

This Present Kingdom
Week 3 - Kingdom Dwellers
Matthew 5:13-20

Before embarking on the body of the sermon, Jesus presented two word pictures that provide the framework for living in the world as representatives of another kingdom. The lost world needs **salt** because it is corrupt and it needs **light** because it is dark. Linking the Beatitudes to the whole of His message, Jesus admonished believers to influence their world as His aroma (see 2 Corinthians 2:14) and His ambassadors (see 2 Corinthians 5:20).

Jesus said, “You are the salt of the earth” (Matthew 5:13) and “you are the light of the world” (Matthew 5:14).

“The you in both verses is also plural. It is His whole body, the church, that is called to be the world’s salt and light. Each grain of salt has its limited influence, but it is only as the church collectively is scattered in the world that change will come. One ray of light will accomplish little, but when joined with other rays a great light is created” (J. MacArthur, *Matthew (Vol. 1)*, p. 240).

I. Infiltration - Matthew 5:13

In Bible times, pure salt was a rare delicacy and was considered more valuable than gold. In his sermon, *Salty Saints*, Dr. Rogers said, “Our English word *salary* literally means ‘salt money.’ You understand that expression today, ‘That man is worth his salt,’ or, ‘He’s not worth his salt.’ Salt was so very valuable” (A. Rogers, “Salty Saints” retrieved from *Adrian Rogers Sermon Archive*) (Matthew 5:13). Salt was highly valued and had many uses. No wonder Jesus applied this word picture to the role of His church!

A. Salt Seasons

Salt seasons and adds flavor. Job 6:6 says, “Can something tasteless be eaten without salt, or is there any taste in the white of an egg?” A genuine believer will live by faith and not sight (2 Corinthians 5:7), producing a life distinguished by the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22) and daily advertising, as a satisfied customer, the reality of a life being radically transformed by the indwelling Christ.

The Christian individually and the church collectively are called out to give society a flavor, a zest, a tang that serves to invite unbelievers to “taste and see that the Lord is good” (Psalm 34:8). The Bible says, “Let your speech always be with grace, as though **seasoned with salt**, so that you will know how you should respond to each person” (Colossians 4:6 emphasis mine).

B. Salt Heals

Salt has antiseptic properties. This point is illustrated in the Old Testament when Elisha put salt into deadly polluted waters, and they were purified/healed (2 Kings 2:19-22). In Bible times newborns were given a saline bath to prevent infection.

C. Salt Irritates

Jesus said, “My Kingdom is not of this world” (John 18:36). Kingdom living will set us at odds with the kingdom of this world. Jesus said, “People will insult you and persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of Me” (Matthew 5:11). The world system, held under the sway of “the prince of the power of the air” (Ephesians 2:2) hates us, the good news of gospel we bring, and the Christ we serve. In Luke 21:17, Jesus said, “You will be hated by all because of My name.” Why does this world hate us? Because salt irritates. Salt burns. To those being saved we are “an aroma of life to life”; to those rejecting Jesus we are “an aroma from death to death” (2 Corinthians 2:16).

D. Salt Creates Thirst

When the Kingdom of God is set on full display through surrendered believers, a thirst for righteousness is (likely) fostered in those outside a personal relationship with Christ. While it is the role of the Spirit of God to bring about an awakening of the soul in the unbeliever, the testimony of the individual believer and the body of Christ at large can be instrumental in creating a thirst for righteousness which leads to the lost finding soul-satisfaction and redemption in Christ alone!

E. Salt Penetrates

In his sermon, Dr. Rogers observed, “Salt is one of the few major compounds that will dissolve equally well in hot or cold water. And, what we need to do is to get the salt to the source, where it can penetrate, where it can activate and change society” (A. Rogers, retrieved from *Adrian Rogers Sermon Archive*) (Matthew 5:13). As the Great Commission is obeyed, the salt of the gospel spreads to “all the nations” (Matthew 28:19), penetrating the culture and activating radical change through the power of Christ.

F. Salt Preserves

Perhaps the most important use of salt in Bible times was preserving food. Prior to refrigeration, salt was the method of choice for preserving food and preventing spoilage.

Stuart Weber said, “Salt was so vital for this purpose that wars were fought over salt, and entire economies were based on it. Salt could literally make the difference between life and death in a time when fresh food was unavailable. Just as salt prevents or kills bacteria in food, the Kingdom servant prevents or confronts corruption in the world. Notice that it is the earth that needs the salt, not the Kingdom of Heaven. If the Kingdom servant did not have a function to perform on earth according to God’s plan, he might as well go straight to Heaven upon conversion. The reality is that the earth needs the influence of Christ’s church in this age” (S. Weber, *Matthew (Vol. 1)*, p. 61)

Christians have a preserving influence to slow the moral and spiritual deterioration in the world. When the church is taken out of the world at the rapture, Satan and his demonic forces will be unleashed in an unprecedented way (2 Thessalonians 2:7-12) as the restraining power of the Holy Spirit is removed along with the saints of God.

Obviously, Jesus' use of the term *salt* to describe His people was rich with meaning, especially to His early listeners. But what happens when salt loses its saltiness? Jesus says, "It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled under foot by men" (Matthew 5:13). Salt that was no longer savory or had become mixed with other potentially deadly compounds (common in salt harvested from or near the Dead Sea) could only be used to fill potholes and pave roadways. For the believer, to lose our saltiness is not to lose our salvation (which is an impossibility - John 10:28), but it is to lose our effectiveness and to become disqualified for service (1 Corinthians 9:27). What a sobering thought!

While Kingdom living is available to every child of God, it is NOT automatic! The Kingdom servant is capable of operating in the realm of the flesh and grieving the indwelling Spirit of God. Stuart Weber observes, "The Kingdom servant who does not live according to his nature as salt is useless to the King's advancement of the Kingdom on earth" (S. Weber, *Matthew (Vol. 1)*, p. 62). Jesus warned His people against becoming unfit for Kingdom work. We have been called to be "the salt of the earth" (Matthew 5:13).

II. Illumination - Matthew 5:14-16

Jesus said, "You are the salt of the earth" (Matthew 5:13) **and** "you are the light of the world" (Matthew 5:14). Both descriptive terms illustrate the Kingdom effect believers are to have on their world. Salt relates to **our character**, while light relates to **our conduct**.

The function of light is to make reality or truth visible. In John 9:5, Jesus said, "I am the Light of the world." Taken together, the two statements mean that we are to be like Him. It is inherent in the nature of a Kingdom servant to dispel the darkness and shine brightly for Jesus. The believer has no light inherent in himself/herself. Christ is the true light, and we are mere reflections of the greater Source. We are called to speak, live, and love in such a way that the reality of Christ is heard and seen in and through us.

To participate in God's Kingdom purposes, we must be careful not to diminish His light by hiding it through sin or indifference or any attitude or action that would grieve the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 4:30). Both a "city set on a hill" (Matthew 5:14) and a lamp set on "a lamp stand" (Matthew 5:15) fulfill their function by being elevated, casting their light over an expansive area. Our good works must be done with such integrity that all who see the practical outworking of the indwelling Christ will have no choice but to credit the Lord for the dramatic change that has been wrought in us. The impact on our sphere of influence by the progressive transformation of our lives cannot be overstated. Stuart Weber noted, "It is the Christian's commission to live in such a way as to make God visible in a world that is blind to Him" (S. Weber, *Matthew (Vol. 1)*, p. 62). Paul wrote, "Prove yourselves to be blameless and innocent, children of God above reproach in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you appear as lights in the world, holding fast the Word of life" (Philippians 2:15-16).

III. Reconciliation - Matthew 5:17-20

Of primary concern for every faithful Jew was Jesus' teaching concerning "the Law and the Prophets" (Matthew 5:17). This was a common term to refer to the Old Testament, which was the only Scripture written at the time.

The Jews revered the rabbinic teaching of the scribes and Pharisees. Sadly, the majority of these religious leaders had reduced a personal relationship with God through faith into strict adherence to the Law. And they had added hundreds of traditions to it. This form of self-righteousness legalism required a great deal of human effort but negated the need of faith in God. Therefore, many rejected Jesus' teachings which, in their minds, seemed to contradict the Law. Jesus assured his Jewish listeners that He was not anti-law, as some were suggesting, but rather He had come to fulfill it, that is to both keep it and explain fully its original intention.

Jesus came to offer a personal relationship as the one and only means to be reconciled with a Holy God. The righteousness God requires - He also offers. It cannot be earned through works of righteousness. It must be accepted as a free gift through repentance and faith (see Luke 13:3). Romans 8:4-5 says, "For what the Law could not do, weak as it was through the flesh, God did: sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and as an offering for sin, He condemned sin in the flesh, so that the requirement of the Law might be fulfilled in us, who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit."

"It is tragic that many people today, like the scribes and Pharisees, will try any way to God but His way. They will pay any price, but will not accept the price He paid. They will do any work for Him, but they will not accept the finished work of His Son for them. They will accept any gift from God except the gift of His free salvation. Such people are religious but not regenerated, and they shall not enter the Kingdom of Heaven"

(J. MacArthur, *Matthew (Vol. 1)*, p. 281).

The Law can **reveal sin** but cannot **redeem sinners**. It was given to expose the lost condition of the human heart and demonstrate the need for a Savior. Galatians 3:24 says, "The Law has become our tutor to lead us to Christ, so that we may be justified by faith." Securing entrance into the Kingdom of Heaven cannot be acquired through works-righteousness as the scribes and Pharisees taught. Only imputed righteousness through a personal relationship with Christ, can reconcile a sinner with a holy God. Good works will naturally follow and testify to the validity of a genuine conversion experience. Thereby salt is shaken out into the culture and light is broadcast into the darkness and our good works give glory to God the Father and His Son Jesus Christ.

Child of God, penetrate the culture. Light the dark. Glorify the Father. This, beloved, is Kingdom Living!