

# Being Salt and Light

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[ 0 : 0 0 ] We've all been in a situation where people who are doing bad things or bad things are happening, and if you did or said anything about it or stuck your head out in any way, you just know that your intervention wouldn't be welcome.

Bad situation, and someone's doing something bad, and you're seeing it, and you just know that if you had to say anything, you're not going to be welcome.

No one wants that. They want you to join them, not to stand against them. So maybe you can remember to your school days where kids are bullying another kid, and you know that you can't stick your hand up and go and ask the teacher for help because just now they're going to come and bully you.

It's expected for you to go along with the crowd and not be any different to what's happening. Maybe at work you've noticed that other workers are taking things that belong to the company.

Maybe they're coming in late regularly or leaving early. Maybe they know that feeling. They can see that you know that they're doing it. And without even saying a word, you know that you're not meant to say anything.

[ 1 : 0 7 ] It's expected that you don't say anything. Just go along with the crowd. Maybe you've had online discussions, especially around issues of topics like sexuality and gender, and it's very much expected for you to go along with the crowd and not call out people for things that they've done wrong or that you think is wrong.

Just give your own opinion. It can be really hard to go against what everyone else says and does. It's really difficult to stand out and to be different.

It's hard to be a good influence in a world gone bad, but in today's lesson, Jesus gives us two very good reasons why we do need to be different.

So we're going to listen carefully to why we should be different in a world, and although it's difficult, Jesus gives us two good reasons why we should be different. The first is he wants us to be salt to a rotting world.

He wants his people to be salt to a rotting world. So just notice his first point that he makes. He's talking to the disciples that are gathered around. You, plural, you guys who are listening to me, who have been changed by me, you're the salt of the earth.

[ 2 : 3 0 ] But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It's no longer good for anything except to be thrown out and trampled by men.

So as the salt of the earth, Christians get to save the world from dying. Being salt is like giving life to the world.

It stops it from dying and makes it enjoyable. In the ancient world, salt was very valuable. It was used as a payment method.

In fact, we get the word salary comes from the word salt. Roman legionaries used to be paid by salt. And it's valuable because it's the only agent that could stop meat from going rotten and being unusable in the ancient world.

It made inedible food edible. In fact, it still does. We know all too well what happens when our refrigerators don't work after a few hours, thanks to ESCOM.

[ 3 : 34 ] And it might be handy to have a pile of salt at home these days. But salt stops meat from going off, from getting rotten.

And it makes unedible food edible. A friend of mine remembers trying to feed vegetables to his kids, young kids, four, five, and six, and they just burst into tears and they took their first bite.

It must have been Brussels sprouts or beans or something. And they just couldn't eat it until he realized he hadn't put any salt on it. And once he put salt on it, then it was chow time.

Then they could take it. They could eat it and get sustenance. And so this image of salt, it's something that has an effect that is both life-giving and life-enhancing.

You may recall the last time you ate a piece of rotten meat and what that does to your insides. It's pretty drastic. Salt saves you from getting really, really sick.

[ 4 : 44 ] And it makes bad things taste nice. Salt is both life-giving and life-enhancing. And so Jesus is saying that he wants his people to be like salt that are both life-giving and life-enhancing.

But how are we to be salty? It doesn't say in the passage here. It just says you are to be salty. How are we to be salty? Well, it might not be what you think.

The context for salt is not primarily in the culture, but in the Bible, specifically in the Old Testament. You've got to go quite far back in the Bible to work out what salt is.

But these are the things that would have been rattling around the disciples' minds when they heard Jesus saying that you are salt. And that's because salt is used to describe God's covenant with his people in a number of places in the Old Testament.

But I'm just going to show you one from 2 Chronicles 13. That's why God is talking to the kings. Well, the prophet is talking to the kings. He says, Don't you know that the Lord, the God of Israel, has given the kingship of Israel to David and his descendants forever by a covenant of salt?

[ 5 : 51 ] That's an interesting phrase. A covenant of salt. So that when Jesus says, You are the salt of the earth, He's saying you are the covenant people of God.

And in Jesus' context, because we're in the New Testament, You are the new covenant people of God. The people that are taking his life-giving blessings and live them out in a world that is busy dying.

It's not necessarily the blessings of material things only, or that can mean that. To be salt is to share the blessings that God has given you. But it's the blessings of a character transformed by Jesus.

And we saw some of those last time. We should still be in Matthew 5 and just have a look at the Beatitudes that we looked at last week. Life-giving blessings are meant to pour through Jesus' people into the world.

And by doing that, because they belong to him, because they're in covenant with him, they will change the world from going bad. So Matthew 5, verse 5, Blessed are the meek.

[ 7 : 02 ] That's a life-giving blessing. It doesn't sound or feel like it sometimes, but it is. Blessed are the merciful. Verse 7, And then blessed are the peacemakers.

Blessed are the meek. Blessed are the merciful. Blessed are the peacemakers. There's others, but those are ones specifically that deal with the outside world. And how we relate to people. And so if you're going to be salty, if you're going to be the salt of the earth, if you're going to be in covenant with Jesus, this is the kind of life-giving, salty blessing that we can give to the world.

Now, too often Christians want to be salty in calling out and confronting sin. And to be honest, we do need to do that sometimes. So often you'll hear, you're the salt of the earth, meaning that we've got to save the earth from being sinful.

And to do that, we've got to be really salty and tell the world what's going on and why they're bad and what they should and shouldn't do. But how salty are you compared to the markers in Matthew 5 and the Beatitudes to being meek, to being merciful, and to being a peacemaker?

So just be careful that when you think of yourself as a Christian, that the only way you can think of being salty is by calling out sin.

[ 8 : 36 ] And then the other problem that Christians often have is of pouring way too much salt on the wound that they see that's going rotten. You know, if they look at the world and say, oh, no, that looks really rotten. Whatever they're doing, that doesn't look right.

I need to put some salt on it. And then they come with bucket loads of salt on that problem. And it's very painful when you pour lots of salt. The salt can heal wounds.

You know, if you've had cuts, you could take a dip in the sea. It's a bit stingy, but it really helps. But if you take a whole bucket load of salt and rub it in the wounds, it'll heal, maybe, but it'll probably make it worse.

So be careful that when you're salty, you don't just pour bucket loads of salt into people's wounds and burn them.

And the person you're trying to help is never going to come back again. Maybe we need to aim at having a more healing effect by living out the covenant blessings of meekness and mercy and peace.

[ 9 : 42 ] Salt can stop the world from going bad, but it can also enhance it and heal the wounds that people have. But there is a warning in what Jesus is saying, that he wants you to be salty.

On one side, you can be too salty, and then Jesus says, no, but I want you to be careful of not being salty enough. If you're no different from the world, and you're too bland, or you've taken pure salt that can do something, and you've mixed it with stuff, with anything really, it loses its effectiveness.

It can't do its job. It doesn't stop meat from going off. It doesn't make food taste nice, and it doesn't heal. If you're not salty enough, if you're too bland, Jesus got a warning.

You must be careful of being rejected by him and being thrown out of the covenant. Not being useful to the cause of the kingdom can cause you to be thrown out and trampled on.

Now, that's quite hectic. You don't often hear that about Jesus. You think, oh, but would Jesus really do that? Well, remember, Jesus is speaking to Jews, and Jews would know all too well about not being salty enough, about not being different enough from the world around them.

[ 11 : 12 ] In fact, looking and sounding and tasting very much like the world around them, and God sending warning after warning after warning saying you need to be more salty, you need to be more like my covenant people, not like the world out there, and when they don't listen and they refuse to listen, God comes down in judgment, and they get trampled on by foreigners.

God sends invading armies, takes his people captive, and they're no longer the salt of the earth. In fact, the Greek word for earth there can be translated salt of the land, so that they get, there's an interesting phrase in the Old Testament, in Numbers, where God says, you know, if you keep on sinning, the land itself, where you're meant to be, is going to vomit you out.

Numbers 18. If you continue sinning, the land itself, you can't be the salt of the land if you're not in the land, because the land, because of your sin, because you're no different from the world out there, is going to chuck you out.

Plenty of warning for God's people in the Old Testament, when they're not being distinctive enough, when they're compromised, when they look and sound and taste like the world around them. They become useless for God's kingdom purposes, and quite literally trampled underfoot.

It's a sober warning. You think, okay, well, that's the Old Testament. I mean, Jesus, maybe he's just being, you know, a bit over the top, just to scare the people here.

[ 12 : 49 ] He wouldn't really carry this out. Remember, this is not intended for individuals. It's for the people as a whole. It could be taken as a warning for the people of Israel.

Jesus, as their king, as their prophet, is speaking to his disciples, but through his disciples, he's speaking to the people, and you could read it as he's giving them, in a sense, not in this verse, but in his ministry, he's giving the people of Israel, the people of God, one last chance to listen to their king and to be the people of the covenant they're meant to be, and they need to start listening carefully.

In fact, the whole Sermon on the Mount is about listening carefully and then doing what he says, and there's dire consequences if you don't. In fact, later on in the Sermon on the Mount, in Matthew 7, verse 19, Jesus talks about those who bear fruit, and he says this, every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.

Every tree that doesn't bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. So plenty of good reasons there to be distinctive, to have an influence in the world, not to let the world influence you, because if you do that, you get to save it, you give it life, you give it flavor, you can heal it, and if you don't do that, if you look too much like the world, you have no, there's no difference between you and the world, well then, he takes the salt that you've got, and just throws it away.

You would do the same. If you've got salt that's contaminated, you would do the same. You just throw it out. You can't use it. As a Christian, the first thing that Jesus wants us to be is salt for the world, but it comes with a bit of a warning.

[ 14 : 47 ] Christians need to be distinct, and people that are not too salty, don't pour, be careful of pouring too much salt into the problems of this world, but be careful of being too bland, but be salt that heals and gives life according to the things you see in the Sermon on the Mount.

The Beatitudes that we've seen, there's going to be more life-giving words and ways of life as we travel through the Sermon on the Mount. Be like that.

Be salt that heals and gives life, not just stopping death and stopping the world from getting more and more rotten. Do that, but don't only be that.

But, it would be, section would be incomplete if we only focus on being salt because there's a problem in the world that only being light can fix.

Only being light can fix. And here, Jesus, instead of giving a warning, gives us a wonderful promise. And so, the next thing that Jesus wants his people to be is light, being light to a world lost in darkness.

[ 15 : 59 ] Being light to a world lost in darkness. So, verse 14, you are the light of the world.

You know, a city on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead, they put it on its stand and it gives light to everyone in the house.

In the same way, let your light shine before men that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven. Being the light of the world means Christians get to save those who are lost and living in darkness.

maybe in the chains of despair, bondage to sin and evil by being a shining light through our deeds that point the way to God.

So, being the light of the world means Christians get to save those who are lost and living in darkness. That doesn't mean we do the saving. God does the saving, but he uses us through the good works that we do to shine a light and point the way to God.

[17:12] Now, this question of the city of a hill, why does Jesus mix these metaphors? You're the light of the world and then suddenly he talks about a city on a hill that can't be hidden and a lamp that you don't put under a bushel.

Well, obviously in those days they didn't have electricity and so a city on a hill you would see it for miles and when you don't have torches it's dark outside you don't know where you're going you can navigate by the stars but maybe the clouds are out the moment you see a light shining somewhere you know that that's civilization you know there's people there you know there's safety there and you head off towards that direction but like the first one being salt of the earth the Jews would have realized what Jesus is saying they wouldn't have just thought of any city they immediately would have thought of Jerusalem and some very specific things about Jerusalem being the light of the world and that comes from our Isaiah passage the law in Isaiah 2 I'm going to take us to Isaiah in another passage in a minute but just to read this one so as you read that passage the law will go out from Zion

Zion is Jerusalem the word of the Lord from Jerusalem and in the context when that happens when this law goes out from Zion and the word of the Lord goes out from Jerusalem world peace happens peace comes not just to Jerusalem but to the nations around and so and then it ends that passage by saying come descendants let us walk in the light of the Lord let us walk in the light of the Lord and so what you've got is you've got this picture of Jerusalem you know Jerusalem's on a hill it's the biggest city in Israel but God is saying that he's making promises in Isaiah that this city Jerusalem is going to be a place of light through his word that gives instruction on how people should live when they live the way God wants him to live there's going to be peace there's going to be blessing there's going to be glory there's going to be wonder it's going to be this beautiful light shining out into the world what Jesus is saying is you can only get that you can only be connected to the light if you're connected to Jerusalem's king in other words to Jesus if you've got your

Bibles just turn to Isaiah 42 because this image of Jerusalem of a city full of light is sort of carried through Isaiah in various places this is a fairly well known one but it's worth looking at so turn with me to Isaiah 42 where Isaiah talks about the servant of the Lord that's coming and his connection to Jerusalem the servant of the Lord is of course about Jesus and see what he's going to do about Jerusalem what kind of light he's going to be so if you're in Isaiah 42 I might just start at verse 5 so this is what God the Lord says he who created the heavens and stretched them out who spread out the earth and all that comes out of it who gives breath to its people and life to those who walk on it I the Lord have called you in righteousness he's talking about the servant of the Lord this king that's coming

I will keep you and will make you to be a covenant for the people we saw that earlier about the salt and a light for the Gentiles so the servant that's coming is going to be a covenant for the people and a light for the Gentiles and what is he going to do what is this light going to do is it a warning light is it a light of fire to destroy or is it a light that's going to help so verse 7 you are going to be a light for the Gentiles to open eyes that are blind to free captives from prison and to release from the dungeon those who sit in darkness so this light and that would have surprised the Jews hearing that they would have said oh but the Gentiles they're the ones trying to kill us you know if there's a light coming from Jerusalem can it be more like that Mount Sinai light a pillar of fire that rushes out and destroys our enemies and God says no

[ 22 : 05 ] I'm done with that when the king comes when I start my new kingdom project he's going to reach out to people who aren't my people and he's going to free them and he's going to give them light and he's going to release them from prison and bring them into the light of the relationship with the king and living according to his rules so back in Matthew 5 again Jesus says I want my people to be the light of the world in fact he just says you are the light of the world if you're connected to me if you're in covenant with me the king you are the light of the world you get to do this kind of thing you get to make a difference your good deeds are going to make a difference in people's lives it's going to change the world what you do as one of my light bearers in a place that's dark is point the way to God and to help people find him just by doing good stuff doesn't say what it is here we'll get into that in a bit you know

I don't know if you've ever been lost at night when you need light it's difficult to get lost in sort of suburbia but if you've been on a hike well sometimes when the electricity goes out it's pretty dark and you don't have your cell phone on you the moment you've got a light people will flock to you they know okay if you've got a light you know how to get out of here you know how to get help all you have to do is switch on your light and people will come to you to receive help you're the light that gets people home and people need that people need that in our world in fact they long for it because our world is in darkness in the darkness of sin of the way that they live they think they're living in freedom they think they're living in the light and then you see everything that happens on well TV but online you might see it around you as you drive around if you see it late at night you might hear it late at night people long for the light because they're living in darkness

I remember when I used to live in Claremont 7 o'clock the rush hour died down everyone had gone home for supper 9 o'clock the noise started picking up because all the clubs all the dance clubs all the pubs was in Claremont Main Road I lived close by started getting noise at about 9 o'clock and everyone was happy going out everyone's boyfriend girlfriend everyone's happy then it gets quiet as they're all in the pub in the clubs and about 12 o'clock 1 o'clock the noise picks up again and it's not a happy noise yeah but you said this and I did that and don't you ever say that fighting fighting fighting everyone that went in happy and together is coming out fighting nothing nice happened inside there you think it might be nice but night after night I heard people very unhappy there's a different way for them to live that's not a good way to live so what

Christians do what Jesus wants Christians to do is to shine a light for people that want to find a way out of that lifestyle not everyone will want it there's two kinds of people at night that go around at night that are lost in the darkness there's ones who want to be in the darkness because they like it and there's ones who want to escape it because it scares them and they don't want to be there and when you shine a light you just have to shine the light and the ones that don't want to be there that want to stay naughty they'll stay naughty they'll run away from the light you don't have to go chase after them god will call them if he wants them in his own time but the ones that are scared and need help and want to weigh out you just have to shine your light by doing the good deeds by doing good and you get to change people's lives just by doing that he's going to do through you god is going to call those he's going to work through you and you're going to be a life giving and light giving influence in the world some examples of being light in the world a very easy example giving thanks for your food that you eat okay so is that really doing good well

I had a friend and he when we went out to a pub or to a restaurant he would sit there and give thanks okay don't often see that even Christians don't often do that sometimes I do sometimes I don't just that small thing that he used to do took a I noticed that and so I started doing it when I came home and with my family and after doing that a few times it's a little bit oh shucks you know if they're not Christian family and like what are you doing holding hands you know okay but after a few weeks they started saying okay Dylan time to pray just finding a little light just lodged a little stone a little of a glimmer and it had an effect on my family and when we went out it had an effect on families around us people would come up and say oh you're praying that's so sweet that's so good it has a good effect doing good has a knock-on effect people see it and they want to know what's happening what about here at

[ 28 : 22 ] St. Mark's how do we shine the light what are we supposed to be doing well we've got lots of good works going on at St.

Mark's that we want you to be to be a part of Nick alluded to it earlier the knitting that we're doing sewing the beanies for knitting the beanies for Gavin school we do community outreaches we've got our soup and later this year we'll start the Latimer after care after school center lots of opportunity to be a light not just inside the church but use the church as a way to shine a light out into the world and change people's lives now it's not just the good works the good works make a big difference but Jesus says it's not just the good works there's a reason I want you to do good works have a look at verse 16 in the same way let your light shine before men that they may see your good deeds and praise your father in heaven the good works the shiny stuff that we do isn't meant to shine the light on us but shine the light on God it's meant to connect people through the works that we do through God reaching out getting hold of them and bringing them to him and bringing them to Jesus reconnecting them to their creator and connecting them to their saviour we're just pulling them along and introducing them to

Jesus so how shiny are you as a Christian how shiny are you as a Christian you know that song I'm gonna make my light shine me in my small corner you in your small corner and I in mine well a city on a hill is not we're not meant to shine in our little corners we're meant to shine collectively together as the people of God Jesus says you're a city on a hill yes he talks about a lamp stand but the lamp gives light to everyone in the house you don't put a lamp in a corner or behind something it's meant to shine and we're meant to shine together how shiny are you like the salt some can shine their light a little bit too brightly you know like the gestapo when you sit there and they want to interview now what have you done and you can shine your light onto people's sin and it's whoa the glare it's because you're being so overly well holy but sort of just over the top and now they don't know how to deal with it it can be like the gestapo and shine your light and hurt people's eyes and some don't shine their light at all they just don't feel like shining their light they hide their light we've got

Christians that do that in many churches the kind of Christian that doesn't really shine their light they go to church but they're not part of the church if you see what I mean they're not there as the people of God so they'll come in sit down sing a few songs and then they'll come in that door sit down and then they go out the same door we won't see them down there with the rest of us we won't see them at our growth groups we won't see them at our events they're shiny but they kind of want to be by themselves Jesus says that's not shiny enough you need to be more shiny you need to put some fuel in there and the way to do that is by being with God people like a lighthouse a lighthouse can only shine when all the candles are working together you don't put one little candle in a lighthouse you know there's lighthouses are thousand candle power lighthouses probably much more than that but no one puts one little candle in a lighthouse and then thinks oh he's doing a great job no it's a collective thing that we want that God wants his people to be doing together it's a whole church thing so we mustn't be too shiny be like a gestapo light catching the deer in the headlights and they don't know what to do about this shininess coming their way because you think that they're so bad and so dark but also don't be shiny by yourself or too little shiny or hide your don't hide your light that doesn't make any sense and

God wants his people to shine their light together not too much not too little and together we need to learn to be the kind of light that Jesus was yes he was on occasion very pointed he did call out sin but to many he was this warm glow of love and forgiveness and rest and help his salt and his light attracted people he didn't only point out sin he went out of his way to help them felt compassion for those suffering under sin and his program is to set those people free not to make them feel worse about their sin and stand there judging them but to bind up the broken hearted to lead out of darkness not stand in the light and tell others how horrible their darkness is he used his light to help others move out of darkness so how shiny are you why don't you join some of the church outreach programs the ones that we've mentioned become more shiny by just spending time with

[ 34 : 29 ] Christians because we often spur each other on to do good deeds things think back to the start of our time together we said it was very difficult to be different people want you to be the same maybe at school the kids are bullying the other kids you can get in a rage and shout at the bullying kids why don't do that why don't you go to the kid that's being bullied and be friendly to them it'll be good salt and good light maybe at work when other people are taking the stuff that they shouldn't be taking but maybe they're in need instead of reporting them go over and ask them if they need anything can you help with them can you offer to pray with them maybe online or in conversations about people's sexuality and gender instead of shining a light on how bad they are they probably know that already show them how good family relationships can be let your home become a beacon of light one way to do that

I think will be to connect with our parenting course I think it'll be fantastic and so friends in a dark and dying world you want to be the one who offers light and life and so let's do that and ask Jesus to help us do that well Lord Jesus you call your people to be salt and light we sometimes feel that we don't do that well Lord so we need your help to be the right amount of salt and the right amount of light Lord help us not to compromise and be as bland as the world help us not to be too salty Lord and hurt people by pointing out their sin help us to help them Lord like you did by calling them out of darkness into the kingdom of light and help us to take that gospel truth and gospel love out to the world Amen