

Matthew 5:13-16

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[0 : 00] Do you be seated and open your Bibles if you will to Matthew chapter 5. Matthew chapter 5.!

Salt tastes, doesn't it? Light is visible.

! And what Jesus is talking about in the three verses from chapter 13 to 16, four verses, Jesus is talking about his disciples and their influence on the world. The way people affect the world. What's happened so far, Jesus has spoken in the Beatitudes, he's described his people and he's saying what sort of people they are. And he's given them an assurance of the blessings that they will receive. And they have. He's described his people, verses 1 to 12. And then in verses 13 to 16, he indicates how his people will influence the world. And he says they are salt and they are light. And so the question is, will the world be under the influence? Let's look at the influence of Christians. I want you to notice the surprise.

surprise. You know it, don't you? If you've been in church any time, you will know this phrase. You are the salt of the earth. You are the light of the world. Do you spot the surprise? What's the surprise? You are the salt of the earth. You are the light of the world. The you there is emphatic. It's you especially. And you exclusively. He says to his disciples, his followers, you and only you are the salt of the earth. He is saying only his people, only his disciples.

It's not just the 12 disciples, but that group. There were more than 12 there on that mountain side. But it was a relatively obscure group of people who were following him. They were his people and he says to them, you are the salt of the earth. And that is surprising and baffling, but that is what they are. The salt of the earth and the light of the world. That's who Jesus' followers are. How can that be? This group of rather ordinary people, I suppose they were, to be called the salt of the earth, an earthly society, and the light of the world.

[2 : 47] That is who they are. Notice he says, he says, verse 13, you are the salt of the earth. Verse 14, can you spot it? You are the light of the world. Notice he doesn't say you are going to become. He doesn't say that's your potential. He says you are. How can I be that? That is what you are. If I am, as he describes his disciples in verses 3 to 12, if I am poor in spirit and I mourn and I'm meek and I hunger and thirst and I'm merciful and pure in heart and I'm a peacemaker. If I add that element of spiritual need and destitution that characterises Jesus' people, if I have my father's likeness to some degree in verses 3 to 9, if I'm one who's willing and does suffer for Jesus' sake, if I need and I'm very needy, then by what

I am, I am, we are, not we become. We are the salt of the earth. We are the light of the world. Jesus is not speaking of some crack troops of Christians. He's not speaking of a Christian elite. Jesus does not have a clique. He's not saying if you go to this conference, if you're part of this little group or network or in crowd, he's talking to however you may want to put it, if we can say this, he is talking to ordinary Christians. His people.

Who may be pretty random on a Sunday morning. Who are not an outstanding group of folks. They don't make the cover of magazines. They're not superstars, but they are the salt of the earth. You are the light of the world. Two Christians walk into a pub. The farmer says to the one guy he knows, who is that? His friend says, he's the light of the world. He's the light of the world. You are the salt of the earth. When you get up tomorrow morning, you have that horrifying moment when you look in the mirror. You say to yourself, I am the light of the world.

Not only the surprise, but Jesus speaks to us of the danger you face. Look at the last part of verse 13. If salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored? It's no longer good for anything. It's no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled on people's feet. And Jesus is giving us a warning there, isn't he? There's an implied warning about the light too. He says no one lights a light and then puts it under a basket. And they don't try to hide it. Look at the danger we're

warned about in verse 13. And we say, I don't understand that. I don't understand how salt can become tasteless. You know, you buy those cylinders of salt from the supermarket. You've had it in your cupboard for about four years and you've still not used it up, but it hasn't become tasteless. It's still as good as the day you bought it. How can salt become tasteless? Well, the salt that they had in Jesus' time was not a salt that you oiled or cleaned or washed in water and you got the salt from it. The salt in Jesus' time was gotten from mines. It was salt. It was encrustations that were around places like in the Dead Sea. Or sometimes it might come from a lake, a lake via the Syrian desert that would dry up in the summertime. And it would leave those encrustations of salt there. And they were going to get it. Or it would come from other places. A 19th century scholar says that in northern Palestine, in a province of Sidon, there was a fellow, a government official who procured salt for the government, the Department of Salt. And he got it from the island of Cyprus and they brought it over. He had enough for 20 years' supply. He put it in 65 houses that he had built specifically for it and he filled them with salt. And the salt was close to the ground and it gathered up moisture or whatever salt is prone to do and it ruined it. It made it insipid. The salt became tasteless. And so we're told that literally they took the salt and they threw it on the street because it was useless. And so the salt that Jesus is talking about, this salt would have a mixture of earth and impurities in it. And because of this, it would, in certain circumstances, the salt would become tasteless and insipid and become no good. And there was no way that you could make anything good out of it. And so you literally had to toss it out into the street. Jesus is saying, if you're going to use a modern day of analogy, somebody buys you a two and a half litre bottle of Coke like my parents do occasionally when I go home or for the grandchildren. And one of my nephews and nephews goes there earlier on in the week and opens the bottle of Coke. And they don't tighten the lid up. And so when I arrive later on in the week, my parents say to me, we've bought a bottle of Coke. And your nephew Ed had some earlier on in the week. And I go to open the bottle, but there's no fizz. There's no fizz. Because the idiot has left, hasn't done the bottle up, hasn't done the lid up. And flat Coke is an awful thing. You might think fizzy Coke is an awful thing, but flat Coke is a terrible thing. What do you do with flat

[8 : 39] Coke? You pour it down the drain. It's useless. And Jesus is saying with salt, if it loses its taste, if it loses its zing, if it loses its bite, if it loses its taste, if it loses that distinctive flavour, it's no good. He's saying don't lose your taste. Salt has a distinctive flavour. You can tell, can't you, ordinarily, if it's been present. You can tell if your boiled egg has had salt in it or it hasn't. Because it leaves a certain bite. There's a difference. There's a distinctiveness about salt. It can be detected. And Jesus said, if you are the salt of the earth, don't allow earthly society to put its influence on you and make you tasteless, make sure the influence goes the other way. You flavour it. Don't let it flavour you. And cut the bite and the tang of your character. And as my disciples, salt is different and distinct. And Jesus is saying we shouldn't do away with that distinctiveness, that difference, because we are his disciples. And so he's saying, don't try to blend in. Don't try to blend into the woodwork at the office. So people won't recognise you as a Christian. He's not saying to you to be odd. He's not saying you to deliberately go in and be different. He's saying be what you are, which is the message of the New Testament. He says, if you blend in, you won't ever be able to bite. And if you become bland, you won't be able to carry any flavour. You must remain salt. You can't let the impurities of your environment change you and affect you and make you tasteless.

Same thing Jesus is getting at verse 15. Now the same illustration. People don't light a lamp, a little oil lamp and put it under a bowl. No one does that. That's stupid. Why would you do that? Why would you light a lamp in a dark house and then put it under a basket? It's daft.

So my brother got a car once he changed the oil. He drained the old oil out in changing the oil filter. And he started putting the new oil in. My father comes out of the house screaming that there's oil going all over the drive. And my brother had forgotten to put the oil plug in. Put the oil plug back in. Before he filled it up. It was stupid, wasn't it? It was ludicrous. It was daft to put new oil into an engine with the oil plug not there. And so it is foolish for Christians.

To cover the light. Jesus is the light of the world. And Jesus has become your light if you are a Christian. And it's foolish for a Christian to hide that light. And it's useless for a Christian. They become useless if they want to blend in.

[12 : 04] And if he tries to become bland. And if he doesn't want to stand out for being a Christian. If he is ashamed of the Lord Jesus because of his lifestyle. And the conflict and the rubs that it might make. In other words, Jesus is saying don't be ashamed of the fact that you're different. And

don't try to hide it. And don't try to let the world tame you into tastelessness.

And I know that's a huge challenge, isn't it? It's a huge challenge in school. It's a huge challenge in work. It's a huge challenge at play. But that is the danger we face.

Jesus gives us that warning. We have the surprise, the danger. And thirdly, Jesus says the impact you make. The impact you make. Let's just play with the image a little bit.

I want to think of the salt of the earth and the light of the world in a general way. Particularly the aspect of salt. As we said, these ought to indicate the influence that Jesus' disciples have.

When you notice Jesus' statement in verses 13 and 14, there's an implied, isn't there, condemnation and criticism of the earth or the world. I've not seen it before. He says you are the salt of the earth.

[13:31] He's implying that earthly society, the earth needs salt. And you are the light of the world. What's he saying about the world? He's saying that the world needs light.

In short, when he calls us the salt of the earth, he's speaking and implying about the decay of the world. And when he's speaking of the light of the world, he's speaking and implying about the darkness of the world.

The world needs salt because it's rotten. And the world needs light because it's stifling. And there's an implied criticism here he makes about the world. And I also think it's a really helpful point that there's a limitation here.

Notice he says you are the salt of the earth. Now salt, at least used in some foods, doesn't really heal it. It doesn't restore it.

But it kind of stops the rot. It retards the deadness. Maybe a preservative. But it doesn't exactly prevent it wholly, does it?

[14:42] It retards decay. Salt can be used to slow down decay. I know there are other indications of what the salt may mean.

We can't bring them all in. But one of the functions Jesus is in mind. He says if you are the salt of the earth, then you are one who is going to slow down by your life. You are going to slow down some of the decay.

It doesn't mean that you will recreate society. It means that you keep it from being so rotten. And I think that's really, really important.

Because there's a lot of talk about the moment in Christian circles, even in Reformed circles, about redeeming the culture. And we need to watch that. Because I think we claim too much by that.

For Christians and their influence. More than Jesus gives us. So I love Tim Keller. I love lots of what he writes. I think he's a gift from God. But I think when he talks about redeeming the city.

[15:47] I want to say to him, show me in the Bible where you get that idea. Where do you get that? How is redemption used ever in that way? The Bible never speaks of people bringing in the kingdom.

That's also that language. People are using it. We are going to be kingdom bringers in. The Bible never speaks of that. Don't overplay your influence.

I don't think it even speaks of people advancing the kingdom. Certainly not of building the kingdom. That is Jesus' work. Jesus builds the kingdom.

Jesus advances the kingdom. Jesus brings in the kingdom. And we need to be really careful that we don't take on too much. He does say.

You are not the ones who bring in the kingdom. But he does say to you. In an evil world you prevent decay. It's not so glamorous is it?

[16:53] It's not so glamorous as redeeming the culture. Or redeeming the city. Or bringing in the kingdom. You slow down the decay. You prevent the rot from stinking too much.

It's a great strapline. You are the salt of the earth. The reason why I think that is important. Because I think with all these kind of things.

That there will be a massive kickback. Won't there? There will be a huge discouragement. Of those who are trying to redeem the city. Because New York City hasn't been redeemed.

Neither has London. Let me explain to you what I mean. In the late 1600s. The French Protestants. Were referred to as Huguenots.

There were 400,000 of the Huguenots. That were leaving France. Because they were under such pressure for their faith. That was in addition to the 70,000. Who had been slaughtered on St. Bartholomew's Day.

[17:50] About 100 years before. But then there were 400,000 Huguenots. That emigrate from France. And one historian said. That they took with them part of the soul of France. He says that the tragedy of the Huguenots.

Was the tragedy of France. Why? Because these people. By their moral strength. And their character. And their expertise. And contribution in education. And industry. Were such an element of salt.

In French society. And then they are gone. And France bumps along its way. In 100 years to a revolution. There is an element.

This writer was saying. That the French Protestants. Who had to leave. Were salt in that society. And now it is gone. Is it? So I want to say to you. Stay in the city. Don't move out. Stay in Ealing. Be salt and light.

Be here for the long haul. Not because you are going to redeem the borough. But because you stopped the rot. You stopped decay. You had great influence on society. Think of William Wilberforce.

[18:50] In the 19th century. He converted as a result of. The 18th century revival. Along with him. Others were so instrumental. In stopping the British slave trade.

Think of another John Howard. He was a convert in that revival. He brought about. Or was instrumental. In bringing about prison reforms. Because of the deplorable condition. Of prisons in that time. He was salt. He didn't recreate.

The whole social structure. Or anything like that. He didn't make evil disappear. But the contribution they made. Stopped the decay. And brought some very needed.

Righteous influence. That was the salt. But it doesn't have to be. Something prominent in history. Does it? Or anything like that. It is. An individual Christian life.

As he goes along. Or she goes along. Daily. And apparently. Obscurely. And unnoticed. They spend time. With some. Lonely person. It might be.

[19:52] Your commitment. To give love. And discipline. To your children. To be salt. With your family. To befriend. That person in the office. Who is pretty unbearable.

And nobody else likes. It may be. That a Christian teenager. Refuses. To have premarital sex. Notice.

I didn't say. That was unforgivable. I didn't say. That someone. Couldn't be restored. To Jesus. If that occurred. But what if. A Christian. Refuses. To have premarital sex. They go.

About. They go. Against. The flow. Of what. Our culture. Indicates. What difference. Is that going to make. Big deal. Is that going to change the world. No it won't. But it stops the rot.

At one place. And at least. With two people. You are the salt of the earth. And alongside that.

[20:48] I think we have to say. That if you are the salt of the earth. That there is implied here. A kind of. Stinginess. About our Christian witness.

It could be. That one of the implications. About Jesus statement. Being salt of the earth. Is that sometimes. In our witness. There will be. A stinging element. To it. We are so conditioned.

In our society. Aren't we? Aren't we? And even in our churches. That if we are giving. A Christian witness. There will always be. A non-offensive character.

A kind of. Cardinal sin. Of the preacher. Is to offend anyone. And I don't think.

We should be deliberately obnoxious. Great harm can be done. Can't it? To Christ's cause.

Because of that. But we need to be careful. That we don't take this too far. Now. When there are situations.

[21:48] In your office. Where you. You need to speak. A word. Or you need to. Bear witness. It's not that it's going to.

Change everything. But you know that a word. Needs to be spoken. What if you're. At the office. Or you're at the school gate. Or you're in the school. Or. And.

And you know. That you have to speak up. You kind of have that. Weak. Uncomfortable smile. But you say.

I don't want to be judgmental. Do you get up in anger. And pound your fists. On the table. And say. You may not be like this. No.

Of course not. But you can still. Make your point. Can't you. What about if somebody. Just. Will not.

[22:44] Stop taking. God's name. In vain. Do you have to sit there. And swallow that. Do you. Or do you. Blast them away. Or do you think.

This is the issue. Not to fight on. That's what most Christians. Think it is. I think. I think you can. Say something. Can't you. You. You can. Say gently.

Do you. Do you have to. Do you have to. Use God's name like that. Jesus did not call us. To be wimps. Did he. He really didn't. For his sake.

And some people say. Well it's a difference of personality. Your personality. Might find that easier. Than other personalities. Like. Honestly. Find me a personality. That finds that easy. I'd love to meet them. It doesn't mean.

That that person. When you say. Do you have to swear like that. They're going to drop to their knees. And say. Well what must I do. To be saved. But there are some immediate ways out there. Where we can be salt.

[23 : 46] And when we do that. It will sting. And we shouldn't be ashamed of that. We need to get away from this idea.

That if I'm going to be a Christian. If I'm going to be a witness. For Christ. It will always be non-offensive. It really won't be. Not of your salt.

And not of your light. Fourthly. Jesus gives us the task we have. In verse 16. And he particularly applies it. In verses 14 and 15. In the task that you have. 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. That is the task that you have.

Let your light shine. That is deliberately. You let it shine. You don't cover it up. And you let it shine publicly before men.

[24 : 43] You let them see it. And you don't try to hide it. It's also concrete. Look at verse 16. That they may see your good works. And let your light shine.

What does the light shining consist of? It consists of good works. Notice he doesn't say. Let them feel your warm glow. Let them feel your spirituality.

Whatever that is. No. It's your good works. What are good works? It's very very important you define it. Well let's ask. Mr. Confession of Faith. In chapter 16.

Good works are only such. As God has commanded. In his holy word. Are not such. As without the warrant thereof.

Are devised by men. Out of blind zeal. Or upon any pretense. Of good intention. That's really really important. Let me try and explain why. Good works are only those.

[25 : 38] God has commanded. In his holy word. Good works are only those. God has commanded. In his holy word.

Have you got it? Good works. Are those. Only God has commanded. In his holy word. That is. What are good works? Let's define it again. What the Bible says are good works. Why. Why. Why. Why am I making a big deal of this? Everyone knows what good works are. But they don't.

They don't unless you define them. You won't know what good works are. Otherwise somebody is going to say. Well listen. I don't eat fish on a Friday. And I think that's a good work.

I don't drink alcohol in January. I have a dry January. And I think that's a good work. I don't shave in. Movember.

[26 : 37] Because I think that's a good work. So you have to say. Let the Bible define. What good works are. Notice he says.

Good works. He doesn't say great works. Being the light of the world. Does not mean. You need to be outstanding. Or do something. Run ultra marathons. Or go around.

Tidying up. Ealing. For a week. It doesn't mean. That you do things. That necessarily. Will get publicity. They are good works.

Not great works. Let's try and define. A little bit more tightly. What are the good works. Jesus is talking about. In the Sermon on the Mount. And. I think it's really interesting.

That when you look. At the good works. That people will see. And glorify your father in heaven. Because of them. The way that the Sermon on the Mount. Defines them. Because one of the good works. Is surely verse 21.

[27 : 39] That your relationships. With Christians. Are not. Full of. Anger. That is a good work. That you do your utmost.

In verses 27 to 30. To keep yourself. From illicit. Sexual lust. In verses 31 to 32. You maintain a faithfulness.

In your marriage relationship. And then in verses 33 to 37. In the way that you talk. It is different. And it is candid.

And it is truthful. And you don't retaliate. And the way that you treat your enemies. Is different. You seek to love your enemies.

As hard as that may be. And you give to the needy. And there is a bit of a problem.

[28 : 40] Isn't there? With that. Because it is so disappointing. Isn't it? So disappointing. They are not.

Great things. Are they? They are. They are. Straightforward. Christian living. That is the good works. But they may see your good works.

And give praise to your father in heaven. And that is the purpose for it all. They may not have that result. Jesus already. Said. Isn't he? In verses 10 to 12. They may see your good works.

And kick you in the teeth. But in verse 16. He gives the other side of that. He says. Let your light shine before others. So that they may see your good works. And give glory to your father who is in heaven.

And you can get a couple of results from your good works. Of living a normal. Faithful. Christian life. That's not remarkable. That's ordinary. But that is the purpose of all.

[29 : 39] That they may give praise to your father in heaven. And you may not let go. You may not get a lot of credit or recognition. I want to say to you.

It is really encouraging. As I've thought about this week. You can keep Lent. You don't keep Lent. I couldn't care less. I'd rather you didn't parade it.

You can do all sorts of things. That religious leaders. Will tell you to do. But they're not good works. Commanded in.

Scripture. I think it's so wonderfully encouraging. Isn't it? That actually. The normal Christian life. Of you working hard in the office. Of you being truthful.

Of you being faithful in relationships. If God has given you a husband or wife. Of being faithful. In your sexual relationship with them.

[30 : 38] If you're single. Of living out a faithful Christian life. In your singleness. People will see those good works. And some.

Well maybe angered by it. But some will glorify your father in heaven. So the great campaigns. Of we're going to bring the kingdom in. We're going to build God's kingdom.

We're going to do incredible things for God. And Jesus says. Be salt and be light. You are salt and you are light. He talks about normal Christian life.

It's kind of disappointing though isn't it? But if you're light. That's always the way light is. When you came in this morning. You probably didn't look at the lights. Did you?

Did you? And meditate on them. Did you? I bet no one did. No one stopped. And thought. Oh this is a beautifully lit room. None of you counted the lights.

[31 : 40] Did you? I counted them in the last ten. There's thirty I think. Let's just pause a moment. Why did you do that? Why did you not do that?

Because the purpose of light. Light is not. The purpose of light is not to draw attention to itself. Light helps us see one another. Helps us to read.

Light is not meant. For us to look at it. Itself. It's what it shats light upon that matters. And so with us. And so our good works.

Our faithful Christian living. Which some of you actually won't be interested in. Because you'll think it's just too hard and too hem-drug. But it is faithful Christian living.

That is the light. Which points to someone else. And any good works that we're doing that Jesus commands. Point to God.

[32 : 41] Paul Gibson was the principal of Ridley Hall Theological College. When John Stott graduated there. When John Stott, the kind of great Anglican preacher. He finished his theological education. The principal Paul Gibson was retiring.

And they had a portrait of him. Unveiled at that. In that ceremony. And when Reverend Gibson. When he expressed his words of appreciation. He said this. He said he thought the time would come.

When people went to Ridley Hall. And looked at this portrait. And they would say. Not who is this man. But who painted the portrait. And that is where the Christian is.

They see your good works. But they give praise to your father in heaven. And there is the answer to the purpose of life.

The purpose of life is not that I reach fulfillment. But that because of me people praise my father in heaven. People of God.

[33 : 45] Brothers and sisters. You are the salt of the earth. You are the light of the world. Will the world be under our influence?

Maybe not. But they ought to at least feel our influence. And see our influence. Let's pray.