

Wheelersburg Baptist Church 9/29/19  
Matthew 5:13-16 “You Are the Light of the World”—part 2\*\*<sup>1</sup>  
*Series: The Sermon on the Mount: Kingdom Living 101*

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Main Idea: Last week we began to answer the question, what is the Christian’s responsibility to the world? We looked at Jesus’ answer to the question in Matthew 5:13-16. First, we are the salt of the earth. Today we’ll consider His second answer. We are the light of the world.

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

“One can hardly blame unsalted meat for going bad. The real question is: Where’s the salt?” – John Stott

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.

Key: A Christian should be just as much a Christian on the job, or at school, and certainly at home, as he or she is in the church-house.

2. People are to see our good works.

Key: “There’s no such thing as secret discipleship.”

3. Our Father is to receive glory.

Key: The goal of our good works must be the glory of God.

Make It Personal: Two questions to consider...

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

Last week we began to answer the question, what is the Christian’s responsibility to the world? We looked at Jesus’ answer to the question in Matthew 5:13-16. First, we are the salt of the earth. Today we’ll consider His second answer. We are the light of the world.

*Scripture Reading: Matthew 5:13-16*

Last week we put six new ceiling lights in our basement. Wow, what a difference light makes. You’ve had the experience. Without light things are dingy. You can’t really see very well. And the effect is you just want to stay away from the area. But the presence of light actually produces an attraction. You want to enter that space, to enjoy it. That’s what light does.

My three-year-old grandson can’t explain the properties of light, but he knows the effect. “I don’t want to go down there, papa. Turn on the light first.”

And so the Master-Teacher says to His little ones, “You are the light of the world.” By that one statement He communicated something that’s so simple, a child can understand it, and so profound, adults can ponder the implications for a lifetime.

What does it mean to be the light of the world? How should this reality affect the way we view the world, and ourselves? This is a dark world, and it’s getting darker. It’s odd that so many Christians seem to be surprised at the darkness. Jesus wasn’t, and oh how we need to take heed to His words.

Let’s set the context. In verses 13-16, Jesus addresses His followers directly. “You are something,” He says. In the beatitudes, Jesus deals with the Christian’s character. In the similitudes, Jesus deals with the Christian’s influence, what we must be.

Salt and light. 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

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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.

around us should be made aware of God's holy standard and thus their need for a Savior.

### 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."

What does salt do? First...

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

Decaying is what is happening to the world around us. Martyn Lloyd Jones explains, "As the result of sin and the fall, life in the world in general tends to get into a putrid state...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... 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>2</sup>

Well said. 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.

Yet in His grace, the Lord has placed in the world something to slow down this spread of rottenness. 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.

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

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.

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

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, and contained impurities. So the actual salt could be leached out, leaving behind a diluted residue.

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.

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".

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

Again, 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.

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."

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

It's easy to complain about how bad the world is. But the question for us, the followers of Jesus, is, have we lost our saltiness? As John Stott put it, "One can hardly blame unsalted meat for going bad. The real question is: Where's the salt?"

What's our responsibility in this world? First, we are the salt of the earth. That's where we left off last week.

## 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>3</sup>

It takes light 1.25 seconds to get from the Earth to the Moon and about 8 minutes from the Sun to earth.<sup>4</sup> I read an interesting article called, "How Light Works," from an interesting website called, "Science.How Stuff Works.com."<sup>5</sup>

Light is at once both obvious and mysterious. We are bathed in yellow warmth every day and stave off the darkness with incandescent and fluorescent bulbs. But what exactly is light? We catch glimpses of its nature when a sunbeam angles through a dust-filled room, when a rainbow appears after a storm or when a drinking straw in a glass of water looks disjointed. These glimpses, however, only lead to more questions. Does light travel as a wave, a ray or a stream of particles? Is it a single color or many colors mixed together? Does it have a frequency like sound? And what are some of the common properties of light, such as absorption, reflection, refraction and diffraction?

You might think scientists know all the answers, but light continues to surprise them. Here's an example: We've always taken for granted that light travels faster than anything in the universe. Then, in 1999, researchers at Harvard University were able to slow a beam of light down to 38 miles an hour (61 kilometers per hour) by passing it through a state of matter known as a Bose-Einstein condensate. That's almost 18 million times slower than normal! No one would have thought such a feat possible just a few years ago, yet this is the capricious way of light. Just when you think you have it figured out, it defies your efforts and seems to change its nature.

But Jesus didn't use this analogy because it's complicated, but so very common. We know about light. The little child understands light. Just give him a flashlight and watch him go to work. He knows that light changes things. Light makes darkness leave. Light influences in powerful, unmistakable ways.

We need to think about this statement from the perspective of Jesus' first century hearers. When they heard, "You are the light of the world," what came to their minds?

First, their own experience. They saw the sun and moon and stars. They had lamps in their homes, and used torches when they ventured outside at night. They knew that light affected in unmistakable ways their dark surroundings. You don't erase darkness. You dispel it by simply putting a light in the dark place.

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<sup>3</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.

<sup>4</sup> <https://amazingfacts4u.com/light/>

<sup>5</sup> <https://science.howstuffworks.com/light.htm>

But it wasn't just their experience. When they heard Jesus say, "You are the light of the world," they thought of their Bibles, and so should we.

**Light is what God is.** Psalm 27:1, "The Lord is my light and my salvation. Whom shall I fear?" James 1:17, "Every good and perfect gift comes from above from the Father of lights." Speaking of the coming eternal city, there will be no need of the sun or moon to shine in it, "for the glory of God gives it light, and the Lamb is its lamp," says Revelation 21:23.

**Light is what God produced.** Remember the creation account? "Let there be light," Genesis 1:3. Remember the pillar of fire? Psalm 119:105 says, "Your word is a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path."

**Light is what God predicted He would send into the world.** The nations were supposed to be able to look at Israel and know what God is like. But Israel didn't send a clear message. So the Lord revealed He would send Someone who would. Jesus' hearers knew the prophecy of Isaiah 42:6, "I will make you to be... a light for the Gentiles." And of Isaiah 49:6, "I will make you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring my salvation to the ends of the earth." This is what "the servant of the LORD" will do when he comes.

And then Jesus came, and **light is what Jesus said He was.** John 8:12, "I am the light of the world." And in John 9:5 "...in the world I am the light of the world." Jesus is the light. We're told in John 1:4, "In Him was life and that life was the light of man."<sup>6</sup>

So light is what God is, what His Word is, what the Messiah is. But here's the shocker. The Messiah is now speaking to His followers and says, "Light is what you are. You are the light of the world."

Today's world certainly would not agree with Jesus. Ever since the "Enlightenment" which occurred in the 18th century, when men began to examine and explain the world in humanistic terms, man began to see himself as the source light. We don't need God. Only those in darkness need God. We have knowledge. We have 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.

I mentioned last time that recent studies have shown that suicide rates in the United States are the highest they've been in 75 years. From 1999 to 2016, the rate of suicide among Americans ages 25 to 64 rose by 41 percent.<sup>7</sup> We may have knowledge today, but we are not enlightened, for knowledge and light are two different things.

The same was true in Jesus' day. 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 His followers in Galilee, He said, "You are the light of the world."

Then Jesus took it a step further by giving a couple of illustrations.

**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

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<sup>6</sup> See also John 1:5, 9 "The light shines in the darkness...The true light that gives light..."

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.nbcnews.com/health/mental-health/suicide-rates-are-rising-especially-rural-america-n1050806>

presence of the cities.

I can still recall the sight. I was living on Kibbutz Ma'Agan in Israel, located on the southern shore of the Sea of Galilee. At night I would look north across the Sea, and there, thirteen miles away was a city on the northern shore. I think it was Capernaum. You couldn't miss it. You can't hide a city on a hill.

That's what Jesus said. He's right of course. We get that. You just can't help but see a city on a hill. The light is unmistakable.

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*. He says, *we are* the light. Now He says to let our light shine. Letting our light shine is doing what Jesus did. He is the light. We are the light. When we do what he did we are letting our light shine.

So what do we see Him doing? Healing the sick. Rescuing the demon possessed. Preaching. Teaching. Touching the leper. Ministering to a grieving sister. Letting our light shine is the same thing as letting Jesus shine, specifically letting people see Jesus in and through us.

You say, "But I'm weak. I can't shine for Jesus very well."

Keep in mind that the light comes from Him, not us. He is the Light. He lives in us. So as we submit to Him and cooperate with Him, He shines through us. So, *let your light shine* is actually *let Me shine through you*.

Remember Moses going into the tabernacle? Remember how he came out shining, so much so that he had to put a veil over his face? Why did his face shine? Simply because he spent time in the presence of God.

There's a lesson here. When you spend time with God, you come out of that experience different. If we're not shining, what needs to happen? Some says, "Do! Do! Do! That's what you need. Do good works. Let your light shine."

But wait. Not so fast. Yes, the doing will come, but first the Bible says, "Be! Be! Be!" As in, be in the presence of the Glorious One who is light, and you can't help but shine. He will shine through you.

Yet how can a sinner be in the presence of God? There's only one way. Jesus said, "I am the way. No one comes to the Father except by me (John 14:6)." So to shine we must first be saved. Then having been saved, we shine. The salvation leads to shining.

Another question. Shine where? "Before men (AV)," says Jesus. "Before others (NIV, ESV)." Who are these "others"? Before other disciples, yes, but primarily before others who are not yet disciples. We know this because Jesus says our objective is to see them do what we do, by God's grace, "give glory to your Father in heaven."

Notice that. Not "to *our* Father," but "to *your* Father." Hopefully that will come, but not yet. We're letting our light shine before others who may not yet know our Father with the ambition that they too will glorify Him.

So the shining is to happen out there. 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.

**Key: A Christian should be just as much a Christian on the job, or at school, and certainly at home, 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 a couple of words for "good". The first describes something with moral quality, worthy of admiration (e.g.—"Now that's a good car!"). The second word refers to something which is beautiful and attractive (e.g.—, "You certainly have a good looking baby"). It's the second word that appears in verse 16. *Kalos*, which means free from defects, beautiful.<sup>8</sup>

This is what the world should be able to see when they look at our lives. Beautiful, attractive, *good* works. We ought to be doing the kinds of things that speak well of our beautiful and worthy Savior, who of course is the One who is shining through us.

**Someone has said, "There's no such thing as secret discipleship."** That's true. If the Light of the world is living in us, people will see it, will see *Him*. Everything we are and do should reflect the mind and will of our Savior.

So let your light shine before others...so that they may see your good works.

Then what? "And give glory to your Father who is in heaven." This is the goal.

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.

This is a mark of a true disciple of Jesus. The disciple wants the Father to receive glory. When he helps a widow, he wants his Father to receive the glory. When she opens her home to house a missionary, she wants her Father to receive glory. When we teach a class, or give a gift of money, or fix a broken car, we want our Father to receive glory.

Psalms 70:4 "But may all who seek you rejoice and be glad in you! May those who love your salvation always say, 'Let God be exalted!'"

So here's what's supposed to happen. 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.

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<sup>8</sup> <http://greekwordstudies.blogspot.com/2007/04/good.html>

Perhaps you, my non-Christian friend, have been looking at the light. You've been seeing the good deeds of Jesus' followers. You've been watching them carefully, people who just like you are sinners, but unlike you have experienced God's forgiveness. And now you know why. Those people you have been watching want something to happen. They've been doing those good deeds so that something will happen in your life, for you to praise and glorify their Father in heaven. Indeed, so their Father will become *your* Father.

So the question is, would you like to join them? Jesus died for sinners, then conquered death, and now offers you eternal life. Will you repent of your sin and put your total trust in Christ? Will you receive the Light of the world into your life and start letting His light shine through you, so that your life results in glory to the Father in heaven?

**Key: The goal of our good works must be the glory of God.**

This is critical. There's a difference between being light and merely being benevolent. Bill and Melinda Gates have given away \$18 billion, or 22 percent of their \$81 billion fortune, to charity since 2000.<sup>9</sup> Warren Buffett gave more than \$46 billion to charity since 2000. That's about 71 percent of his \$65.5 billion fortune.

Those are staggering numbers. The Gates say they do all this, bringing people out of poverty, improving healthcare, they say, "because it's our life."

I'm thankful for benevolent people. The world is a better place because of benevolent people. But according to Jesus, there's a difference between mere benevolence and being light. The actions may look the same, but the difference has to do with who gets the glory and praise.

*Let your light shine before others*, says Jesus to His followers, *that they may see your good deeds*, the help you give to the hurting, *and glorify your Father in heaven*.

It's all about the Father. He's the One who sent His Son to save us. He's the One who opened our eyes to see the beauty of the Light of the world. He's the One who enables us now to shine by doing good deeds. And He's the One we want to receive the praise and glory.

So what does being the light of the world look like in practical terms? You are the light of the world. That's what Jesus said. If we do that, what will it look like? Will we fix a widow's car this week, or volunteer at the school?

This is an important question, and thankfully, we have an answer. Look at the rest of the New Testament. In the book of Acts and then in the epistles and you'll find two things. Examples and an explanation. What kinds of things did the New Testament churches do to put Jesus' words into practice?

All kinds of things. In Acts 3 we see Peter heal an invalid who then leaps and praises God. See the connection? A good deed that results in glory to God. In Acts 9 we see Dorcas "always doing good and helping the poor" (9:36). The result of her story? "Many people believed in the Lord (9:42)." We see people selling land and laying it at the apostles' feet, a good deed that results in the gospel going forth to the praise of God.

And of course we see preaching. Is preaching a good deed? It's actually the best of deeds because it's the deed the Father has chosen to use to bring salvation to hell-bound sinners. And we see this good deed all over the New Testament.

Look at Acts 13. Paul and Barnabas went to Pisidian Antioch and preached the message of Christ. Many of the Jews who listened became jealous and then obstinate and started attacking the missionaries. Remember what happened?

Acts 13:46-48 "Then Paul and Barnabas answered them boldly: 'We had to speak the word of God to you first. Since you reject it and do not consider yourselves worthy of eternal

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<sup>9</sup> <https://www.cnbc.com/2017/09/21/warren-buffet-is-the-most-charitable-billionaire.html>

life, we now turn to the Gentiles. <sup>47</sup> For this is what the Lord has commanded us: “I have made you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring salvation to the ends of the earth.” <sup>48</sup> When the Gentiles heard this, they were glad and honored the word of the Lord; and all who were appointed for eternal life believed.”

Notice that. These men were letting their light shine. How? By preaching. Why? Because they knew the Lord had commanded them to be a light to the Gentiles.

Paul later wrote to the churches and told the church members, “Now you are light in the Lord (Eph 5:8).” And, “You are all sons of the light (1 Thes 5:5).” And he also warned of the evil one who “...masquerades as an angel of light”, as do pseudo-preachers in the church (2 Corinthians 11:14-15).

We’ll see some more examples next week, the Lord willing.

### Make It Personal: Two questions to consider...

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

We let our light shine not by being the same as the world but by being different from it in an attractive way. Too often these days churches try to make the church look like the world thinking we will make feet people feel comfortable if they come to us. So we try to look like the world and sound like the world. But light is qualitatively different from darkness. Light transforms darkness. Not by being less brilliant.

Our evangelism grows out of the question, what makes you different? What is the reason for the hope that you have? Peter puts it this way in 1 Peter 2:12, “Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us.”

So we need this question. 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 and sharing the gospel with? And can they see it in you?

*2. 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.