



The Teaching of Jesus Christ - Salt and Light

Matthew 5:13-16

1. Salt (verse 13)

2. Light (verses 14-16)

This morning we will finish the opening section of Jesus' famous Sermon on the Mount. In recent weeks, we have seen Jesus describe the citizens of the kingdom and pronounce His blessings upon them. This morning, we will see the last descriptions Jesus uses in this sermon to describe those who are truly His. These are found in Matthew 5:13-16, where Jesus taught, "You are the salt of the earth; but if the salt has become tasteless, how will it be made salty [again]? It is good for nothing anymore, except to be thrown out and trampled under foot by men. You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do [men] light a lamp, and put it under the peck-measure, but on the lampstand; and it gives light to all who are in the house. Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven."

In this section of His sermon, we see Jesus using two natural elements found in the world to describe the Christian. Jesus calls those who are truly in His kingdom: salt and light. Salt is mentioned in verse 13. Light is mentioned in verses 14, 15, and 16. These are both very common substances and often used in the Bible to illustrate various aspects of truth. With respect to salt, ...

- Jesus spoke of salt as good, which we ought to have in ourselves (Mark 9:50; Luke 14:34).
- Paul spoke of how our speech needs to be seasoned with salt (Col. 4:6).
- James spoke of the difference between salt water and fresh water (James 3:12).

With respect to light, ...

- Jesus spoke of light being truth of the gospel, which is heralded and understood (Matt. 4:16; Luke 8:16).
- Jesus spoke of light in referring to the public arena (as opposed to the private place), where all can see and hear (Matt. 10:27; cf. Mark 4:22).
- Jesus spoke of light as referring to those who have been born of God, "sons of light" (Luke 16:8).
- Jesus called Himself the "light of the world" (John 8:12; 1:4-8).
- The Old Testament Scriptures described the Jews as "Light to the nations" (Is. 42:6; Acts 13:47).
- Paul speaks about light as understanding (Eph. 3:9).

In light of this, it is difficult to simply pin down the meaning of these metaphors with statements from other portions of Scripture, because these metaphors are used so freely in the Bible, to refer to different things. However, when we come down to it, it isn't too difficult to understand. In this context, Jesus is simply using these natural elements to describe **influence**. The presence of salt influences the taste of food. (You all have experienced food, which is too salty or too bland). The presence of light influences what you can see. (You all have experienced darkness and brightness, which is dependent upon the amount of light where you are).

This is Jesus' point: kingdom citizens will make a difference in the world. They will be salt. They will be light. They will be an influence to the world around them. As Christians are in the world, (but not of the world,) things will happen. When Christians begin to rub against the world, friction develops.

Sometimes, this results in persecution (as we saw last week). This is what happens when those in the world are hardened to the message of the gospel. They will seek to rid themselves of the influence around them that is undesirable, namely you. Sometimes, this results in conversion. This is what happens when God prepares the heart to receive the truth of gospel. When the good news comes of redemption from sins, the message is seen with great joy. To use the phraseology of the prophet Isaiah, "How lovely on the mountains are the feet of him who brings good news" (Is. 52:7). When the gospel comes to the heart that God prepares, it is like water to a thirsty throat. It is like food to a famished stomach. It is like a cold shower to a hot and sweaty day. It satisfies every need!

Salt and light make a difference. Salt and light influence their surroundings! In some instances, their presence is welcomed (i.e. with food that is too bland, or with a cave that is pitch dark). In other instances, their presence is hated (i.e. with salty food, or with the bright sun on a snow-covered landscape).

Let's tackle each of these images that Jesus uses. We will begin with ...

1. Salt (verse 13)

2. Light (verses 14-16)

Let's focus first on the last half of verse 13, "You are the salt of the earth; but **if the salt has become tasteless, how will it be made salty again? It is good for nothing anymore, except to be thrown out and trampled under foot by men.**" Let's consider first what it means to have tasteless salt.

For us, this is strange. We don't experience tasteless salt, do we? Salt is salty. Salt doesn't become tasteless for us, does it? How many of you have every tasted unsalty salt? We know what it is like to go to the refrigerator and pull out those things in the back that have been there for months, ... and have gone bad. Lettuce wilts and turns brown. Apple cider begins to ferment. Bread and cheese begin to mold. Milk begins to curdle. Meat begins to stink. But we never go to the cupboard and say, "Mom, the salt's become bad again! Can you get some more the next time you are at the store?"

Much of this today has to do with our refining process. We have pretty much figured out how to manufacture **pure** sodium chloride. The purity of the salt prevents its decay. However, in the ancient Middle-east of Jesus' day, they didn't manufacture pure sodium chloride. Rather, they used to gather their salt from the Dead-sea, where salt and other minerals abounded. At times, however, the salt was far from pure. They would collect the salt from the shores of the sea. At times, it was mixed with other minerals. If the salt wasn't pure enough, it would be essentially be tasteless. As a result, it would be useless. Everything that the salt was intended to do, it could not do, because of its impurity. The only thing that it was good for was the walking path. To throw it in the field would be bad, because it would actually destroy the fertility of the soil.

I believe that this is Jesus' point, when he said that the citizens of His kingdom are like salt. They are to do what salt does. If they don't do what salt does, they are useless. They are good only to be thrown on the road. They have no hope.

Now, this leads us to another question, what was salt intended to do? After all, Jesus said in verse 13, "You are the salt of the earth." Those in the kingdom are like salt. "What does that mean?"

In my study this week, I found that most commentators mention several things that salt does.

1. Salt was used as a seasoning.

Perhaps this is the first thing that comes to our mind when we think of salt. We have salt-shakers on our tables. When our food is too bland, we pour a little salt onto our food. In Jesus' time, it was no different, when food was a bit bland, they salted their food and it tasted better.

The Christian life ought to be that which gives the world seasoning. Just as food that needs salt is bland and unpleasant, so life without Christ is likewise plain and ordinary and will lead to unpleasantness. Christians are the ones who can give life meaning and experience and pleasure.

The way that we season the world is with our mouth. We season the world by telling others of Jesus Christ. Paul said it in Colossians 4:6, "Let your speech always be with grace, seasoned, as it were, with salt, so that you may know how you should respond to each person." Paul is instructing the believers at Colossae to speak in such a way that their speech might be well received by others -- that their speech might be "savory." Our speech ought to be tasted by others and found pleasant, because it isn't bland, but rather, salty. In the verse previous to this one, Paul was obviously speaking of evangelism when he said, "Conduct yourselves with wisdom toward outsiders, making the most of the opportunity" (Col. 4:5). With the opportunities that you have with outsiders, you need to have salty speech, which directs them to a Savior.

Though salt was used as a seasoning in Jesus' time, there was a greater function that salt served.

2. Salt was used as a preservative.

In the ancient world, they didn't have refrigerators, so they used salt to preserve food -- particularly meat. In those days, they would take the salt and rub it into the meat and would preserve the meat from decay. It would end up a little bit like beef jerky. When they wanted meat for dinner, they either butchered an animal just before dinner, or they went to their pantry and pulled out their lamb jerky. This was probably the most predominant thing that salt was used for in Jesus' day (far more than taste for food).

The Christian life ought to be a life of preservation in our society. Obviously, down through the ages, whenever Christians came into a pagan society, they reformed the morals of the society. As a result, the society was preserved from greater troubles. I believe that the United States of America has reaped the blessing of the Christian preserving influence of its early settlers, the Puritans. As we forsake the heritage today, our society worsens. I believe that the former Soviet Union has reaped the destruction that occurs when you have a society based upon atheism. Whenever a society has strong, unpolluted, pure, salty Christians, they will act as a preservative in society.

Without Christians sounding the truth of God, (i.e. the absolutes He requires) the world is destined for corruption and wickedness. The world is out drifting on the sea without any moral bearings. But when there are Christians living purely and standing for the truth, they will act as preservatives in society. Though I may be speaking here concerning the macro level - the society at large -- it all begins on the micro level - with your relationships with others.

The wicked are restrained in the presence of godly people. This is a fact. I have experienced the speech of others change in my presence. I have seen people hide their cigarettes in my presence. I have seen people, who were drinking beer, simply leave their cup where it was, so as not to acknowledge that they were drinking alcohol before I showed up. I have seen plans change, because I would be involved. Now as a "pastor," it has even become more apparent. I trust that many

of you have experienced similar things as well. This is one aspect of the preservation of society which salt does.

The commentator, Albert Barnes, sums up both of these functions of salt (as a seasoning and as a preservative) when he said, "Salt renders food pleasant and palatable, and preserves from putrefaction. So Christians, by their lives and instructions, are to keep the world from entire moral corruption. By bringing down the blessing of God in answer to their prayers, and by their influence and example, they save the world from universal vice and crime" (Barnes' Notes on the New Testament: Matthew and Mark, p. 47).

As I said earlier, both of these characteristics of salt have to do with influence. Salt acts as a seasoning agent, because it influences the food by enhancing the taste. Salt acts as a preservative, because it influenced the food not to decay. So likewise kingdom citizens influence those around them. I believe that this is the major point of Jesus in this text.

Other commentators bring up other characteristics of salt as it pertains to the Christian life. For instance, ...

- When placed in a wound, salt stings. So Christians ought to sting the world in conviction of sin.
- When placed in the eye, salt burns. So Christians ought to burn the conscience of human hearts.
- When placed on the tongue, salt creates thirst. So Christian ought to create a thirst for God in others.
- When placed on the ground, salt sterilizes. So Christians ought to be purifying agents in the world.

In each of these instances, they are really manifestations of the same theme, though I am not sure that Jesus had all of these analogies in mind when he taught this parable. Jesus' point is that salt influences whatever it comes into contact with. Kingdom citizens will influence those around them.

Furthermore, kingdom citizens won't be diluted. Though salt in water makes water salty. If more and more water is added, the dilution increases until the point that the salt makes very little difference. But kingdom citizens remain salty. This is illustrated in one of my favorite movies, "Willy Wonka & the Chocolate Factory." Perhaps my favorite scene in that movie is when Violet takes a piece of gum from Mr. Wonka's hand and begins to chew it. This gum was a special sort of gum that gave off different tastes as it was chewed. At first, Violet tasted Tomato Soup. Then, for the main course, she tasted mashed potatoes and beef. Finally the desert was blueberry pie. It was during the blueberry pie that her face began to turn purple, and she blew up to be a round, blue-berry. The illustrative point I'm trying to show is that the gum never lost its flavor -- it was always savory. Likewise, Christians are always savory. They always put forth salty flavor and preservative.

Again, let me remind you that Jesus is describing the kingdom citizens. He isn't saying, "Be salt to the world." He is saying, "You are salt." It isn't an imperative (i.e. a command), but rather, an indicative (i.e. a description). He is saying, "If you are a kingdom citizen, you will be salt and you will be an influence on others. You cannot help it." This naturally begs the question, "How will I influence those around me?" You will make Jesus Christ an issue, wherever you are, in whatever context you find yourself.

Parents, you will model a life of godliness before your children, which will salt the children with salty flavoring. Your children will see you reading your Bible. Your children will see you praying. Your children will see you love your spouse. Your children will see you respond to situation with the fruit of the spirit, "Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control" (Gal. 5:22-23). Your children will see and hear your genuine repentance and confession when you fail. You will do these things with joy (i.e. make your relationship with Jesus attractive, or savory). In all of this, you will season the lives of your children with salt.

Parents, you will also preserve your children. You will rub the metaphorical salt into your children, by forcing them to deal with the Lord. This is what Joshua did when he said, "As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord" (Josh. 24:15). If you are home-schooling your children, you will set aside time in your school schedule for your children to spend time reading their Bibles and praying. Fathers, you will gather your family together for family worship. You will sing songs of praise together. You will read the Scripture. You will pray together.

Children, you will honor your parents. You will love to read your Bible. You will love to pray. You will speak to your friends about Jesus. You will speak to your parents about spiritual things. You will love your family worship and the scripture you learn. This will cause you to be a salty influence on your friends and siblings.

Men (or women), who work outside the home, you won't be ashamed of your Christianity with others. If the opportunity presents itself, you will put up simple decorations around your workplace that tells others that you are a Christian. If possible, when people see your environment, they might say, "A Christian sits here." (If you don't have anything like this around your environment, may I simply suggest that you display the bulletin covers that you get each week). When you have opportunities to speak with others around you about the Lord, you will open your mouth and speak of Him.

You will pray for those around you. Do you know your neighbors? You will pray for them by name. Don't know your neighbors? You will pray for opportunities to meet them.

These are the types of things that you will do as salt to the world. When you fail to do this, you fail to manifest yourself as a child of the kingdom. Last week I spoke about persecution. I said that one of the surest signs of knowing that you are a Christian is that you are persecuted for the sake of Jesus. The same is true here. One of the surest signs of knowing that you are a child of the King is that you are salt to the world, influencing others by your actions.

When you bear testimony to others of your faith in the death and resurrection of Jesus, you are simply demonstrating the truth of Romans 10:9,10, "If you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you shall be saved; for with the heart man believes, resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth he confesses, resulting in salvation." Jesus confirms this same thing when He said, "Whoever is ashamed of Me and My words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will also be ashamed

of him when He comes in the glory of His Father with the holy angels" (Mark 8:38).

What is this? Salvation by witnessing to others? No. Jesus is describing how a genuine Christian will react to "the love of God that has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us" (Rom. 5:5). The one who knows the love of God will speak of the love of God. The one who knows the love of God will act upon the love of God. All I'm saying is what Jesus said. You will know a tree by its fruit (Matt. 7:20). A fruit of a citizen of the kingdom is that he (or she) will be salt (Matt. 5:13). Salt influences the world. If you aren't influencing the world, you aren't salt.

Let's now focus our attention on point #2. Kingdom citizens are ...
2. Light (verses 14-16)

Now, much of what I have said about salt will be applicable to light as well, so we can probably speed through these verses a bit faster.

Let's look first at **verse 14**, "A city set on a hill cannot be hidden." Jesus is saying, "You are the light of the world. **You cannot hide your light.** Your light will shine!" For us in Illinois, we may lose the effect of this illustration. We live in the flat-lands. I was trying to think of a city around here that is on a hill, but couldn't think of any. But to those whom Jesus spoke, this was a very easy illustration. In those times cities were built upon hills. Primarily this was for protection. A city will have a wall around it. A hill will simply increase the height of the walls. If ever you tour over in Israel, you visit hill after hill after hill. Today, we call them "tels." In Jesus' day, you didn't try to hide from your enemy (like the Taliban today in the caves). In Jesus' day, you fortified your city, by building it upon a hill with walls at the top. You cannot hide such a city.

This is the same point that Jesus was making in verse 13. Just as salt will influence whatever it contacts, so also will light. Light will shine wherever it is. You cannot hide your light, any more than you can hide a city on a hill. Those who have been enlightened by the grace of God cannot help, but to shine their light forth. For instance, ...

Remember when Moses came down from the mountains, after being face to face with God? What happened? "His face shined from being in God's presence!" (Ex. 34:29-35). It isn't like Moses said, "OK, face, shine forth!" The Bible says, "Moses did not know that the skin of his face shone because of his speaking with [God]" (Ex. 34:29).

As many of us men have studied in Mark recently, we saw the leper healed. Jesus said, "Say nothing to anyone" (Mark 1:44). But he went out and "began to proclaim it freely and to spread the news about, to such an extent that Jesus could no longer publicly enter a city" (Mark 1:45).

The Samaritan woman was much the same way. When Jesus told her of all the things that she had done, she went and told the whole city of Jesus (John 4:39).

The faith of those in Thessalonica was sounded forth in the surrounding regions of Macedonia, Achaia, and beyond! (1 Thess. 1:8).

The picture of the work of God in the heart isn't that He does a work, which remains completely internal and nobody knows that anything happened in the heart. The picture of God's grace in your life is that it cannot be hidden. It's like a glow-in-the-dark object. When light shines upon it, it will glow. My children has some glow-in-the-dark stars, which they received from the treasure chest, a while back. When the lights are on, they take in the light. When you turn the lights out, they glow.

The picture of God's grace in your life is that it cannot be hidden. It's like the child who steals a chocolate-chip cookie from the cookie jar. Try as that little child might to deny that he didn't take a cookie, the evidence is often written all over their face. So it is with the light of God's grace in our hearts! It will shine forth. Even if you try to suppress it, and you cannot. "A city set on a hill cannot be hidden."

So, I ask the obvious question, "Do those around you know that you are a Christian?" You cannot hide your light. It will shine forth, somehow, somehow. You won't need to contrive a way to do it. It will simply shine forth.

My admonition to you this morning is this, "If others around you don't see your light, are you light?" If that light isn't shining, perhaps it is an indication that the light isn't in you to shine. If that is the case, cry to God for mercy. Realize that you are empty and dead before Him. Realize that you desperately need His grace to make you alive!

Look now at **verse 15**, "Nor do men light a lamp, and put it under the peck-measure, but on the lampstand; and it gives light to all who are in the house." The point here is that **you will not hide your light.**

Don't lose the logic here. When you turn a light on, you intend for it to lighten your room, so that you can see. You don't turn on a light only to hide it with a blanket or something. You don't turn on a light only to leave the room. Our children have problems with this one. They often will turn a light on and leave the room with the light doing no good. Our flashlights often have this same problem. I can't tell you how many times I have gone for a flashlight, which is standing upside down, only to find out that the switch is on and it has been giving light to the shelf for the past several days and now doesn't work. You don't take a flashlight and turn it on only to leave it upside down on your shelf.

God's grace in your life is meant to be seen. To hide God's work in your life is against all common sense. Do you think that God saves people only to have them hide what God does in their life? Rather, upon the earth, we are trophies of God's grace to display to the world. When God saves an individual, His purpose for that individual is to display forth God's glory in his life. This is what Peter said, "You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light" (1 Peter 2:9).

Many places today are totally dark -- without any Christian witness at all, except for you. Picture the world as completely dark. Picture Christians as the only lights to illumine the world. When you go to your workplace, before you get there, it is totally dark. But when you arrive, the light is there. When you leave the light leaves. Your purpose in being there is to shine your light for others to see.

Yet the sad fact is that many people cannot see the light. This is simply because "the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelieving, that they might not see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ" (2 Cor. 4:4). Their own sin and Satan, himself, have blinded their minds to see the light. You shine a light into a blind-man's face and it does nothing. Yet, when God opens the eyes, the light is seen clearly. Paul writes two verses later, "God ... is the One who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ" (2 Cor. 4:6).

Our object is to illumine the world and trust that God will open the minds of the unbelieving to see the light of the gospel (2 Cor. 4:4). Parents, illumine your homes with the gospel. Men (and women), illumine your work places with the gospel. Church family, let's illumine Rockford with the gospel. My prayer is that the people of Rock Valley Bible Church would love to shine their lights in dark places. Sure, our church is a place where Christians can find refuge from the world and its influence around us. Sure, our church is a place where Christians can enjoy great fellowship. Sure, our church is a place where Christians can be trained in the truth of God. But our purpose in the world is to be lights to the unbelieving.

As summer approaches, are there ways in which you are planning to shine your light, where there is nothing but darkness now? May I encourage you to obey the words of Jesus in **verse 16**, "**Let your light shine** before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven." Here is a list of practical suggestions for you to be a light to Rockford this summer.

- Have some neighbors over for dinner.
- Host a block party.
- Go door to door with brochures about Rock Valley Bible Church.
- Pray for your neighbors to see the truth of the gospel.
- Pray for opportunities to speak with your neighbors.
- Take walks around your neighborhood with the purpose of meeting people.
- When you see your neighbor outside doing something, join them if appropriate.
- Join a club of some-sort with the purpose of being light. For instance, Boy scouts, cub scouts, radio-controlled racing clubs, sports teams, sewing guilds, political causes, big-brothers/big sisters, volunteer at a local hospital, host an international student, volunteer at the crisis pregnancy center. Be involved in whatever interests you! To be light, you don't have to be involved with a "Christian institution."

If you involve yourself in one of these activities, consider it an outreach of Rock Valley Bible Church. Then, tell us about it that we might pray for your outreach ministry to Rockford.

It doesn't bother me in the least if you men cannot come to Men's Equippers because your children are involved in soccer and your heart is to be light to those who have no light. It isn't a bad thing to choose answering the phone for the crisis pregnancy center, and miss a Wednesday night ladies Bible study. Evangelistic opportunities are always valid excuses for missing some church function, because that is the very work of the church.

This is my heart for Rock Valley Bible Church being salt and light to Rockford. May we never be so involved in the church, that we no longer have time to illumine the world with the gospel. I would love to see the people at Rock Valley Bible Church have such a heart.

For some of you, it might be the best thing for you to simply come to every event that Rock Valley Bible Church has so that you can be rooted and grounded in the word of God. For others of you, it might be time to reach out to our community and serve it in whatever way you can for the purpose of being a light to the world. I know of one church, whose motto is, "Come, Grow, Go." The idea is that people come to church and get involved so that they grow in the faith. But the end result is that they would go forth from the church to shine their light. May Rock Valley Bible Church be such a "Come, Grow, Go" church.

As one missionary hymn said,

"Can we whose souls are lighted
with wisdom from on high
Can we to men benighted,
The lamp of life deny?"
(by Reginald Heber)

This is my heart, because I believe that it is the heart of Jesus. Jesus said, "Let your light shine." This is what I have been seeking to push you to this morning. Shine your light!

Notice how Jesus tells us to shine our light. Jesus is telling his disciples to behave in such a way as to direct any attention that you may get to God and not to yourself. Do you realize how difficult this is? More often than not, godly behavior isn't ever associated with God. What do people often say when they see you do a good deed? "What a kind person you are!" "My what a nice thing you did." If people ever associate your deeds with a religious significance, it is usually related to the person doing the good deed. "I'm sure you will go to heaven." (See John Chapman's book, Know and Tell the Gospel, p. 55).

People need to see that you are a genuine Christian, not so that you might be well spoken of, nor to be like the Pharisees were. It was said of

the Pharisees that they practiced their righteousness "men to be noticed by them" (Matt. 6:1). Rather, you need to "practice your righteousness before men in such a way as to draw attention away from you, and unto God." I don't know of any other way to do this, but to open your mouth and let others know that you are a Christian and the reason why you are doing the things you do. Those in the world deny God. They only look at things on a human level. The fool who says in his heart, "There is no God," (Ps. 14:1), will only be directed godward when he is told why you are doing your good deeds. It is your good deeds that will attract the attention of the world and give you an opportunity to reflect all praise to God, who has given you a desire to serve the world in such a way as this.

Jesus says that kingdom citizens are salt and light to the world. Saltless salt, is good for nothing, but to be thrown out and trampled by the foot of men. A burned out light bulb is good for nothing, but to be thrown out and sent to the garbage dump. May we of Rock Valley Bible church be found to be salt and light in this dark and wicked world.

This sermon was delivered to Rock Valley Bible Church on April 28, 2002 by Steve Brandon.
For more information see www.rvbc.cc.