

Matthew 5:13-20

³ *“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.*

¹⁴ *“You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden. ¹⁵ 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. ¹⁶ In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.*

¹⁷ *“Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. ¹⁸ For truly I tell you, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished. ¹⁹ Therefore anyone who sets aside one of the least of these commands and teaches others accordingly will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever practices and teaches these commands will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. ²⁰ For I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven.*

Sermon Theme: You Are...So Be

If someone claims to be your friend, you expect them to act a certain way. If someone claims to be your spouse, you expect them to treat you in a certain way. If you say you are something, there is an expectation you will be that in how you live and act. Today we tend to be cautious about putting labels on people and things. Part of the reason is because of those expectations that come along with the name. We don't want that name to hedge us in. We want people to see us as being something more. At the same time, we like to have a little flexibility in life. There's a certain feeling of freedom that comes from being in that grey-zone. There's a feeling of safety and comfort with lower expectations and less demands. So we might say, “I'm their friend, but not that type of friend.”

Some want to believe they can be that way with their spiritual lives and relationship with God. They may want to claim to be a Christian, but they also expect there to be some flexibility. They want to be known as a Christian by the “right” people. At the same time, they want to be able to live and act how they want. But as Jesus continues his Sermon on the Mount, he doesn't say you might or could be at some point. He says you are. And because you are, this is how we are to be.

Jesus says, “You are the salt of the earth.” As you know, you can use salt for many different things. It was no different in Jesus' day. Salt flavors, tenderizes, preserves, and cleanses. It's used to soften water and melt ice. It's useful. Jesus is telling us, you are useful to this earth. You have a purpose.

Since the fall into sin, this world needs salt. It's been decaying since Adam and Eve and only getting worse. No amount of social agendas can reverse this curse of sin and the world's decay. And if the world is left to itself, God already would have destroyed it all. We've already seen him wash it clean once with the Flood in Genesis.

"You are the salt of the world." Without salt, food is bland. It can be down-right gross and inedible. Even someone who needs to cut back on salt for dietary purposes will say things just don't taste as good. This sinful world on its own is not just bland. It's putrid to God. If someone doesn't have saving faith in their heart, even the best and most commendable good things they do are disgusting in God's mouth. It's a reminder of the complete spoilage of sin and God hates it.

And that's where you, dear Christian, come in. You are the salt of the world. Because of what Jesus has done for you, God is already pleased with you. This means that your good works you do are tasty to him. The good work that you do is not for your own personal benefit. It preserves this world from destruction and complete spoiling. Your good works are not for yourself. No, they are for the people around you. As salt we push back against the sin that corrupts. You keep back the misery that spoils. You soften the despair that hardens this world.

What a terrible disservice we do to this world when we do not live as God has made us. But that's what we do when your life looks like you are trying to live in the grey zone. Jesus isn't speaking only to leaders of the church in Matthew. He's speaking to all of his followers. Should we be surprised that others are not excited to be part of this church when it looks like we are just going through the motions? Should we be surprised when someone doesn't take their relationship with God seriously when how we talk, how we act doesn't seem to either? Granted, some of it comes down to personality and the type of person you are. But ask yourself, are you hiding behind your comfortable wall of excuses? You go along with the distasteful joke because you don't want to be different. You join in with talking behind someone's back because you have a juicy story you want to tell. You say you are waiting for the right moment, but you think that means you can live your faith life when it's convenient for you. You're afraid of coming off judgmental so you ignore the sin.

What a damning disservice we do to ourselves when we do not live as God made us. We want to believe that we can have it both ways. We are scared of failure so we are cautious to wholly commit. We are afraid what that will mean for our relationships with our friends and family. We are sure it's going to make life more difficult taking away from "me" time. We want to have it both ways.

But nowhere in God's Word does it say this is possible. Either you are or you are not. There is no in between. God sees through every empty claim to Christianity. He's not

fooled by anyone just going through the motions to get people off your back. He knows when you do good works because you want to make yourself feel better about yourself. He knows when your heart is not in it and you are only doing it because you are “supposed to.” Jesus warns, **“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”** (v.13). The only thing worse than not being useful, is being a damage to other people and their faith. And that’s what happens when I, as a Christian, do not live as salt and light in this world.

Still Jesus makes this bold claim, “You are salt...you are light.” How? Because God didn’t wait for you to decide you need to do better. He knows even if we did, it wouldn’t be enough. He doesn’t wait for us to come to this realization that is this who we are. He knows how we struggle with all types of questions and doubts. He doesn’t hold back his blessing and love until you do something. While we were still lost and dead in sin, he sends his Son. God holds nothing back. He comes to you in the flesh jumping in wholeheartedly to make you his own. Jesus isn’t riding the fence when he comes to this world. He suffers along with us. He has weaknesses like you and me. He struggles against the same temptations including disregarding God’s will for the sake of being comfortable with life. But Jesus resists. Jesus says he came to fulfill the Law. This means that he came to make it clear what God expects. He says, **“Unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven”** (v20). The Pharisees were the epitome of what their society saw as “good” people as they went through the motions thinking that’s what made them right with God. Jesus fulfills the Law showing us it’s more than going through motions. His heart is set on fulfilling God’s Law perfectly not for himself, but for you. He lives as true Man to lift the heavy burden of that Law from your shoulders. When he goes to the cross to die, he goes as your salt to preserve you from eternal death in hell. He dies so that you might live. He is raised to life again so that you might live forever with him in his glorious light.

Jesus doesn’t wait for you to do or be enough. In him and through him, you are. You are salt of the world because that’s what Jesus makes you. In baptism the Spirit washes you and your good works of the decay of sin and makes you pleasing in God’s sight. Jesus makes you right with God so that you will certainly enter the kingdom of heaven. He doesn’t even wait for you to choose to believe this. The Light of Jesus shines through the darkness of sin and, with the Spirit working through that Word and Baptism, he brings you to saving faith that grasps onto Jesus’ work and promises.

Through faith you are salt, you are light and God so thoroughly and completely forgives you of your sins that he now uses you to do the important work of bringing more to him. Jesus isn’t asking for some great, grandiose act that people are going to notice. You carry out these good works as salt and light in your daily life. You’re shining the light of Jesus

when you are willing to help without someone asking. That light shines when you are willing to be uncomfortable so that someone else knows Jesus' love. You are being salt when you struggle alongside another as they wrestle with sin assuring them of Jesus' love and forgiveness. You are shining your light to your children and grandchildren in how you treat and talk about your spouse. You are being salt when you insist you take someone's words and actions in the kindest possible way at home, at work, in church. Often times we seem to pit one position in life as more important than the other. But whether it's being a good hard worker or a parent who is present in their children's life, whether you are a retired person who's not able to do as much anymore or someone who is able to do it all, in the church or at home, all are good and pleasing to our Father in heaven. Every stage of life is tasteful to do God when done in Jesus' name.

But why we do it is not for me. It's not so that other people will point and say, "They must be Christian!" We do good works to point people to our the Father in heaven. As Christians, our purpose in this world is not to make more law-abiding citizens. It's not only to make a better world for the next generation. It's not just to be a good role-model so someone knows what's right and what's wrong. That all takes a back seat and will come later. My good works and your good actions do not save. But Jesus uses them to give us opportunities to share the life-giving faith-creating Word. So Jesus sends you and me out together to be salt and light of this world so that others may come to know what Jesus has done for them.

Jesus knows what you are going to say. He knows what you are thinking. "But I don't feel that I'm the right person. You don't want to use me. I've done too much wrong. I'm not going to say or do the right things." Jesus says, "I chose you from before the creation of the world. I already wash you clean of every sin. I most certainly didn't make a mistake in saving you. I most certainly am not mistaken in choosing you to declare my praises."

"But I'm going to fall again. I keep doing the same over and over again." Jesus says, "I know. And I've forgiven that too. I'm not excusing what you did or will do. But I've already paid your entire debt."

"But I keep struggling..." Jesus says, "My power is made perfect in your weakness. My love is sufficient for you. Come to the Lord's Supper. Receive my body and blood given and shed for you. You are forgiven. I promise I am working in you to will and to act according to my good purpose."

As Jesus speaks to the people on the mountainside he speaks to you today. You are salt. You are light. With sins paid for and forgiven, this is what Jesus calls you. So be. Amen.