

## Matthew 5:13-16

## “Salt and Light”

13 "You are the salt of the earth; but if the salt has become tasteless, how can it be made salty *again*? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled under foot by men.

14 "You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden;

15 nor does *anyone* light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house.

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.

### Introduction

This is one of the most well-known passages of Scripture. We must be careful not to take these verses away from the ones that go before them. We must realize that Jesus was speaking about how we could live a life that is a blessed life. The word for blessed means happy, but much more than happy. It means that a person is living under the smile of God, that they feel His pleasure at their life!

The Beatitudes are an impossible standard. What they require of my life is staggering. I cannot live them. I am crushed by their high standard. I stand in awe of what they require me to do. They chase me to Christ. They cause me to stand moment by moment in the Holy Spirit's power if I have any chance of living to that standard any given day. They are wonderful, beautiful and exacting.

For instance, I am filled with pride so often. Never a day goes by that I do not fight with this most hideous sin, and yet, the first requirement listed to possess the kingdom of Heaven is that I must become a beggar in my spirit. Beggars are not proud. Beggars are living off the kindness of others. The truth is that I am a beggar, but I am filled with pride. The beatitudes crush me. Yet, the standard remains. My failures do not mean that the sermon does not apply to me. I am still bound to live up to the level dictated in this teaching by Jesus. So, they drive me to prayer. They drive me to the cross to find the forgiveness when I fail. They drive me to ask the Spirit of God for help.

### Why Is the Bar Set So High?

This might cause us to say, why did Jesus raise the bar so high on the Sermon on the Mount? Why is it important that I live this kind of life?

1. This life is the only life that is blessed by God, so it is the best life possible.
2. This kind of life must be lived by surrender and with God's help, so it is a constant reminder of the cross.
3. This life displays Jesus to the world. We are salt and light to this world. If we are not living the life that we say we are, then we will not attract the world.

## You are the Salt of the Earth (v. 13)

**13 "You are the salt of the earth; but if the salt has become tasteless, how can it be made salty *again*? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled under foot by men.**

There are many things that I think are important as we begin to examine this passage. Let me give you a couple of things I noted about this verse right off the bat. This is the view from 30,000 feet. To help you remember each one, I will use a word that starts with 'P.'

1. Partnership. I note that this teaching addressed all Christians. "You are the salt of the earth." The You is plural. You all are the salt of the earth. No Christian is an island. What we do affects others. You do not have to live the Christian life alone.
2. Permanent. The first phrase is powerful, but it is followed by the word "but." This passage contains a warning that we can become useless in this life.
3. Plain. It is about salt. We all know about salt and can understand this teaching. Some teaching of Jesus is difficult to understand. This one is plain, even simple, but living it is hard.

### ***"You are the salt of the earth,"***

The passage is about our partnership in this life. We stand or fall together. One grain of sand is not that useful, but put many grains together and food can be flavored. If we are salt, then think of the church as the saltshaker. Let's notice that the saltshaker is the right place for salt, but salt is not much good in the saltshaker, but when it comes out, then it becomes useful. So, we must live our lives among the people of the world. We should not shut ourselves up in a monastery. We belong mixing with the people that Jesus mixed with. We cannot help the world and bring them the life-changing message of the gospel unless we live among them.

In this phrase, I notice that it is addressed personally to me. But, I also noticed that it does not say, "You can be the salt of the earth." The portion above speaks of a person that can be blessed if they live a certain way. This portion is more certain. It speaks of something that you are. You are the salt of the earth. This speaks of the certainty of your life meaning something. You are being tested and watched everyday. You will live a life of influence. You cannot stop that from occurring. If you are a Christian, you are salt. The question is will you be salt that tastes good or salt that tastes bad.

The passage compares us to salt. The specific property of salt that is being talked about is its taste. Nothing tastes like salt. Have you ever tried a salt substitute? I have and I would never confuse one with actual salt. Nothing tastes like salt. It makes food come alive. If you put the right amount of salt on something, it

can enhance the natural flavor of that food and make it taste, not more like salt, but more like itself, only more vivid and real. Salt is wonderful.

Woodrow Wilson told the story of being in a barbershop one time. "I was sitting in a barber chair when I became aware that a powerful 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. And before I got through with what was being done to me I was aware 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 affect that his visit had brought upon the barber shop. They talked in undertones. They did not know his name, but they knew something had elevated their thoughts, and I felt that I left that place as I should have left a place of worship."

Not only are we salt, but we are "the" salt. We are the only salt on this earth. We are the ones that have the message of eternal life. We have the message of the cross and the story of forgiveness of sin! We are the body of the Lord Jesus Christ. If we fail to take His message and live out good deeds in His name, who will? We are the only salt here.

Notice that the Bible says that we are the salt of the earth. That is the target for our salt, the earth. We are here to flavor this world. We are here to preserve this world. Without us, the earth would be consumed by God's judgment and wrath. Yet, He waits for all the elect to be gathered from all the ages.

### *"but if the salt has become tasteless"*

We preserve this world and we flavor this world, but, the example that Jesus is giving here deals with impure salt. We are able to gather pure salt today, but in Jesus' day, the salt was gathered with a great deal of impurity. If that impurity was put under heat or rain, it would often spoil and the salt would no longer taste good. The salt that tastes salty is pure salt. When it is mixed with impurity, the taste leaves. Also, when that impurity is exposed to heat or rain, suffering or blessings, the impurity can take over the taste.

When the world is too much a part of our lives, when it impact us more than we impact it, then our saltiness is gone. We become useless to the Master. Here is what Paul said about the cost of our mixing with the world.

### **2 Timothy 2:19-21**

**19** Nevertheless, the firm foundation of God stands, having this seal, "The Lord knows those who are His," and, "Everyone who names the name of the Lord is to abstain from wickedness."**20** Now in a large house there are not only gold and silver vessels, but also vessels of wood and of earthenware, and some to honor and some to dishonor.**21** Therefore, if anyone cleanses himself from these *things*, he will be a vessel for honor, sanctified, useful to the Master, prepared for every good work.

The amazing thing about this passage is that it is advice given from Paul to Timothy about how to be used by God. You can be a vessel of honor or a vessel of dishonor, and you get to choose. If you cleanse your life of wickedness, you will be a vessel of honor, set apart or sanctified, useful to the Master, and prepared for every good work. If you fool around with the things of this world too much, they will work themselves inside of your heart and become part of your life. They will spoil you, corrupt you. You will become useless to the Master, a vessel of dishonor, who is not prepared to do good deeds. This is scary. We can be a vessel that brings dishonor to God, or we can honor Him. I can think of nothing that concerns me more. Here is what Jesus said about this topic.

#### Mark 4:18-19

18 "And others are the ones on whom seed was sown among the thorns; these are the ones who have heard the word,<sup>19</sup> but the worries of the world, and the deceitfulness of riches, and the desires for other things enter in and choke the word, and it becomes unfruitful.

Being useless and fruitless are the same idea. When the world touches our lives, it corrupts us. When the cares of this life get inside our heart too much, when the love of money clouds our thinking too much, and when our main desires are not centered around the One who died for us on the cross, the Father He came to serve, or His kingdom's increase, then we become fruitless. We must take care. Caution is needed. This is primarily because there are no Christians who are vessels of dishonor. Christians are not fruitless.

*"how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled under foot by men."*

#### Titus 1:15-16

15 To the pure, all things are pure; but to those who are defiled and unbelieving, nothing is pure, but both their mind and their conscience are defiled.<sup>16</sup> They profess to know God, but by *their* deeds they deny *Him*, being detestable and disobedient and worthless for any good deed.

#### Matthew 7:21-23

21 "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven *will enter*. 22 "Many will say to Me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?'<sup>23</sup> "And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; DEPART FROM ME, YOU WHO PRACTICE LAWLESSNESS.'

Notice that the unbelieving have lives that back up their unbelief. Their mind and conscience are defiled and although they profess to know Jesus and say they are

Christians, with their lives, they deny Him. Scripture says that they are detestable, disobedient, and worthless for any good deed. Jesus said in **Matthew 7** that His not knowing a person and their practicing lawlessness are tied together. The warning that Paul gave to Timothy is real and we must realize that we are created for the purpose of doing good works. We will come back to this in a few moments. But, do not miss the fact that if the salt loses its flavor it is worthless except to be thrown out and trodden under the foot of men. It can be used to form roads, but it is not useful to the Master for good deeds. Our place is not under the foot of this world, but to be conquering this world.

I like the story of the pastor who said to a member of his congregation, "How are you doing?" The church member replied, "Pretty good, under the circumstances." The pastor replied, "Under the circumstances? What are you doing under there?" Isn't that right? What are we doing under the circumstances of life? We are more than conquerors through Him that loved us!

### **You are the Light of the World (v. 14-15)**

***"You are the light of the world."***

Not only are we the salt of the earth, but we are the light of the world. Again, "you all" instead of "you." We are in this together. We are the lights, we will either be lights that are hidden or lights that shine for all to see. We are still the only lights this world will be given.

### **Phil 2:14-16**

14 Do all things without grumbling or disputing; 15 so that you will prove yourselves to be blameless and innocent, children of God above reproach in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you appear as lights in the world, 16 holding fast the word of life, so that in the day of Christ I will have reason to glory because I did not run in vain nor toil in vain.

Notice that we appear as lights in the world. We are like the moon, we are glory reflectors. Jesus is the true light. John said that He enlightens every elect person who will ever live. He shines. We reflect that Light. We glow, but for now, the glory is His. Later, we are actually given glory of our own, which is a subset of His glory. It will be a glory that is a shared glory with the Son in Heaven. It will not be a glory which competes with His glory even then, but for now, we are simply reflectors and have no glory of our own. In this passage, again, Paul gives warning. If the people that he is writing to would not stop grumbling and complaining, it would mean that they were not lights in this world, and that Paul's work among them was in vain. They would be mere professors and not true possessors of Christ. If you truly have Christ within you, you cannot help but shine and reflect that glory. We have this treasure in earthen vessels! The treasure cannot be contained by us.

**“A city set on a hill cannot be hidden; nor does anyone light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house.”**

We can hide our lights. We can also put them on a lampstand and they will give light to the entire world. The lampstand is the local church. We are told this in Revelation. If you are not part of the local church, you are hiding your light. Again, the Scripture has much to say about people who claim Jesus but are not a part of a local church.

### **Heb 10:23-25**

23 Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful; 24 and let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, 25 not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging *one another*; and all the more as you see the day drawing near.

### **1 John 2:19**

19 They went out from us, but they were not *really* of us; for if they had been of us, they would have remained with us; but *they went out*, so that it would be shown that they all are not of us.

In the passage from Hebrews, the author tells us that we are not to forsake the assembling of ourselves together. We cannot say we are Christians and not go to church. That is sin since God commands us here to attend church. In the passage from 1 John, we notice that people prove that they are lost, in context of the verse it would be literally that they have the same spirit in them as the coming Anti-Christ, they are rebellious to Christ too. You cannot really be pro-Jesus and remain away from His Church. I frequently meet people like this. They try to be lone-ranger Christians, but that is not possible. If you can leave stay away indefinitely from the Church that Jesus bought with His blood, then you are not His.

### **Your Good Works Bring God Glory (v. 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.”**

We are to let our light shine before men in a manner that brings glory to God. This means that we can do good things in a wrong manner and it will not bring glory to God. We must do the right thing with the right attitude. Then, our lives will bring glory to God. When we do that, people will see this and give glory to God. We will evangelize with our lives. Jesus like President Wilson saw in the life of D.L. Moody, even when we are getting a haircut, we will live a life that brings glory to the One who saved us! Note that we are not saved by good works, but are created to do good works after we come to know Jesus Christ (**Ephesians 2:10**). We are His works of art, His masterpieces. We should show that handiwork, more and more each year.