

## Matthew 5:13-16

When Jesus **called** His disciples to be His followers, they were not particularly **well-known** or **influential** people. Yet, Jesus **taught** them, **worked** with them, and **empowered** them to do **great** things in His kingdom. Our text today describes the influence which **all** Christians are to have on the world. It shows how **different** from, and yet at the same time how closely **related** Christians are to the **rest** of the world. In speaking to the **believers** who were gathered to hear Him in His famous Sermon on the Mount, Jesus used two **pictures** to show that relationship. He said, **You Are Salt And Light**. Let's take a closer look at what that really **means** for our lives.

Our text begins, "*You are the **salt** of the earth.*" Notice that it doesn't say you **were** salt, or that you may **become** salt, but rather, you **are** salt. So, in order for us to carry out God's **will** in our lives, it's important for us to understand the **purpose** of salt. Salt has **many** qualities - some are **positive**, while others are **negative**. On the **positive** side, these days salt is used primarily as a **seasoning** for food, something which adds **flavor** and **variety** to the things we **eat**. It's **also** important as a **preservative** in order to make our food **last** longer. In our particular climate, salt is used to melt **ice**, making our roadways and sidewalks at least a **little** bit **safer** to travel. Salt also aids us in **retaining** body fluids - something which can be good **or** bad. And **entirely** on the **negative** side, salt can be a major factor in causing **high** blood pressure in **our** bodies, as well as in eating away at the **metal parts** of our cars and trucks.

Obviously, when Jesus is telling His followers that **they** are the **salt** of the earth, He is focusing only on the **positive** qualities of salt. That brings us to the question, "How can Christians serve as a **preservative** in this world?" Since we **know** our Lord Jesus, we know those things which are most **worth** preserving - like God's **Word** and **Sacraments**, the freedom to **worship**, and the privilege of **prayer**. We can help to **preserve** such things simply by making frequent and faithful **use** of them. But as **salt**, we are also called upon to provide **seasoning** - not for **food**, but for the **world**. That **seasoning** comes from our **perspective** as Christians - a perspective which enables us to look at everything which happens in this life from its **best** side - knowing that even in the **worst** of times, God will find a way to bring us **safely** through.

We **are** salt. But Jesus goes on to tell us that just **being** something doesn't guarantee our **effectiveness**. Jesus said, "*If the salt has **lost** its flavor, how will it become salty **again**? Then it is no good for **anything**, except to be thrown **out** and*

*trampled by people.*” **Pure** sodium chloride, as we know it **today**, can be kept in our cupboards and pantries for **years**, and it will **not** lose its saltiness. So, let me give you a little **background** into what Jesus **means** in this part of our text. The Israelites had access to an **unlimited** supply of **salt** on the shores of the **Dead Sea**, but this salt is quite **different** from **ours**. It is of the **rock** or **fossil** variety, and because of its many **impurities**, particularly the presence of **gypsum**, the outer layers of this salt usually lacked **flavor** - it was **un-salty**. It’s interesting that while **salt** provides an excellent remedy for un-salty **foods**, there is **no remedy** for un-salty **salt**. Therefore, it was simply thrown **away**. It was **useless**, just as Jesus said.

Jesus is telling us that we must be **careful** that we don’t become **impure** or **contaminated** by the distractions of this **world** - and in the process, lose our **saltiness** - our **effectiveness** as Christians. The **Pharisees** in Jesus’ day had become contaminated by **self-righteousness** and **legalism** in their religion. We may **personally** become contaminated by desires for **fame** or **fortune**. Even whole **church bodies** today have become contaminated, by getting too involved in **economic, social, and political** issues. **Any** and **all** of these things lead to **ineffectiveness** as Christians. We know that our primary purpose as the Body of Christ, is to spread the **Gospel** of salvation - that the **lost** may be **found** - that the **found** may be **strengthened** - and that in it all, **God** may be **glorified**. We must be very **careful** not to lose **track** of that most important priority.

In order for us to **spread** the message of salvation to **others** - in order for us to **share** our **saltiness** - the salt must be **scattered around**. After all, what good is even the **finest** salt, if it simply remains **inside** a salt shaker? Some good examples of this principle can be found in God’s Word. In the **Old Testament**, when the Promised Land was being divided up among the Children of Israel, God didn’t give the **Levites** a special **area** of land. Instead, He gave them individual cities **throughout** the land. That way the example of these **spiritual leaders** could be shared by **all** the people, instead of being **concentrated** in only **one** area. And in the **New Testament**, on the Day of **Pentecost**, God saw to it that the disciples had the opportunity to bring the Gospel to people from all over the **world**, rather than just sharing it with their **neighbors** in Jerusalem. That enabled the Christian Church to become more **wide-spread**, and to grow at a much more **rapid** pace. God also wants to spread **us** around - around our **community**, our **state**, our **nation**, and our **world** - in order to share **Jesus Christ** with as **many** people as possible. After all Jesus said, *“You are the salt of the earth.”*

But our text **continues** with **another** metaphor. Jesus went on to say, *“You are the light of the world. A city located on a hill cannot be hidden. People do not*

*light a **lamp** and put it **under** a basket. No, they put it on a **stand**, and it gives **light** to all who are in the house. In the same way, let **your light shine** in people's presence, so that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven."*

The metaphor of **light** is one which occurs over and over again in the **Epiphany** Season. The main point which Jesus is making **here** is that our light as **Christians** is to be both **visible** and **radiant**.

If light is not **visible**, it has no **purpose**. Jesus asks, "Why would anyone light a lamp, and then place it under a **basket**?" The whole purpose for **lighting** the lamp is that the light can be **seen**. **Christians** are to be noticeable **too**. We should **stand out** from the **rest** of the people of the world. I remember the story of a college student who spent his summer vacation working in a lumberjack camp in Alaska. His mother had been very **concerned** that as a **Christian**, he wouldn't be able to **cope** with the roughness and crudeness to which he would certainly be **exposed** in the company of lumberjacks. To make a long story short, when the summer had ended and school was about to begin again, the young man returned home. His mother anxiously asked, "Well, how did it **go**? Was it **difficult** for you to live in those **sinful** surroundings?" And the young man replied, "No problem at all, Mom. They never even **found out** that I was a Christian." This young man had peacefully coexisted in a world of **darkness**, because he had completely **hidden** the most precious **light** of his faith. What a tragic **mistake** - and what an **opportunity** lost.

We **daily** have that same opportunity. In fact, our Christian **lives** may be the **only** way that many people will become **exposed** to God. While they may not read God's **Word**, and they may not attend a **church**, they are **constantly** reading our **lives**. And from what they **see** in those lives, they are forming **opinions** about what a Christian **is** and **is not**. We will want to be sure that we are sending the **right** message to them. We will want to be living as children of **light**, who are always letting our light **shine**. After all, **light bearers** are also to be **light sharers**. We want the message that Jesus is our Savior to be so **clear** in our **actions**, that the only way it could be **missed** would be if the people purposely **closed** their eyes, and **refused** to look.

As I wrap this up today, I'd like you to consider one last thought. In the little town of **Prescott** where I grew up, there was a baseball field about a block away from our home. And although **most** of the ball games were played during the **day**, on occasion we would also have a game at **night**. As I looked around as a **child** at the **lights** for the field, I often wondered why the city workers didn't bother to change the **bulbs** which had **burned out**. Looking **back**, I could probably say that it would have been pretty **difficult** and **expensive** to replace bulbs which were on such high

poles. Or **maybe** they figured that new bulbs weren't really **needed**, since the **other** ones still provided **enough** light to **get by**. It worked all right for playing baseball in a small town, but that's **not** what God has in mind for **us** as **Christians**. When it comes to saving **souls**, God wants **all** the light He can **get**. Don't try to leave it up to only a **few** lights to carry the load. God expects the light of **each** and **every** Christian to **shine** in this world, so that **together** we can provide the greatest possible reflection of the **true Light** of the world - **Jesus**, our Savior. Dear friends, **You Are Salt And Light**. See to it that those God-given qualities are **evident** in your daily lives. Amen.