

# Salt and Light

by Rev. Dr. John C. Tittle



## Prayer of Illumination

Lord God, may your Word  
be a lamp to our feet and a light to our path,  
through Jesus Christ, our Lord.  
Amen.

## Gospel Reading: Matthew 5:13-20 (NRSVue)

<sup>13</sup> "You are the salt of the earth, but if salt has lost its taste, how can its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything but is thrown out and trampled under foot.

<sup>14</sup> "You are the light of the world. A city built on a hill cannot be hid. <sup>15</sup> People do not light a lamp and put it under the bushel basket; rather, they put it on the lampstand, and it gives light to all in the house. <sup>16</sup> In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven.

<sup>17</sup> “Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have come not to abolish but to fulfill.

<sup>18</sup> For truly I tell you, until heaven and earth pass away, not one letter,<sup>[a]</sup> not one stroke of a letter, will pass from the law until all is accomplished. <sup>19</sup> Therefore, whoever breaks<sup>[b]</sup> one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever does them and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. <sup>20</sup> For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.

*The grass withers and the flower fades,  
but the Word of God endures forever.*

## SERMON – “Salt and Light”

“You *are* the salt of the earth.”

“You *are* the light of the world.”

Not *ought* to be, *should* be, but you ARE. Christ has blessed us with these qualities, making them realities in our lives. We just have to trust, to live into who we are. We’re citizens of heaven, but we’re called to this place right now. We have an earthy faith, that is in the world, but not *of* the world.

Don’t lose your flavor. Don’t hide your light. Your presence is needed.

“You are the salt of the earth,” says Jesus. Salt seasons, preserves, and purifies. Salt doesn’t exist for itself. It adds flavor and keeps food fresh. Salt’s not only powerful, but it also changes things, influences the environment. The presence of salt in water actually changes its boiling and freezing point. Salt is an active presence, a change agent in the world. Salt is life-giving. We would die without salt.

Jesus is challenging and inviting the church to be the church. Christians to be Christians. Be the new creation Christ made you to be. It’s a call to mission, to get out into the world.

- Be a purifying, preserving, life-giving change agent that keeps the world fresh, keeping it from going bad.
- Salt brings out the flavor of other things. Salt doesn’t exist for salt. We’re salt for the world, not salt for salt.

Too much of you, too much salt, leaves a bad taste in the mouth. It exists to bring out the best in others.

Jesus tells us to beware of losing our saltiness. All too often we behave just like the rest of the world, and get our distinctive Christian flavor watered down, when we:

- live for keeping up with the Jones's.
- play hardball and take off the gloves in our dealings to get our own way.
- look out for #1.
- not take our faith too seriously, wanting to be respectable or just fit in.

Stay salty Immanuel. "If we aren't preserving and flavoring the world with God's love, who will?"

The Hebrew root word "*tpl*" can mean either "lose saltiness" or "be foolish." It's wise to stay salty. To stay salty, memorize Leviticus 2:13. Do you know that passage?

"You shall not omit from your grain offerings the salt of the covenant with your God; with all your offerings you shall offer salt."

In other words, to be the salt of the earth, live sacrificially for God and lay down your life for others. Walk in Christ's footsteps—dying to ourselves and taking up our crosses and following Jesus. Stay salty by being faithful in our relationships with Christians and non-Christians alike:

- Eating together in the Hebrew culture was sometimes called "sharing salt."
- Choose hospitality over hostility.

Next, memorize 2 Kings 2:19-22. In this passage the Prophet Elisha put salt into a bowl and threw salt into a town's spring water that was bad and the water was miraculously purified and made potable. Be a purifying, cleansing, and refreshing agent—turning what is sour, toxic, and bitter into a freshwater spring. Change the atmosphere to be life-giving and life-affirming. Be a breath of fresh air to those around you. Salt resists corruption.

Memorize Colossians 4:6, "Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt..."

To use salty language is to be Jesusy. Let your tone and spirit and conversations be gracious, loving, and respectful. Let's not lose our identity or forget who we are, my fellow Christians, my fellow "Little Christs." Christlikeness is next to saltiness. Remember the Golden Rule... and the Salty Rule. "You are the light of the world."

Do you remember the first words God speaks in Scripture?

God said, let there be—light. It was out of darkness that God created the first creation—light. Shine your light in the darkness.

Light is powerful. Light travels at 186,000 miles per second or 671 million miles an hour. The farthest distance the human eye can detect a candle flame is over 1.6 miles. In Christ, we're on the move and we stand out. We're a city on a hill, a lamp on lampstand.

Light is meant to be seen and shown—to illumine. How does the song go again, *Hide it under a bushel, NO!, I'm gonna let it what?...* Shine.

So we're not embarrassed of the light. In fact, *we are* the light!

Like salt that doesn't exist for itself, we don't put ourselves or our works in the limelight. Rather, we reflect Christ, we point to the Lord Jesus who is described as the Bright and Morning Star, the Light of the World, and the Sun of Righteousness. Light is a sign of God's presence, illumination, and guidance:

"Send out your light and truth to be my guide," says the psalmist, and "let them lead me to your holy hill." (*Psalm 43:3*)

God's light is revelation—God revealing himself. But in the light of God's revelation we see ourselves better. King Solomon says in Proverbs 20:27, "The Lord shines into a person's soul, searching out their inmost being."

The light of God's presence also dispels our fear, as David says, "The Lord is my light and my salvation—whom shall I fear?"

Just as God is light, the Scriptures teach us that we're children of light. As Ephesians says, "Though you were once darkness, now as Christians you are light. Prove yourselves at home in the light, for where light is, there is a harvest of goodness, righteousness, and truth."



One of the ancient rabbis asked his disciples this question:

- *When does night become day?*

One student said: "Could it be when you see an animal in the distance and you can tell whether it is a sheep or dog?" No said the Rabbi. Another pupil wondered: "Could it be when you look at a tree in the distance and can tell if its fruit is a fig or a peach?" No said the Rabbi. "Well, then what's the answer Rabbi?" It's when you look in the face of any person and you can see that they are your brother or sister. Because if you cannot do this, then no matter what time it is, it's still night.

Our kindness and mercy, our justice, our modesty brings out the best in not only others, but in ourselves. With Christ in us, our presence and works bring hope and direction to a world that is often times groping in the darkness. We illuminate a better way.

Then Jesus gives us one of his mission statements: "I came not to abolish or destroy the law and the prophets, but to fulfill or complete them." Literally, to "fill it full." "Truly I tell you..." says Jesus, or more literally, "Amen I tell you." We end our prayers with Amen, but Jesus curiously *began* his words with Amen. And anytime he says, "Amen I tell you," we'd better listen to what follows.

- The Hebrew prophets would speak on behalf of God in the third person: *Thus says the Lord*.
- The Apostles of the New Testament would say: *It is written*.
- But Jesus says: *I say unto you*. Jesus' words carry the authority of Scripture. Not one jot or tittle will pass away until all this is achieved—until all that must happen has happened.

So, how did Jesus fulfill the Scriptures? By his complete obedience to them. And by teaching us deeper meanings of what the Scriptures teach. As Christians, we take Jesus seriously. We take the Scriptures seriously, too. We listen and obey, in the strength of the Spirit, Christ's commands that he gives to us—to love others the way that he loves us. His commands are gracious, but they're also incredibly challenging and rigorous. He challenges us to follow the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy, to not just hear but *do* the Word of the Lord.

As Jesus says, that is building our lives on the solid foundation. You'll be great in God's kingdom. Don't ignore, gloss over, or play down God's commandments. That is building our lives on the foundation of sand. Jesus says we'll be least in the kingdom if we do this. So we avoid the two dangers of being rigid and legalistic—and also of being lax and dismissive of God's commands. Unless you show yourselves far better than the Scribes and Pharisees, you can never enter the kingdom of heaven.

*What does this mean?*

Jesus taught and showed us what true righteousness is:

- Caring for the vulnerable.
- Having the faith of a child.
- Loving our enemy.
- Desiring mercy.
- Serving.

By the grace of God, we follow in Jesus' own more perfect way. We trust in Christ, who fulfilled the law, not in ourselves. We let Christ live and shine through us.

"You *are* the light of the world."

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

Amen.

Sermon Art: *Jesus on the Mount of Olives*, Apolinare Nuovo, Ravenna, 6<sup>th</sup> century

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