

Main Idea: What is the Christian’s responsibility to the world? How are we to relate to it? Jesus answers that question for us this morning, in Matthew 5:13-16, with two words. Salt and light. With these two metaphors Jesus teaches us about the influence we should be having on the world as His followers.

- I. We are the salt of the earth (13).
  - A. Salt prevents decay.
  - B. Salt provides savor.
  - C. Salt that loses its saltiness is good for nothing.
- II. We are the light of the world (14-16).
  - A. Jesus gives us two illustrations of light.
    - 1. Think about a city on a hill (14).
    - 2. Think about a lamp (15).
  - B. Jesus gives us the implications of being light (16).
    - 1. We are to let our light shine.
    - 2. People are to see our good works.
    - 3. Our Father is to receive glory.

Take Inventory: Three questions to consider...

- 1. How salty am I?
- 2. How visible is my light?
- 3. What good works can I do this week that will cause people to praise our Father?

*Scripture Reading: Matthew 5:1-16*

Why are we here? Why, when God saved us through faith in His Son and gave us the gift of eternal life, didn’t He take us home to heaven? Why did He leave us here? What is the Christian’s responsibility to the world? How are we to relate to it?

This world is a decaying and dark place. Think of those words. Decaying. And dark. This is our world. Watch the evening news. Check out your news app. That’s what you see. This is a decaying and dark world.

E.g.—

Is there hope? Yes. Jesus says there is. Jesus addresses the pressing question of our responsibility to the world in Matthew 5:13-16 by giving us two words. Salt and light. What prevents decay? Salt. What dispels darkness? Light. Who are we? You are the salt of the earth, says Jesus, and the light of the world. With these two metaphors Jesus teaches us about the influence He intends to have through us His followers on this world.

We began looking at Jesus’ sermon on the mount at the beginning of the summer. We began where Jesus began, with the beatitudes. Who has God’s blessing? These kind of people do. The *poor in spirit*, that is, those who acknowledge they have nothing to offer a holy God for they are spiritually bankrupt.

But they don’t just acknowledge it. They *mourn* over it. And are *meek* because of it rather than proud. And then they *hunger for* what they need, *righteousness*, and receive it from the One who alone satisfies.

These are the blessed people. They, by grace, have entered into a right relationship with God. And then, having been made right with God, they turn outward. They are *merciful*, for they share the mercy they’ve received with others who need mercy. And *pure in heart*, no hidden agendas with them. And they function as *peacemakers* in the world, just like their

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\*\* Note: This is an unedited manuscript of a message preached at Wheelersburg Baptist Church. It is provided to prompt your continued reflection on the practical truths of the Word of God.

<sup>1</sup> For a previous look at this passage, see the series preached at WBC in 1988.

Savior the ultimate Peacemaker. And because of all this, they now stand out as so different from the world that they are *persecuted* for it. They are persecuted because of righteousness.

These are the blessed ones, says Jesus. These are the people who have God's approval, who possess His kingdom. If you want to be my follower, says Jesus, this is what you must be.

Then a significant change occurs in verse 11. "Blessed are you. ." Jesus moves from a general description of eight characteristics of His disciples to a direct address to His followers. No longer "they"--Now it's "YOU". He begins by emphasizing that persecution is to be expected for us as His followers (11-12). You will be insulted and misrepresented because of Me. But when that happens, rejoice and be glad.

Then in verses 13-16, Jesus again addresses His followers directly. "You are something," He says. In the beatitudes, Jesus deals with the Christian's character, who we are. In the similitudes, Jesus deals with the Christian's influence, what we must be.

Salt and light. We know about salt (it influences our tongues). We know about light (it influences our eyes). The key word is influence. By application we are to influence those around us by what we say and what we do. Because of the influence of our lives, people around us should be made aware of God's holy standard and thus their need for a Savior.

These words of Jesus are of extreme importance for us, particularly at this time. Why?

\*Because of the rapid decay of morals in our society. What's our responsibility? Be salt and light, says Jesus.

\*Because of severe antagonism towards the absolute authority of God's Word in our "enlightened" age. Our response? Be salt and light.

\*Because of the political mudslinging, and the upcoming elections. Our task? Be salt and light.

The Lord says He intends to influence the world around us the same way salt and light influences that which they contact. And He intends to do it through us.

### I. We are the salt of the earth (13).

Verse 13, "You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled underfoot."

Jesus, the Master-teacher, uses something we all know about to teach us something we need to know about. I recently read a book called, *Salt*, by Mark Kurlansky, and learned that salt is the only rock we eat. So much of our human body is made up of salt that we'd be dead without it. We need salt. According to Kurlansky, "Chloride is essential for digestion and in respiration. Without sodium, which the body cannot manufacture, the body would be unable to transport nutrients or oxygen, transmit nerve impulses, or move muscles, including the heart."

And think of this. Again, according to Kurlansky, "Salt is so common, so easy to obtain, and so inexpensive that we have forgotten that from the beginning of civilization until about 100 years ago, salt was one of the most sought-after commodities in human history."

In the first century world in which Jesus spoke these words, "The Romans salted their greens, believing this to counteract the natural bitterness, which is the origin of the word salad, salted...The Roman army required salt for its soldiers and for its horses and livestock. At times soldiers were even paid in salt, which was the origin of the word salary and the expression "worth his salt" or "earning his salt." In fact, the Latin word *sal* became the French word *solde*, meaning pay, which is the origin of the word, soldier."<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Mark Kurlansky, *Salt: A World History*

And Jesus says, that's what you are. Salt. The salt of the earth. His wording is emphatic. "You and you alone." If you are a disciple of Jesus Christ, if you have believed in Him and are now a Christian, these words are for you. This is what you are and are to be.

When something is brought into contact with salt, something happens, a change occurs. Salt speaks of influence, in this case, a far reaching influence. We, the followers of Jesus, are the salt *of the earth*.

What does salt do? First...

#### **A. Salt prevents decay.**

In a day when there were no refrigerators or freezers, salt was indispensable. In the warm temperatures of Israel, meat would spoil and become rotten within hours. To prevent this undesirable decay, a person would take a piece of meat, and rub salt into it. The meat would then be usable at a later date. The salt acted as a preservative.

If you think this world is bad now, just think of what it would be like without Christ's followers in it. Life decays without salt.

When Jesus says, "You are the salt of the earth," He's telling us something about ourselves, which we'll probe in a moment. But He's also telling us something about the condition of the world.

How many of you think the moral conditions of the world are worse today than they were fifty years ago? Did you lock your house and car when you were a kid? What's happened?

I think Martyn Lloyd Jones gives a helpful answer. He preached on this passage back in the 1950s in London, and his sermons are now a very helpful book, which I recommend. He writes:

Now that is not only a description of the Christian; it is a description by implication of the world in which he finds himself...<sup>3</sup>

It clearly implies rottenness in the earth; it implies a tendency to pollution and to becoming foul and offensive. That is what the Bible has to say about this world. It is fallen, sinful and bad. Its tendency is to evil and to wars. It is like meat which has a tendency to putrefy and to become polluted. It is like something which can only be kept wholesome by means of a preservative or antiseptic. As the result of sin and the fall, life in the world in general tends to get into a putrid state. That, according to the Bible, is the only sane and right view to take of humanity. Far from there being a tendency in life and the world to go upwards, it is the exact opposite. The world, left to itself, is something that tends to fester. There are these germs of evil, these microbes, these infective agents and organisms in the very body of humanity, and unless checked, they cause disease. This is something which is obviously primary and fundamental. Our outlook with regard to the future must be determined by it. And if you bear this in mind you will see very clearly what has been happening during the present century. There is a sense, therefore, in which no Christian should be in the least surprised at what has taken place. If this scriptural position is right, then the surprising thing is that the world is as good as it is now, because within its own very life and nature there is this tendency to putrefaction.<sup>4</sup>

Lloyd-Jones is right. Ever since sin entered the world in Genesis 3, it has been decaying. Sinners do what sinners do because they are powerless to do otherwise.

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<sup>3</sup> Martyn Lloyd-Jones, p. 150.

<sup>4</sup> Lloyd Jones, pp. 151-2.

Yet in His grace, the Lord has placed in the world something to slow down this spread of rotteness. Salt doesn't preserve meat forever, but it does extend the shelf life. You, says Jesus to His followers, are the salt of the earth.

When you walk into the breakroom at work, they're going to clean up their vocabulary a little bit, or at least be reminded that they should.

Should we be concerned about the spread of evil in the world? Sure, but we ought not be surprised by it. The Lord has placed us here to have a preserving effect. Salt prevents decay.

### **B. Salt provides savor.**

Unseasoned food is bland. Hospitals are wonderful, and people receive much-needed medical attention there. But have you ever eaten their food? One of the common objections is, it's too bland, it needs salt. Salt provided savor for food that would be otherwise quite dull. Salt adds flavor to life.

This too should be the effect we have on this world. A preserving effect, and a flavoring effect. By God's grace, we've been saved from sin's control and know what the Creator intends life to be. We've tasted the good life, and as we rub should with non-Christians they should taste it too.

Would your neighbors be sad if you moved away? I wonder what my neighbors would say. Is my community a better place to live because I live in it? Is my workplace a better place to work because of what God is doing through me there? My school? My team?

You are the salt of the earth, says our Savior. We're to have a preserving effect and a savoring effect. And that raises the question, how? How are we supposed to do it?

That's not an easy question to answer. I see two ditches that we need to avoid. First, some read these words and think the solution is politics. Embrace a political party and work through it to preserve this nation. I don't think that's what Jesus is saying.

Listen again to Martyn Lloyd-Jones' helpful insight:

You never find the apostle Paul or any other apostle commenting upon the government of the Roman Empire; you never find them sending up resolutions to the Imperial Court to do this or not to do that. No; that is never found in the Church as displayed in the New Testament. I suggest to you, therefore, that the Christian is to function as the salt of the earth in a much more individual sense. He does so by his individual life and character, by just being the man that he is in every sphere in which he finds himself. For instance, a number of people may be talking together in a rather unworthy manner. Suddenly a Christian enters into the company, and immediately his presence has an effect. He does not say a word, but people begin to modify their language. He is already acting as salt, he is already controlling the tendency to putrefaction and pollution. just by being a Christian man, because of his life and character and general deportment, he is already controlling that evil that was manifesting itself, and he does so in every sphere and in every situation. He can do this, not only in a private capacity in his home, his workshop or office, or wherever he may happen to be, but also as a citizen in the country in which he lives."<sup>5</sup>

So there's one ditch to avoid, thinking this call to be salt is a call to influence through politics, as though the church needs a political party to help it fulfill the Lord's assignment. I agree that this preserving effect happens best life on life, and is not a call to be political.

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<sup>5</sup> Lloyd-Jones, pp. 154-5.

Let's take that a step further. There's a reason we must be cautious about seeing politics as the answer, and that is that being salt is a means to something. It's not our ultimate mission in this world. And our politics, if we're not careful, can undermine our mission.

What is our mission? Listen again to Lloyd-Jones. He's so helpful:

The primary task of the Church is to evangelize and to preach the gospel. Look at it like this. If the Christian Church today spends most of her time in denouncing communism, it seems to me that the main result will be that communists will not be likely to listen to the preaching of the gospel. If the Church is always denouncing one particular section of society, she is shutting the evangelistic door upon that section. If we take the New Testament view of these matters we must believe that the communist has a soul to be saved in exactly the same way as everybody else. It is my business as a preacher of the gospel, and a representative of the Church, to evangelize all kinds and conditions and classes of men and women. The moment the Church begins to intervene in these political, social and economic matters, therefore, she is hampering and hindering herself in her God-appointed task of evangelism. She can no longer say that she "knows no man after the flesh", and thereby she is sinning. Let the individual play his part as a citizen, and belong to any political party that he may choose. That is something for the individual to decide. The Church is not concerned as a Church about these things. Our business is to preach the gospel and to bring this message of salvation to all. And, thank God, communists can be converted and can be saved. The Church is to be concerned about sin in all its manifestations, and sin can be as terrible in a capitalist as in a communist; it can be as terrible in a rich man as in a poor man; it can manifest itself in all classes and in all types and in all groups."<sup>6</sup>

So embracing politics is not the answer for being salt. It's a ditch to avoid. However, there are significant political implications when we are salt. This is the other ditch to avoid. I'll call it privatizing our faith.

Friends, we cannot support a political party that promotes evil in its platform. Salt would not do that. Think of Bonhoeffer and others who refused to support the Nazi "make Germany great again" agenda that endorsed the killing of a people group it deemed unworthy.

If we are salt, then there is no such thing as private faith. It's a misnomer, a contradiction in terms. Salt influences. When a person really believes in Jesus, that person is going to spread the influence of Jesus in tangible ways.

Let me give you an example. Back in the 1930s, the Nazis put great pressure on the churches in Germany to affirm a very unbiblical view of man that says the German race is superior and that other races are sub-human and therefore expendable. So pastors and churches and followers of Jesus had a choice to make. They could keep quiet and have their little private faith inside the four walls of their church buildings, and if they did that, society would applaud them. Or they could really believe in Jesus and let everyone see they really believed, no matter what the cost. Most did the former. But a few believed what the Savior said.

One was Pastor Paul Schneider. In 1934 he was pastoring a 1,000 member church in Hochelheim, a church his father had pastored until he died of a stroke. Pastor Schneider preached a message called "Christ Crossing the Stormy Lake and Jesus' Glory," and made statements like these:

"I am certain no thinking and alert Christian has failed to notice that we in the Evangelical Church are being challenged to struggle and to witness and to confess our faith..."

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<sup>6</sup> Lloyd-Jones, pp. 155-6.

“The little boat of the church is traveling on stormy seas...”

“There no longer is a fence between saints and pagans...”

“We have tolerated the teachings of Balak, of liberalism that praises the goodness and freedom of men and women while minimizing the honor of God and letting the seriousness of eternity fade away into a misty haze...”

“We are auctioning away the forgiveness of sins, this most precious good of Christ’s church, like mass-produced pieces of junk that anyone can buy for a penny...”

“You must believe, trust, and abandon yourself to the miraculous power of the Lord in whom you believe. But perhaps you do not believe? Then never say that you are a Christian, for then you are only a Christian in name or in your head or maybe a hypocritical Christian...”

“I would rather die for my faith than live a cowardly and cultured life with the rest of the world.”

Which Pastor Schneider did. Schneider preached this sermon and others to pit the Christian worldview against the Nazi worldview, and to alert his congregation to the great danger of calling yourself a believer in Christ but not living in submission to Christ’s Word. Less than a month after he preached this, however, the Nazis and their supporters who were sitting in the church pews terminated his position. Three years later he was sent to Buchenwald concentration camp. Five years later he became the first Protestant martyr at the hands of the Nazis.

Interestingly, other prisoners referred to Schneider’s cell as a cell with “paper walls” because all he had to do to go home to his wife and six children was sign a paper saying he would not go back to his church and preach again. This he could not do. This his *faith* would not allow. He could not be salt and be silent.

This brings us to a third point.

### **C. Salt that loses its saltiness is good for nothing.**

Listen again to Jesus [in the ESV], “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 the KJV, “Ye are the salt of the earth: but if the salt have lost his savour, wherewith shall it be salted? it is thenceforth good for nothing, but to be cast out, and to be trodden under foot of men.”

Strictly speaking, salt is a stable compound, and can't lose its saltiness. But in Jesus' day, most salt came from marshes or from the Dead Sea, known as the Salt Sea. As such, it contained impurities. The actual salt could be leached out, leaving a diluted residue. This saltless residue had little value. It was often scattered on the soil of the flat roofs. It would harden the soil on top of the homes. And it would prevent the flat roofs from leaking. Hence, the imagery, “it is good for nothing, but to be cast out, and to be trodden under foot of men.”

So Jesus calls us to be salt in the world. We are to act as a preservative in the world. How? By modeling the values and characteristics of our King. When we seek first the kingdom of God in our lives, we function as a moral disinfectant in a decaying world. This is a call to be distinct from the world, to be in it but not of it. Distinct in our beliefs, distinct in our values, distinct in our conduct.

But when we Christ-followers become indistinguishable from non-Christ-followers (in our beliefs, our values, our conduct), we end up being as useless as “saltless salt”. That's what Jesus said.

This verb Jesus uses in verse 13 translated [AV, “have lost its savor”] occurs only four times in the NT (from the Greek *moraine* comes the English *moron*). In Romans 1:22 the same

word is translated "they became fools." In a very real sense, when disciples of Jesus lose their distinctive savor in the world, they are making a fool of themselves.

You are the salt of the earth. That's who we are. The Lord has placed us here to prevent decay and provide savor.

There is an obvious assumption behind Jesus' statement. Why does the world need salt in the first place? The answer is sin. The world is plagued by the sin problem. The first man, Adam, sinned, and consequently all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. Left to itself the world festers and decays in the ugliness of its sin. Someone has said (Lloyd Jones), "It is surprising that the world is as good as it is now!" Man in his sin, left to himself, will destroy himself.

But God. But God in His grace sent His Son into the world, who never sinned, and then died on the cross to pay sin's penalty for all who would receive Him as Savior. Then He conquered the grave, and now He exerts His power in setting people free from their sin chains. And to those He sets free He says, "You are the salt of the earth."

It's easy to complain about how bad the world is. We are appalled at the moral decay of our nation. But who's to blame? Surely the devil. Surely the wickedness of unregenerate men and women. But what about us? Is it possible that we, the followers of Jesus, have lost our saltiness?

"One can hardly blame unsalted meat for going bad," says John Stott. "The real question is: Where's the salt?"

This is who we are. We are salt. Let's live like it. Several years ago Rebecca Pippert wrote a book on evangelism with a great title. *Out of the Salt-shaker*. Let's be salty this week as we interact with our unsaved friends and neighbors. And there's something else about salt that ought to encourage us. It creates thirst. So let's expect our salty, distinct lives to cause people to be thirsty, and then let's share the Living Water with them and tell them about Jesus.

What's our responsibility in this world? First, we are the salt of the earth.

## II. We are the light of the world (14-16).

Verses 14-16, "You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden.

<sup>15</sup> Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. <sup>16</sup> In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven."<sup>7</sup>

The world has prided itself in its "enlightenment" since the Renaissance of the 15th and 16th centuries. A tremendous attack on the authority and reliability of the Bible began in the historical period of the "Enlightenment" which occurred in the 18th century. Man began to examine and explain the world in humanistic terms, leaving God out of the picture. Natural processes were in. The Supernatural was out. The world promoted its knowledge as the source of true light.

But the truth of the matter is that in spite of tremendous scientific and technological advances, our world is immensely dark today. Enlightened man is in the state of moral darkness. Wars continue. Social abuses are profuse and increasing.

All this makes Jesus' words in verse 14 both shocking and encouraging. He told His disciples, "You are the light of the world." Again, the "you" is emphatic. Jesus says, "You

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<sup>7</sup> In the KJV, <sup>14</sup> Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on an hill cannot be hid. <sup>15</sup> Neither do men light a candle, and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick; and it giveth light unto all that are in the house. <sup>16</sup> Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.

Christians, and you alone, are the light of the world.” The implication? It’s not the “enlightened” man of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. There is no such thing. According to Jesus, the world is in darkness. Only His followers, Christians, are the “light of the world”.

Modern man, of course, would argue this point. “We are enlightened! How can you say otherwise? Look at all the discoveries we’ve made in the past one hundred years!”

And they’re right about the discoveries, with the radio, airplane, television, computer, cellphone, GPS, and more, all in the past one hundred years.

And they’re wrong about being enlightened. *Time* magazine ran a feature article in June 2019 with this title, *U.S. Suicide Rates Are the Highest They’ve Been Since World War II*.<sup>8</sup> Another June article, this one in the *Los Angeles Times*, was entitled, “*Suicide rates for U.S. teens and young adults are the highest on record.*”<sup>9</sup>

What’s going on? We are the most affluent country the world has ever known. We have more access to education than ever before. My grandfather had to drop out of school after the eighth grade, and he was not alone. You hardly ever hear of that these days.

But you hear things like this all the time. Just two weeks ago NBC News ran a story that began, “Suicide rates are on the rise, especially in rural America, according to a study published Friday. From 1999 to 2016, the rate of suicide among Americans ages 25 to 64 rose by 41 percent, researchers reported in *JAMA Network Open*. Rates among people living in rural counties were 25 percent higher than those in major metropolitan areas.”<sup>10</sup>

So we have knowledge, but we are not enlightened. Knowledge and light are two different things, and Lloyd-Jones explains why (keep in mind he’s saying this from his pulpit in London in the 1950s):

The tragedy of our century has been that we have concentrated solely upon one aspect of knowledge. Our knowledge has been a knowledge of things, mechanical things, scientific things, a knowledge of life in more or less purely biological or mechanical sense. But our knowledge of the real factors that make life life, has not increased at all. That is why the world is in such a predicament today. For, as has often been pointed out, in spite of our having discovered all this great and new knowledge, we have failed to discover the most important thing of all, namely, what to do with our knowledge. That is the essence of the whole problem with regard to atomic power at this moment. There is nothing wrong in discovering atomic power. The tragedy is that we have not yet a sufficient knowledge of ourselves to be able to know what to do with this power now that we have discovered it.<sup>11</sup>

Have you ever considered that Jesus lived *after* the great thinkers of Plato, Socrates, and Aristotle? He knew all about the Greeks’ fascination with knowledge, and of course, the Romans’ fascination with progress and their elaborate road systems, etc. But as He looked into the eyes of these blue-color believers in Galilee, He said, “You are the light of the world.”<sup>12</sup>

So what does Jesus mean? He tells us by giving a couple of illustrations.

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<sup>8</sup> <https://time.com/5609124/us-suicide-rate-increase/>

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.latimes.com/science/la-sci-suicide-rates-rising-teens-young-adults-20190618-story.html>

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.nbcnews.com/health/mental-health/suicide-rates-are-rising-especially-rural-america-n1050806>

<sup>11</sup> Lloyd-Jones, pp. 160-1.

<sup>12</sup> Lloyd-Jones, “Let us never forget that Plato, Socrates, Aristotle, and the rest, had given their full teaching several centuries before these words were uttered. It was after that amazing flowering of the mind and the intellect that our Lord made this statement. He looked at this band of ordinary, insignificant people and said, ‘You and you alone are the light of the world.’” pp. 162-3.



### **A. Jesus gives us two illustrations of light.**

1. *Think about a city on a hill (14).* In the ESV, “You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden.”

Ancient towns were constructed out of a white limestone. In the brilliance of the mid-day sunlight, the limestone blocks would glisten with the reflection of the sun's rays. And at night, these same cities would be visible for miles, as the oil lamps situated in the windows of homes would light up the dark sky. It was an impressive sight. It was impossible to miss the presence of the cities.

Years ago we flew back from Colorado and approached the airport in Columbus at night. At one point, I looked out the window to one side and saw the lights of Cincinnati, to the other side and saw Dayton, behind us was Indianapolis, and in front of us was Columbus. The cities, though miles away, lit up the night sky with brilliance.

You can't hide a city on a hill, says Jesus. He's right of course. We get that.

2. *Think about a lamp (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 [ESV].”

It was a day before flashlights, before strobe lights, before streetlights, before the availability of instantaneous light with the flick of a switch on the wall. If you wanted to see at night, you needed an oil lamp. You would light the wick on the lamp (usually a bowl-shaped clay pot filled with oil) and then you could see. It would be absurd to light the lamp, and then put a basket over it. The light would be hidden. The light concealed under the basket would be useless to you.

Jesus says it's even more absurd to think of a follower of His who fails to shine in the world. And so He explains the clear implications of His two illustrations in verse 16.

**B. Jesus gives us the implications of being light (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.”

Jesus already told us that we are to influence the world as SALT. We are to delay the decay of the world. He warned us to avoid compromise and conformity to the values of the world. Now He says we are to influence the world as LIGHT. We are not to withdraw from this sin-darkened world. We are to illumine it.

Notice the three steps in progression.

1. *We are to let our light shine.*

Jesus did not say, "You are the light of the Church", but of the "world". What we do on Sunday is important, when we sing “Amazing Grace” and put our money in the offering plate. But our Christianity is supposed to be visible the rest of the week too. The clerk behind the counter at WalMart should see it. So should people in the stands on Friday evening. A Christian should be just as much a Christian on the job, or at school, as he or she is in the church-house. We are to let our light shine.

2. *People are to see our good works.* The word "good" in verse 16 is significant. The Greeks had two words for "good". The first describes something which is good in quality (e.g.—"That's a good car."). The second word refers to something which is beautiful and attractive (e.g.—when the baby sitter reports to the parents, "You certainly have a good child").

The world should be able to look at our lives and see "good works". Our actions as Christians should draw attention from people around us, attention not to ourselves, but to God. Everything we are and do should reflect the mind and will of God.

Someone has said, "The good word without the good walk is of no avail." Someone else has said, "There's no such thing as secret discipleship."

3. *Our Father is to receive glory.* So it's not enough simply to be different from the world. People must know why we're different. Jesus says the goal of our good works is so our Heavenly Father will receive glory.

So here's how it works. We let our light shine and people look at our lives. They see that we're different because our good works shine before them. But here is the result we're after. We want them to give our Father the glory He deserves, and that happens when they realize they need what we have, a relationship with His Son, Jesus Christ.

Perhaps you, my non-Christian friend, have been looking at the light. You've seen the good deeds of Jesus' followers. And now you know why. You've been watching people who like you are sinners, but unlike you have experienced God's forgiveness. Would you now like to join them? Jesus died for sinners, then conquered death, and now offers you eternal life. Will you repent and put your total trust in Him and begin glorifying the Father in heaven?

#### Take Inventory: Three questions to consider...

##### *1. How salty am I?*

In other words, what kind of influence am I having on the world? As Christians, we are to be different from the world. Salt doesn't disappear when applied to meat.<sup>13</sup> Rather, salt preserves the meat. Light and darkness don't mix. Rather, light exposes darkness. A great tragedy today, however, is that many Christians are having a tendency to conform to the world, sort of like a spiritual chameleon.

No, we're supposed to be salty. Our lives should be making people thirsty to know the One who has given us new life in His Son.

##### *2. How visible is my light?*

When Jesus preached this sermon, He was on the north side of the Sea of Galilee. Less than a hundred miles to the south, the Jordan River flowed into another sea, the Salt Sea, commonly called the Dead Sea. On its Western side lived a monastic community called the Essenes. They were intense, devoted students of the Scripture (the Dead Sea Scrolls discovered in the 1940's were their work). They had their own philosophy on how to deal with the wickedness of the world. They withdrew from it. They lived as an island in the vast sea of humanity. Ironically, they called themselves "sons of light" but took no steps to let their lights shine.

Brothers and sisters, as salt, we are to stop the spread of evil. As light, we are to promote the spread of the truth, by our words and deeds. How visible is your light? Who are the people you're actively seeking to introduce to Jesus right now? Who are you praying for? Who are you spending time with? Who are you sharing the gospel with? And can they see it in you?

3. *What good works can I do this week that will cause people to praise our Father?* A couple of weeks ago we launched a community prayer ministry. We're asking people we live near and work with or go to school with if they have any needs we can pray for. Praying is work, and this kind of praying can be a good work that we're trusting will result in people glorifying our Father. And there are other good works. We'll be sharing our ideas about those in our community groups later today.

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<sup>13</sup> See John Stott for some of the comments that follow.