

Living As Salt in a Rotten World

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Text: Matthew 5:13

Series: King of Kings

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Living Hope Bible Church of Roselle, IL

Introduction: I invite you to turn in your Bibles to **Matthew 5:13-16**. We are in a series through the book of Matthew entitled: “King of kings!” Today’s we are looking at: “Living as Salt and Light”.

Called to Influence!

God left us on earth to be an influence. In light of the countercultural marks of a true disciple voiced in the Beatitudes, it would be easy to assume that Jesus was calling His followers to a life of isolation or collective monasticism in some kind of a commune or closed society, like the Amish. In fact, here in Matthew 5:13-16 Jesus instructs us to do precisely the opposite. Christians must permeate this world and culture as agents of redemption.¹ God calls us to be “salt” and “light! He calls us to have a major influence on the world around us.

Your **testimony** and transformed life in Christ is one of the most powerful and lasting things on this earth. You are the salt of the earth.

Do you see the culture around us deteriorating? Perhaps your own family at this moment is breaking down and in a point of crisis. What we are going to learn is that Jesus calls us at all times to live an impactful life. We are never to coast as Christians. We are never to be casual. Christ calls us to bring change to our world by being personally affected by the Gospel and then by living that out and touching the lives of others. God calls us to be “salt” and “light!

Think about this: at all times and at this moment you are either having a negative or positive influence on the world around you. We cannot be stagnant! Stagnation brings rottenness. If we stop shining, we are in darkness! We must be burning brightly at all times. We must be moving forward having a major impact on this world.

Reading of Scripture

Matthew 5:13, “You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt should lose its taste, how can it be made salty? It’s no longer good for anything but to be thrown out and trampled on by men.”

Salt has many properties. Let’s look at several of them and apply this scripture to our lives. So let’s look at our high calling – our place of fantastic influence. Listen to the words of Christ: “You are the salt of the earth!”

I. We are called to be **Salt** (5:13)

Matthew 5:13a, “You are the salt of the earth.”

¹ Blomberg, C. (1992). *Vol. 22: Matthew*. The New American Commentary (102). Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers.

01- Salt Represents Inward Character

Light is outward and active, but when Christ talks about salt, he's talking about what is inward in the Christian. It speaks of a person who is in covenant and alliance with God. This alliance changes him. The world is rotten, and the salt brings a healing, transforming, preserving power. It's like an analeptic that kills the bacteria. Those salted by God are transformed. This comes right from the Old Testament.

02- Salt in the Old Testament Signified Covenant and Alliance

Salt in the Old Testament was a picture of commitment to God's covenant and influence in your life. You share a **salty, savory meal** with friends not enemies. In many ancient societies salt was used as a mark the covenant of friendship and alliance. God prescribed that all sacrificial offerings in Israel were to be offered with salt "so that the salt of the covenant of your God shall not be lacking" (Lev. 2:13).² Salt is the picture of God's friendship having first place in your life.

And so when Jesus says: "You are the salt of the earth", He's talking about the power and influence of Christ's presence on your character. He's just spoken of the inward character of a true disciple. True disciples mirror the character of their Master.

- **Poor in Spirit** – the Christian knows he or she desperately needs Christ
- **Mourn** – Oh how the Christian hates and mourns over sin. Christ never knew sin, so the Christian can never be casual about sin. There's an honesty and owning up to that which is wrong in our lives.
- **Meek** – There is this wonderful childlike attitude – a trust that only God and His Word and Spirit can change me.
- **Hunger/Thirst for righteousness** – the one who is teachable hungers to be taught how to change and desires to carry out this transformation. We are "renewed in the spirit of our mind" and we want to "put off the old life" and "put on the new life".

03 – Salt More Valuable Than Gold

In Christ's day, pure, uncorrupted salt was far more valuable than it is today. It had many uses and it was hard to obtain. Until modern times, salt played a major factor in the economies of entire nations. In Jesus' day, undiluted salt was often more valuable than gold.

Salt-Money

At one time the Roman Empire valued salt as a form of currency, and workers were at times paid with it. It's where we get our word salary from. It literally means "salt-money." That's why we use the expression: "That person is worth his salt." Salt is valuable. When Jesus says "You are the salt of the earth" – He's saying, the most valuable commodity to the world is the Body of Christ. A person can have all the wealth in the world, but if they don't have Christ, they lose everything, even their own soul in the end. It is the Christian who has the power to give Christ to people. "How shall they hear without a preacher?"

² MacArthur, J. F., Jr. (1985). *Matthew*. MacArthur New Testament Commentary (241). Chicago: Moody Press.

Christians are Valuable to this World!

Christian, you are valuable, because you are the only one who is going to pass on the **life-saving** and **life-giving** message of the Gospel. Who else is going to do it? Will the self righteous or the God-deniers pass on the Gospel? Will the many religious lost people pass on the Gospel? Christian God has told you – your power to give the Gospel is more valuable than all the gold and fame and influence on the planet. Simply sharing the Gospel with someone is far more valuable than founding Microsoft or Apple.

04 – Salt Preserves

Salt is also valuable because it preserves. In Jesus' day food would not last very long if not rubbed with salt or placed in a salt solution. In ancient times, merchants would pack the meat and fish they would sell in salt. The bacteria that caused decay could not exist in a highly saline environment. This was extremely important in biblical times when people had no ability to freeze or refrigerate food. Salt can slow and even prevent decay and rotteness in meat.

Jamon Serano

I remember the first time Jill and I went to Spain, we would walk into a supermarket and you could smell the wonderful savor of cured ham, what they called “Jamon Serano”. Before refrigerators, and still today, the best way to preserve meat is to cure it with spices and salt. This is a savory way to eat food – the meats are rubbed with salt to preserve them. Fish is also preserved this way. I can remember watching my friend Manolo with what looked like a raw fish in his hand. But it was cured. So the way they eat it is to cut it open on the top and eat it like a taco. You just stick your hand in there and it is savory. The only problem is the eyes are looking at you! But it so preserves the fish that it is good to eat.

The salt of a holy life and applying the Word of God inwardly to our life preserves our testimony and has a preserving influence on those around us.

Jesus by the Sea of Galilee

Jesus was standing by the Sea of Galilee and teaching a crowd of his disciples, many of whom were actually fishermen. Fishermen know the need for salt. It was necessary to salt the fish down to keep them edible. Salt in that day prevented decay and restrained corruption.

As Christians have the ability to stop the corruption in our society and culture. The world is a very corrupt and rotten place. A saint is a separated one – one set apart for the Gospel. Our world is like that food; it is slowly decomposing in a spiritual sense due to the “bacteria” of sin. Without the influence of God's people being “Salty”, the world would quickly decompose spiritually.

Sadly, Christians for a time can choose to become conformed to the world instead of being transformed by the Word, and it hurts our influence and impact. We don't want to add to the rotteness of this world! We want to preserve it from rotteness.

Salt of God's Word, Spirit, Repentance, Brokenness

Are you letting the salt of the Word of God preserve you? Are you yielding to the influence and preserving power of the Holy Spirit. Is there anything in your life that is grieving the Holy Spirit right now? What is it that is spoiling your service for Christ? Let the salt of confession and repentance and brokenness restore your influence in this world!

05 – Salt Flavors

Just as salt provides flavor to our food, so Christ in us provides the flavor of godly influence in an unsavory world. The ancient patriarch Job asked, "Can that which is tasteless be eaten without salt?" (Job 6:6). . Christianity is what brings spice and zest to life. The bland is made savory, and the unpalatable becomes a delight!

There is a satisfying, distinctiveness about the Christian's character. It adds true, satisfying flavor to life. Let's think of a few examples.

- Consider the **good flavor** of a godly single life. My time as a single man was spent in preparing myself to bear fruit for Christ. Whether I would remain single or married, I wanted to serve the Lord with abandon. Compare that with the bitter taste of the single person that ruins a marriage. Contrast it to the godly flavor of the pure, chaste, and committed child of God.
- Look at the **good flavor** of **converted children in the home**. Submitted children are a **pleasant aroma** of Christ in contrast to the **bad aroma** of the status quo of children talking back, pouting, and all the drama of today's youth.
- Look at the **good flavor** of a committed Christian in the **work place** who works hard and helps the company prosper without complaining. Compare that to the laziness and sour attitude of someone uninfluenced by the Lordship of Christ.
- We could talk about the **good flavor** of using your **free time** well, reading and living out the Scriptures day and night as opposed to wasting your time in empty things.
- Because of Christ, everything we do should stand out with an attractive, **Christlike flavor**. We should be the most faithful, most generous, the hardest working, the most loving. Even in the small things, we should stand out.
What kind of tip did you leave for the server the last time you ate out? Unfortunately, many servers cringe when they see a family bowing in prayer before a meal. Not because they don't like God. But because they know they will be receiving a smaller tip.

Be Careful Not to Lose Your Flavor / Influence

Christ went on to warn of the danger of salt losing its flavor, its distinctive taste. It would then be good for nothing except casting into the dirt streets. Be careful of losing your testimony!

06 – Salt Penetrates

It doesn't take much of this seasoning before the whole dish tastes like salt. That's how pervasive the influence of a godly life can be. It cuts through.

Salt speaks of the inward effect of the Gospel on us. In other words, how we act in our homes means everything. How we act when we are persecuted and mischaracterized is vital. How we live in secret cannot be underestimated.

The Little Things Matter

The little things matter, because they reveal our true character! **Luke 16:10–11**, “One who is faithful in a very little is also faithful in much, and one who is dishonest in a very little is also dishonest in much. 11 If then you have not been faithful in the unrighteous wealth, who will entrust to you the true riches?” Jesus said, “Every idle word will be taken into account at Judgment Day”. What we say may save someone’s soul or destroy them and make them question the reality of the Gospel.

We can’t hide our inward character for long. Jesus said in **Luke 12:3**, “whatever you have said in the dark shall be heard in the light, and what you have whispered in private rooms shall be proclaimed on the housetops.” The littlest things will be shouted to all.

Just as salt penetrates, the Gospel if it is truly believe will change us! So by calling you and I “salt”, Jesus is saying that as a result of the penetrating power of the Gospel, you have this **transformed character**, this new heart and life now that you’ve surrendered to Him as Messiah. And it is worth so much. That’s why He says: “You are the salt of the earth”.

Even a Little Salt is Much!

Just a little pinch of salt can flavor a whole batch of food. Little is much when God is in it! That’s the way the gospel works. The message of Jesus Christ began with a small group of 12 disciples and spread all over the earth. Sharing what Jesus has done for you personally is one of the most effective forms of evangelism. The salt of the Gospel can penetrate the hardest heart.

William Wilberforce

William Wilberforce, the statesman who almost single-handedly championed the abolition of slave trading in the British Empire, is living proof of this. Dwarfed by disease, Wilberforce didn't appear to be a person who could accomplish much. But here's what biographer James Boswell wrote after listening to one of his speeches:

“I saw a shrimp mount the table; but as I listened, he grew and grew until the shrimp became a whale.”³

It was said of Wilberforce, “Tiny, elfish, misshapen, he was salt to British society, not only bringing preservation but enticement to Christ by his beautiful life. A little salt makes its presence felt.”⁴

God uses ordinary people! He’s called the “weak and the foolish and the small” to confound the wise and mighty! God can use your and my little life to turn the world upside down.

The Smallest and Weakest of Christians Change the World

Consider the poor uneducated apostles of Christ! Just a pinch of salt can penetrate! Salt penetrates! The smallest and weakest of Christians are used of God to change the world!

³ F. W. Boreham, *A Bunch of Everlasting* (Nashville: Abingdon, n.d.), 186.

⁴ R. Kent Hughes (2001). *The sermon on the mount: The message of the kingdom*. Preaching the Word. Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books., 80, as quoted by David Jeremiah in *Signs of Life*, 26.

07 – Salt Stings

Salt can sting! If you've ever spilled salt onto a cut, you know how it really stings! The truth of God's Word, when it is rubbed into this decaying world, will certainly sting. If you speak God's truth in this world, it is going to irritate some people.

Often the godly character of God's people can offend. Christians are not to be purposely offensive, but the cross does offend. The godly lives of Christians often sting the world, prick its conscience, and make it uncomfortable in the presence of God's holy gospel.⁵

Richard Baxter, the Puritan pastor and writer said that many professing Christians are used to preaching that has no conviction, no application, and they are happy to be undisturbed. But he says that offense often comes when the Word of God is clearly applied.

Let me encourage you that when the Word of God is applied to your life, it may sting, but you must yield to it. But get ready, because the life of a salty Christian, sensitive to the Word and the Spirit's conviction will often be a sting and an offense to the world. Christians, like God, love the people in the world and want them to be saved. Christians are willing to risk the pain of the Gospel message because we know the pain of eternity without Christ is infinitely worse. C.H. Spurgeon said, "Have you no wish for others to be saved? Then you're not saved yourself, be sure of that!" Oh how Christians long for others to be saved. It is a mark of their salvation.

Like a doctor we have to give the stinging message of the consequences and condemnation of sin before we can give the message that heals.

08 – Salt Heals

Salt may sting, but it has an antiseptic property to it. It aids in the healing process. The healing power of the Gospel changes lives. We want to shout from the rooftops this morning: "By His stripes we are healed".

Analeptic / Baby Saline Bath

Salt has antiseptic and healing properties to it. As a matter of fact, in Bible times, when little babies were born, they would give that baby a saline bath to hold down infection.

The Gospel is an antiseptic, taking away pain and bringing new life. The salt of the Gospel heals the depraved human heart. It can cure the addictions of sinful flesh. It can bring sweetness to bitter hearts and mend broken hearts

Elisha's Healing Salt

In **2 Kings 2:20-22**, you read of Elisha putting salt into some deadly, polluted waters. Those waters were healed – no longer barren and bitter, but blessed by the Lord.

God's conviction on our lives has stung but it also has healed us! It has turned us from **anger** to **adoration** – from **hatred** to **healing**!

09 – Salt Creates Thirst

Salt promotes thirst-as you know if you've ever eaten potato chips. Well, as Christians we should be making people thirsty for God.

This leads us to ask: Do you make anyone thirsty for Jesus Christ? The non-Christian tends to feel **self-satisfied** even if he is not, and he naturally goes through life telling himself that circumstances are just fine. But when a Christian comes into his life, there should be that

⁵ MacArthur., 242.

evidence of joy, satisfaction, and peace that makes him look up and say, “That’s what I want; that is what I want to be like!” Can that be said of you? Do you make men thirsty for Jesus Christ?⁶

When you walk in peace, confidence, and security—especially in the midst of pain or suffering—you demonstrate that you’ve found the source of peace. Your godly lifestyle creates a thirst for the truth.

The lost person sees the peace and trust you have, and they want to know, how can you live with such peace in such a tumultuous world? How can you go through the trials you are going through with a settled contentment? “You are the salt of the earth”. You create thirst.

People don’t know what it is to be satisfied in Christ. They turn to all kinds of things that don’t satisfy their thirst. They turn to bad relationships, social media, even drugs and alcohol.

But you know the Thirst-quencher! You know the soul-satisfier!

10 – Salt Can Lose Its Strength through Contamination

Jesus said in **Matthew 5:13b**, “if the salt should lose its taste, how can it be made salty? It’s no longer good for anything but to be thrown out and trampled on by men.”

Much salt in Palestine, such as that found on the shores of the Dead Sea, is **contaminated** with minerals that make it taste flat and even repulsive. When a batch of such contaminated salt would find its way into a household and be discovered, it would be thrown out. People would be careful not to throw it on a garden or field, because it would kill whatever was planted. Instead it would be thrown onto a path or road, where it would gradually be ground into the dirt and disappear.

There is a sense in which salt cannot really become unsalty. But contamination can cause it to lose its value as salt. Its saltiness can no longer function.⁷

In a similar way, believers who tolerate sin to **contaminate** their lives lose most of their ability to impact others for the gospel.

A Loss of Effectiveness

The salt losing its taste is not referring to a loss of **salvation** but a loss of **effectiveness**. It can lead to a loss of assurance. In **2 Peter 1:9** we find that Peter enumerates the marks of a true Christian, but says that at times it is possible to become so “myopic” and nearsighted with the distractions of this world, that for a time a Christian can lose his assurance and “forget that he was cleansed from his former sins.” How easy it is for all of us to fall into forgetfulness and distraction. God will not allow this permanently, but we can expect God to chasten those whom He loves.

As we said, like salt in a wound that preserves, we are called to sting the world's conscience. We cannot sting the world's conscience if we continually go against our own. There is a point for a Christian that he so hardens his conscience and through sin becomes disqualified for service.

David’s Sin Limited His Effectiveness

2 Samuel 24 records the sin of David numbering the people. David's heart condemned him. God chastened David. The plague went through Israel until David sacrificed. Yet David

⁶ Boice, 65.

⁷ Ibid., 245.

was told that his kingdom would have been much greater and his influence much larger had he not sinned. David's sin limited his effectiveness. Don't become corrupted.

How to Know if You've Lost Your Saltiness

How do you know if you've been corrupted by sin? Salt is no good if it is mixed with corrupted element. Here are a few things I wrote down. You know you've lost your effectiveness if you have...

- stopped growing
- stopped being hospitable
- you've become self-righteous or critical or proud
- you know what the Word says but you find it too painful to apply to your life
- you've lost your zeal for Christ
- you've lost your zeal for the lost
- you are no longer convicted by the Holy Spirit on a regular basis

There is a real danger of losing our ineffectiveness. The Bible says if we are not careful we can grieve and even quench the Holy Spirit.

11 – A Re-Salted Christian

Can a Christian be re-salted if he loses his flavor? Remember Jesus said in **Matthew 5:13b**, “if the salt should lose its taste, how can it be made salty?”

Can Christians regain their saltiness? Can we get the corruptions out of the salt? Christ is saying that if salt has lost its effectiveness, there is no natural hope for it. Is there any hope for us if we have become desalted? **The answer is no**—not in ourselves anyway.

However, Jesus extends the metaphor into the supernatural, and here we must say that the answer is yes! Jesus is not saying that if a Christian loses his pungency, he cannot get it back, even by going to the source from which it came. Nothing but our own sin can keep us from being re-salted.⁸

Christians who are conformed to the world have **no impact** on the culture - in fact for a time they can make it worse. Salt that is corrupted is “good for nothing”. That's what we are when we justify or hide or put up with sin in our own lives.

And though we cannot be made salty in our own power, we can through Christ. We can come through the same repentant faith and brokenness that we had at our salvation.

Peter's Example

Jesus said, “Without Me, ye can do nothing”. The Christian life is a life of constant re-salting!

Peter is a good example. After the resurrection he got into a prideful, racist division in the church. Paul confronted him with the salt of rebuke, and that salt apparently healed that sin in Peter's life!

Biblical sanctification demands that we are constantly re-salted, coming under the powerful salty sting of the Holy Spirit's conviction so that we can salt others.

⁸ Hughes, 81-82.

Conclusion: But let's close with the warning Christ gives. **Matthew 5:13b**, "if the salt should lose its taste, how can it be made salty? It's no longer good for anything but to be thrown out and trampled on by men."

You can be sure that nothing eternal will happen if you or I coddle our sin. If we allow ourselves to be corrupted, the world will not be affected by us.

UCLA in Monterrey, Mexico

This past week I was in Monterrey, Mexico for a couple days. I saw a church that prayed, and in 20 years they planted 2 other churches. Then they prayed for a Christian University. The pastor happened to also be a judge. Because he was trusted they were allowed to start an accredited Christian University.

Today, it is the **only accredited Christian university** in all of Latin America.

This little church started with just a pinch of salt, and now in the last ten years they started 10 churches within 20 miles of their church and about 25 all around Mexico and around the world. They are flying airplanes now to reach the remotest parts of Mexico to bring training to groups of pastors that have had no training.

Each church that is planted begins to redeem and literally rebuild the neighborhoods. **I got to visit three of these churches while I was there.** The people are being rebuilt, the houses are being rebuilt, the work ethic is being rebuilt, one person at a time.

Don't you think we need that here in our town? What if God wants to do that same thing here at Living Hope and all around the Chicago area? I believe He does want to use us. The question is we ready to guard our saltiness? Are we ready to pour out the salt shakers into this community?

May God give us the grace to be salty, influential Christians.