

# **The Jesus Christ Salt and Light Company**

## **Matthew 5:13-16**

**A sermon preached by Dr. Calvin Warpula  
at the West University Church of Christ,  
Houston, Texas, on May 29, 2011**

We've all heard of Center Point Energy, Reliant Energy, and many others that provide gas and electricity for our homes and businesses. But have you heard of "The Jesus Christ Salt and Light Company"?

Jesus spoke about it in our reading today from the Sermon on the Mount. The Lord had just told us the characteristics of his disciples. They are blessed by God because they are poor in spirit, mourn over their sins, are meek and gentle with their strength under control, hunger and thirst after God and his righteousness, show mercy, are single focused and pure in heart, work for peace among people, and are persecuted for righteousness sake.

The last beatitude, "Blessed are the persecuted," tells us how the world affects the church. Now Jesus shows us how disciples affect the world. He says, "**You are** the salt of the earth. . . **You are** the light of the world." Jesus speaks in the present indicative mood. These are not commands, "You shall be salt," or, "You shall be light." These are simple declarative statements of what God's people are in Jesus. The disciples of Jesus are "The Jesus Christ Salt and Light Company."

The thing we want to know this morning is, "What is salt? What is light? What does Jesus mean by this?"

### **"You are the salt of the earth"**

Salt is one of the basic necessities of life. To us today, salt has many uses. There are over 14,000 uses for salt such as seasoning food, making glass and soap, softening water, and thawing ice. Salt, a simple compound of sodium and chloride, NaCl, is a necessity for life.

What does Jesus mean here? I think that primarily the reference of Jesus here is to the use of salt as a preservative. In modern times, we use ice and refrigeration to preserve our food from spoiling. In Jesus' day of some

1900 plus years ago, these were not available. Salt was the primary preservative.

If a fisherman caught fish in the Sea of Galilee and wanted to sell it in the market in Jerusalem one hundred miles away, he would need to salt the fish so that it would not spoil in the ninety degree heat. If a farmer butchered a beef, he had no way to preserve it except to salt it. Today, in parts of the world where ice and refrigeration are not available, salt is still used the same way as it has been for thousands of years. Some of us older folks can remember our parents and grandparents using salt to preserve meat when they killed a hog, butchered a cow, or shot a deer. The farmers and ranchers hung meat in their smokehouses after soaking them in salt

When Jesus said, “You are the salt of the earth,” he meant that his disciples are to preserve society. Salt keeps something bad from happening. It keeps food from decaying. Jesus’ disciples as salt means that the world is rotting and they stop the spread of evil. Jesus’ disciples help make the world wholesome and delay the day of decay and consequent judgment. He meant that their good influences, presence, and teachings would make society livable and help preserve it from being destroyed. By our Christian influence and life we preserve the earth from destruction. We put off its decay and rot. We help make it livable and healthy.

Jesus followers preserve society the way that ten righteous people in the city of Sodom could have saved it from destruction. In Genesis, the first book of the Bible, chapter 19, God says that if he could find ten righteous people in the city of Sodom it would not be destroyed. The right living of just ten people would save a big city of hundreds from being destroyed. A good influence preserves society. The Bible says that “righteousness builds up a nation but sin is a reproach to any people” (Proverbs 14:34).

Salt by its very nature is different from what is around it. Salt can be quite abrasive. If you have a sore in your mouth and eat something coated with salt, it stings and burns your mouth. If you have a cut or scratch and go swimming in the Gulf of Mexico, the salt water burns your skin. For salt to be effective, it must be different from whatever it is placed on or whatever it contacts.

This means that Jesus followers must be different from the world or we will do no good on earth. Jesus makes a difference in our lives and we are to make a difference in the lives of others. We are not to conform to the world or let the world shape us into its mold, but we are to “present our bodies as living sacrifices to the Lord and to be transformed by the renewing of our minds” (Rom. 12:1).

We are to put off the old, pre-conversion person with its lust, anger, slander, sexual immorality, drunkenness, greed, hatred, prejudice, and the idolatry of things, power, or popularity. We are to put on the new spiritual person formed by the Holy Spirit and live lives of faith, love, hope, kindness, gentleness, purity, wholesomeness, forgiveness, and righteousness.

If we do not do this, then we are just like the ungodly world that does not know or follow God. We will have lost our “saltiness.” Salt is a stable compound that cannot lose its saltiness so what did Jesus mean when he said that? The salt that was commonly available to the first century Jewish people was a piece of rock dug from the ground or taken from the Dead Sea. It was often mixed with things like gypsum, natron and sodium sulphate. When water washed through the rock, the salt would dissolve and leave a worthless residue that would not preserve anything. This worthless material was then thrown out to harden roadbeds and foot paths. It was literally trampled under people’s feet. It would be like caliche or street paving materials. Its only use was to be dust and dirt on which people walked.

Today in modern Israel savorless salt is scattered on the soil of flat roofs. This helps harden the soil and prevent leaks. Since roofs serve as playgrounds and places for public gatherings, the salt is still being trodden under foot.

Jesus’ point is that if we do not follow him, if we revert back to the worldly life, if we cut away our distinctiveness that Jesus gives us, then we lose our saltiness and are good for nothing for God’s purposes.

Jesus is emphasizing that we must be different from the world. The church today is often imitating and following the world. George Barna surveys of evangelical believers versus those who have no faith in Jesus show that in matters of morality, ethics, and lifestyles believers are just two percentage points better than unbelievers. The church is imitating the world instead of preserving the earth, and both the church and the world will perish. God has no use for a worldly church. A rotten church cannot preserve a wicked world.

Today, about fifty percent of the couples live together in sexual partnerships before and if they become husband and wife legally and morally. I have found the same thing to be true in the church. The world pursues sex, money and power and many times those who wear the name of Jesus do the same in reality. The world produces magazines, web sites, movies and music that feed the appetites of the sinful nature. Some who claim to be Jesus followers support and finance them. The world promotes beautiful bodies more than righteous spirits. Likewise, sometimes believers are more concerned about their physical appearance than their spiritual

health. The world promotes athletics, ball games, and sports. There is nothing wrong with these things in and of themselves but if Jesus followers allow these recreational and pleasurable pursuits to displace worshipping God with his church then we are letting the world set our priorities.

We cannot preserve the earth if our lives are no different than the world. I ask you today, “Are you salt?” Salt preserves. Are you a preservative? Are you preserving anything? Salt seasons. Are you seasoning anything?

Jesus did not call us the sugar or honey of the world. We are not here to sweeten the world with cross-less living, easy “believism” or cheap grace.

For salt to be effective, it must get out of the salt shaker. Salt can preserve nothing or affect nothing if it remains in the box or the shaker. The church is not a salt warehouse. The salt must come in contact with the earth in order to preserve it. God wants you to be salt where you are at school, at work, and in your community.

I am so pleased when I hear that you are a good, salty influence for Christ in our world. Randy Bullard leads the umpire teams for Little League baseball here in West U. He is influencing and has influenced hundreds of youth this way. Jill Herrera led Mark Twain Elementary’s PTA and was recognized for her outstanding leadership. Kelly Rushing serves on the board of Open Door Ministry that ministers to hundreds of homeless men who are trying to rebuild their lives. Clift and Debra Norris moved into the African-American Third Ward. Debra is making a difference. She invites her neighbors to dinner. She was elected secretary for the neighborhood association and knows the names of the families in the neighborhood. Jim and Lou Ann Taylor are involved with feeding the University of Houston students attending the campus ministry luncheons. Michael and Rebecca Coulson feed seventy-five homeless people at the Impact luncheons. Praise God for all of you who are one by one making a difference in others’ lives. You are “The Jesus Christ Salt Company.”

### **“You are the light of the world”**

The second metaphor Jesus used is light. [Read Matthew 5:14-16].

We are the light of the world. We are to be like a city set on a hill that cannot be hidden. We are to let our light shine like a city on a hill. I remember driving into Houston on I-10. From thirty miles out, I could see the lights of Houston. In this dark world of sin and hopelessness, the church of Jesus Christ is a bright light that illuminates our world. The Jesus Christ Light Company promotes truth, beauty, and goodness.

Have you ever thought about what this world would be like if Jesus had never come? Some recent books detail the differences that Jesus and his followers have made in this world in the last 1900 years. The people of God have positively influenced every major reform movement that bettered mankind. The civil rights movement, prison reform, care for the mentally ill, child labor, race relations, the care of the unborn and little children, hospitals, and educational institutions have been built by Jesus followers. Skeptics United and the American Association for the Advancement of Atheism have never started any orphanages or hospitals to care for hurting humanity. People of faith are making a difference in the world.

The purpose of light is to shine. We are not to put our lights under a basket or a bowl but to let it shine. Light only fulfills its purpose if it shines. We are to let our light shine, not so that people can see the light or be blinded by it, but so that they can see our good works and give glory to God who gave us the light and who gave us the ability and resources to let it shine.

Jesus says, "Let your light shine." You can make a difference for God. You cannot do everything, or be everywhere, but, as the children's song says, you can "brighten the corner where you are." You don't have to be a 1000-watt chandelier. You can be just a single light bulb. One little, single light bulb, even a night light on the darkest night, will penetrate the darkness. Light penetrates the slightest crack. The darkest place cannot put out the tiniest light.

There are no secret disciples. God did not call us into the secret service. Either the secrecy destroys the discipleship or the discipleship destroys the secrecy. Separation from sin does not mean isolation from sinners.

Stuart Briscoe, a preacher in Wisconsin, tells the story of what happened to him when he was in the Marine Corps. He says:

When I was in the Marines, I was the only one in my group who didn't booze it up. Night after night, the others would invite me to go out drinking with them, and I would regularly say no to their invitation. Do you know what happened? I became nursemaid and helper, putting them to bed, helping them cope with their hangovers. At least I added a little touch of difference to the situation. In fact, as the months went by, one by one many of those Marines came to know Christ.

[Stuart Briscoe, The Sermon on the Mount: Daring to Be Different. Wheaton, IL: Harold Shaw Publishers, 1995, p. 56].

This is what it means to let your light shine. One day a young woman expressed her dissatisfaction with her living arrangements. She told her preacher she wanted to move, and he asked why.

“Well,” she said, “I am the only Christian there.”

The preacher, “I still don’t understand why you want to move.”

She responded, “Because I’m the only Christian there.”

“O. K.,” the preacher answered. “But I still don’t understand why you want to move.”

“It’s such a dark place,” she explained.

The preacher answered, “It would seem to me that the darker the place, the brighter the light that’s needed.”

[Briscoe, The Sermon on the Mount, p. 65].

God wants us to shine our light in the dark places. C. T. Studd, an Englishman who spent his life fortune on spreading the gospel, wrote this interesting limerick:

“Some want to live within sound of church or chapel bell.  
I want to run a rescue shop within a yard of hell.”

We shine the light by our good works that glorify God. We are not saved because of good works, but we are saved to do good works. “Faith without works is dead, being alone.” The Bible says that “God has created us in Christ Jesus to do good works” (Eph. 2:10). The Bible says that Jesus Christ gave himself for us “to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession, who are zealous for good works” (Tit. 2:14). The “good works” here refers to our witness for God through our words and our works.

We do the type of works that Jesus did. He preached the good news of God. He called people back to God. He cared for those nobody else cared for. He ministered to the poor, the sick, the disenfranchised, the diseased, the dying, the outcasts, the abused, and the fragile. He also ministered to the rich, the powerful, the educated and the elite. We are Jesus to the people of this world.

We are light when we share the good news of Jesus for the world. We are not silent witnesses. We share the message of the gospel with a dark and dying world.

We are also light when our lives back up our messages. Our lives are demonstrations of the power of the Christ. We shine the light when we are

punctual, honest and hardworking on our jobs. We shine the light when we do not succumb to greed and stinginess. We shine the light when we do not return a barbed reply but do good to those that would insult or laugh at us. We shine the light when we seek the benefit and goodwill of others. We shine the light when we do not encourage racial or ethnic jokes. Instead, we show love and acceptance to people of all races and ethnic groups. We shine the light when we do not laugh at smutty humor. We listen to the pains and hurts of others and pray with them.

The world does not read the Bible. They read our lives. We are the only Bible the world reads. They take their conception of Christ, not from the Bible, but from us. The only way the world will know God is through us.

People will ask you, “Why do you do this? Why do you care? What is it with you, any way?” And your answer will be, “Because of Jesus. I am following the light of the world and showing his light to others. I love people because I love God and God loves them and me as well.”

We are “The Jesus Christ Salt and Light Company.” Salt and light both must penetrate and saturate or they are useless and ineffective. The salt must get out of the box and the light must shine in the darkness. Let’s leave here today determined to be salt and light for Jesus. Let’s make a difference for God in our world. Let’s start today with who we are, where we are, with what God has given us, and with the people with whom God has placed us. Let’s always remember the words of Jesus, “**You are** the salt of the earth. . . .**You are** the light of the world.”

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