people expected that soon wars would be abolished, diseases would be wiped out, suffering would be eliminated, and discrimination would cease. They fully expected that the twentieth century would see one loving, global society where enlightened citizens would push this. Despite the optimism, the twentieth century was one of the bloodiest of all centuries. People did not improve in their nature and behavior despite enormous increases of knowledge in almost every area of life.

When Jesus spoke on the mountain to a bunch of insignificant and unlearned men of Galilee, telling them, ***“You are the salt of the earth,”*** he was saying that the world was rotting like rotting meat. Isn't this still true today? The people of this world are wicked, sinful, and against God. They glory in their shame and even today many are coming out proudly declaring their homosexuality, extramarital encounters, cheating, lying, hustling others and other deviant lifestyles. Evil has become good and good has become evil. When someone can argue that sex outside of marriage is the new “norm”, we have become hardened against what God plainly teaches about the matter. However, this has been the situation in the world since the fall of man. Why? Because of the sin of human hearts. In Jeremiah 17:9 we read, ***“The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure,”***

In Matt 15:19 Jesus said, *“For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, slander,”* and so on. In Rom. 1:21, 24 and 26 we read, *“Although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him. . . God gave them over [in judgment] to the sinful desires of their heart to sexual impurity for the degrading of their bodies with one another. . . God gave them over to shameful lusts.”* And in Rom. 1:28 we read that God *“gave them over to a depraved mind to do what ought not to be done.”*

If you continue to read in Romans 1:29-32 you see the assessment of Jesus that the world is rotten; so, his statement that Christians must be the salt of the earth is also still true. *“They have become filled with every kind of wickedness, evil, greed and depravity. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit and malice. They are gossips, slanderers, God-haters, insolent, arrogant and boastful; they invent ways of doing evil; they disobey their parents; they are senseless, faithless, heartless, ruthless. Although they know God’s righteous decree that those who do such things deserve death, they not only continue to do these very things but also approve of those who practice them.”*

## **Salt for the World**

In verse 13 we read, *“You are the salt of the earth,”* and in the Greek it is **“You and you alone are the salt of the earth”**. Why did Jesus say that to this small group of uneducated, poor, humble, Galilean disciples? He was telling them that although they must live in a rotting world, they as Christians were to function like salt in that world. Why? Because they are different from the world. Like the world, they had also been dead in sin, but they had been delivered by the power of God and made alive by their relationship with Christ.

This is true of all Christians. In Ephesians 2:3-4 we read, *“Like the rest, we were by nature objects of wrath. But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions. . .”*

And in 2 Corinthians 5:17 we read, *“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!”*

All Christians, then, are the salt of the earth. Why? We have been born again. Given a new birth and a new nature— a divine nature—through union with Christ. Therefore, we must also live for the benefit of this rotting and rotten world.

### **The Distinctiveness of Salt**

In this short statement Jesus was also warning his disciples to avoid two errors. First, he was saying that Christians must not try to live away from those in the world and go into monasteries because salt to do its job must be applied. Only then will it function as an antiseptic. We are to be in the world so that the world can benefit because of our difference from the world. And second, he was saying that Christians must also avoid the error of being one with the world and embracing its values and ways.

These warnings are applicable to us today. I have seen many Christians discover materialism in a sudden way. In fact, many preachers are preaching that rather than looking forward to a heaven “paved with gold,” they want some gold and goodies and symbols of luxury now. But when they say these things, are they not denying the distinctiveness of the salt of the earth?

I know a man in CA that won a lottery. It was in the millions and he lost his mind! He bought anything he wanted, he invested nothing, he left the Lord, he pulled away from extended family and lost nearly all his friends. Yes, he had a huge pile of money, but soon it was gone and now he was left with NOTHING! It took 8 years but he lost it all. He live a worldly life for that time and used none of his riches to help others. I know another man in VA that won a lottery too. His winnings were also in the millions of dollars. His mindset was very different from my CA friend. He looked at that pile of money and how it could be used to further the cause of Jesus. He spent some on himself but most went to the Lord.

Consequently, he expanded his base of friends, he endeared himself to many that he helped and most importantly, he put God first in the matter. Now, I ask you, which man do you think enjoyed happiness before God?

Today's church is trying to be like the world in its value and fashion. But that is an error, because the ways of the world are evil. We must be as different as salt is different from dead meat. We must be different from this rotting world. We must be in the world but not of the world. Why? So that the world may be helped by us. We must be different, and we must glory in our difference.

When Jesus said, "**You alone are the salt of the earth,**" this was a huge compliment and great encouragement from the lips of the Lord of the universe. This statement gives every Christian great dignity and self-esteem. I feel sorry for you if you are trying to be like the world in speech, in dress, in value, and in fashion. By trying to conform to the pattern of the world, you are declaring that you are darkness, that you are rotting and that you are not a Christian.

### **The Purpose of Salt**

Jesus did not tell his disciples, "**You are the sugar of the world,**" but rather, "***You are the salt.***" Let's, examine what the purpose of salt is and how Christians function as salt.

**First, salt functions as a preservative.** It is an antiseptic which performs the function of preventing meat from becoming rotten and corrupt. In tropical countries where there is no refrigeration, people rub salt into meat to keep it from going bad. In the same way, when Christians come in close contact with the sinful people of the world, the world is kept from progressing further into unspeakable foulness. Christians benefit secular society. Without Christian presence, the world would degenerate at an even faster rate. As a moral antiseptic, Christians keep the corruption of society at bay by opposing moral decay by their lives and their words.

Now we must realize that, like salt, Christians might irritate the wound at first. Remember, Christians are not sugar; they are salt. But I say, welcome the irritation that Christians bring about. Welcome the discomfort that the salt of the earth initially creates, because salt will greatly benefit you. If you have ever had a tooth pulled you will remember that the Doc told you to use salt water rinses several times a day. This is to kill bacteria and germs and keep them from causing an open wound from becoming infected. Yeah, it stings a little, but it does the job.

**Second, salt is necessary for flavor.** Without Christians and the gospel that they proclaim and practice, this world would be more tasteless. There is no true flavor found in the world. There is no true joy found in this world. Only the company of Christians gives flavor and joy to the world. We can prove this by examining the worldly parties and good times. What are they like? Boring, tasteless, and insipid. As Christians, we have the function to provide flavor and taste to the world. The gospel of Jesus Christ is the power of God unto salvation to everyone who believes. The world is without hope, and only the Christian, by his proclamation and practice, will point the world to hope in Jesus Christ.

As Christians, as light and salt, we provide a measure of balance to the world we live in. This is as God has designed it. We must live up to our part of this if we are to have any degree of success in converting a lost and dying world. May God give each of us the courage and strength to apply ourselves as light and salt to an evil and corrupt world.

**Invitation**