

Matthew
The Salt of the Earth
Matthew 5:13
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Let me remind you of this, when God created the physical universe in which we live, He established it with laws that govern how it operates, laws like gravity. That's just a reality. You can accept it and thrive, or you can deny it and perish, but it's there, nonetheless. In the same way, God also established laws that govern what we could call, "The Moral Universe." There are laws that are inviolable laws that govern how things operate in this world that God created, morally speaking. For example, God created the law of sowing and reaping. You can, again, you can accept it and thrive, or you can deny it and perish, but it's still true, Galatians 6:7, "Whatever a man sows, this shall he also reap."

But this morning, we come to a passage in "The Sermon on the Mount" in which Jesus addresses another law of the moral universe. Let's call it "The Law of Influence." What exactly is influence? The Oxford Dictionary defines influence like this, 'It is an action exerted imperceptibly or by indirect means by one person on another so as to cause changes in conduct, etc.' In fact, our English word 'influence' actually comes from a Latin word that means 'to flow into,' in the sense that influence is really the reality that 'one life flows into another life and powerfully affects that life.' God Himself created this law of influence and the power of influence, the reality that you and I have incredible power to influence those around us. Now, influence is constant in our world, but it occurs or happens through four primary means, there are others, but these are "The Four Primary Means of Influence."

First of all, there is the influence that comes through "Genetics." We are influenced by the sin nature that we inherited from Adam and by some of the specific traits and qualities that we

inherited from our parents. Now, that's not a death sentence, it doesn't mean we have to be like our parents in every way. There's always God's grace that can change us, but nevertheless, we are influenced by genetics.

Secondly, we are influenced through “Proximity.” By simply being in physical proximity to another person, our lives can be profoundly influenced or affected. For example, it's not uncommon for there to be an innocent passenger in a car who is seriously injured or killed because of physical proximity to a drunk driver. Powerful effect can come from proximity.

Thirdly, we are influenced through “Teaching.” We're powerfully shaped and influenced by those that we accept and affirm as our teachers. We may do it deliberately or we may do it unintentionally simply by what we fill our minds with. But whoever you allow to teach you, whether it's somebody on TikTok or somebody on some other social media page, or whether it's a particular person on YouTube, who claims to be a teacher or a pastor or parents, we are influenced by the teaching of others. My own life has been forever shaped by the men under whose ministry I have sat and so has yours.

Fourthly, we are influenced through “Example,” that is, through moral example. I mean, all of us can think of those who have influenced us for good, right? We are who we are today because we bear the mark of their moral influence. Well, the same, sadly, is true of the power of evil influence. Proverbs 13:20 says, “He who walks with wise men will be wise, but the companion of fools will suffer harm.” 1 Corinthians 15:33 says, “Bad company corrupts good morals.”

There's a little saying in English that says, “One rotten apple spoils the barrel.” In other words, if you leave one rotten apple in the middle of a barrel of apples, the rottenness of that one apple, left unaddressed, will continue to spread and eventually cause rot in all of the apples in that

barrel. Scripture makes the same point with a different metaphor. The Bible often uses yeast or leaven to illustrate the power of negative influence. 1 Corinthians 5:6, a little yeast, “a little leaven leavens the whole lump *of dough*?” Those of you who bake understand that. Just a little spreads powerfully through that entire lump of dough. So, those are the four primary means of influence in our world.

Jesus is going to focus, in the paragraph we come to today, primarily on the last two of those, on the teaching to which we're exposed, the words that are spoken, and the example, the moral influence of others. So, today in “The Sermon on the Mount,” Jesus explains to us that, as His disciples, we can and should influence the world around us, the people in our lives. And He uses salt and light to describe the power of that influence. Let's read it together. Matthew, chapter 5, verse 13. These are our Lord's inspired words to us. He says:

You are the salt of the earth; but if the salt has become tasteless, how can it be made salty *again*? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled underfoot by men. You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden; nor does *anyone* light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house. Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven.

Now in these verses, Jesus explains, really, the purpose or the mission that God has given to every Christian, that He's given to you with regard to the world. And in one word, that mission is ‘influence.’ What Jesus teaches us in the verses we just read is that if we belong to His spiritual kingdom, then He has given us both the ability and the responsibility to powerfully influence the people in our lives.

Now before we study what Jesus is actually teaching here, I first want to step away and consider several “Popular, But Bad Ideas about Christian Influence.” These are common in Christian circles. First of all, here's the first bad idea, “The church can best influence unbelievers by *contextualization*.” What is *contextualization*? Well, the basic idea is that if the church caters to what unbelievers enjoy, then it will attract them, and will then be able to influence them. At first, this meant doing church services in such a way to make them more comfortable for unbelievers. Eventually, it meant actually designing the entire service for unbelievers. Today, it means those things, but it also means doing even bizarre things to increase church attendance and, therefore, hopefully, the church's influence. For example, many churches, now, will routinely play secular movie clips in their services. They'll even play secular songs in the service. There's a philosophy behind that; you need to understand that. The philosophy is “If we can make it comfortable for unbelievers, they'll come, and then we'll have the power to influence them.” Last Easter, a large, pragmatic church, in our community, focused their service more on the Masters Golf Tournament than on Jesus' resurrection. This theory, although well-intentioned, misunderstands how to reach and influence the world.

Another bad idea out there is that “The church can best influence the culture through *political action*.” Now again, let me say very clearly that Christians should vote, they should be good citizens, they should be a voice for righteousness—all of those things are true. But many Christians believe that they can exert the greatest influence on our culture if they focus on electing the right people. I've lived long enough to see this as round two of that. During the 70s, there was the “Moral Majority” where this was the theory and philosophy. And it was well-intentioned, but it failed, and it'll fail today because this is not what the New Testament teaches,

or the early church modeled. I challenge you, read the New Testament and find that anywhere in its pages.

Thirdly, another bad idea is that “The *main goal* of the believer's influence is to make our planet, our country, and our communities better places to live.” Now, the key word there is ‘main.’ Don't misunderstand, Jesus, Peter tells us in Acts 10:38, “went about doing good,” and so should we. That's why Christians, historically, build hospitals and have orphanages and care for people's needs, of course. But if that's our main goal, if that's what we're really committed to as the church, then it's really just like rearranging the deck chairs on the Titanic—the ship is going down. It's just temporary, and it's relatively unimportant in the light of eternity. As we're going to learn, especially with the metaphor of light, next week, Lord willing, the main goal of our influence is not to make the world a better place—it's evangelism!

Number four, here's another bad idea. “We shouldn't care about our influence on the world; we just need to focus on our own personal devotion to Jesus.” Just don't worry. That's not what Jesus says in the text we come to today. Those are all flawed ideas.

So what does the Bible say? What does Jesus say here? Well, in our text, Jesus gives two illustrations of our Christian influence. First of all, in verse 13, He says, “We are the salt of the earth.” And then in verses 14 to 16, He says, “We are the light of the world.” Now I love that because the primary images that Jesus uses here were simply ordinary things in every first century home—salt and small oil lamps. In fact, as Jesus was growing up as a boy, He witnessed his mother use salt in food preparation every day. And every night, He watched at twilight as Mary lit the oil lamps that illumined their home in the darkness. And He uses these two ordinary images in an incredibly powerful way.

Today, I want to just examine His first illustration, that of salt. Look at verse 13 again with me. Jesus says to us, “You are the salt of the earth; but if the salt has become tasteless, how can it be made salty *again*? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled underfoot by men.” Now Jesus' profound statement here has three important parts to it regarding “The Salt of the Earth,” and I want us to take it apart, and then we'll put it back together in the end.

So, let's start then by considering “The Picture Jesus Uses,” the picture Jesus uses. Before we can understand the point, we need to understand the picture. Verse 13, Jesus says, “You are the salt of the earth.” In Greek, the word ‘you’ is plural. You could say “you all” or “all of you.” It's also emphatic in Greek. Jesus said to his followers, “All of you and only you are the salt of the earth.” Now think about how extraordinary that statement is. Put yourself back in the first century, you're there in the crowd, and Jesus says to His followers, “You are the salt of the earth.” Jesus preached this sermon early in His ministry. He was surrounded by a huge crowd of curious people, but He made this statement to the twelve men that He had just chosen earlier that morning to be His Apostles, and to the slightly larger group of His followers who were gathered around Him. They were part of that large crowd of curiosity seekers. Those who were actually His followers were a small group of mostly farmers and merchants from the backwater region of Galilee. Probably a couple hundred at most because remember, even after the resurrection, only 500 gathered together in Galilee. So at this point, the number is undoubtedly less than that. And Jesus said to them, “You and you alone are the salt of the earth.”

Notice what he doesn't say. He doesn't say, “You are the salt of the nation Israel.” He says, “You are the salt of the earth.” Ours, whatever this means, is not a local mission but a global

mission. And notice Jesus doesn't say, "You ought to be the salt of the earth." He says, "You are the salt of the earth." Now the metaphor itself is an interesting one.

Take salt, I mean we use it every day, and yet, when's the last time you really thought about salt? It's a profound picture. Salt, or sodium chloride, is a fascinating mineral; it's actually a mineral. It's formed when the unstable metal sodium reacts with chlorine gas. It's the only family of rocks that you and I regularly eat. Salt was extremely important in the first century world. In fact, the very first great Roman road was the Via Salaria, which means "The Salt Road" that ran from Rome to the Adriatic Sea where salt was harvested. Salt is actually essential to your continued life. You see, all of our cells, every cell in your body contains a certain amount of salt. Or more precisely, it's salt in the form of dissolved electrolytes. And that dissolved salt, in every cell in your body, regulates the water content of your body. The salt in each of those cells has to be balanced with the liquid that surrounds the cell. If there's too much salt in each cell, then the cell dehydrates. And of course, when that happens system-wide, we know what happens to us physically. On the other hand, if there's not enough salt in each cell, then water can flow into the cell actually rupturing the cell wall. And this creates another issue. You can actually kill yourself; water can be poison if you drink too much of it, and you get rid of the salt that's necessary.

Now in the ancient world, it was obviously necessary for life itself just to sustain our bodies, but salt had three primary purposes in the ancient world. First of all, it was used as "A Seasoning for Food," just as it is today. In Job, Job was describing a time during the time of the Patriarchs, during the time of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, so think about this, 4,000 years ago, Job 6:6 says, "Can something tasteless be eaten without salt" (I say, "No! is the answer!" And he gives the perfect example.), or is there any taste in the white of an egg?" Who wants to eat an egg without

salt? Don't answer that; there may be a few of you that are troubled, but the rest of us normal people, we don't want it without salt.

Secondly, it was used as “A Cleanser or Antiseptic.” In Ezekiel 16, God is talking to Israel, and He's describing her as if she were a child who had been born and thrown out, that He had then taken to Himself. But He describes practices during the time of Ezekiel, so this is some 600 years before Christ, and He says this, Ezekiel 16:4, “As for your birth, on the day you were born, your navel cord was not cut (These were the normal practices.), nor were you washed with water for cleansing; you were not rubbed with salt or even wrapped in cloths.” You see, newborns were bathed, and then they were rubbed in salt as a kind of antiseptic to protect them, to cleanse them.

Thirdly, in the ancient world, salt was used, as it is even today, as “A Preservative.” I'll come back to that. But those uses of salt meant that salt was valuable and even listed at times with wine and oil as one of the staples of life. Jesus tells us in this picture that we are “the salt of the earth.” That's the picture.

Now secondly, let's consider “The Point Jesus Makes.” We've seen the picture, what does He mean, “You are the salt of the earth?” Both salt and light, I think you understand as Jesus uses them here, are metaphors. So let me remind you how a metaphor works. In English, when I was in seminary, I taught English on the undergrad level at the college I was a part of. And so let me just remind you what a metaphor is. In a metaphor, there is what grammarians would call ‘a topic,’ that is something you're talking about. And then there's ‘an image,’ it's the picture you use to describe that topic. And then there is ‘a point of similarity between the topic and the image.’ Let me give you an example. Jesus says of King Herod, “Go tell that fox.” That's a

metaphor. Now in that metaphor, Herod is the topic, he's the one we're talking about. Fox is the image; it's the picture that He's using to describe Herod. So in looking at a metaphor, you ask yourself, "What's the point of similarity? What's the point of similarity between Herod and a fox?" It's pretty clear and obvious in that case. Both of them were sly, cunning, crafty, deceitful. It's important to remember that a metaphor is often used in different ways in Scripture. So when you come to a metaphor, don't think it's always that. A lot of Christians see the word 'yeast' and because it's used as evil in some places, everywhere they see it, they think it's evil. No, Jesus uses the word 'yeast' positively in Matthew 13, as we'll see in the future, to describe the silent but powerful growth of His spiritual kingdom. It spreads through the world like yeast does through a piece of dough. It's positive in that context.

The same is true with the metaphor of salt; it's not the same thing every place it occurs. There are different points of similarity depending on the context. For example, in Luke 14, it refers to the permanence of discipleship. In Mark 9, verses 49 and 50, Jesus uses salt to make three entirely different lessons in two verses. So it doesn't always mean the same thing. So the question here in our text, let's come back to Matthew 5, verse 13, the question is this, "In this text, what is the point of similarity between believers and salt?" What is Jesus saying when He says, "You are the salt of the earth?" What's the quality that salt and Christians both share? I just told you the three primary uses. I think there may be nuances of all three of them, but without question, Jesus' main point here is salt as a preservative because that's, by far, the most common use of salt in the ancient world.

Before refrigeration, the only way to keep meat from spoiling, shortly after the animal was killed, was by rubbing salt into the meat or by soaking the meat in a brine mixture of salt. How did that help? Well, when you added salt to that fresh piece of meat, it pulled out the moisture,

including the blood, through the process of osmosis. And it actually changed the structure of the protein that firmed up the meat and made it more impervious to bacterial growth—that's what the salt did. Later then, when you were ready to eat that piece of meat that had been heavily salted, you just put it back in water. You soak it in water and reverse osmosis pulled the salt out, and made it edible again, and then you could cook it and enjoy the meal. So salt, then, was used mostly in the ancient world to keep meat and food from rotting. Jesus calls us salt here to point to the power of our preserving, purifying influence in the world and specifically with the people in our lives.

Now think about this for a moment. If you're to be salt to keep rot down, what is Jesus saying about the world around you? What is He saying about the people, He's talking about people here, what is He saying about the people around us who are not in Christ? “They are decaying; there is rot.” Christians, we combat the moral and spiritual decay around us. Ken Hughes puts it, I think, very well in his commentary, when he writes this: “Christians exert an incalculable influence on society. Their mere presence reduces crime, restrains ethical corruption, promotes honesty, quickens the conscience, and elevates the general moral atmosphere. Their absence will allow unbelievable depths of depravity.”

You say, “Wow, how do we do that? How do we exert that kind of influence?” And the answer is by simply being what Christians are, and doing what Christians do, and speaking like Christians speak. Tasker writes this, “We are called to be a moral disinfectant in the world where moral standards are low, constantly changing, or non-existent. Christians can discharge this function only if they themselves retain their virtue.” John Stott puts it this way, he says, “Christian saltiness is Christian character as depicted in the Beatitudes, committed Christian discipleship exemplified in both deed and word.” That's how you're salt. D.A. Carson similarly

says, “Jesus' disciples are to act as a preservative in the world by conforming to kingdom norms.” In other words, by living out this sermon, by being what Jesus describes in this sermon.

Now I mentioned several qualities of salt, but there's another quality that factors in here that's very important. One of the amazing qualities of salt is its permanence. Do you realize you can't destroy salt? If you try to burn it, you dissolve the salt, but it doesn't go away. If you put enough salt on the fire, it puts the fire out. If you dissolve salt in water, then all that happens is that the sodium and chloride ions separate, but you're not getting rid of the salt because all you have to do is take out the water and there's your salt. So Jesus said to His Disciples and to us, let's put this in context, here's the point. Jesus said to His Disciples then and to us today, “You and you alone are permanently the moral preservative in the lives of the people around you.”

Thirdly, back in our text, we've seen “The Picture” Jesus uses, “The Point” Jesus makes.

Thirdly, there's “The Peril Jesus Exposes” because He goes on to give us a warning. Verse 13, “You are the salt of the earth, but if the salt has become tasteless, how can it be made salty *again*?” Or He puts it differently in Mark 9:50; it says, “If the salt becomes unsalty with what will you make it salty *again*?” You say, “Wait a minute Tom, I thought you just said that salt is permanent. How can it be made or become unsalty?” And the answer is pure salt can't. But there were two problems with salt in the first century. First of all, the Dead Sea, which was one of the main sources of salt in the land of Israel in the first century, produced bad salt. If you took the water from the Dead Sea, there was a lot of salt, but it was mixed with gypsum and other minerals. So in the process of mining those deposits or evaporating the water that you collected from the Dead Sea, the real salt could leach out, and you were left with a lot of gypsum and other minerals, but very little real salt. And so it became tasteless or lost its distinctiveness, not because salt can, but because it wasn't real salt.

Secondly, another problem in the first century, was salt was valuable and that created issues. In fact, salt was so valuable that, at times, Roman soldiers were given an allowance specifically to buy salt. That was called their 'solarium,' from which we get our word 'salary.' It was their salt payment. One to two gallons of salt in the first century, one to two gallons, cost a few days' wages. So unscrupulous merchants, just like they would do today, saw an opportunity. Let's just take the real pure salt, and let's mix it with other substances to pad our profits. Now, if the salt that you bought, somehow became tasteless or unsalted because it either wasn't salt or it was mixed with something else, Jesus asked, "How can it be made salty again?" Verse 13, "It is no longer good for anything." Literally, the Greek text says, "It has power for nothing." But you know the problem with salt that's not really good salt is that it's not only useless, it's dangerous because most foods that spoil can be recycled; they can be put in the garden, or they can be put in a compost bin, but not contaminated salt. Because if you put it in the garden, it still has enough salt to kill all the plants. Or if you put it in the compost bin, it's going to kill the bacteria that make the whole compost process work. There's only one thing you can do with worthless salt, verse 13, "It is no longer good for anything except (Here's the one exception.), to be thrown out and specifically trampled underfoot by men." In other words, Jesus says, "Listen, here's what you can do with worthless salt, just throw it in the road or throw it on a path because at least it'll kill the weeds that are prone to grow there, and it won't harm anything else."

Now, Jesus is giving us a serious warning here. Jesus is warning us, as His followers, that what happened with real salt in the first century can happen to us who claim to be His followers.

There are two warnings Jesus gives here. First of all, He warns us that "The sin in our lives reduces our preserving influence." Just like those unscrupulous merchants would add to the salt other things, other substances, if we, that are supposed to be pure salt, allow sin into our lives, it

becomes mixed, and it loses its power to preserve. We lose our power to preserve, to be a preserving influence in the world around us. This happens through sin in our lives, it happens through compromise, it happens through conformity to the world; and we can become more like the rot around us than the salt that we are.

Christians, if we live, think, and talk so much like unbelievers that it's hard to tell any difference, then we lose our preserving influence. Let me ask you this morning honestly, ask your own heart, "Is that you? Have you allowed patterns of sin in your life that have caused you to see your preserving influence seriously reduced? Do the people in your home see you reflect Jesus Christ? Do the people in your workplace, in the school you go to, in your neighborhood, in the clubs you belong to, do they see your distinctiveness?" Do they, I'm not talking about weird here, I'm talking about being like Jesus. Do they see that? The word, by the way, that's translated "become tasteless" in our text, occurs four times in the New Testament. Twice, describing salt that loses that distinctiveness. The other two times, this same word means and is translated 'to become foolish.' It's a word from which we get our word in that family of 'moronic,' it's foolish. I think Jesus is likely using a play on words. He's saying, "Those disciples, those who claim to be My disciples, who no longer function as salt, they're not only worthless, they are foolish."

There's another even more serious peril or danger that Jesus warns us of here, and that is "The lack of preserving influence proves that we're not Jesus' followers." You see, we may look like salt, but we may just be a cheap substitute. And what does Jesus say happens to salt that isn't salt? "It's thrown out." It's thrown out because it's good for nothing. Do you have a preserving influence on the lives of the people around you? Do you look just like the unbelievers around you? Or as you live and work and you're home and you're in your job, in your school, in all of

the contexts in which you interact with unbelievers, do you maintain the distinctiveness that is a moral likeness to Jesus Christ, or do you just look like everybody else around you? Jesus says, “If you're a true Christian, you are salt.” You know what that means? It means that if you're not salt, you're not a real Christian. If you look like everybody around you, if you think like all the unbelievers in your life, if you crave the same things they crave, if you talk like they talk, if you punctuate your speech with foulness and cursing and lies and on and on it goes, if the way you act and live doesn't look like Jesus but looks more like the world around you, then you're not salt, and that means you're not a Christian. What you need to do today is truly repent of your sins, and you need to believe in Jesus Christ, and you need to plead with Him to change you, to give you what He called the new birth, where He makes you all over again, gives you, as it were, a fresh spiritual start where you now can know Him, be forgiven of your sins, have a relationship with Him. You need to believe and trust solely in His perfect life, in His substitutionary death, in which He purchased the forgiveness before God, for everyone who would ever believe in Him and His resurrection. We sang it together this morning, “On the cross,” Jesus said “It is finished.” On the third day when God raised Him from the dead, God said, “It is finished.” You need to put your trust in Jesus to change you.

So how, as Christians, most of us here are believers, “How Can You and I Practically Be Salt?” Jesus says, “You are the salt.” How can we do this? How can we live out this mission? How can we be a preservative in our homes, our communities, our workplaces, our schools? How can we fulfill this mission that God has given to us? Let me give you several ways, just very practically.

Number one, “Be in the world.” Turn with me to John 17, Jesus makes this point so powerfully in the prayer that He prayed the night before His crucifixion. This is really “The Lord's Prayer.” The one we'll get to in Matthew 6 is really “The Disciples' Prayer.” This is His prayer, and I

want you to see how clear He makes this. John 17, and look at verse 14, Jesus is praying, and He says to the Father:

Father...I have given them Your word; and the world has hated them, because they are not of the world (I want you to notice the prepositions—They are not of the world.) even as I am not of the world. I do not ask You to take them out of the world, but to keep them from the evil *one*. They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. (Now drop down to verse 18. However, even though that's true.)...As You sent me into the world, I also have sent them into the world (We're not of the world, but we've been sent, like Jesus, into the world. For what purpose? Look at verse 21, end of verse 21.)...so that the world may believe that You sent Me.

You see, brothers and sisters, for salt to fulfill its mission, it can't stay in the pantry; it has to be among the rottenness. You can't be the salt of the earth if you just want to stay in the saltshaker. It might be more comfortable, and we all enjoy being with our brothers and sisters in Christ. The point here is, “Christian, don't intentionally isolate yourself from unbelievers. Don't run from that. Be in the world.” We've been sent into the world. Our Lord never isolated Himself from unbelievers. You and I need to look for opportunities and even make opportunities. Be in the world.

Number two, you say, “What do I do when I'm in the world?” Here it is. “Be who you are in Jesus Christ.” Look at verse 17 of John 17, here's who you are. Jesus prays for believers, “Father...sanctify them (Make them increasingly holy, increasingly like Me.) in truth (by means of the truth); Your word is truth.” In other words, to be salt in the world, simply be who you are;

be what God has made you. Be increasingly like Jesus Christ, set apart from your sin, and you'll be salt.

Both of these metaphors, salt and light, describe what God has done. I mean, God is the one who made us salt, and God is the one who made us light. It's what He's done. In addition, think about the two metaphors. Somebody has to add the salt to the meat, and somebody has to light the lamp. In both cases, God has done this. He intentionally left you in the world for this reason. Just as Jesus sent the disciples into the world, He sent you into the world. That's why He didn't take you to heaven the moment He saved you. I mean, think about it, everything else we do in this world, after we were saved, we'll do better in heaven. Our praise will be better, our worship will be better, we'll be perfectly like Jesus Christ, on and on it goes. Everything will be better in heaven, except for one thing you can't do in heaven, and that is be an influence on the unbelievers around you. Be salt on the part of this rotting globe where Jesus has placed you. Be who He made you in Christ, wherever He has put you.

Number three, "Live out the Beatitudes." You see, if you'll just live out, in context, I think this is the main point, if you'll just live out what we just studied in the Beatitudes, you will be salt. Look at verse 3, if instead of being proud, arrogant, self-assured, you are "poor in spirit" before God, you'll be salt. Verse 4, if instead of laughing at sin, yours and the sins of others, you actually "mourn" over it, you're going to be salt. Verse 5, if instead of complaining about your circumstances, this is the Godward side of this one, you submit yourself to God's providence in your life, you're going to be salt; the human side of verse 5, if instead of being harsh with the people around you, you're "gentle" and gracious, oh boy, you are really going to be salt in this world. Verse 6, if instead of longing for all the wrong and sinful things the people around you long for, you "hunger and thirst" to be and to do what's right, you're going to be salt. Verse 7, if

instead of being unmoved by the trouble of others and just selfishly focusing on your own troubles, you are truly “merciful,” you're truly compassionate with others, you're going to be salt. Verse 8, if instead of having a heart that loves what's dirty like the people around you, you instead love and pursue “purity” in your heart and in your life, you're going to be salt. Verse 9, if instead of being bitter and angry and stirring up conflicts in your life, you are a “peacemaker,” you're going to be salt. You see, Christian, what I want you to see is if you will live like this, you will be salt.

Number four, “Live a life of righteousness in obedience to Jesus Christ.” In other words, be a real disciple. Study what Jesus says in this sermon, and by His grace, by the power of His Spirit, seek to live this out, and you're going to be salt. If you're not given over to lust, if you're not given over to anger, if you speak the truth, and you don't include all these oaths to prove to people you're telling the truth, but you just keep your word, on and on it goes, you're going to be salt. Be honest in your everyday interactions at your job, in your school, with your neighbors, with cashiers, servers, plumbers, just be honest and they'll be shocked. Demonstrate a genuine respect for all others around you as those made in the image of God, even if they differ from you dramatically in what they believe, treat them with respect as those made in the image of God. Demonstrate a genuine respect for those in human authority by doing what the authority asks you to do, unless they're asking you to do something that's contrary to God's Word, and do it with joy. Don't affirm or enjoy those things, that in your speech or your mind or your entertainment, that God hates. Don't enjoy and celebrate those things. Don't approve them but expose them, Ephesians 5:11.

Number five, “Don't lose your distinctive character.” Don't become mixed with the impurities in the world around you. Don't try to be like the unbelievers around you. Don't harbor sin in your

life. Keep short accounts with God. When you sin, and we all sin, when you sin, stop yourself immediately, plead for the Lord's forgiveness, and ask Him for the determination and resolve to turn from that sin. Don't lie there in your sin. Get up. You know, Lloyd-Jones used to describe it this way, he said, "A lot of Christians, they're climbing the mountain toward spiritual maturity, and they fall down, they assume that they just slid all the way to the bottom again." No, you just fell on the mountainside, get up and keep journeying on toward spiritual maturity and holiness. Don't lose your distinctive character.

Number six, and in some ways this may be the most important of all, "Be faithful to speak the truth of God's Word and His Gospel." You see, not only are we salt by how we live, we are salt by what we say. Turn over to Colossians; Colossians, chapter 4, look at verse 5, Paul writes, "Conduct yourselves with wisdom toward outsiders." He means unbelievers, so here we're talking about how you interact with unbelievers. Conduct yourselves with wisdom toward unbelievers, "making the most of the opportunity." So be wise, seize opportunities. How do you do that? Verse 6, "Let your speech," he's going to talk about salt in our speech, speech can be salt. How? Look at what he says, "Let your speech always be with grace." Now obviously, that means generally, be gracious in how you say, what you say, but how can you most minister grace to the unbelievers in your life? By telling them of the grace of God in Jesus Christ. And then he goes on to say, "*as though* seasoned with salt." You'll notice "*as though*" is added by our translators, literally, it says, "Let your speech be seasoned with salt." In other words, your speech is a preservative. How do you do that? Speak God's truth, speak the Gospel, just be a Christian.

You see what happens with us as believers, let's just be honest, with believers, we talk one way, we interact one way, we get on the job, we get at school, and it's like we're ashamed of those

things, and we just don't act like Christians—just be a Christian! Talk like you normally talk with believers, with unbelievers, I mean, obviously you have to temper that, and you have to be wise, but don't be somebody else. If you normally talk about God's providence in your life, express that in ways the unbeliever around you can understand. Be a Christian. “Let your speech be seasoned with the salt of God's truth, and certainly the Gospel.” You know, I think our Lord, and I know in fact, our Lord is the perfect illustration of being the salt of the earth. Think about it, Jesus was in the world, but He was always the One influencing and never the one being influenced. The world never changed Him. He was consistently the same in every interaction, and that's what we're called to be. He was always a preserving influence in His words and in His actions. In fact, Jesus could say, as He says with light, you remember He says, “I am the light of the world.” Jesus could also say, “I am the salt of the earth.” But then He turns right around and says, Christian, “You are the salt of the earth.” May God help us to fulfill our mission as He did.

Let's pray together. Father, even as we study this passage, we have to come seeking Your forgiveness. Lord, too often, we almost act ashamed of Christ. We're almost afraid to talk like Christians, to interact like Christians, to be distinctive. Father, don't let us lose our distinctiveness. Help us to be like Jesus in how we think, in how we speak, in how we act, and in so doing, be the salt of the earth as He Himself was.

And Father, I pray for those here this morning who have taken a serious look at themselves in the mirror of Your Word and perhaps have come to realize that they came in here thinking they were a Christian, but there's really no difference in how they think, speak, what they desire, what they love, how they live than the unbelievers around them. Lord, help them to see today the reality that they're not a Christian at all. But Father, thank You that you are gracious, even as we read in Ephesians 2 this morning, that You save those who come to You by faith. May this

be the day they repent of their sins and put their faith in You, and Your Son, and You change them and You make them salt where before they've been only rottenness. Lord, thank You for your grace. We pray that You would do this for Your Son, in whose name we pray. Amen.