Salt and Light

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Preacher: Tyler Neighbors

[0:00] Go ahead and turn in your Bibles to Matthew chapter 5 verses 13 through 16.

! We're going to continue our series on the parables tonight. Pastor Mike kicked that off for us last week. And as he told us, a parable, it's using real life situations or elements.
These are stories that illustrate heavenly truths or spiritual truths. And tonight we're going to be in one of the opening parts of the Sermon on the Mount.
Just like Pastor Mike was this morning. Jesus is speaking a blessing over these people who are looking and longing for the kingdom of God to come to earth.
That's what this text is following. We hear Jesus say things like, Now all through Jesus' Sermon on the Mount, he is trying to teach these people something new about the kingdom of God.
[1:31] Something that they weren't expecting. That the kingdom of God that is coming, it's not necessarily about political persuasion. It's not about geographical borders.

The kingdom of God is something that is born in your heart. It is something, it is a matter of the heart. And all through the Sermon on the Mount, we see Jesus doing that. Where he is taking things that are well known from the law that people have committed to memory.
And he is turning it into a heart issue rather than a legal issue. Now as Jesus is pronouncing this blessing over these people, over this lowly crowd, he also pronounces this kind of citizen imperative.
You know, people that are citizens of the kingdom of heaven, what effect should they have on the world? What should they be like?
How do citizens of the kingdom of heaven function in a lost world? And we're going to see that in our text today. Starting in verse 13 of chapter 5.
[2:39] Jesus says this, And this is the word of the Lord.

So what has happened here is Jesus has pointed out two very precious but common commodities in that time. Salt and light.
Now most of these seem like pretty mundane commodities for us in today's time. Every house has salt in it. We all have light in our house from electricity.
We can just flip on a switch or turn on your glow stick and there it is. But back then, salt wasn't cheap. And it had many uses.
Light also was very precious back then. But it wasn't as simple as flipping on a light switch. It required a lamp. It required oil.
[4:08] This was something that was expensive to have in your home on a regular basis. Now another thing about both these elements is they have a profound effect on the environments and the things that they are applied to.

Salt was a preservative for meat. It provided flavor. Conquering enemies would often scatter on the ground as they were leaving the place they had just conquered to keep things from growing again.
Sinful wives were often turned into pillars of salt, if I'm remembering the Old Testament correctly there. And as far as light goes, dark places were illuminated by the application of light.
So I think even in the Middle East, I think it's worth mentioning as well that in this time, salt was often used in covenants.
Tribes, people that were wanting to make covenants or agreements with each other, the exchange and consumption of salt was often done. Also in the sacrificial system, when Jews were making their grain offerings even.
[5:14] God had commanded them to season their grain offerings with salt. You look at 1 Chronicles, it says that God had commanded them not to abandon the salt of their covenant.

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It was a way of showing sincerity on both sides of the party. Now all that in mind, Jesus used salt and light as analogies here because they, first of all, they're very familiar commodities that they would know well about.
And they also had a profound impact on wherever they were applied. And that in mind, the main idea of our text today is this.
Kingdom citizens should have a kingdom impact on the world. Kingdom citizens should have a kingdom impact on the world. Both of these analogies of salt and light, they point to the same truth that kingdom citizens are to show the goodness of God to a lost world.
There's supposed to be some impact on our presence in this place. We're not saved to be reclusive hermits to keep the goodness of God to ourselves. 2 Corinthians 5, I think Pastor Mike quoted this this morning, but we have been called and given to, we've been given the ministry of reconciliation.
[6:38] He also said that the love of Christ compels us. It controls us. So the love of Christ should compel us to kingdom effectiveness in this world that we have been placed in.

Now Jesus illustrates this to his listeners in two ways by describing us as salt in the life. And the first truth that we see in this passage is that kingdom citizens preserve the goodness of God for the lost to taste and see.
Like I said, salt had many uses in this period. It was a preservative. It added flavor. Judgment on the land after it had been conquered.
It was used in covenants. And I'm fully aware that there are a lot of applications, sermon applications that we could take from this. But for the sake of time, I'm just going to kind of hone in on the couple that rose to the surface for me.
And the first way that we are the salt is that disciples share the flavor of God's goodness to a lost world. Now there should be a difference in us that the world sees.
[7:46] It's a goodness that both intrigues but at the same time repulses the world that's around us.

For those that are lost and running from the Lord, the saltiness that comes with being a disciple of Christ, it may be bitter to them. It may be something that they try to push away or even trample on. Now because to the lost, the goodness of Christ speaks to their actions. It speaks to their sinfulness. It's contrary to what their life stands for.
Jesus said this to his brothers who seem to be doubting him at every turn. In John 7, 7, said, So because of the testimony of Jesus about the world, the world hated him.
And because we come bearing that same message, bearing that same saltiness that comes with being a disciple of Christ, Jesus gives this warning or this truth to his disciples.
[8:57] If the world hates you, and this is John chapter 15, verses 18 and 19. If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you.

If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own. But because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you.
So while most of the world, and I would say most of the world, will be repulsed by this flavor of Christ that we bring to it, the Bible also talks about some that see this for what it is.
In 1 Corinthians 1, 18, it says, For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to those who are being saved. It is the power of God.
So there is a very polarizing response to the gospel and to its heralds of the gospel and scripture. But whatever the response may be, as long as we are pleasing to Christ, it doesn't matter who we displease.
[10:05] As long as we are pleasing to Christ, it does not matter who we are displeasing. So we are here to share the flavor of God's goodness. But we are also here to preserve godliness in the world.

So there is the flavor that salt brings, but there is also the preservation aspect that salt brings. So disciples preserve godliness in the world.
Now the things in this world that reflect God's goodness in his image are under constant attack. And Christians should be a voice that speak out for the things that are close to God's heart.
Christians should be a voice of justice and truth in the world. A voice that speaks out for the innocent. We have too many Christians that are simply content with letting the world slip further and further into depravity.

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I've got my beliefs. I know what I believe. I'm solid in them. I don't care what the rest of the world is doing. Things like marriage and the family unit are under attack.
[11:15] The country has sought to redefine marriage like they can redefine something that's in God's word, the absolute source of truth. But still they have sought to redefine marriage.

And we see movies, kids, TV shows, and even in some instances our public education system is seeking to indoctrinate a new and perverse view of what they think a family should look like as opposed to the way that God has designed it to be.
The very value of life is challenged in issues like abortion. When Christians stand up and speak out on these things, we aren't doing it because of our hatred of people or of this world.
We are doing it because we love our God who has ordained things like marriage, life, and justice to be for his glory. And while there is a righteous anger that is often kindled within us on these issues, our boldness, it shouldn't come from our own opinions.
It shouldn't come from our hatred of people. It comes from the fact that we stand on the truth. Truth that is never going to change. This is God's word we can stand on, and that is where our boldness and our confidence comes from.
[12:31] Now, does being pro-life or having the right family values, does that make someone a born-again Christian? No. No, it does not.

But as God's people, as people that share his heart, it should break our hearts like it breaks his to see things like marriage, life, and justice being trampled because these are things that are close to God's heart.
And we should also look for opportunities as we speak out on these issues to share the gospel, to share our faith. 1 Peter 3.15 says, But in your hearts, honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you, yet do it with gentleness and respect.
So we cling to and we uphold the things that glorify God because in our hearts we have honored Christ as holy, and that should be reflected in every area of our lives.
Now, there's also a warning in this analogy, too. I had said earlier that salt had many uses, and pure salt, it's not going to lose its flavor.
[13:55] It's not going to lose its effectiveness or its preservation value, but salt that is contaminated, it can. In this time, salt that was taken from the Dead Sea was often contaminated with a mineral called gypsum, or gypsum.

And it would dull the flavor. It would ruin the preservation value of that salt. And as Jesus said, it was no longer good for anything except to be thrown out and trampled underfoot.
And that is what they did with contaminated salt. They would throw it along the pathways to keep the vegetation from growing up and, you know, covering up the pathways again. Well, disciples lose their effectiveness when they become contaminated.
This is the first warning that we see. Disciples lose their effectiveness when they become contaminated. Now, there are a couple of ways I really want to focus on. There's lots of ways that we can become contaminated.
But the two that I really want to hone in on are the first is sin. I mean, I think that's the most obvious and the biggest one. When we allow sin to take root in our lives, we have become contaminated salt.
[15:06] We are no longer the pure product that God desires us to be. And what God has cleansed for his purpose and for his glory, when we allow sin to come in, we have allowed ourselves to become tainted.

And we lose our effectiveness. Practically speaking, what unchecked sin does in our lives, it makes our lives look a lot like the rest of the world around us.
We lose that salty effect, that flavor of God's goodness, that preservation value that God has intended us to have. Our lives don't match up with the gospel that we proclaim.
In this godliness that we're proclaiming, instead of tasting like a salty flavor, in the eyes of the world that are watching us, it begins to taste a lot like hypocrisy.
1 John 1.6 says, So we cannot say one thing and allow our lives to live a completely other way.
[16:20] We cannot claim allegiance with a sinless Savior while having no regard for our own personal sanctification. If you care about being effective for God's kingdom, then you will have a great concern for your personal holiness and your pursuit of Christ.

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Now the next way that we can become contaminated, and I see this a lot with Christians, is abandonment of the church. God has provided us the church as the context with which we're supposed to live out our faith.
Your pursuit of holiness and your love for the church are always going to go hand in hand with each other. Every letter that Paul and Peter and John wrote in the gospels even, these were written to churches.
We can't read the New Testament without the local church in mind, because that's who they were addressing. Either that or they were written to individuals that were leading local churches, like Titus and Timothy.
So you cannot talk about the Christian life and be effective for God's kingdom without talking about the church, because the church is the body of Christ that we have been saved to function within.
[17:33] I want to read this passage from Ephesians. Ephesians chapter 4, verses 10 through 16.
He who descended is the one who also ascended far above the heavens, that he might fill all things.

And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, so that we may no longer be children tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness and deceitful schemes.
Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.
So you cannot live the life that God has intended you to live. You can't exercise your faith to its fullest measure. And you cannot live in absolute obedience to God without being involved in the church.
This is how God has intended you to grow. And your involvement, your involvement, is also how he has intended other Christians to grow. This is a mutually beneficial relationship where we are pursuing Christ together and we are pushing each other to that same end in everything that we do.
[19:24] We're here to edify one another, to glorify God in this outpost of heaven. The church is also a sending station for the salt of the earth.

We equip the salt for the work of the kingdom to go into the world. I guess you could say that the church is like a salt shaker. That'd be kind of a, that'd be an awesome name for a church.
You think? First Baptist salt shaker, maybe? Yeah. Sorry, that was not a funny joke. Anyway. The next warning that this passage gives is disciples also face God's judgment when they lose their saltiness.
We face God's judgment. Jesus' parables are full of examples of stewards, of servants that God has entrusted something to and they don't do anything with.
And when the master comes back at a time they didn't expect, all of a sudden there's a reckoning that happens. There is judgment that comes on these lazy servants.
[20:35] Now people think that judgment is just for those that reject God, but it's also for those that just don't give a rip about doing anything for them.

You've got the servant with the one talent. I think it's a prime example. Rather than being wise with what the master gave him, he took it, he buried it in a field somewhere.
And when he came back, the master's response wasn't, well, you know what, you did what you thought was right with it. You received my blessing and you know, at least you kept that much safe.
No, he said, throw this lazy servant out into outer darkness. There was extreme judgment on this servant for what he did not do with the gift of God.
And one of the things that I think that we need to remember here is that we've been called to an act of faith. We haven't been called to keep this gift to ourselves.
[21:35] We haven't been called to hide it. We've been called to share it. We've been called to have that profound kingdom impact on the world that surrounds us. God has saved you to be effective.

This is the first application of our text today is that God has saved you to be effective. And to be effective, we need to remain uncontaminated.

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If you have sin that you have become comfortable with in your life, unrepentant sin, the only proper response to that is repentance.
And yes, Christians, born again saints, they can fall into sin. But as 1 John says, God is faithful and just to forgive on those that call on him. So there is grace, there is mercy, but you have to repent. You can't allow sin to take hold in your life and expect to be effective for God's kingdom. If you have become comfortable with unrepentant sin, then you have become contaminated salt.
[22:42] But as the word says, there is forgiveness, there is restoration. So that is the response to this application is to repent, to be made right, and to be made effective again for God's kingdom.

Now the next imperative that we see from scripture, and this is going into the second part of our parable today, is that God's citizens shine the light of God's goodness through their good works. Let's go back to our text again, starting in verse 14 in Matthew chapter 5. It says, You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden, 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.
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. So Jesus calls us the light of the world and then goes on to talk about, you know, lamps.
Lamps were in typical, you know, Hebrew homes. They were these little, jar-like things, contraptions that had a wick in them. They were filled with olive oil that would soak the wick so that it would, so that it would burn slowly and last longer, but these things didn't put out just a ton of light.
[24:05] So you wouldn't put it on a low surface. You certainly wouldn't put a covering over it. You would put it on an elevated surface, on a stand, where it would give the optimal amount of light to the house.

Jesus also draws this analogy of a city on a hill. You know, one of my favorite things to do with my dad, he has a plane and he'll go flying at night sometimes and we've gotten to fly all over Oklahoma, going to different churchmen concerts and when it is dark outside, when there's no light left in the sky, it becomes plain where the cities are.
You see them, they're just lit up on the horizon. You even see the small little communities that are dotted all over the landscape because there's light. These houses that have come together, these people that have come together, they have light and especially in these big cities, there's no mistaking where these centers are because they're lit up.
It's just mesmerizing to watch it. Your attention is just immediately drawn to it. Now as disciples of Christ, those who have been born again, the true light of the world, the very one who was with God in the beginning that commanded light into existence, he has made his home in you.
John 15, 24 says, if anyone loves me, he will keep my word and my father will love him and we will come to him and make our home with him.
[25:37] We are the light of the world because the light of the world lives within us. and that light is manifested to others through our good works as this passage is just talked about.

Jesus again draws our attention to how we can become ineffective as lights in this dark world just like the other passages, a warning that comes with this. Just like salt can become contaminated, a source of light can be hidden.
So what are some ways that we hide the light in our lives? What are some ways that we keep others from seeing the light that is within us? First one is that we hide the light by neglecting good works.
This is really the heart behind what James was saying in his epistle that faith without works is dead. I've known some Christians that repeat the phrase saved by grace not by works.
They say that so much that I honestly believe they've forgotten that we are saved to do good works. I want to read that passage to you. Ephesians 2, 8, 9 says, For by grace you have been saved through faith.
[26:51] And this is not your own doing. It is the gift of God, not a result of works so that no one may boast. These first couple of verses, this is not a justification for inaction.

Because we go on to verse 10. It says, For we are his workmanship created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.
Now that last part there, we are created in Christ Jesus for good works. Christian, you're right. We're not saved by works, but we are saved to do good works.

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And when we neglect this life of active faith that this parable is talking about, we are putting our lamp under a basket.
We're not allowing the world to see our good works that Christ is producing within us. Now I had a friend who was an atheist and we would always go back and forth with each other and I was still pretty young in my faith at the time, but one of the things that he had asked me that stumped me at the time is what's the difference between the good works that we do?
[28:07] Why do I need Jesus to do good works? Can't people just decide to be good people and do the right thing? It's a great question.

There's lots of kind-hearted people that exist in this world. There are many lost people who do many great charitable things and a lot of them will say the same thing about religion.
They'll say the same thing about Jesus. I don't need Jesus to do these things. I'm doing fine on my own. The difference is is that we do good works. We do these things that God is calling us to so that we can show the world that they need Jesus.
We don't want the world to see our good works and thank us. We want them to see our good works and glorify God. Now, of course, I care about meeting people's physical needs.
I think that that should be the heart in every Christian is that we're broken for people's pain. We want to empathize with them. We see Jesus doing that all the time when he was healing the sick, when he was feeding the hungry.
[29:11] So, of course, we care about people's needs, but we want to meet these needs in an effort to make inroads to meet their need, their greatest need for a Savior.

We also hide the light by staying silent. I think that the greatest sign of apathy toward the gospel is our indifference to share it.
The only thing that gives eternal value to our actions, to our lives, is the gospel that is proclaimed along with it. people will see your good works.
People will experience your good living, but people will only hear the gospel. They will only hear the gospel.
That's the only way it's going to be good news is if they hear it for themselves. One thing that I have heard quoted a lot was from St. Francis of Assisi. He said, preach the gospel at all times, and if necessary, use words.
[30:23] Now look, I understand the point that he was trying to make. It's a very good quote. But again, I've heard people use this as an excuse to stay silent with their faith.

Like, well, just as long as I'm doing good works, I'm doing kingdom work. No, you're not. What makes it kingdom work is that we are pointing people to Jesus. Romans 10, 14, Paul said this, how then will they call on him in whom they have not believed?
How are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? Paul understood this necessity for preaching.
He understood this necessity for there to be heralds of the gospel. And you might say, well, sometimes people just need a helping hand. Peter and John, whenever they were going into the temple and they healed the lame beggar, he said, you know what, we did a good thing today.
This whole Jesus thing, this might cause some trouble, but we've done a good thing with this miracle. We can just go on because we've made this guy's life better. But they didn't. When they were called into the Sanhedrin and they were questioned and they were told to stay silent, this is what they said.
[31:38] Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you rather than God, you must judge for we cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard.

So church, your light will be shown to the world through your actions, but even more through your words. So don't be silent.
Don't let the intimidation of the world put a basket over your light. It goes back to what we were saying earlier, that it doesn't matter who we displease as long as we're being pleasing to Christ.
I think the final application is this. Let your life of good works give credence to the gospel that you preach. They should supplement and support one another.
They should never replace each other. The message falls on deaf ears without the lifestyle. And the lifestyle keeps the lost ignorant without the gospel.
[32:45] So the light shines brightly that shines brightly from you. It may be offensive. It may cause some to pull back and reproach because they've been living in darkness for so long.

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Your saltiness that may taste bitter to those that are running from the Lord because the goodness of God convicts them of their sin. But you come bringing the truth.
That truth without the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit in someone's life it will be offensive to people. I think Jesus has made that plain in his word that we are going to encounter opposition to the gospel because it testifies as Jesus said it testifies about them and their works that they are evil. and it also exposes their need for redemption for a savior. So you are shining a light into the darkness and when Jesus came into the world the opening verses of John it says the light shines in the darkness but the darkness could not overcome it.
The darkness will always fight against the light in this world but it will not overcome it. so let your light illuminate a darkened world exposing the brokenness and their need for a savior and let your life be the flavor of our savior Jesus Christ pointing those who are hungry for redemption to their ultimate source of fulfillment.
[34:16] The savior who has come as the true light of the world to save. Let's pray. Father we are so grateful that you have saved us and Lord we pray that Lord you would strengthen us to be the salt and the light that you have called us to be.

Lord that we would cling to you when we are tempted Lord so that we can remain uncontaminated by sin. Lord I pray that we would not stay silent about the truth that is within us so that our light can shine to those that are in darkness.
Lord we want to be effective for your kingdom. Lord I pray that we would not be content with inactivity or complacency but Lord that we would long to have that kingdom impact that you have called us to have as kingdom citizens.
Lord I pray that we would pursue Christ with our whole hearts. Lord I pray that we would do good works in his name with the hope of sharing the gospel with those that are lost. and Lord when we do face persecution or when we do face resistance for the gospel Lord I pray that our joy would constantly be found in you knowing that we are being obedient to your words to your commands that we are being pleasing to you.
Lord I pray for all these things in Jesus name. Amen. Amen.

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