

Living as Salt and Light

Matthew 5:13-16

Good morning church! For those of you who do not know me, my name is Eric Aho and I serve as the Junior High Pastor here at Coram Deo. I'm incredibly grateful to Pastor Rob for the opportunity to preach this morning while he and Becky take a much-deserved break after the busy Christmas season.

Open up your Bibles to Matthew 5:13-16. If you need a Bible, just get the attention of one of our ushers and they will get one to you.

As we come off the high of Christmas, we can often start to feel a little down. Christmas was such an amazing time. We were focused on the coming of Jesus; we spent time together as church worshipping on Christmas eve; we had a blast doing different Christmas parties and events.

And then it all ends, and we head back to the real world. And the real world isn't all that pleasant.

When you flip on the TV, there is story after story of tragedy or evil on the news. It seems like the world is falling apart and falling deeper into sin. Honestly it can be tempting in those times to pack everything up and go live in the mountains somewhere away from it all. I've often wondered if I could survive in the wilderness. I would take Malorie and our soon to be born baby of course, but we could just get away from it all. But that's not part of God's plan for believers.

We are to have an impact on this world. We are to show others who God is and be his agents of change.

In Junior High ministry, we have been walking through the Sermon on the Mount from Matthew 5-7. In this sermon, Jesus describes how his followers are to live as a part of his kingdom, the kingdom of God.

At the beginning of the sermon, Jesus describes what are commonly called the Beatitudes – Poor in Spirit, mourning over sin, meekness, hunger and thirsting for righteousness, merciful, pure in heart, peacemakers, and being persecuted for righteousness. This is the kind of a life a member of his kingdom should live out.

In our section of the sermon this morning, Jesus explains that when believers live like this, they stand out and have an influence on the world around them. Jesus describes this influence using the metaphors of salt and light.

We are going to start with salt this morning. Read with me **Matthew 5:13**.

"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 trampled under people's feet."

Jesus calls his disciples the salt of the earth. As his disciples today, those who have been saved by him and are living for him, we are the salt of the earth. The command here is to live as that salty influence on the world. That leads us to our first point. **Live as the salt of the earth.**

Calling us salt is kind of weird on Jesus's part. I've heard of people calling other people salty but this is definitely different. It makes a lot more sense however once you understand the purposes behind salt.

Back in Jesus's time, salt had many uses. We are going to look at three of them this morning.

One of its primary purposes was as a purifying agent. A purifying agent is a substance that removes impurities or contaminants from something, essentially "cleaning" it and making it pure. In practical terms, this could mean removing dirt, bacteria, chemicals, or other unwanted substances.

In the same way, this world is diseased with sin. Everything went wrong with Adam and Eve and it has only gotten worse. Every day the decay of this world shows by the evil that happens. The school shooting in Wisconsin just a couple weeks ago is evidence of that.

But the good news of the gospel is that Jesus came to save us from our sin. And as his followers, we are commanded to share the good news about Jesus with the world! In Mark 16:15, Jesus told his disciples to "Go into all the world and proclaim the gospel to the whole creation." When we do, and God leads them to respond in repentance, we are having a purifying influence on this world.

If you are going to live as salt of the earth, **proclaim God's solution to sin.**

Tell others about who Jesus is and why he came to this world. Speak up and share about how wrong sin is and the consequences of it. Do so out of a desire to see more and more people come to saving faith in Jesus. When they do, they are purified! They are washed clean from sin and its eternal consequences! To be clear, God is the one who saves and purifies, but in his infinite wisdom he uses us to tell others about him and point them to him.

But that means we have to speak up! We can't remain quiet while the world around us rots away. We need to get involved in the world around us. God wants to use us as salt. It can be appealing to run away from the world, but that's not the answer Jesus presents. We are to be that purifying agent.

To do this, you need to find ways to interact with the world. Go volunteer somewhere. Go get involved in your child's school, or extracurricular activity where you can meet people. Get to know the neighbors where you live. There are lots of creative ways to do so.

Then as you do, make it a point to talk to unbelievers you meet about your faith in Jesus. Tell them why you follow Jesus. Tell them about his life and what he did for us on the cross. And invite them to repent and believe as well. If God is calling them, they will respond! As he does, he is using you as purifying salt of the earth.

But being salt doesn't stop at purity. Salt is also used as a preservative.

A preservative is something that slows rot. You see back then, they didn't have refrigerators. Meat would spoil if left untreated. The solution was salt. They would cover the meat in it or soak it in a salty mixture. This acted as a preservative against the rot.

Left to itself, this world rots in its sin. It only gets worse. People hurt each other to get what they want. They lie, cheat, steal, murder and much worse. This world needs a salty, godly influence.

The church, believers who God is growing and changing, are to be that salt, a purifying and preserving agent God uses against that rot. They help to halt that rot by embracing God's desires for us.

If you are going to live as salt of the earth, **embrace God's desires for us.**

What does that look like? Well a believer who seeks to learn more about God's desires for us and lives for God on a day to day basis has a major impact on those around them. They show others what God wants.

Think back to the Beatitudes – being merciful, peacemakers, hungering and thirsting for righteousness, etc. All of these show the world what God wants. As you embrace and live it out, you reveal God's desires. They lead society towards what is right and condemn what is wrong.

When non-believers are around a believer who lives out their faith, they are often more hesitant to sin. The mere presence of someone who hates those things and loves what Jesus loves has an influence on those around them.

The presence of Christians living for what God wants also has a huge influence on society as a whole. Crime is reduced, the hurting are helped, honesty is promoted, and the community is more moral. The rot is slowed down.

Christians throughout history have had a major impact on this world as they lived for what God wants. For example, William Wilberforce, a strong evangelical Christian, worked tirelessly to end slavery within the British Colonies. This evil practice wasn't in line with what God wanted. Eventually this led to Slavery Abolition Act of 1833. This freed more than 800,000 slaves in the Caribbean and South Africa. He embraced what God desired and impacted the world.

The challenge Jesus is giving here is to be that salt. To be that kind of godly influence on the world around you. As you actively live as a member of God's kingdom, you show the world what God desires for them. You cause them to think twice before sinning. You are used by God to accomplish his good will in this world. You perhaps are even used by God to lead others to repent of sin and turn to him. Thus, Jesus saves them from that rot.

Now does that mean everyone will respond positively to you being salt, absolutely not. Sometimes you are more like a salt in a wound to them. As you live for Jesus and they are convicted of their own sin and they may react poorly. They may hate you, persecute you as Matthew 5:10-12 lays out.

But for others you will also be appealing. Let me ask you this, would you prefer the taste of unsalted popcorn or salted popcorn? Salt right, because it tastes good.

Not only is salt a purifying agent and preservative, but it also gives things flavor and creates thirst. That's another one of its purposes. As you taste it, you find it appealing and the more you have it the more thirsty you get. In the same way, we are to help lead others to hunger and thirst for God by showing them the goodness of God.

As the salt of the earth, **Show God's goodness to others.**

How do we do this? We live righteous lives that give others a taste of God's character (again think beatitude lives). We can also point them to the Word and what it reveals about our amazing God.

As we do, people begin to want to know more. They want to know this awesome God that we serve and won't stop talking about.

This can lead them to repent of their sins and believe in him, to surrender their lives to him so that they too can become salt.

You never know how God can use you to impact others. All you are called to do is be faithful to him. As you live for him in front of a fallen world, God can use you to be a purifying, preserving, and thirst/desire inspiring agent in a decaying world and lead others to turn to him.

There is also however a warning in this passage. Look back at **Matthew 5:13.**

"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 trampled under people's feet."

In studying this passage, I learned that if salt becomes diluted by something else then its saltiness is lost. It becomes less pungent. Eventually it is indistinguishable. If salt lost its saltiness, it would be useless.

In the life of a believer, if we stopped living for Jesus, if we stopped being that godly, salty influence on this world, we would no longer be serving our purpose.

There are times where we can lose our purpose. Where we can fall for temptation and give into sin. Where we can start living for what the world wants and be indistinct from the world around us.

The way we approach money and possessions becomes no different from the world. How we treat others is no different. We are not merciful. We are not peacemakers. We are instead selfish and hate filled. In those moments, we are no longer living distinct salty lives. We have become diluted.

Jesus is challenging us not to be like that. If salt becomes diluted it loses its purifying, preserving, desire and thirst inspiring characteristics. In Jesus time there was no way to fix it, hence the question, how shall its saltiness be restored. It can't. It's only fit to be thrown out.

But thank God there is a spiritual way to restore us. If you are sitting here and you are not living as salt, I want to challenge you to repent. God will forgive you. God can spiritually restore a believer who repents and turns to him.

For some in here, this lack of being salt may mean you have never been saved. You've never turned to him as your personal Lord and Savior and so your life isn't different from the world's. Turn to him for the first time. Taste and see that he is good (Psalm 34:8).

For the rest of us, let's start living like salt in a decaying world. Let's live for God and be used by him to impact those around us.

Look back with me at **Matthew 5:14-16** for the second metaphor Jesus uses to describe the influence we should have on this world.

“You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. ¹⁵ 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. ¹⁶ 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.”

For those of you who know your New Testament, you might have had a thought pop into your minds as we read these verses. In John 8:12, Jesus explicitly says, “I am the light of the world.” So in reading these verses it can sound like a contradiction. Which is it? Are we the light or is he the light? Both! Jesus explicitly said both and both must then be true.

How does that work? We simply reflect the light of Christ to a world lost in the darkness of sin by means of being indwelt by the Holy Spirit, living for him with the Spirit’s help, and telling others about him.

When I was kid, I had a bedroom on the top floor of our house with a window right next to my bed. There were times where I would stay up at night and just look out the window at the stars and moon, and the McDonalds neon sign a few streets away. One thing I didn’t know as a kid was that the moon itself did not produce light. Only later on as I was in school did I learn that it was merely reflecting the sun’s light back to the earth.

In the same way, Jesus is the true light of the world. He came to this earth and shined his light through the way he lived, what he taught, and ultimately what did for us upon the cross. His light pierced the darkness of sin that covers this world.

When Jesus describes us as the light of the world, he is saying we are reflecting or sharing his light to the world. We show the light of Christ to a sinful and fallen world, as we live for him with the Spirit’s help and tell others about him. This exposes sin for what it is and Jesus for the Savior and Lord he is.

This leads us to our second point. **Let your light shine for all to see.**

We are going to come back to verses 14-15 and the images he uses to describe this light. For now, look at verse 16 and the command Jesus lays out. “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.”

This living as light starts at salvation. We must repent of our sins and place our faith in Jesus to save us. We surrender our minds, hearts, and wills to Jesus in salvation. Then out of that salvation God grows us and leads us in a transformed character – like the Beatitudes. This is how we shine Christ’s light today, by what we say and do.

Before Christ, you lived for sin and yourself. After salvation, you grow to live more and more for God with his help. That results in more and more good works. This brings glory to God. As verse 16 says, “they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.”

The world will see and wonder what happened to you. They will want to know why you are different. You can point them back to Jesus. You didn't change ourselves. God did. You simply surrendered to him and followed him with his help. This brings glory to God. This can result in the world even praising God for what he has done in you.

I've seen this happen with people who turn to Jesus in the face of an addiction. Those who knew them before are amazed at the transformation in their lives. They praise God for what has happened in their friend's life.

"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."

Jesus is commanding us to live bright shining lives that point others to who our God is, the salvation he offers, and life he wants for them.

Is that the way you are living? Are you pointing others to God by what you say and do? Is God receiving glory for how you live?

Listen to what Jesus is saying here. Embrace being lights in a dark sinful world.

Look back at **verses 14-15 for the images he uses to picture this light**. "You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. ¹⁵ 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."

Jesus tells us that if you approached a city set on top of a hill, there is no way to hide it. If you have ever driven along the highway at night back towards the Quad Cities, you know that the light from the cities give them away. They aren't hidden but shine through the darkness. That's what our lives should be like. Beacons of light, that reveal our amazing God and what he is doing in us. So bright do they shine, that they can't be hidden.

This happens when we forgive others when the world would say take revenge. This happens when we are content with what God has provided versus always wanting more as the world does. This happens when we choose to love and serve others when the world would only look out for themselves.

In those moments, our lives scream something different. They point to the fact that we have the Spirit in us and guiding us as we seek to live for God. Our light is shining.

But too often that isn't the case. Instead we hide the light of Christ. Jesus points out how ridiculous this is using the image of lighting a lamp and putting it under a basket. That makes no sense. You put it in the highest place so that it lights up the whole house.

Jesus is telling us that we shouldn't be hiding his light from the world. The way we live should point people back to Christ the true light. It should be a beacon to others.

The problem is we often give in to pressures to hide our Christianity. We are embarrassed to admit we follow Jesus in front of our non-Christian friends or in front of strangers. We fear how others are going to respond to us if stand up for Jesus and live for him. Maybe they'll hate us or hurt us.

The true Christian must let their light shine regardless of the consequences. They live for him despite how people might hate them for it.

Are you shining for Christ or are hiding him? If you are hiding him, this may even point to the fact that you don't know him as your Savior and Lord. Christ changes us. If your life is no different from the world around us, you are not living as Salt and Light. You have to ask yourself if you have truly embraced him as your Savior and Lord.

If you have not, turn to him. Repent and believe.

If you have, live out that relationship with him. Don't let fear or anything else get in the way of your love for Christ and your desire to glorify him.

Each of us are going to face different opportunities to live as salt and light in this world. The commands Jesus lays out here is to embrace those moments and firmly follow him. As you do, you bring glory to God and influence this world for him.

Stand firm in the face of decay and darkness. Be that salt and light.

Let's pray.

Lord we thank you for coming to this world to be that light and to save us from our sin. Please forgive us for the ways we have failed to live as salt and light in this world. Please equip us and teach us to live this out more and more. Provide opportunities for us to practice. As we enter a new year, guide us in what you are calling us to do differently. We commit to living as salt and light.

Amen!