

Salt & Light
(Matthew 5:13-16)
By Randy Wages
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Note: The text below was prepared for oral delivery rather than for publication in print. As such, be aware that sentence fragments are intentionally used and that this document has not been edited to correct the errors in grammar, sentence structure, etc.

Today we will continue our walk through the Sermon on the Mount with our text taken from Matthew, Chapter 5. Those of you who were here at the 10 o'clock hour already know that this is a continuation of our earlier session, picking up where we left off this morning. I had hoped to preach on the entire passage that includes verses 10 ó 16, all in one sermon; however in order to do the subject justice within our time constraints, I decided to deliver it in 2 consecutive sessions instead. During the 10 o'clock hour my message was titled "Blessed of God ó Part V" which concluded our study of the Beatitudes. In this hour, I will pick up where I left off with our primary text taken from Matthew 5, verses 13 ó 16.

As I told everyone earlier, in preparing for the message today, I became persuaded that there's an important tie-in between what Christ is saying in verses 10 - 12 with that which he communicates in verses 13 ó 16 where He uses the metaphors of salt and light to describe these same folks spoken of in the preceding verses ó that is the ones referred to throughout the first 12 verses as "blessed" ó the eternally blessed of God in Christ. Now the title I've chosen for this sermon is simply, "Salt and Light." I do believe that these 2 messages are best heard together and I encourage any who might hear them later to consider listening to the both of them in the order given. So let's go back and begin our by looking at this entire passage, Matthew 5:10 ó 16. Beginning in verse 10 we read:

"Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. ¹¹Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. ¹²Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you.

¹³Ye 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. ¹⁴Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on an hill cannot be hid. ¹⁵Neither 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. ¹⁶Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.”

1. Introduction to Matt 5:13 ó 16:

Now as we consider verses 13 ó 16, keep in mind the backdrop of verses 10-12. The very traits displayed in each of the beatitudes, traits exclusively found among the citizens of the kingdom of heaven, are those which bring on the persecution that comes from the world. When we testify and witness of the fact that Christ=s righteousness alone makes the difference between saved and lost, heaven and hell, blessed of God and cursed of God; when we plainly say that we’re justified, redeemed, reconciled and accepted by God by the blood of Christ (His righteousness) alone to the exclusion of all that men by nature value; when we call on sinners to repent of trusting in anything else or something in addition to the righteousness of God in Christ, this will bring out the offense of the cross and bring on that persecution in some form or another.

To see how this works, we must recognize that it is impossible to walk as a citizen of the kingdom of heaven in a purely private way. The believer is not poor in spirit, mournful, meek, hungry and thirsty for righteousness, merciful, pure in heart, a peacemaker C all in some kind of isolation. These characteristics when manifested in a lost, sinful world identify the Christian and thereby constitute his witness to the world ó a witness that brings on opposition and persecution.

Now we know that this fellowship in the sufferings of Christ, this persecution, is not suffering over our morality, kindness, generosity, etc., because we know our Lord was not persecuted for any of these things. Why was He persecuted? In John 7:7 He said: *“The world cannot hate you; but me it hateth, because I testify of it, that the works thereof are evil.”* It was His doctrine, His testimony that the world was lost and their deeds were evil.

2. Now here in verses 13 ó 16, Christ goes on and says of these very folks who are blessed of God and persecuted for righteousness sake, that they are the “salt of the earth” and the “light of the world.” Seeing this tie-in has really been convicting and a blessing to me as I’ve prepared this message.

And I hope it speaks to you in the same way. Here we see that if you are among the blessed of God, this is the case.

You see, these blessed ó will be persecuted (and that affliction may be light) but it shall occur for righteousness sake ó not because you refused a drink at a cocktail party or you endured a snicker for bowing for prayer in a public restaurant to be seen of others like the Pharisees. I mention this because ashamedly, I used to believe that is what was meant here. It is not because you took a stand for your concept of Jesus ó but for righteousness sake, and that is for Christ's sake. Now ó if your hope is wrapped up in Him, based on righteousness ó then you are salt and you are light. You aren't merely encouraged to be salt and light but you are!

3. Look again with me at verses, 13 ó 15:

“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. ¹⁴Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on an hill cannot be hid. ¹⁵Neither 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.”

4. Christ says here that if the salt isn't salty anymore ó how will it regain its saltiness ó it's good for nothing. He's showing the absurdity of un-salty salt. The ðifö in ðif the salt have lost his savourö is hypothetical. I believe He is communicating that if it could lose its savor, it never was salt.

Salt in the ancient world was used primarily as a preservative. Salt is also used as a seasoning ó to make things savoury. Consider that salt is distinct. It has its own flavor. It does not merely blend in with the surroundings. Our Gospel, our doctrine, is distinct and unique. It does not blend in with the doctrines of this lost religious world. We cannot say, AWe all believe the same thing@ because so many still rest in that of which we have been brought to repent ó seeing the very evil of our former religious thoughts that we once considered good. The distinctiveness of our doctrine is that we trust in Christ alone for all of our salvation, based upon the righteousness of God established by Christ alone in His life and death, with no contribution by or through us, the sinner.

Now the true church will never lose its savour. Here on earth there will be unbelievers or false professors present in the visible church. But all true believers, the salt of the earth, will never lose their savour. They will endure until Christ comes again because their entire justification, salvation, and sanctification are found in the immutable (unchangeable) God-man, Christ Jesus, who cannot and does not fail.

5. Likewise, all of the citizens of the kingdom are aptly described as light. Light's usefulness is to expose, to dispel darkness. Christ shows the absurdity of the concept of a light that is hidden so as to not fulfill its function of light that isn't seen. That is not its function.

a. A city set on a hill cannot be hid. (Cite examples of ancient walled cities of Italy, built on hillsides so that they could see from their watch towers for miles).

b. Men don't light a candle and then cover it up if it is meant to give out light and dispel darkness.

6. Well, if you're among the blessed of God, you are salt and light and you will be useful in some capacity, to some degree, in the ministry of the Gospel on this earth. If not, the verses here suggest that it gives evidence that you're not among the blessed at all. Believers, (men, women, and children) as members of the body of Christ, are all servants in the ministry of reconciliation of the ministry of the Gospel.

a. Let me digress just a moment and point out what some commentaries that I studied brought out about the obvious shift in the language that takes place here in Matthew 5 beginning with verse 11. Prior to verse 11, Christ addressed the multitude as "they" or saying, "Blessed are they." Then in verses 11 to 16, Christ speaks more directly to these who are blessed by using the pronoun, "ye" or "Blessed are ye." Some think that these remarks are directed to the disciples and intended only for pastors or teachers with public ministries, such as the disciples were given. And I agree that it certainly includes them; however, I'm convinced that these verses are likewise directed to all of the members of the body of Christ of all of the redeemed ones who have been given life. The scriptures tell us that all believers are given spiritual gifts to contribute to the church's ministry of the ministry of reconciliation, being peacemakers in the sense I reviewed in an earlier message in this series.

b. We know that, as God's servants, we sin when we hide or fail to make use of the gifts and talents which He has given us for use in His ministry. We are lit candles and as such, act contrary to our calling in Christ Jesus and His purpose for us on this earth, as salt and light, when we hide that light as if under a bushel basket.

7. Now here in our text today, I want you to gain a sense of the context by viewing verses 13 ó 16 in light of the preceding verses, 10-12. By nature, we love the praise of men, we desire to be liked ó I certainly do. But do we love the praise of men, more than the praise of God? In the 12th chapter of John, it was recorded of some of the Pharisees who were following Christ, that they would not confess Him, “...*lest they should be put out of the synagogue...*” (i.e. - be persecuted, not applauded, but rather rejected) “...*for they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God.*”

Well, I believe the message here from Christ to believers is that this is why you must endure that which ó aside from the fact that you have cause to rejoice in such circumstances, it is nonetheless ó undesirable to our human nature. Suffering and persecution are not among the things that we naturally desire or look forward to. When these verses are considered together, I believe Christ is expressing here that we are to rejoice ó not only because it evidences that a great reward awaits us (heaven itself), but also because He has a job for you. He's reminding them that they are “*His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that <you> should walk in them.*” (Eph 2:10). We know that the ministry of the word of God ó the Gospel wherein His righteousness is revealed ó makes use of the remnant of the election of grace that has remained on this earth in each and every successive generation ó and it does so through the preaching of the Gospel. What a privilege! We've been entrusted with the glorious knowledge of how God can be both just and justifier of ungodly sinners such as we, of how God saves sinners based solely on the person and work of Jesus Christ ó based upon the righteousness He established in perfect satisfaction to God's justice. What a responsibility! But also ó What a privilege!

a. As salt ó when God deals with a person to cause them to understand that the way of salvation that would seem right unto men, but leads to destruction, is awry ó that there is ósomething rotten in Denmarkö so to speak ó that is, that it is objectionable or unsavory ó He uses His

servants, the salt, these who have already been blessed with spiritual life, to provide the seasoning, the savour of Christ.

In 2 Cor. 2:15-16 it reads: *“For we are unto God a sweet savour of Christ, in them that are saved, and in them that perish: ¹⁶To the one we are the savour of death unto death; and to the other the savour of life unto life. And who is sufficient for these things?”*

All spoken of here as citizens of the kingdom of God are the savour of life unto life to others who will believe through preaching, teaching and supporting the ministry of the preaching and teaching of the Gospel, wherein God's glory is revealed. As salt, we are used to deliver and spread the distinctive message that is believed unto salvation wherein men can be assured that they will be preserved and nothing can separate them from the love of God in Christ.

b. As light we share the light of the Gospel the very light that has been shown into the hearts of these eternally blessed of God, these who are persecuted for righteousness sake. It is *“...the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face (the person and work) of Jesus Christ.”* (2 Cor 4:6).

8. Let your light shine: So since we are salt and light let us be diligent and ready. He says in verse 16, so, *“Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.”*

a. Now consider just a few interesting characteristics of the 2 metaphors, light and salt:

i. Consider that salt shakers don't just hop around on the table and empty themselves indiscriminately on all the food. Salt doesn't force itself where there is no interest and on those who like their food as it is. But it sits on the table ready to be used. It is made (1) available and (2) it stands ready.

ii. Similarly we don't go around shining lights in people's eyes with the intent of shocking them but the light source stands by, ready for use and for the switch to be turned, the candle to be lit and when the

light is called for ó it shines and exposes things as they are, dispelling darkness.

b. So how are we to respond as salt and light in this world? In Matthew 10:16, Christ said, *“Behold, I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves: be ye therefore wise as serpents, and harmless as doves.”* We should use our heads and be wise as serpents. And we should attempt to be harmless as doves ó gentle in our support of the outreach of the Gospel ministry in the world we live. It is using wisdom to refrain from browbeating folks in whom the Lord has yet to stir up an interest; and, it is wise to avoid stirring up religious controversy just for the sake of controversy. However, that truth should not be used as an excuse for any lack of diligence, attention, or zeal to take every opportunity to serve God by each of us applying our individual gifts and seizing the opportunities so as to collectively support the spread and ministry of the Gospel in our community and elsewhere.

As justified sinners, plagued with remaining sin, we do need reminding and encouragement from the scriptures and from one another to be exhorted unto good works ó to act as the children of the kingdom that we profess to be. And with what motive? Listen, it isn’t in order that we can look at our own service and gain assurance that we measure up ó for we never will.

We serve out of love for Him because He first loved us. This is a love that I believe manifests itself by flowing through believers to others in much the same way that we discussed in a preceding verse that began, *“Blessed are the merciful...”* Well, has that love of God been shed abroad in your heart (to use the scriptural language)?

Imagine for a moment that you have a friend or family member dying with cancer ó a dear friend you presumably love and care about. Now also assume you’ve learned of a sure and certain cure. Not only that, but you also know that the expert who can communicate and clearly explain to others ó just what is required and involved in this cure ó is conducting a seminar in your area. Can you imagine, out of genuine love for your dying friend, failing to even invite them to come hear this man who is going to conduct a seminar that will relate to them how they too can be cured ó the sure and certain remedy.

Why, I imagine if it was one of our dearest loved ones, we wouldn't just invite them. I believe I would use all the persuasion I could muster because I love them and I love this true cure that I've been shown cannot fail.

Well, do we really believe that we live in a dying world or a religious world mind you, but no less a spiritually dead world? I'm talking about a world where most of our friends and family are sadly not even aware of the extent of their disease or of the nature and depth of their sinfulness before God. And their ignorance is so obvious to those who have been given an understanding in spiritual life or who have been made aware of how they too were mistaken. The blind and sinful ignorance of those whom God has not yet blessed with spiritual life is made evident by the inadequate remedy they religiously presume constitutes the cure they need or that they think proves them to be accepted by God as they rest in a false refuge or something other than Christ's obedience unto death or His finished work in establishing righteousness.

Well, if you too perceive that we are surrounded by spiritual darkness in a world that abounds in spiritual death and ignorance, I want to encourage you as I encourage and preach to myself the things that came to mind as I prepared this message. As most of you already know, we are hosting a Sovereign Grace Bible conference here at our church in just a few weeks. And I, for one, don't know of any 3 men anywhere in the world with whom I have as much confidence in communicating the one true cure, the one true Gospel that I love, than the 3 men who have so graciously agreed to come here and speak. And they will all be gathered in this one place, on this one weekend or here in Albany, GA.

Here's the question: Will I, (will you), take the time, and perhaps risk the rejection, by personally inviting and encouraging those around us to simply come and hear this glorious message or the one that could change their lives for eternity if God be so pleased? To you who are salt and light, I hope this speaks to you as it has to me.

Look or let's not kid ourselves. I've given some thought as to why we're often tempted to hide our light under a bushel. We know ourselves and our sinful nature. We also know that any who come and hear this message of salvation by grace alone, based upon the righteousness of God in Christ, excluding any contribution by, in or through them or we

know that they will not receive it and (unless they're just indifferent) they will hate it ó unless God performs a miracle of grace and gives them spiritual life with its faculties to see and understand what the spiritually dead cannot see and will not have.

That puts it out of our hands doesn't it? We might be ostracized, have a few things said against us, and / or just not be accepted quite as well by them unless they are one of God's own. I'm convinced that this type of reluctance is nothing more than a manifestation of the remaining sinful nature that plagues us in this life. Recognizing this, we need to continually feed on God's word and encourage one another to act as ambassadors for Christ, consistent with our standing in Christ ó dead to sin in Him.

Well which will it be?

1) Will you concede to the natural, sinful aversion to being rejected by those you know will most certainly be in opposition (short of a miracle of grace) once they hear the message you are promoting ó or will we

(2) be faithful stewards of the marvelous gift God has entrusted us with ó His Gospel, knowing (a) that it is the power of God unto salvation and thereby, His ordained instrument used to bring everyone of His sheep into a knowledge of Him and what He has accomplished, and (b) that, independent of the responses of the hearers, that it, the Gospel, is that message which glorifies our Father and exalts our Savior by ascribing to Him all the preeminence in salvation that belongs solely to Him.

9. Letting your light shine ó vs. 16: Now when vs. 16 says to let your light shine, it isn't saying let your good works shine. Most people interpret this scripture as if it were saying that the world will recognize us to be a Christian@ when they see our works of morality, charity, compassion, kindness, and love. All sorts of unbiblical platitudes are spawned by this kind of reasoning, such as B AI=d rather see a sermon than hear a sermon;@ AYou are the only Bible some people read;@ APeople will not listen to your doctrine until they see your life of obedience.@ It is true that all Christians should live exemplary lives of obedience and morality.

And it is sad when a true Christian ignores his responsibility to conduct himself according to God's revealed will and chooses to walk inconsistent with his calling and vocation. It is even sadder when such behavior in a professing Christian gives the enemies of Christ occasion to blaspheme God and conclude there is nothing to our profession and religion as Nathan told King David regarding his sin in 2 Samuel 12:14. Christians should realize when they do such things they misrepresent and dishonor the God of salvation and Christ whom they claim to serve.

However, this being the case, we must interpret Matthew 5:16 in light of a glaring reality and in the light of other scriptures. The glaring reality is that no one did as much good as our Lord, yet the world did not recognize Him to be the Son of God incarnate. As you've heard others say, while some sing "Let Others See Jesus in You," they fail to realize that they didn't even see Jesus in Jesus. He led a perfectly sinless life, yet the world did not recognize it as such. The world called Him evil, a blasphemer. Consider this verse, I John 3:1, where it reads:

Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God: therefore the world knoweth us not, because it knew him not.

Here we see that just as they failed to recognize the Lord for His good works, they failed to recognize the followers of the Lord for their good works. How, then, do we rightly interpret Matthew 5:16? We must understand that the "light" here is not the works of believers. It is the Gospel truth that shines on such works and reveals them to be the works of sinners justified at the cross of Calvary by righteousness established and imputed and who have been given life to know it. The principle here is this: **Good works can only be good and recognized as good in light of the Gospel.** Outward works of morality will not bring anyone to glorify God. Most all religions, even those that openly deny Christ, promote morality. God uses the light of His Gospel, applied by the power of the Holy Spirit, to bring a person to glorify the Father in heaven. Only those who come to hear, believe, and judge by the Gospel will recognize the works of believers to be good works and thereby glorify God. Also, consider that the same light that reveals the works of believers to be good works also exposes the works of unbelievers to be evil deeds and dead works as the scriptures assert in the book of John.

People will never be converted simply by looking at our outward acts of morality. However, we should never let immoral, careless, or unbecoming conduct get in the way of our witnessing the Gospel light to the world. Let us be diligent to adorn our profession of the truth with obedience, service, love and good works.

Verse 16 says that we are to let our light (the Gospel message itself ó the light that has been shone in our own hearts) so shine that men may see your good works (not hampered by giving them ammunition to truthfully say all manner of evil against you, nor by drawing attention to yourself), but rather that they might discover that your works are perfectly good and acceptable in Him. And notice the verse doesn't stop with just seeing your good works but seeing them and glorify your father which is in heaven. We don't normally look at light. We look at what light exposes. The good works of a believer are to be accompanied by the testimony of the Gospel that redounds to God's glory ó revealing how salvation is conditioned on His person and work alone.

This letting your light so shine is to participate in the ministry wherein is shone that same light of the knowledge of the glory of God in Christ that is manifested in each and everyone to whom God has given spiritual life.

Turn to 2 Cor. 4 and let's close by looking at that passage. I'm just going to read this with a few brief comments as I go ó for God's own word itself is God's instrument of regeneration. I believe you'll see here how this entire chapter 4 of 2 Cor. is relevant to the message of today's text in Matthew. Beginning in vs. 1, we read:

“Therefore seeing we have this ministry, as we have received mercy, we faint not; ²But have renounced the hidden things of dishonesty, not walking in craftiness, nor handling the word of God deceitfully; but by manifestation of the truth commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God. ³But if our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost: ⁴In whom the god of this world <Satan> hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them. ⁵For we preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord; and ourselves your servants for Jesus' sake. ⁶For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. ⁷But we have this treasure in earthen

vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us. ⁸We are troubled on every side, yet not distressed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; ⁹Persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed;”

And then in the interest of time, skip down with me and pickup again in verse 15 where Paul writes:

“For all things are for your sakes, that the abundant grace might through the thanksgiving of many redound to the glory of God. ¹⁶For which cause we faint not; but though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day. ¹⁷For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory; ¹⁸While we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal.”

Salt and Light: *“Let your light so shine among men that they may see your good works and glorify your Father which is in heaven.”*

Footnote from the author: While this sermon was prepared and delivered by me, I often utilize the commentaries, study helps, and teachings of others to supplement my own prayerful study of the scriptures. Since this document was not originally prepared for publication in print, please excuse and recognize that it was unfeasible to properly identify and credit all of the various original sources used to develop the content herein. Ultimately, it is my sincere and foremost objective to accurately present the gospel of God's grace found in the only infallible source, God's word itself ó the Bible.

Randy Wages