

The following sermon was preached at Redemption Baptist Church on Sunday, 16 April 2023. We encourage you to look up the Scriptures that are referenced and see the context for yourself. May the Lord speak to your heart as you study His Word.

Salt and Light

Mathew 5:13-16

There is a tourist spot in America, near Washington, D.C., which draws thousands of visitors from all over the world every year. (My family visited it a couple times when I was a kid; and I have seen it a couple times in my adult years.) That place is Mount Vernon—the house and estate of America’s first president, George Washington. The house itself is fascinating; but the smaller “utility” buildings on the estate are interesting, as well. Each one tells a story of what life was like in the 1700’s.

One interesting building to visit at Mount Vernon is the Salt House—the place where fish and beef were stored in barrels of salt, to preserve them. Herring were abundant in the Potomac River, nearby Washington’s house; but the harvesting season for Herring was only about 5 or 6 weeks. In that short time, Washington’s servants had to cut off the heads, and cut out the innards, of thousands of fish, and wash them in brine. They then packed the fish in barrels, about 800 fish to a barrel. They would put down a layer of fish, then a layer of salt, then a layer of fish, and so on. This preservation process worked so well, that the fish were good to eat for well over a year. In fact, there was a ship that sank in the year 1830, which was excavated by archaeologists in 1991; and in the cargo of that ship, they found a barrel of herring that were preserved by this method. And guess what? The fish were still edible, after 161 years!ⁱ

However, in order to have a long “shelf life” for your meat, you had to pack it in *good* salt. The *kind* of salt that you used *really* mattered. The best salt (and really, the only acceptable salt) was the salt that was imported from Lisbon, Portugal. The way they produced their salt in Portugal was by flooding a large piece of land with salt water, and then allowing the sun to evaporate the water, and to leave the dry salt. This salt was very stable, and did not absorb moisture when it came into contact with wet meat.ⁱⁱ

Now, there *was* another kind of salt, which came from Liverpool, England. This type of salt was made by boiling sea water. However, its quality was not great. Fish that was packed in Liverpool salt didn’t last for even six months. However, it was *cheap*—and easily accessible. In contrast, the Lisbon salt was much more expensive, because it first had to be taken to England, to pay customs, before being shipped to the Americas.ⁱⁱⁱ However, it was *worth it*. Everyone knew that Lisbon salt was the “good stuff”!

Now, what is the point of this little piece of history? The point is that the Lord Jesus wants the citizens of His Kingdom to be like “Lisbon salt.” As Jesus preached His “Sermon on the Mount,” He made it clear that when He sets up His glorious Kingdom on earth one day, *only* those who have humbled themselves before God, repented of their sin, and been inwardly converted, will enter that Kingdom. You don’t become a member of Christ’s Kingdom by trying to be righteous; rather, you *are* righteous, and you *are* a member of the Kingdom, *because Christ has saved you*. When you come to Jesus for salvation, He begins to change you from the inside out. Spiritually speaking, He makes you like salt, preserving yourself (and others around you) from sin. He also transforms you into a child of light. As the world gets darker and darker, the citizens of Christ’s Kingdom shine brighter and brighter.

This morning, we will learn more about the way that Kingdom Citizens should live their lives. The title of this message is ***Salt and Light***.

Read Matthew 5:13.

I. Christians are the “salt of the earth.”

The people of Jesus’ day would have had a good understanding of what Jesus was talking about when he compared His followers to the “*salt of the earth.*” Salt was a very important commodity in Jesus’ day, and it was used for many purposes. However, there were two types of salt. There was *pure salt*; and there was *impure salt*.

Impure salt came from the Dead Sea region; and it was contaminated with gypsum and other minerals. It *acted* like salt for a while; but it quickly lost its flavour. After it lost its flavour, it was good for nothing except to be put on footpaths, to keep them free of vegetation. As Jesus said, it was good for nothing except “*to be trodden under foot of men.*” On the other hand, pure salt (salt that is *not* contaminated with other minerals) does not lose its flavour. It is the “good stuff”—the kind that is used for preserving food, and giving it flavour.

Now, why does Jesus compare Christians to salt? And if Christians are like salt, what does *impure* salt represent? It’s simple: pure salt represents true Christians; and impure salt represents *fake* Christians, who were never truly saved. Jesus’ point is that true Christians continue to live godly lives. They don’t act excited about Christianity for a while, but eventually get offended, or get tired of trying to be holy, and drop off the face of the earth, never to be seen doing Christian things again. True Christians have an *endurance* in their lives, which is generated by the Spirit of God. In contrast, false Christians “fall away” from the truth (because they never truly embraced it). Now, God certainly can *use* false Christians for His purposes, just as He can use *any* unbeliever for His purposes. However, this doesn’t change the fact that they are not true salt. They are like *impure* salt, which can be used for a temporary purpose, but then disposed of.

Now, true Christians often do stumble in sin. (If you have been saved for any length of time, you know too well how easily you can stumble!) However, the difference is that true Christians *do not remain* in sin. They are compelled by the Holy Ghost to confess their sins, to get back up, and to serve the Lord again.

Read 1 John 3:7-10.

What is John saying here? Is he teaching a “works salvation”? Is he saying that you must be perfectly sinless in order to be saved, and that if you ever sin at all, you’re *not* saved? No! He is simply saying that if you be a true Christian, your life will be characterised by a *continual* pursuit of holiness. Because a Christian has the “seed” of God’s Holy Spirit living inside him, he has the power to overcome sin; and as long as a Christian is living in *submission* to the Holy Spirit, he *will* be holy, and will overcome sin.

Now, the reality is that our sin nature is still with us, and it is always battling against us; and we do often stumble in sin. However, as you grow in Christ, you learn how to confess your sins, and to get up in the strength of the Lord, and to walk with the Lord again. An unsaved person, on the other hand, sins habitually and continually, without even realising it (or without even caring). When someone claims to be saved, but his life does not show any sign of a pursuit of holiness, there is reason to question the genuineness of that person’s testimony.

Brethren, Jesus says that we are the “*salt of the earth.*” This means that we have work to do for the Lord. For one thing, salt preserves food from corruption. Likewise, true Christians should be restraining corruption in society by proclaiming the life-changing Gospel of Jesus Christ, and by living holy lives. Our job is not to change society by voting in good politicians,

or by lobbying and boycotting for moral causes. At best, this puts a “plaster” on a wound, without doing anything to heal the deadly “illness” of sin. At worst, it can lead to compromise, as Christians begin to “hold hands” with religious apostates in order to try to uphold “morality” in society. As children of the Kingdom, we must preach the *Gospel*. Only the Gospel can change people’s hearts, and bring about true righteousness in people’s lives.

Now, not only does salt preserve food from corruption; it also heals wounds. I don’t think I need to point out the spiritual application, here! Brethren, we live in a society that is in serious need of healing. We live in a society in which the “*whole head*” is “*sick*,” and the “*whole heart*” is “*faint*.” From “head” to “toe” there is “*no soundness*” in our society, “*but wounds, and bruises, and putrifying sores*,” which have “*not been closed, neither bound up, neither mollified with ointment*.” People are filled with rage and anger. Homes are broken and dysfunctional. Multitudes of people are trying to cope with reality (or to *escape* from reality) by doping themselves up with drugs and alcohol. Young people are so confused, they don’t even know what gender they are. The only way these deadly wounds of sin can be healed is through the salvation that Jesus Christ offers; and as Christians, we are the *only* ones who can proclaim that salvation. Jesus came to “*bind up the broken-hearted*”; and He uses *us* to accomplish that purpose, by leading people to *Him*. God can use us as spiritual salt, to heal sin-sick souls, by proclaiming the Gospel to them.

Salt preserves things; it heals things; and last, but not least, **salt has good flavour**. Likewise, the Bible says that our “*speech*” should be “*always with grace, seasoned with salt, that he may know how ye ought to answer every man*.” Christian, as you live a grace-filled life, and as you allow the Holy Spirit to “season” your words and actions, God will be glorified; and it will leave a good “taste” in the mouth of everyone around you. In time, people may come to know Christ as Saviour, because you allowed Christ to “season” your life with salt!

Now, let’s examine the “fruit” of this teaching. What does a “salt-seasoned” person look like up-close? How does he live? Let’s see what King David had to say.

Read Psalm 26:1-5.

David said, “*I have hated the congregation of evil doers, and will not sit down with the wicked*.” The word “*wicked*” is plural, which implies a *group* of wicked ones, who are assembled for the purpose of sinning. David’s message is clear: don’t hang out with people who are congregated together for the purpose of sinning! Sadly, though, many Christians *do* sit in the congregation of the wicked. Many Christians excuse their going to worldly places, and hanging out with worldly people, and even participating in sinful activities, on the grounds that Jesus ate with publicans and sinners. However, this argument does not stand up to Scripture. Never do you see Jesus going to places where the people were congregated for the purpose of doing evil--such as to an alehouse, or a gambling house. Of course, you do see Jesus going into the *homes* of wicked people, to share the Gospel with them. In Zacchaeus' case, his heart was already convicted by Jesus' preaching, and he wanted to hear more; and during the feast at his house, he found salvation. In Matthew's case, he was *already* saved; and he invited his old tax-collecting buddies to a feast at his house, so that they could hear the Gospel. Jesus was *not* sitting around sipping the bubbly with them! They were *not* having a boozy lunch: they were listening to Jesus preach the Gospel to them. Jesus did *not* sit down with sinners in a place that was dedicated to sin; nor did He dabble in any sin (such as drinking alcohol) in order to “win” people. If He had done so, He wouldn’t have been able to be our sinless Sacrifice!

The clarion call of “evangelism” in many professing Christian circles today is “Come and join us, because we’re all nice guys. We aren’t opposed to doing the worldly things you do. We won’t be preachy, or make you feel like you might have a sin problem.” However, this so-called “evangelism” is unbiblical, and spiritually destructive. God commands us to be separate from sinners *when they are congregated together to do wrong*. Sinful talk and ways *do* rub off on Christians when they are not determined to be separate from the world. Instead of being salt, and helping to *deliver* people from sin, they themselves are contaminated by sin.

Christian, don’t ever compromise your witness by partaking of sin--no matter how nice a gesture it may seem to be. In a corrupt world, keep your “saltiness” for the Lord!

II. Christians are the “light of the world.”

Read Matthew 5:14-16.

In **John 8:12** Jesus said, “*I am the light of the world.*” *Christ*, and Christ alone, is able to give spiritual light to sin-blinded eyes. Apart from Christ, men’s hearts are filled with darkness. This raises a question, though: if *Christ alone* be the Light of the world, then why does He call *us who are saved* “*the light of the world*”? If only *He* can give spiritual light, why does He call *us* “light”? We are the ones who need to be enlightened by *Him!*

Well, to answer that question, it is helpful to know that there are two Greek words for “light.” First, there is the word *phos*. The word *phos* refers to a light producer, such as a flame, or the sun. The other word for “light” is *luchnon*. This refers to a light *bearer*, such as a lamp or a candle. In the passage we’ve just read, Jesus uses *both* these words to describe the citizens of His Kingdom.

First, Jesus calls us light “producers.” In **verse 14** Jesus says, “*Ye are the light* (the *phos*, or “light producer”) *of the world.*” Jesus calls us light “producers” in the sense that we are in Him, and He is in us. Our life is bound up in Christ; and since He is the true Light of the World, we, too, are called “the light of the world.” This describes our *position* in Christ.

However, the humbling reality is that we are merely *luchnoi*—light “bearers.” This is the word that Jesus used when He said, “*Neither do men light a candle (luchnon), and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick.*” Brethren, we are nothing but “lamps,” or “candles,” bearing the true light of Christ within us. There is nothing truly good in us: thus, whatever righteousness shines forth from our lives is actually Christ’s righteousness shining through us. Christ called John the Baptist a “*burning and a shining light* (a *luchnos*, or “lamp”)”; and that is what *we* should be, as well.

We see, then, the word “light” refers to two aspects of our Christian lives. First, we are “light producers” because of our union with Christ. This is our *position*. Secondly, we are light *bearers*. This is our *practice*—the way we actually live our lives. In position, we *are* “light” in Christ; but in our daily practice, we must *carry* the light of Christ to others. We must allow Christ to shine in our lives, as we submit to the control of the Holy Spirit.

Read Ephesians 5:1-13.

In **verse 8**, Paul says that there was a time in these Christians' lives when they "were... **darkness.**" This is an interesting statement, isn't it? There are many Scriptures where God says that lost people are "in" darkness: but here, Paul uses even stronger language. Paul says that before these Ephesians were saved, they "were darkness."

Is there a reason why Paul says that the Ephesian believers were once "**darkness**"? Yes, there is a reason. Paul's point is that *there is no spiritual light in the natural man!* Christian, before you and I were saved, *our entire being* was full of darkness. There was, within our being, absolutely no desire or inclination to submit to God. There was no desire to bow the knee to Him. Before we were saved, we were completely, utterly bent on going our own wicked way. This is why the Bible says, "**There is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God.**" Sinners don't seek after God: they seek their *own* way. Why? Because there is no light in man. Man does *not* love the light, nor does he come to the light. Man *recoils* from the Light. It is Jesus Christ who, in His mercy, comes seeking after *us*; and it is our responsibility to respond to His call of salvation.

With this in mind, please notice that Paul says next. After reminding the Ephesian Christians that they were once "darkness," he goes on to say that they were now "light in the Lord." Therefore, Paul says, they had a responsibility: and that responsibility was to "walk as children of light." The word "walk" refers to our lifestyle, or way of living. Paul is saying that *because* we are now saved, and *because* we have the *position* of being called "light in the Lord," our *practice* should now reflect our *position*. Because we are "light," we should *live* like children of light. People should be able to look at a Christian and see the holy light of Jesus shining forth from his life.

Now, this brings me to an important point. There is an important phrase in this verse, which we mustn't overlook. Paul says that we who are saved are "light in the Lord." Those words "in the Lord" are important. It is only because of the presence of *the Lord* in our lives that God can call us "light." Judicially, God sees me as "light" only because Christ's perfect righteousness has been imputed to my account, as though it were mine. In *position*, God sees me as "light" because of the saving work that Christ did for me on the cross. The reality, though, is that I am an unworthy sinner who has been saved only by the grace of God.

Christian, you must never forget that even though you are saved, there still is nothing good in *you*. Your old, sinful nature has not improved one bit. Paul wrote in **Romans 7:18**, "**For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh,) dwelleth no good thing.**" In our old, sinful nature, there is only darkness. Any light of holiness that shines forth from your life is not your *own* light: it is the light of the Lord Jesus Christ, who dwells within you.

Christian, it is extremely important that you remember this truth, so that you will not be deceived by false teachers. Our modern world is full of inspirational lecturers, speakers, and even pastors, who say that there is a "light of divinity" in all of us—that we are all "part of God." A New Age teacher would take Jesus' words, "**Ye are the light of the world,**" and would say, "See? Jesus said that you have a spark of divinity! Jesus said that you have the light of natural goodness in you. You simply need to recognise this fact, and know that you are god!" One of the foremost New Agers of our time, Oprah Winfrey, has been *enormously* successful in pushing this devilish doctrine all over the world. For example, during one of Oprah Winfrey's "Supersoul Sessions," a musician named India Arie got up on the stage and sang a song called "I Am Light." In the song, India says that "I am not the mistakes that I

have made.” In other words, she is denying that she is really a sinner. She is saying, “My mistakes (what the Bible calls “sins”) are not the real me.” Instead, she says, “I am light.”

Now, make no mistake about it: when India says “I am not the mistakes that I have made,” and when she says “I am light,” she is *not* speaking in any biblical sense. She is *not* saying that her sins have been blotted out by the blood of Jesus Christ. She makes no mention of salvation through the cross of Jesus. By no means is India saying that she has received the imputed righteousness of Jesus Christ, so that the Father can now judicially see her as having the righteousness of His Son. She means nothing of the sort! She is not saying that she is “**light in the Lord**”; she is saying that she, *in and of herself*, is “light.” She is saying that she is naturally a good person, and that she is *god!* In the last verse of the song, India comes out into her full New-Age colours when she says, “I am divinity defined, I am the god on the inside, I am a star, a piece of it all: I, I, am light.”

Do you see why it is important to understand what Paul is talking about here? Satan knows how to twist Scripture to make it seem to say something precisely the opposite of its true meaning. We’d better find out what *God* means when He says, “You are light in the Lord.”

So, what *does* Paul mean when he says, “**Now are ye light in the Lord**”? He is saying that on the day when you were saved, you were brought into a relationship with Him. You are now *identified* with Christ. You are “in Christ,” and Christ lives “in you.” His divine, indwelling presence in you is permanent. Christ is the Light of the World; and He has now made His abode in you. It is in *this* sense that you are called “**light in the Lord.**”

If you are saved, you are no longer called “**darkness**”: you are called “**light in the Lord.**” However, you must remember that you are, in reality, merely a lamp that bears the Light. Jesus said, “**I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life.**” The moment you believed on Christ, the light of His presence was placed in you. You now “**have**” the Light of life, Jesus Christ. You are like a little clay lamp, with oil in it (such as they used in the first century). You are the lamp; and the oil and the flame are the indwelling Godhead. Let’s look at some Scriptures which talk about this.

Read John 1:1-9 and 5:33-35.

In **John 1**, we are told that John the Baptist was *not* the *phos* (the Light). *Christ* was the Light; and John was sent to bear witness of the light. In **John 5:35**, Jesus said that John the Baptist was “**a burning and a shining light.**” The word for “**light**” in **John 5:35** is *luchnos*. Jesus is saying that John was merely a *lamp*, and that the Holy Spirit, who dwelt in John, was the true *Light* that shone forth from John. Let’s look at another Scripture.

Read Luke 12:35.

In this verse, Jesus commands His disciples to “Keep your lights burning!” Which word for “light” is Jesus using, though? He is using the word *luchnos*. Jesus is saying that believers are merely lamps, bearing the Light of the Spirit of God.

Putting all these verses together, then, we find that Jesus’ message is clear: we are the “**light of the world**”—but only because the *true* Light of the world, Jesus Christ, has entered into union with us. The reality is that we, in ourselves, are only *luchnoi*—lamps.

Christian, any true light that shines forth from your life does not actually come from you; it is Christ who dwells within you. Now, it may *appear*, to others, that it is *your own* goodness which is shining forth from your life. (A lost man once told me, “You seem to have a warm

‘glow’ about you.”) However, don’t fool yourself. It isn’t *your own* righteousness that others are seeing; it is Christ’s righteousness working in you, *as you submit to Him*. When you *stop* submitting to the Spirit of God, you will, by default, think and act according to the old fleshly way. Christ does not ever *leave* you, nor forsake you (praise God!); however, whenever you stop submitting to the Holy Spirit, Christ’s Light is *hidden*, just as a flame is hidden under a bushel. Don’t hide the Light of Christ, Christian. Walk as a child of Light!

In a sermon by Pastor H.A. Ironside years ago, Ironside told this story:

“A lady said to me some time ago, mentioning a certain servant of Christ, ‘Did you ever know Mr. So-and-So?’ ‘Oh, yes,’ I said, ‘I knew him well.’ ‘Well,’ she said, ‘you know, we had him in our home for a month, and his very presence there seemed to change everything for us. Why, there was such a godliness about [him], piety without long-facedness, holiness without morbidity. Our children simply loved him; and yet, there was such intense godliness, that soon the little things they used to do and say carelessly, dropped away. They did not like to say in his presence what they would when he was not there. They did not like to do, when he was looking, the things that ordinarily they would do with utter indifference. The effect of his presence in our home was simply wonderful; and yet, he never reproved anybody by word of mouth for anything they did...he manifested the life, and the life was the light.’”

This account reminds me of the time when the Ark of the Covenant was kept in the house of a man named Obed-Edom. Before we close this morning, let’s read that Scripture.

Read 2 Samuel 6:1-12.

During the three months when the Ark of the covenant was in the house of Obed-Edom, God greatly blessed his home, and caused him to prosper. Now, why did the presence of a golden box cause Obed-Edom’s house to be blessed? Was the Ark some kind of “magic charm”? No, it was not. You see, it wasn’t the *Ark itself* that brought blessing to Obed-Edom’s house: it was the *presence of God in his house* that brought blessing. Remember, the Ark was the place where God manifested His presence on earth. The mercy seat on the lid of the Ark was God’s symbolic “throne” on earth. Think about that for a minute! Imagine if the Ark of the Covenant were sitting in a corner of *your* house: and you knew that that supernatural light hovering over the lid of the Ark, and lighting up your house, was the presence of God Himself! Would the visible presence of God in your house cause you to think twice about sinning? Do you think your prayer life might become more earnest because you knew that God was right there in the room, and that He was watching you? It would probably make a *huge* difference in the way you live, wouldn’t it? Obed-Edom’s house prospered because *the realisation that God was right there* caused Obed-Edom and his family to walk more closely with the Lord; and as they walked closely with the Lord, God blessed them.

Perhaps you are thinking, “Pastor, it would be so much easier for me to live for the Lord if I could *see* God’s visible presence in the room.” However, you don’t *need* to see God’s presence. If you have been saved, God isn’t merely in a corner of the room: He actually *lives inside you*, all the time! This realisation *should* make a difference in the way you live your life. You are the light of the world: so walk as children of light!

Conclusion: As Jesus preached the Sermon on the Mount, He was speaking to His true followers; and though these people were saved, they did not yet have the privilege of being *indwelt* by the Holy Spirit. The Spirit was with them, and by them, and near them—but not *in* them (yet). Yet, they were able, by the

power of the Holy Spirit, to be “salt” and “light” for the Lord. How much more do *we* now have the power to be “salt” and “light,” when the Spirit is *in* us all the time! Christian, you are a citizen of the Kingdom of Heaven. One day, you will rule and reign with Christ in His Kingdom, for 1,000 glorious years. Until then, though, you have work to do for the Lord. Be salt and light for Him! **If you are not sure that you will be in that Kingdom**, please realise that trying to be holy won’t save you. Jesus took your sins upon Himself on the cross, and paid for them in full, so that in exchange, you might receive His righteousness, and be accepted by God. In simple faith, *ask* Him to save you from all your sins, and to come into your heart, and be your Lord; and He will do it! He will then fill your soul with light!

ⁱ George Washington’s Mount Vernon: Salt Preservation, <https://www.mountvernon.org/the-estate-gardens/historic-trades/fisheries/salt-preservation>.

ⁱⁱ *Ibid.*

ⁱⁱⁱ *Ibid.*