

## **Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time***

### **You are the Salt of the Earth**

Scripture: Matthew 5:13

Code: 2207

Turn with me to Matthew 5 for our study tonight; we are continuing, rather patiently, to work our way through the Sermon on the Mount in connection with the study of the entire gospel of Matthew. It will take us quite a long time, but it is so wonderful and rich that we are not at all adverse in spending plenty of time in this tremendous book.

Let me read you the text that we'll be working through tonight. Matthew 5:13-16. "You are the salt of the earth; but if the salt loses its flavor, how shall it be seasoned? It is then good for nothing but to be thrown out and trampled underfoot by men. You are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do they light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven."

What you have in these very simple four verses is the picture that our Lord gives of the Christian in the world, the function of the believer in the world. If I could reduce it to one word, it would be the word 'influence.' Our Lord is saying that the Christian who lives according to the Beatitudes is going to influence the world as salt and light. In all that a person does and is (or is not), the sum total of our character, consciously or otherwise, affects other people. Philosophers have put it this way: "No man is an island."

One of my favorite stories in Greek mythology is recorded by Dr. Biederwolf in a rather old book, and this is what he says. "The story is told in mythology of a goddess who came unseen but was always known by the blessings she left in her pathway. Trees blackened by forest fires put forth new leaves as she passed by. In her footprints at the brookside, violets sprang up. The stagnant pool became a spring of sparkling water; the parched fields blossomed as the rose, and every hillside and valley blushed with new life and beauty when she passed.

"The story is also told of another beautiful princess, who was sent as a present to a particular king. About her was an atmosphere as sweet-smelling as the garments of Aphrodite. She seemed as beautiful and as pure as if fresh from a bath of dew, and her breath was as sweet perfume of the richest rose. But, strange enough, in the atmosphere that she carried about with her was the contagion of death. From her infancy, this beautiful woman had known no food but poison. She had been reared on it, and had become so permeated with it that she herself became the very essence of it. She would breathe her fragrant breath into a swarm of insects, and behold, they lie dead at her

feet. She would place the loveliest flower upon her bosom and lo, it would fade and fall apart. Into her presence came a hummingbird; it fluttered, poised a moment, shuddered, and fell dead."

How like this poisoned princess is every man whose influence is a blight, a curse upon his fellow men. "We live," says Biederwolf, "and the atmosphere we exhale is richly laden with the fragrance of virtue or with a poisonous perfume that consumes the people around us." One other writer put it this way, "You are writing a gospel, a chapter each day, by deeds that you do and words that you say. Men read what you write, whether faultless or true. Say, what is the gospel according to you?"

Andrew Murray evidently lived a holy life before his children. I was reading about Andrew Murray, a great man of God, and about the effect he had on his children. The biographer says, "Eleven of his children grew to adult life. Five of the six sons became ministers of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Four of his daughters became ministers' wives." Not bad, nine out of eleven. Even the second generation made a good showing. Ten grandsons became ministers of Christ and thirteen became missionaries. Influence.

President Woodrow Wilson told this story. He said, "I was in a very common place. I was sitting in a barber chair when I became aware that a personality had entered the room. A man had come quietly in upon the same errand as myself, to have his hair cut, and sat in the chair next to me. Every word the man uttered, though it was not in the least didactic, showed a personal interest in the man who was serving him. Before I got through with what was being done for me, I was aware that I had attended an evangelistic service, because Mr. D. L. Moody was in that chair.

I purposely lingered in the room after he had left and noted the singular effect that his visit had brought upon the barber shop. They talked in undertones; they didn't know his name, but they knew that something had elevated their thoughts. I felt that I left that place as I should have left the place of worship. My admiration and esteem for Mr. Moody became very deep indeed."

Influence. What message do you leave the world? When you pass by, what are you saying? Years ago, Elihu Burritt wrote this, "No human being can come into this world without increasing or diminishing the sum total of human happiness. Not only of the present, but of every subsequent age of humanity. No one can detach himself from this connection. There is no sequestered spot in the universe, no dark niche along the disc of nonexistence to which he can retreat from his relations to others, where he can withdraw the influence of his existence upon the moral destiny of the world. Everywhere, his presence or absence will be felt. Everywhere, he will have companions who will be better or worse because of him. It is an old saying," says Burritt, "And one of the fearful and fathomless statements of import, that we are forming characters for eternity.

"Forming characters? Whose? Our own or others? Both. And in that momentous fact lies the peril and the responsibility of our existence. Who is sufficient for the thought? Thousands of my fellow

beings will yearly enter eternity with characters differing from those they would have carried thither had I never lived. The sunlight of that world will reveal my finger marks in their primary formations, and in their successive strata of thought and life."

This is precisely what Jesus is teaching in Matthew 5:13-16; He is talking about influence, about how you and I affect the world. In the Sermon on the Mount, at this point, He is saying, "You who are characterized by Beatitude-quality life, you who are the sons and daughters of the Kingdom are the salt and light of the world to influence the world for good and for God." Our Lord is calling on us to influence the world that we live in, just as He was those disciples gathered with Him as He preached to the multitudes.

It isn't easy, you know? In fact, in many ways, it is an almost impossible task. Think about it this way: in a prayer to the Father, in John 17, our Lord once said regarding those who believe and enter the Kingdom, "I pray not that You would take them out of the world." In the very next sentence, He said, "They are not of the world." One verse later, He said, "So I have sent them into the world." Later on, the Holy Spirit said to John, "Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world." The sum of those verses goes like this. "I want you in the world, but not of the world. I've sent you to the world, but don't love the world." I don't know about you, but to me, that feels like a thin line. How could believers be in the world but not of the world; sent to the world but not permitted to love it? What a paradox.

How can we influence it, then? How are we to influence this world? How can we be in it and not of it? How can we be sent to it and not love it? The solution comes in verses 13-16. We have to be salt and light. Salt, in order to be effective, has to be mingled with the substance it's affecting, and yet salt is distinct from that substance. Light, in order to dispel darkness, must shine upon the darkness, yet is distinct from the darkness.

It's going to take us a few weeks to get through these four verses because they are so pregnant with meaning, but we'll begin to at least look at the characteristics of salt and light tonight. Remember, our Lord has outlined magnificently the qualities and principles that make Kingdom people distinctive. We are the beggarly ones, who mourn over our sin, who are meek before a holy God, who hunger and thirst for righteousness and are consequently merciful, pure in heart, peacemakers. Thereby, we are persecuted. This is the distinctiveness of our lifestyle.

Remember that in the first part of this sermon, in verses 1-12, the Lord defines the character of a believer. He says, "This is the kind of character that you now must use to influence the world." So you see, in order for us to influence the world, it presupposes the kind of character defined in the first section of the Sermon on the Mount. As we enter the Kingdom on these conditions, as we become Kingdom people, and manifest these characteristics. We who are the sons of the Kingdom will have a profound effect on the world. As we live out the reality of the Beatitudes, we will affect the world.

The world will react negatively many times, and persecute us, but some will react positively and believe and be saved.

It fascinates me, I guess, as perhaps it does you, if you think about it. This follows right after verses 10-12. Verses 10-12 say, "Blessed are they who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, blessed are you when men revile you," or abuse you to the face, "And persecute you, and say all manner of evil against you falsely for my sake. Rejoice and be exceedingly glad for great is your reward in heaven. So persecuted they the prophets who were before you."

In other words, the point is this: you're going to live a Beatitude kind of life, a godly life in the world, and you can anticipate, gild-edge guarantee, that at some point in time, if you really live a godly life in this present world, you will be persecuted. However, when that happens, that doesn't mean you change your function. Immediately He says, "You are still the salt of the earth. Do not forfeit your saltiness; you are still the light of the world. Don't mitigate or minimize or turn out or hide under a bushel that light." The point is this: don't let persecution alter your function in the world. Your influence is to be what God designed it to be, and it must not be altered even though you would be persecuted.

In I Peter 2:9, Peter says, "You are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a kingdom of priests, a holy nation, a people of His own." Look at the distinctions. A chosen genos, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people of His own. For what purpose? "In order that you should show forth the praises of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light." The reason you are what you are in His Kingdom is to manifest this influence. Christians cannot bend to the world; we cannot bow to the world, even when the world sets about to persecute us. We do not alter our commitment.

It is like Martin Luther, when confronted by those who were branding him as a heretic and about to take his life, he said, "I cannot recant, I will not deny that which is true." That is the way we all are to live. The whole point of the passage is that we who are the sons of the Kingdom are to be salt and light in the world, and never, under any condition, be it persecution, face-to-face abuse, behind the back, malicious slander, never are we to alter that function one whit. We have to face the music (in the vernacular), or, in biblical terms, we have to take up the Cross and follow Christ.

By the way, I feel that this is directed, not to the whole multitude seated on the side of the hill as Jesus preaches, but this is directed to the disciples, the ones who believe. Listen, I still think He has the multitude in His heart. The reason He wants the ones who believe to be salt and light is to win the multitude, you see. So He never loses the perspective. The King, for a moment, leaves the crowd and talks to the saints, the disciples, sitting before Him. But it isn't for their sakes only that He talks, He loves the vast multitude, the unheeding mob, if you will. He realizes that if that unheeding mob is to be reached, it is to be reached because the believing community is salt and light. This is a mandate, beloved, to influence the world.

Jesus is saying we are to be different; poor in spirit, mournful and meek, thirsting for righteousness, merciful, pure in heart, peacemaking. And even though we are all those things, we don't crawl off into a monastery somewhere. We get out in the world and we live it right there where they can see it.

The final Beatitude in verses 10-12 is transitional. We see, in verses 10-12, the attitude of the world toward the believer, and in 13-16, the attitude of the believer toward the world. The world is going to hate us, but we still have to be salt and light to influence them. The important truth is revealed that the people the world hates are the very ones they desperately need to be influenced by. Did you hear that? Even the quasi-religious, quasi-pious scribes and pharisees who hated the representatives of Jesus Christ were totally dependent on their influence to know the truth of God. The world may hate us and persecute us, but the world is absolutely dependent on us being the influence and the verbal manifestation of the Gospel of God.

We alone are the salt of the earth; there is no other. That's it, just us. If we lose our saltiness, it's lost. We are the light; that's it, just us. Nobody else. If our light is under a bushel, there is no other alternative.

As we look at these four verses, I want to give you four great truths. Four great truths so that you'll understand what it means to be salt and light. First, the presupposition; secondly, the plan; thirdly, the problem; fourth, the purpose (it will take us a few weeks to get through these).

First of all, the presupposition. The presupposition is simple; this text presupposes two things: the world is decayed, that's why it needs salt, and it is dark, that's why it needs light. The presupposition, then, is the decay and darkness of the world. It doesn't have to say that; it presupposes it. The fact that the world needs light presupposes it's dark; the fact that it needs salt presupposes that it's decadent, or decayed and decaying. Salt is needed where there is decay. Salt is used where there is corruption. Light is brought where there is darkness.

G. Campbell Morgan says, "Jesus, looking out over the multitudes of His day, saw the corruption and the disintegration of life at every point. He saw its spoliation and because of His love of the multitudes, He knew the thing they needed most was salt in order that the corruption would be arrested. He saw them wrapped in gloom, sitting in darkness, groping amidst fogs and mists, and He knew that they needed, above everything else, light." Morgan is right. The presupposition here is that we live in a decayed and decaying, dark and darkening world; that is the biblical world view. Jesus reveals His perspective on the world: it's decayed and dark.

It isn't getting better. "Evil men," it says in Timothy's epistle, "Shall become worse and worse." You know, it is absolutely a ridiculous, stupid pipe dream to think the world is getting better. It can't get better because it isn't good to start with. It's bad, and it's getting worse.

One student told me last week that one of the professors at a local college was telling his class recently that the reason marriage is on the decline, and the reason marriage is fading out as a human institution is because man is evolving to a higher level and marriage is something man only needs at the lower level. So man is evolving to a higher level of living, an evolutionary-style of living, that is causing marriage (like his prehensile tail) to drop off.

Listen, anybody standing around in the world today, saying, "We're still evolving up," is blind as a bat! Now, I agree that we're learning a lot. We have an incredible amount of science, and technology, and medical knowledge, and philosophy, and history, and sociology, and psychology, and educational technique, and all of this stuff is going on all the time. You know what? It has no effect upon the corruption of society, none at all. We just get worse and worse and worse. All that information means nothing.

The world of Jesus' time had the same decay and the same darkness. All we've done is increased the volume; we've turned it up louder and invented new ways to do it. There are just more of us than there were then, and the time in between has allowed us to have more inventions of evil, as Romans 1 talks about.

It's interesting to go back in history, to go back to the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century - that wasn't long ago, just 80 or so years ago. Philosophers and poets at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century had an incredible optimism. In fact, not long after that, we had what we call the Emerson Era; people just believed that everything was going to become a golden age, we were all going to go waltzing into Utopia. Everything was going to change, the Golden Age in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, and they based it on the theory of evolution. Man was getting better and better; man was ascending, advancing, rising, the scale was going upward.

They said, at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, that wars were going to be abolished, that there would never again be a great war. They said that disease was going to be cured, suffering would be eradicated, through education, the masses would cease drunkenness and immorality, and vice would come to a halt. Nations would talk, not fight, and the world would be characterized by peace. Some writers said the earth was fast becoming a paradise.

Those books don't sell too well in the day in which we live. Not many people believe that stuff. The world is rotten and polluted, and we know it. What is so amazing is that it is just as rotten and polluted with technology as it was without it. It has had absolutely no impact on the morality of our day. Information has no impact at all.

Listen, beloved, that is the biblical view of the world; that's the way Jesus saw it, that's the way it has always been. It didn't take very long from Genesis 1, when God created man, to Genesis 6, when

God looked at man and said, "All I see is only evil continually." God said, "There's only one thing to do: save eight righteous souls and drown the rest of humanity." And He did. He locked up eight of them with a bunch of animals in a big boat, and the rest of them drowned. God made a perfect world, sin entered, evil, polluting influence took over, and God had to destroy the entire world by Genesis 6. He had a new start, gave them a new start.

By Genesis 19, one area of the world called Sodom & Gomorrah had become so rotten, vile, and corrupted that God had to come in and destroy everyone in that place by fire and brimstone. The time is coming in the future, according to II Peter 3, when God will again rain fire out of Heaven and destroy the world in a holocaust of fire like men have never dreamed.

You see, it's the same old tale told again. It's the same old story. Man just gets worse and worse and worse; he is infected with the germ of sin. There is no antidote apart from God, and he will not have God because he loves his darkness rather than light. He loves his decadence and does not want purity, and the germ thus affects the whole body of humanity, brings universally the disease of sin, and the world continues to descend on the scale of immorality to the place where God will eventually bring final judgment.

The world is dark. I don't mean we're dark in the sense of information; we have information. We have all kinds of information. They're storing it on molecules now. They can get the Library of Congress on an object the size of a sugar cube. We've got so much information that they're working on storage problems. We have information, but our knowledge is mechanical. Our knowledge is scientific, and with inanimate objects. There is some knowledge of the scientific function of animate objects, but when it comes to the inward knowledge of why people are what they are, and to the truth of life and death and eternity and God, man has no answers. So he cannot retard the corruption and darkness in which he lives.

By the way, it's really a frustrating thing to be a philosopher. Bertrand Russell spent his whole life being a philosopher. At 96 years old, he was ready to die. His final statement was this, "Philosophy has proved a washout to me." It didn't take him anywhere, because nothing that he ever thought of ever had anything to affect the way the world was going.

The greatest thinkers in the world are completely baffled at solutions to the real hunger of the human heart. They are talking now about the fact that what we need is electronic stimulation of the brain (ESB), where they stick a bunch of stuff in your brain and zap out all your evil parts, so that all you are is a zombie. You know what cloning is? You know where we're going with test tube babies? We're going to the place where they will determine who gets to be born and who doesn't get to be born. They will try to get this all out of society by controlling genetic processes. It will never work. You say, "All we'll have is a bunch of zombie clones." Well, if that's true, they'll be bad ones.

You're not righteous by accident; man is depraved from his birth. David said, "In sin did my mother conceive me. From the very point of conception I was a sinner." So the decay and the darkness of the world is the presupposition, and nothing can be more evident than that against the backdrop of the knowledge we have today.

I mean, we've had so many peace talks and we have so many answers, and technology and science and so forth, but we still have problems we will never solve. Killings, slaughters, wars never end. Crime rates rise, more murders and rapes and crimes of all kinds than ever are happening. Despair and pessimism reign in our day because man hasn't been able to retard his descent. In fact, he has the sickening feeling that he is just speeding it up with his technology. We're all sitting on the edges of our chairs hoping that some little man somewhere doesn't punch the wrong red button and blow us all up in a nuclear war.

One magazine says, "It is the particular heresy of Americans that they see themselves as potential saints rather than real-life sinners.." *TimeMagazine* says, "Today's young radicals in particular are almost painfully sensitive to these and other wrongs of their society. They denounce them violently. But at the same time, they are typically American, in that they fail to place evil in its historic and human perspective." *TimeMagazine* says this! "To them, evil is not an irreducible component of man, it is not an inescapable fact of life, but something committed by the older generation attributable to a particular class or the establishment and eradicable through love or revolution." That's foolish. It is an irreducible human component, evil is.

The heart of man is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked. This is Jesus' view, the view of any thinking person. Any evolutionist would have to be blind to reality to think human society is on the ascent. It isn't true. So our Lord is saying that since we have a decaying, corrupted society shrouded in darkness, this society needs salt to retard the corruption and light to brighten the darkness. The presupposition, the darkness and decay of the world, moves us to the second point: the plan.

God has a plan. The plan is the dominion of the disciples. He sets us up in the world as a holy priesthood, a kingdom of priests, as kings and priests. He says, "I'm giving you dominion, I'm giving you a restored dominion that man lost in the Fall. You are My kings, and you are My vice-regents, you are My princes in the world. You are My priests and prophets in the world, and your job is to retard the corruption and bring light to the darkness."

You know what's so sad about it? Instead of the church influencing the world this way, the church is influenced by the world. The very things we talked about this morning, and what we've talked about in the past, we become victimized. Remember when we talked about the crises of Christianity and how the church has fallen victim to so many trends in human society? It's ludicrous what the church



permits under the influence of the world.

So what is the plan? Verse 13. "You are the salt of the earth. You are the light of the world. Let your light so shine before men." Guess who has the responsibility? You! To whom does the 'you' refer? I believe it refers to the disciples, the believers; they are the agents of divine transformation. They are the ones who are salt and light.

By the way, in verse 13, "You are the salt," and verse 14, "You are the light," the pronouns are emphatic. You only are the light, you only are the salt, no one else! You're it, and if you don't retard the corruption, if you don't bring the light to bear on the world, there will be no retardation and no light. That's why I've been telling you, from the bottom of my heart, for so many months now that we must live in the world, distinct from the world, if we are to fulfill the plan that Jesus set about to fulfill in the world. We cannot be corrupted by it; we cannot swallow its morality, or immorality, or ammorality, or non-morality. We cannot swallow its materialism, self-centeredness, easy solutions, we cannot listen to its philosophies.

When we are called to come out and be separate and touch not the unclean thing, that is a very exacting call. The very ones who are persecuted by the world, the very ones hated by the world are not to retreat to some place in the woods, they are not to run in persecution. We are to stand there and face the world emphatically, holding to the responsibility to be salt and light if ever there is to be a retardation of corruption and a dawning of light in the darkness. Literally translating verse 13 would be this: "The only salt of the earth is you." That's it. Here we are in 1979, in Southern California, in the midst of a decadent and dark society, and the only salt of this place is you. That's it. All who possess the character of the Kingdom are it.

By the way, that 'you' is plural; He's talking about the collective body of believers. You don't put one grain of salt on anything. You don't say, "Pass the salt," and then pick out one grain and drop it on there. It only functions in combination with other grains of salt, and the church, to influence the world, must be collective salt. It's not enough to be all alone at it, we must be at it together using collective influence. By the way, the same is true of the light. 'The light' uses the illustration of a city; it's many lights that light city, many grains of salt that affect a substance.

So the saved are the salt. The verb here, este, stresses being. The stress is on being, what we are and what we continue to be. We are the salt, we continue to be the salt, and we are the only salt in the world. Let me add this, it's not what we should be, it's what we are. Like it or not, you're the salt of the earth. The only question is whether you're salty or whether you've lost your salty flavor. You are the salt; you either have savor or you don't.

The idea isn't, "Please be salt," it's, "You are salt." The only question is whether you're salty. You are light; the only question is whether you're on or not. That's all. If you are a believer, you're salt. If

you're a believer, you're light. You're not going to get to be salt. You can't say, "I'm a new Christian and I would certainly like to attain salt." No. "I'm growing toward being light." No, you are light. You are salt. The question is whether you've got taste and shine.

The same emphasis is made in verse 14, the same thrust. "You alone are the light." Of course, we know that Christ is the true Light that lights every man who comes into the world (John 1). In John 8, Jesus said, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me shall not walk in darkness but have the light of life." In John 9:5, He claimed to be the light again. In John 12:35, He claimed to be the light again. Ever and always, He claimed to be the light. But what's so wonderful is that He passed that light along to us. In Philippians 2:15, it says, "You should be blameless, harmless children of God, without rebuke in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation among whom you shine as lights in the world, holding forth the word of life." That's the motto we have on the stationery of Grace Church, "Holding forth the word of life."

God says, "Christ is my Light, but you also are lights." He is the sun, and we are the moons. This means we have become part of a miracle. We were darkness and we are now light. Paul said that many places; we've read it in Ephesians 5:8, "For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord." We're the light. Paul says to the Thessalonians, "You are not in the darkness, you're in the light. Walk as children of the day."

Beloved, we are the light and the salt. That's just the way it is. We have been totally separated from the world. In I John 5:4, it says, "Whoever is born of God overcomes the world. This is the victory that overcomes the world, even our faith. Who is he that overcomes the world but he that believes that Jesus is the son of God?" When you believed in Christ, you overcame the world, you stepped out of the darkness. Colossians 1 says, "You were translated from the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of His dear son, and the kingdom of His son is light."

You say, "What does 'light' mean?" It means the truth and the life of God revealed. We are no longer in the darkness; we are in the light, and we are the light of the world. Reflecting the light of the sun, we are moons, that the world may know the truth of God. So we are salt to retard the corruption and light to manifest the truth. One is negative and one is positive. Salt retards corruption and light manifests truth.

Not only are we to retard the corruption, but we are to manifest the truth, both a negative and a positive. By our influence, we retard corruption. By our verbalization and our living, we manifest the truth. So you have here the influence of a silent testimony and the impact of a verbal and living testimony. Our salt influence may be silent and hidden as salt was rubbed into meat to preserve it. But our light influence has to be open and ablaze in the way we live and in the manifestation of verbalizing the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Salt is unlike the medium in which it is placed. Light is unlike darkness. God has changed us from being a part of the corrupting, stinking, foul meat of the world to be the salt that can preserve it, and from being in the gloomy mist of darkness to being light that can expose it. I don't think there is any middle ground; you're either Peter or Judas, there is nothing in the middle.

Worldliness and secularization is totally condemned in this passage; you cannot be a part of the system. You can't! We can't have people who claim to be Christians and who never separate from the evil system; it can't be done. There is something wrong with that, something seriously wrong when you claim to be a believer yet you never come out of the world. You're not salt; you haven't changed from the medium you're in, you're still corrupting. You're not light; you haven't come out of the darkness.

So our Lord connects great blessedness through verse 12 with great responsibility in verses 13-16. If God is so gracious (verses 3-12) to put you in the Kingdom and to give you everything He gives you: the Kingdom of Heaven (verse 3), comfort (verse 4), the earth as an inheritance (verse 5), filling you up with righteousness (verse 6), giving you mercy (verse 7), allowing you to see God (verse 8), calling you a son (verse 9), and giving you a great reward (verse 12). If you have all of that blessing, believe me, you'll have responsibility too. The responsibility is to live as salt and light.

It is challenging and exciting, not easy, but vastly rewarding. We must live above the world. You sprinkle salt from above onto something. You shed light from above onto something; that's what Christ is saying. That's the divine plan: dominion.

I want to talk specifically tonight about salt. Next time we'll talk about light. I think salt is fascinating. What does it mean for us to be salt? How does salt manifest itself? Let me give you some thoughts about salt. I don't know if you know this, but salt has always been very valuable in human society. Today it's not like it used to be, but in the Greek's day, salt was considered to be divine. In fact, they called it theon, they called it divine. Salt was very important. The Romans said nothing was more valuable than sun and salt, because in a day without refrigeration, the only way they could preserve meat was to salt it. They would literally rub the salt in. You've read about the old times when they traveled across the sea and kept their jerky in big barrels, soaked in brine, or even just salted and left hard and stiff. You see that in stores today. Salt was a preservative.

Roman soldiers were paid with salt, did you know that? If you were a lousy soldier, you weren't 'worth your salt,' that's where that phrase came from. Salt was used throughout the ancient society as a sign of friendship. There were salt covenants. Today in the Arab world, if a man partakes of salt with another man, if two Arabs today partake of salt, that means that they are under each other's care. Even if a worst enemy came in and ate with a man, and ate his salt, that man would be obliged to care for that enemy as if he were his fast friend. So salt was used for pay, salt was used to bind

friendships, salt was used with covenants. I think there has been something of a holdover with that today, when people throw salt over their shoulder when they make a promise in some societies.

In II Chronicles 13:5, God speaks of a covenant of salt that He made with David. It was common in that part of the world to add salt to a covenant. There wasn't any notary public, there wasn't someone to put a stamp on it, so when you wanted to authenticate the legality of a document, the two men who entered into the agreement would eat salt in the face of witnesses. When the witnesses saw them eating salt, they said, "The covenant is binding."

By the way, God prescribed salt as a necessary part of the sacrifices, partly to be a preservative. Some of the sacrifice would be eaten by the priests, and some of it would be taken back, perhaps also as a symbol of this covenant concept. In Leviticus 2:13, we read, "Every oblation of your meat offering shall be seasoned with salt. Neither shall you suffer the salt of the covenant of your God to be lacking from your meat offerings. With all of your offerings, you shall offer salt"

So salt was a very important commodity. When Jesus said, "You are the salt of the earth," they could have thought of a lot of things. They could have thought, "We are the valuable people in the world! We are the ones who are honored in the world; there is nothing more important than sun and salt, and we're salt." Later, He said they're light, so light and salt, sun and salt, that's it. That's what the Romans had been saying for years. Maybe Jesus was playing off that little thought, some think. What Jesus said no doubt had tremendous significance to them.

Salt was used to season food. In fact, food without salt, let's face it, has something missing. You know, people just have a terrible time when they have to go on salt-free diets. That's biblical! You're supposed to eat some things with salt. Take eggs for example. Eggs are awful generally anyway, but without salt, wow! I heard a doctor say the other day that the white of the egg is fine, you can do what you want with that, but leave the yolk alone - it's supposed to be a chicken! Anyway, in Job 6:6, it says, "Can that which is unsavory be eaten without salt, or is there any taste in the white of an egg?" Job says, "You can't eat an egg without salt." So maybe the idea is that salt is used to season things.

By the way, Isaiah 30:24 brings up the same issue. I thought this was interesting. Salt is used to preserve. Turn to Ezekiel 16 and you'll find a fascinating use of salt. Mothers, you may be a little reluctant to try this, but it is kind of interesting. Ezekiel 16:4 has the birth of a baby, "And as for thy nativity, in the day thou wast born thy navel was not cut, neither wast thou washed in water to supple thee; thou wast not salted at all, nor swaddled at all."

Now you say, "Wait a minute! Are they going to eat this baby?" No, you know what they used to do? First thing, they'd wash the baby, then they would rub salt all over the baby. Why? In the process of birth, there may have been some knicks, or scratches, or wounds that occurred to the baby, and this

would act as a healing agency. So they would rub salt all over the baby. So He is simply saying, "You weren't salted." Of course, then they were swaddled, or wrapped in some kind of cloth. So it was used as a healing agent; newborn babies were even washed with salt.

It could also serve a destructive purpose. If you really wanted to mess up your neighbor's field if you were having an argument, you'd salt his field; that would do it. In fact, in Judges 9:45, when Abimelech captured Shechem, he wanted to show his displeasure with them, so he salted their fields as a punishment. Salt became a symbol, then, of something that was sterile and barren. Salt could be something virtuous, something valuable, as the commodity used in a salt covenant.

So you can see how just the statement 'you are the salt of the earth' could open up to the minds of the people a lot of thoughts, a lot of things that were possible. Salt was used in a positive way; he could be saying, "You are the salt. You're to go out there and punish the world. I'm sending you out to sprinkle their fields and kill their crops," in a sense. They could have looked at it like that, that they were supposed to end the typical lifestyle of the unbelievers and act as judges in the world. They could have looked at it as the idea of healing, or a medicinal application, or as seasoning for the unseasonable life of man on the earth. All of these were possibilities, a tremendous potential richness here.

Let's get specific, and let me suggest several things that many commentators suggest, then we'll pick the one that is the best. First of all, some say that Jesus had purity in mind. What color is salt? White. Some feel that this is what Jesus was emphasizing. "You are the salt of the earth," and in those times, sometimes there would be a little pile of salt outside, and it would glisten against the rather brown, drab background of that particular part of the world. The glistening whiteness could have aroused this thought in Jesus, and He was connecting this with verse 8, "Blessed are the pure in heart," that the believer was to be sort of the glistening, white, pure, righteous person in the world of drab, brown, gloomy, dark, decadent evil.

We are to be examples of purity, we are to hold up the divine standard in thought, speech, and action. We are to be pure and pristine and glistening and white. Well, I think something of that is contained in the Lord's thought, but I don't think that aspect really captures the richness. It seems a little strained to imagine that was what He was talking about, because He could have used any white thing. When He talks about being really white on another occasion, He talks about a painted sepulcher, didn't He?

So we wouldn't necessarily see this just as an illustration of 'white.' By the way, if salt sat out very long, dust would blow on it and it would be brown until it was washed. The second possibility is that He was talking about flavor. Some commentators really go crazy on this one. They say, "Jesus is simply saying, 'You are the flavor of the world. The world is tasteless, dull, drab, lifeless, unsavory, like the white of an egg. You are the flavor of the world; you are what salts life. The pleasures of the

world really are yours."

In other words, the idea is that God blesses the believers, and the unbelievers who stand around get the spill-off. You know, like the rain falls on the just and the unjust; God sends the rain to bless His people, but unsaved people get it too. We are the salt, and we spill over on the world. We flavor the world. What a world it would be without Christians!

One writer says, "We Christians have no business being boring. Our function is to add flavor and excitement to the world! Jesus was saying, in effect, 'Does this world have to go on the way it is, without salt? Can't we have some salt around here please? That will add a beautiful touch to the whole thing.' If I, as a Christian, am boring and dull, if I'm not adding flavor to life around me, I am not fulfilling my function as salt."

That's a nice sentiment, but there is a problem with it. I agree that we flavor the world; I Corinthians 7 says that an unsaved spouse is sanctified by a believing partner. Even an unsaved person is going to be sanctified and blessed just by hanging around a Christian. So it's true that, in a sense, we flavor the world. I mean, with only eight righteous people in the world, God just destroyed it in the flood. And with only a few righteous people left at the end, He'll destroy it again. When the church is taken out at the Rapture, all Hell breaks loose everywhere, so the world ought to be glad we're around, because we give it a flavor of righteousness. We do give it a flavor of life, and we do allow it to go on a little further without being blown to smithereens by a holy God. So there is a sense in which we make the world palatable, we make life palatable. But frankly, the world doesn't see us that way. As far as they are concerned, we're party poopers.

I don't think that the earth thinks of us as the salt. The tragedy is that people have connected Christianity with exactly the opposite; they think that we make the world tasteless. They think they're trying to live it up, party it up, live as salty a life as they can, and we're just raining on the parade. They have connected Christianity with that which takes the flavor out of life. "I don't want to become a Christian; it's so dull and boring! You can't do anything!" Like Swinburne said, "Thou has conquered, O pale Galilean, the world has grown grey from thy breath." What a statement! "You've just lulled the world into grey."

Oliver Wendell Holmes once said, "I might have entered the ministry if certain clergymen I knew had not looked and acted so much like undertakers." Robert Lewis Stevenson once wrote this in his diary, "I have been to church today, and am not depressed." Frankly, the world doesn't necessarily see us as really contributing to the flavor of life. So, although there is a sense in which I think we are symbols of purity in the world, and we do flavor the world, I don't think that's quite dead-center on the thought.

Let me give you a third option. Salt stings. Not only is it white and adds flavor, it has a medicinal or healing property when put into a wound. So some say that the Lord is saying, "Believers are not to be honey to soothe the sinful world, you are to be salt in the world, so whenever you see a place where there is a problem, you should just throw yourselves in and make it sting." I like that. I don't think we do near enough of that. I think we just want to drip honey on everyone, and we figure that if we never offend, if we just go along in life, it will be alright. If we gloss it over and let it be the way it is, nobody will get upset and everyone will say, "Oh, those Christians are so loving and tolerant of us." But there is never a clear definition of a distinction, you see. We're not honey, we're salt.

II Corinthians 2:15-16 says, "For we are unto God a sweet savor of Christ unto them that are saved and unto them that perish. To the one we are a savor of death unto death, and to the other a savor of life unto life." In other words, we are honey to the believers, but man, we are salt to the unbelievers. Many Christians never see this; all they think about is living comfortably, don't upset anyone, don't get anyone angry; they may reject Christ if you say anything too confrontational, don't get too open with things. Just gloss it over and they'll come along.

A man said to me the other day that he was in a church and no matter what happened in the church, they had some elders who were having affairs with other elders' wives, and the pastor said, "Don't do anything. God is on the throne and everything will be all right. We don't want to stir anything up."

I think we ought to have a stinging ministry. I think we ought to get in the wounds of the world and irritate them to pieces. In fact, in John 20:23, it says, "Any sins you remit are remitted, and any sins you retained are retained." We need to go around and say to people, "Your sins are forgiven because of your faith in Jesus Christ; yours aren't," and be confrontive.

I shared this with the people on Wednesday night. A couple came to see me and said that the Lord brought them together and wanted them to get married. I said, "That's wonderful. Tell me about your situation." I spoke to them because I knew the young man and knew that he was a believer, and I said to the young girl, "Are you a Christian?" She said, "Oh yes, I've always been a Christian, all my life." That always bothers me, so I asked about her background.

She explained that her background was in the Catholic religion, so I said, "Tell me how to become a Christian. How do you gain salvation?" She said, "You have to try really hard." I said, "Try really hard to do what?" And she said, "Try very hard to be good." So I asked her, "How are you doing?" She said, "Well, I'm trying. But it really doesn't matter if I fail, because He forgives me." I said, "So the idea of being a Christian is that you try really hard, but if you fail, then He forgives you anyway. So why try? There has got to be a better way." So I said, "Maybe you don't really understand the meaning of salvation," and explained the fact that it was a finished work.

Then I said, "Now, you're going to get married, tell me about your past. Have you been married before?" She said, "My divorce will be final in a month, and then we're going to be married." Oh. "Why are you divorcing your husband?" She said, "Because he has committed adultery; he has been unfaithful." I said, "I see. Has he repented and wanted to come back?" She said, "Yes, but I don't want him back." I asked if she had been faithful, and she said, "We've been married for four years, and I was for the first year."

The young man had Christian training and everything, so I said, "In other words, both of you are adulterers. Let me ask you another question: are you two committing acts of fornication?" That was like the final straw. The red flags were waving. I said, "That is a pointed question, but I expect an answer. You should have no fear to tell me the truth." Well, the truth was that they were. I said, "Don't you have audacity to come in here and say to me, 'God brought us together,' when you've got an adulterous situation in a marriage that isn't even finished yet, and you've entered into another adulterous situation, and now you tell me that God's will is for you to get married? You couldn't possibly know God's will, because you're living in such a state of disobedience, you are defying the revealed will of God in the Bible. How would you know the part that isn't even written here for your life?" At this point, they got up and stomped out of the office.

I said, "Lord, thanks for the illustration of salt stinging in a wound." I really believe that if Christians don't start standing up for something, the whole deal is going to go down the drain. I'm committed to the fact that if there is going to be one church in one place that is standing for something, it's going to be right here. If you get to the place where you're not happy with it, you can chase me away. But I'll just go somewhere else and do the same thing. You don't want to push me off on other people; you've endured me this long, you know how to handle me.

I think salt is to sting, but I don't think that's all there is to it. Let's go to a fourth possibility. Some writers say that salt's primary purpose is to create thirst. Salt is in your body because it creates thirst and makes you drink, and you have to drink in order to stay alive. If you don't drink water, you get bloated and die, and salt is involved in that.

One writer said this, "The primary function of salt is to create thirst. Without salt in food, there would be an improper intake of liquid. Where there is an improper intake of liquid, there would be dehydration and death, or severe sickness. This would be particularly true in the desert countries around the land where our Lord was speaking. An essential part of every traveler's baggage was a sack of salt to prevent dehydration; even in our day, those who labor manually in the summer use salt tablets."

I can remember, as a football player in college, popping salt tablets on hot days, because you had to do that in order to keep your thirst going so that you would drink water. So some writers say that we are to be salt in this sense, that we are in the world to create thirst. It's kind of like Romans 11, where



God allows the Gentiles to make Israel jealous. We're around and we're saved and we have the Messiah and we're supposed to make Israel thirsty. Or sometimes people come up to you and say, "What is it that you've got? How can you have so much peace in this situation? Why do you always seem to have all the answers? Where does all this contentment come from?" You see, that's creating a thirst. Salt will do that, and that's alright. They may not like our theology, and they may not want our Christ, but they will see a lifestyle within us that makes them thirst for that.

Is that what Jesus was talking about? I think He was, partly. I think we ought to be white and pure in the world, and flavor it, and sting the world. I think we should also make the world thirsty for God because our lives are so rich and full. But I think the key reason that we are called 'salt' is the fifth one, and it's as a preservative.

I'm going to close with this. This is a negative function, in a way. I think we're here to prevent corruption; that's what I believe. As I told you, they used to rub the salt into the meat, just rub it in so that it would saturate and preserve it. That's the principle idea: we are an antiseptic in the world. We are a preservation in the world. If you don't think so, in the Bible, watch what happens to the world when the church is removed. Watch all the demons of Hell released and evil goes wild.

We are a preservative, an antiseptic. As we live in the world, a holy, Christlike character, and as we are pure white in the world, and as we do flavor the world, as we do sting the world a little bit, as we do make the world thirsty for God, all of that in combination can be added to the thought that we preserve the world from going completely corrupt. Once we leave, it only takes seven years for the world to go to the pits of Hell. We check the rottenness and decay of the world. And He says right here that the only way we'll ever do it is if our salt still has its savor.

Our presence in the world is to hold back crime. The Spirit of God in us is the one who hinders, II Thessalonians says. Our presence in the world should change certain kinds of conversation; it ought to affect barber shops, like D. L. Moody's did. It ought to affect kids, like Andrew Murray's life did. We ought to pass through the world the way that goddess did, and everywhere we step, flowers bloom. That's what He is talking about.

Our presence should condemn apostasy, our presence should affect the way men think. I know a little about that; it's amazing how people alter their conversations when I come around. It's amazing, and you know that too. In Genesis 18:23, God was at the decision-making point. Look at it.

"Abraham drew near, and said, 'Will you also destroy the righteous with the wicked?'" He was saying, "God, you don't want to destroy Sodom and Gomorrah. You don't want to wipe out all the righteous people with the wicked."

"Suppose there are 50 righteous people in the city. Will you not spare the place for the 50? That be far from thee to do after this manner, to slay the righteous with the wicked, and that the righteous should be as the wicked, that be far from thee. Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?' And the LORD said, 'If I find in Sodom fifty righteous within the city, then I will spare all the place for their sakes.' And Abraham answered and said, 'Behold now, I have taken upon me to speak unto the LORD, which am but dust and ashes. Perhaps there shall lack five of the fifty righteous: wilt thou destroy all the city for lack of five?' And he said, 'If I find there forty and five, I will not destroy it.' And he spake unto him yet again, and said, 'Perhaps there shall be forty found there,'" he's moving down the scale there. "And he said, 'I will not do it for forty's sake.'"

"What about 30?' 'I'll not do it for 30.' 'How about 20?' 'I'll not do it for 20.' 'Oh Lord, please don't be angry. What about 10?'" He said, "I'll not destroy it for 10."

You want to know something? Just 10 righteous people could have spared that entire population. Listen, beloved, believers in the world preserve the world from the wrath of God; we are an agency to retard God's inevitable judgment. One day, God is going to judge this world, and before He does, He is going to pull all of His believers out. I believe that. He will pull us all out, and then He will fire His judgment at the world.

I'm telling you something, if we're going to retard the corruption of the world like salt, we can't live the way the world lives; we just can't do it. We've got to be in the world, rubbed into the society, like salt dissolves into the meat, and yet different and separate. I just feel like the church has got to be in the world and touch the world and yet never be of the world.

Notice it says 'the salt of the earth.' I think the term 'earth' here refers to the whole globe; we're the only salt in the whole earth. He doesn't use the word 'world' because that has more of a philosophical connotation, 'earth' just means the masses of humanity that live on the globe. We are responsible for the retardation of the deteriorating, disintegrating, rotting carcass of humanity. We are the only restraint in the world, as indwelt by the Spirit of God.

Beloved, Grace Community Church sits as as a place, where it sits in Southern California, to be salt. This is the power of our influence, the power of our silent witness. Isn't it amazing how God uses us to do that? Isn't it amazing how God uses something as humble, useless, and basic as us? God gives noble purposes to ignoble things, doesn't He? When He made man in the Garden, He didn't use gold or silver, He didn't even use iron; He used dirt. When He called David to deliver Israel from the Philistines, he didn't use a great, flashing sword; he used some little pebbles. When He came into the world, He didn't enter a family of wealth and nobility; He wasn't born in a castle, He came to a peasant girl and was born in a stable. God wants to take you and me, sinners saved by grace, and make us salt. He literally wants to use us to hold back judgment on the world and retard the corruption.

What about your influence? What's it like? What happens when you walk by? I'm going to close with this story. A writer says, "When I was saved, during a mighty movement of the Spirit in the city of Glasgow, Scotland, a young lady was also saved. Her name was Helen Ewing. She was just a slip of a girl, but at the very threshold of her new life in Christ, as she crowned Him as Lord absolutely and was filled with the Spirit, the rivers of living water simply flowed from that young girl's life. Although she died at the age of 22, all Scotland wept. I know hundreds of missionaries all over the world who wept and mourned for her. Imagine!

"She had mastered the Russian language and was expecting to labor for God in Europe; she had no outstanding personality. She never wrote a book, never composed a hymn. She was not a preacher, never traveled more than 200 miles from her home, as far as I know. When she died, people wrote about her life story. Although she died so early in life, she had led a great multitude to Jesus Christ. She arose every morning of her life at 5 o'clock to study God's Word, to commune, and to pray. She prayed for hundreds of missionaries. Her mother showed me her diary, one of many diaries, and there were at least 300 different missionaries for whom she was praying at all times. It showed that God had burdened that young heart with a ministry of prayer. She had the date when she started to pray for a request and the date when God answered it. She had a dynamic prayer life that moved God and moved man.

"I was talking one day with two university professors in London. We were talking about dynamic Christianity when one of them suddenly said, 'Brother Stewart, I want to tell you a story.' And he told me that, in Glasgow University, there was a remarkable little girl who, wherever she went on the campus, left the fragrance of Christ behind her. 'For example,' he said, 'If the students were telling dirty stories, someone would say, "Shhh, Helen is coming," and as she passed by, she unconsciously left the power of God.'" Influence. Let's pray.

Father, help us to be salt; help us to be light. Help us to so live that the world can see who You are and that we belong to You. Father, help us to be obedient to the things that are needful, the things that belong to Your Kingdom, to be separate from the world for Your glory. In Jesus' name, Amen.

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