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Matthew 5:13 - 5:16: Salt and Light



Sermon on the Mount - Steve Gregg

Steve Gregg discusses the concepts of salt and light as mentioned in Matthew 5:13-16. He explains that salt and light have particular impacts, effects, and influences on something or someone. Gregg highlights that Christians need to live according to biblical patterns and principles, even if it goes against cultural norms, and even if it brings persecution. He argues that unless there is a revival of Christianity, there is no possibility of saving America from total destruction due to the decay and rotting of society, despite the presence of many Christians.

Transcript

Let's turn to Matthew 5, verse 13. Jesus said, Now, these are not exactly what we call parables, but they are what we would call metaphors. You, meaning the disciples, and particularly probably with a view to those who fit the description of the Beatitudes, which he has simply concluded just before this, such people are like salt and they are like light.

Now, it's not immediately evident how people are like salt or how they are like light, and as with any metaphor, one has to say, okay, well, what is the reason for choosing this particular image? What does it mean to be salt? What does it mean to be light? Now, it should be observed that salt of the earth, light of the world, suggests that Jesus is now moving from the topic of what these people are internally, which was described in the Beatitudes, to what they are socially or what their impact is on the world around them, on their environment. And therefore, when we think of salt and when we think of light, although there are perhaps any number of things that might be said about salt or about light, the particular things that Jesus has in mind are going to have to do with the way that salt impacts or the way that light impacts or affects or influences something. Because the disciples are said to be the salt of the earth, and I would also point out that the word earth here, the word *ge* in Greek, can mean land, the salt of the land.

I'm not sure exactly if that's a better translation. It may not be. In fact, if it were taken to be salt of the land, it's hard to know exactly how to take that, because there were times in the Old Testament when invaders would salt the land or salt the fields of their enemies in order to render them unproductive.

And Jesus saying you're the salt of the land might bring those images, though I'm certain that those are not the images that he had in mind when he used the term salt. It is not clear whether salt of the earth or salt of the land is better understood. If land, probably the land of Israel is what is in view.

But when he says you're the light of the world, the word world is not translated land and is therefore probably the larger world in which we live. And we know that elsewhere in Scripture, the Bible talks about a contrast between Christians and the world. Christians and the world are not the same.

Christians are on the other side of a conflict with the world. Jesus said if you were of the world, the world would love its own, because I've called you out of the world. The world hates you.

And yet, even if it's a world that hates us, we provide a benefit for it. And that benefit is referred to as ultimately salt or light. And so I want to talk about what those things mean.

Salt, of course, is known to us in a much purer form than was known in those days. Jesus actually speaks in this verse 13 of the suggestion that if a salt loses its flavor, how will you season it again? Well, salt, as we know, it can't lose its flavor. The salt that you buy in the store is pure sodium chloride or whatever it is, and it's simply impossible for it to cease to be salty, because saltiness is its characteristic.

But the salt that they were acquainted with could lose its flavor. And the reason is because it was not pure. It was very difficult in ancient times to isolate pure salt from the land.

Now, if you got salt from the ocean, I'm not sure if they distilled water and took salt from the ocean very often, but not everybody had much access to the sea. There was salt in much of the land. There was a lot of salt in the southern region of Judah, near the Salt Sea.

And a lot of the salt they had was sort of a mixture of pure salt mixed in with other minerals that it was found in, and they didn't have any ideal way to isolate the salt from the other kind of minerals it was with. So if a person had a bin of salt in their home, it would be possible under some conditions, for example if it got wet, that the salt would leach out of it, and all you'd have left is the other minerals that were there. All the salt would not, it wouldn't be there anymore.

The substance with the salt in it, they called their salt. This was their salt. But what we called salt was only one of the elements within the amalgam, and it was possible for the actual salt to be leached out, and then there'd be no saltiness left in the bin of salt.

So the salt, as it were, would have lost its flavor, and he says, well how are you going to

salt it again? How are you going to re-flavor it? How can you re-season it if it loses the savor that it has? And the question rhetorically is indicating it can't be done. Now that means that the Church has some characteristics which make it valuable, and without those characteristics, it is of no value. He said if the salt loses its flavor, it's after that good for nothing, and it'll be cast out and trodden under the foot of men, which speaks of it not receiving any respect whatsoever.

It's not valuable. Now salt, when it is salt, it has great value. And in Old Testament times, as well as modern times, salt was used for more than one thing.

It was used, as we use it, for seasoning food. It was also used for treating wounds, in a certain sense, for killing germs, or for, if not killing them, at least preventing infection. And it was also used, of course, to pack meat, so that meat would not rot.

At a time before refrigeration, it was necessary either to eat meat completely fresh, or else find some way of preserving it at room temperature. Even today, if you make beef jerky or something like that, some form of meat preservation that does not require refrigeration, you're going to end up using a great deal of salt. Because salt, when meat was packed in salt, it would be preserved from rot, from microorganisms growing in it and so forth, and rotting it.

So, salt was valuable and essential in many ways. Some have pointed out that there were times when the Romans paid their troops with salt instead of with gold or silver, because salt was that valuable. That is, in fact, the root of our word salary.

A person receives a salary. It comes from the same root as the word salinator, or salt. And that's a strange thing to us, because salt doesn't seem to have that value to us.

It's so easy to come by, so inexpensive to purchase. But it was hard to come by salt, and it was hard to refine it, and to have it was absolutely essential. See, we can refrigerate or freeze foods now, or can them.

Even when you can food, you use salt. But they didn't have all of the technology we do, and so it was very essential to have a good supply of salt for preserving food. And without salt, food would rot.

Now, there have been many suggestions made by Christians as to what sense Jesus intended the Church to be looked at as salt, with reference to the earth, the salt of the earth. Some have felt that we are supposed to give zest to life, that like you put salt on food for seasoning, that the presence of the Church gives some kind of seasoning to the world. If so, it's hard to know who it is that appreciates this seasoning.

Perhaps God. But I don't know that that metaphor is likely to be the correct one. There are just too many things about other metaphorical applications that seem to be better than that to me.

Someone said that salt makes a person thirsty. If you eat a bunch of salt and peanuts, you get thirsty, and that our presence in the world is supposed to make the earth thirsty for God. I don't think that's likely either.

I mean, it's subjective on my part to say so, but it just doesn't strike me as having the ring of truth about it. Most scholars believe, and I think that they do so for good reason, that salt here was being thought of as a preservative for preserving meat from rotting, and that the disciples or people like those described in the Beatitudes served the earth in which they lived as a preservative to prevent it from becoming rotten. And if Jesus said to these disciples that you are the salt of the land, if that's how it is to be translated, he would be suggesting that the land of Israel was rotting spiritually, but it was the presence of remnant people like these, the ones who were sincere people of God, who were not in the majority at all in Israel, but they were there, that that tended to retard the rot, the decay.

You see, the nation was rotting and would soon be dispensed with altogether, but the rot was slowed, the rot was retarded and kept at a bayonet somewhat by the presence of a godly remnant in them. And that is possibly how Jesus understood his own words here, that the disciples representing a remnant within Israel were there to prevent the ultimate rot, decay and collapse of the land of Israel as a nation. But of course we are not Israel, we're not in Israel, we're not in the land and we're not functioning quite like that, but we live in lands also, we live in a society.

And our presence is supposed to inhibit rot. Moral decay is a natural tendency of human society. You see it before the flood.

Adam and Eve sinned and shortly after that Cain is killing Abel, and shortly after that you've got more murder going on, a guy named Lamech doing some killing and taking a couple of wives and things are just getting less and less the way God wanted them. And within ten generations from Adam things are so bad that God can't tolerate it anymore. And he sends a flood because within ten generations the people of the earth have become intolerably violent and wicked and their thoughts and imaginations of their hearts were only evil continually.

And so he destroys them with a flood, but it doesn't take very long. After the flood, especially the Hamites give rise to a nation called the Canaanites and they become utterly corrupt, and other nations become corrupt too. The Canaanites apparently more than most, and God decides to wipe them out and he chooses a nation, the people of Abraham, to do that.

And yet the people of Israel, they become rotten too. In fact the whole human nature tends toward rottenness. It is part of the fallenness of man.

But the speed of rot, the speed of decay, is somewhat controlled by the presence of a

high density, hopefully, of persons who are not rotting. Or if they're not rotting, they're not rotting so much. Now Christians are people who needn't rot.

The second law of thermodynamics takes its toll on most things in nature, and so things wear down and rot and go back to their basic elements, and get worse and worse. But the life of Jesus has infused a different factor, a different dynamic in the human experience, so that we do not have to be conforming to the downward spiral. We actually are infused with a new kind of energy, a new kind of life.

I shouldn't use the word energy because the Jewish people use that so much, but it is a new dynamic of power, which is the life of God, which transforms the downward spiral of our life into an upward climb, climbing back up from glory to glory into the image of Christ. And the presence of this element in society, which is moving the opposite direction, swimming upstream, as it were, climbing while the rest are declining, but still having a presence, having a voice, having an influence in that rotting society, tends to pull back the opposite direction a little bit, pull the society with them, or at least hold back the cascading decay. And that is what I think Jesus has in mind here, that whether it's the remnant in Israel, which his disciples were, slowing down somewhat the destruction of the nation, or whether it's Christians in any part of the world having a similar impact in their own society, this is probably the meaning of being the salt of the earth.

Now with reference to Israel, remember John the Baptist came and said that Jesus was coming, he was coming in judgment, and already the axe was ready to be laid to the roots of the tree and tear down the wicked trees and throw them in the fire, and his fan was his hand, and he was going to burn the chaff with unquenchable fire after he collected the grain out. This is where he's of course talking about the difference between the remnant, which were like fruitful trees, or like grain, and the wicked in Israel, who were like the fruitless trees, or like the chaff. And the prediction that the chaff and the fruitless trees would be burned was a prediction about the imminent destruction of Jerusalem, and of the society of Israel, which of course did occur, but it didn't occur quite immediately.

It may be that what Jesus is implying to his disciples on this occasion specifically is that God is ready, as John the Baptist said, to judge Israel, but he has found in Israel a remnant of people who are poor in spirit, who mourn, who are meek, who hunger and thirst for righteousness, people who are merciful and pure in heart and peacemakers and persecutors for righteousness, that their presence is causing God not to totally cast out the nation of Israel immediately. It may be that they retarded the decay for another generation by their presence, because it took a full generation from Jesus' time, 40 years, until the actual corruption and destruction came about. When it did come about, what's interesting is, we know that when the Christians left Jerusalem in 70 AD, then all kinds of demonic perversions and decadence just took reign, took control.

It's like the rot was left unchecked once the remnant left the city in 70 AD, and if you read what Josephus says about the behavior of the Jews during the siege in particular, you certainly have the impression that this is about as corrupt as people can get, and they got that way rather rapidly, because there was no Christian influence any longer among them. They may not have appreciated the Christian influence, they may have persecuted them, and the Christians who were the salt were persecuted for the righteousness sake, but when they were gone, the rot just took over and destroyed the whole nation. And that is simply a prototype, no doubt, of what will happen in nations of other kinds, too.

I mean, all nations eventually meet their doom. All nations, from their beginning, have a bit of decay and rot in them, but then they might even improve for a little while, but like the human body, which from its childhood grows until a certain age, and then begins to decompose, so societies usually do. In the early part of your life, there's a process called metabolism, building you up.

You're growing bigger, stronger, better. You're improving, but you reach a certain peak, and from that point on, the rest of your life, a different force seems to overwhelm metabolism, and that's catabolism, and you begin to get weaker. Your organs begin to be more susceptible to failure, and so forth.

I wouldn't suggest anyone in this room has reached that place, but we have young people here. But that point does come, where it's harder to maintain your health and your physique and your energy level and so forth. And there are societies, I think, that go through that stage, too.

A society will have its rise, sometimes a rapid rise, but then it'll just take a slow or fast decline from that point on, just go on down to oblivion. But the presence of godliness in the society, in the persons of believers in Christ, is capable of hindering that decay from happening as rapidly, and that apparently is something that God wants the Church to function as in society, as a retardant to decay. And we can see in our own society a great deal of decay that has happened rather suddenly.

America has been a nation for over 200 years, and although none of us were there, we are told that it was a much nicer place, a much more godly place, a much more conscientious society in previous generations, in previous centuries, but we certainly have seen a rapid decay in the last 30 years particularly, 30 or 40 years perhaps. And it's hard to say, why would this happen so rapidly? I mean, for centuries it seemed America was a decent place, and citizenry were largely decent folks. In fact, there's still a fair number of decent folks in America.

But there's been such a corruption, such a decay, such a downward spiral in the past 30 years that has been so fast that people who were adults 30 years ago looking back can hardly recognize this society as the same one, and it isn't the same one. It's going down

to oblivion. I don't know that the downward spiral will not come back up if there's something like a revival, but that's what it would take.

Unless there's a revival of Christianity, there's no possibility that America would be saved from its total destruction. Many people feel that it has passed the point of no return, because once a society begins to approve of homosexual marriage, for example, and a generation comes up not knowing the difference between homosexual marriage and other marriage, then the whole concept of family is lost to a society. And once that's gone, there's just nothing to build morals or anything else on.

There comes a point where you reach a critical mass of corruption that it seems suddenly after that there's nowhere else to go but down and fast. And there are many people who think our society has reached that point, but we're not 100% sure, because God can infuse another injection of life through revival in the Church and through godliness of the saints. And even if he does not, those saints who are following Jesus can still have an impact on those that are at least immediately around them.

Now, salt in the meat presents a decay, a slowness of decay. It prevents decay from taking place as quickly. And therefore, Christians are to have that impact.

Now, we need to ask, why is it in the last 30 years that the society has decayed when there are in fact Christians here, and lots of them? We live in the age of mega-churches. Thirty years ago, you never heard of a church that had 5,000 people in it. But now a church of 5,000 is not too uncommon.

Almost every major city has a church at least that large, maybe two or three. Southern California has quite a few churches that are that big and larger. There are churches with 10,000 or more in this country.

And there are some places where there's a high concentration. There's the Bible Belt. There's Southern California where there's lots and lots of huge churches.

There's lots of people who are professing to be Christians. And yet, these very areas are rotting too, rapidly. And the question arises, how can this be if there is salt there? The answer is probably that the salt has lost its saltiness.

Jesus said, if the salt loses its savor, it'll just be trampled by men. We live in a time, I think, where the church is held in contempt by society. In my recollection, when I was younger, which was, I'm thinking of 30 years ago, most people were not Christians in America, not real Christians.

Most were not followers of Jesus. I don't know, but perhaps most did not go to church. I don't know what the statistics were.

But whether they did or not, most people respected Christianity. Most people respected

clergy, for example. Most people realized that the Bible was probably true, even if they didn't care to read it or believe it.

And they knew that Christianity was better than non-Christianity. There were many who did not want to pay the price to follow Jesus Christ, but they kind of in their own hearts knew they should. They knew that Christians were better people than people who were not Christians.

I mean, that was a general feeling in society, it seems to me. But the opposite is true today. There are very few out there who would suggest that Christians are any better than non-Christians, or that clergy or men in the ministry have any reason to be respected, or that Christianity is even a better way than any of the many other ways that are embraced in our society.

Some would even say that Christianity is the worst possible way, because it seems to be the one element in society that's holding out for intolerance. When the rest of society is evolving on and moving on to greater and better things, greater tolerance and greater unity among all people, it's the Christians and only the Christians. Well, it's not only the Christians, but it's largely, almost entirely, the Christians who are holding out for something like division, and say, no, not everyone is the same.

Not everyone is right. Not all ways of life are okay. And for that reason, the view of Christianity that the world holds is just the opposite of what it was a short time ago.

And in my opinion, this is not, it's not likely that this is because Satan has been somehow released in the last 30 years in some way that he was not before. I think it has more to do with the church itself. Jesus said, if the salt loses its savor, it will not be worth anything, and it will be trampled underfoot by men.

It will be treated with contempt by men. And that is, today, what has happened. Now, the savor, the flavor that the salt loses is its distinctiveness, its distinctiveness.

Many people believe that the church, in order to recover its influence in society, has got to become relevant again. And by relevant, they mean we have to be perceived by the world as addressing the things that are their felt interests. If people live in a soundbite culture where they're not accustomed to listening to long speeches and so forth, well, then we need to give them short little sermonettes.

If people are visually stimulated because of television and movies so much, then we need to have dramas, we need to have entertainment of various kinds. If people are bored by simple music because we've got high production, recorded music that people listen to all the time that's very stimulating, then we have to have big bands and big stimulating music in the churches too. We've got to do whatever it takes that the worldly person coming in will find us relevant.

God forbid that we appear old-fashioned, because old-fashioned is interpreted as irrelevant. And one of the things that many people have observed is that the church, if anything, is viewed as irrelevant by today's American society. And I believe that is correct.

The church is viewed as irrelevant, and to a large extent the church is irrelevant. The church, if we mean the institutional church. And what is making it irrelevant is the fact that it is copying the world, that it is saying, what does the world want? Let's give them more of that, maybe we'll get more of them to come to church.

That is being irrelevant as church. That might be relevant as a social club, but it's not relevant as church. The church does have a relevance to society when it remains pure, because Jesus, if his teachings are followed, presents an entirely different cultural alternative to that which is in the dominant culture.

And that cultural alternative has to do with the way money is spent, the way money is earned, the way people find personal security, the way people interact with their neighbors, and with those who hate them, even. The way that they conduct their family life, the way they conduct their sex life, the way they react to, the way they handle themselves in trials, the way they use or don't use substances that are addictive substances, and so forth. I mean, the actual behaviors of Christians, if they followed what Christianity teaches, what Jesus teaches, in the Sermon on the Mount especially, hit people in very relevant places, much more relevant than people's finances and their families and their social lives, and their health and their sex lives, and things like that.

I mean, those are very relevant issues. The church, however, is only relevant as it presents an alternative in these very areas to what the world is offering. The world already knows what it thinks about these things.

And if the church simply copies the world, the church becomes irrelevant. If the church stands up and says, listen, world, you're wrong about what you think in all these areas, and we'll tell you what's right because God has revealed it in his word, and we're going to demonstrate it, we're going to teach it, and we're going to live it, and you'll see it in action among us. When the church does that, it is relevant because it offers a relevant alternative to the hopeless and meaningless life that the world around already is experiencing.

If the church copies the world, it simply presents itself as having no more meaning and no more purpose than the world itself has. And that is what is the savor of the salt, is its very difference from the world. Salt can prevent meat from rotting for the simple reason that it is different from meat.

It is not meat. If salt becomes meat, it will rot with the meat. Salt prevents rotting because it is chemically different.

It has different qualities than the meat has. It is entirely something other than meat, and it is that otherness, it is that distinctiveness of salt that gives it its beneficial influence on meat to keep it from rotting. If it loses that distinctiveness and becomes more like the meat, it simply rots with the meat.

And so the church, in copying the world, in feeling like we have to tailor our church services and our dress styles and our entertainment habits and our dating habits and our marriage styles and our opinions about money and about divorce and things, by tailoring those things after what the world says, we think we are going to be more relevant and the world is going to see us as someone who really knows where it is at. Actually, the world is more likely to say, they don't know where it is at any more than I do. They think the same thing I do.

They don't have any alternative to offer. It's much more going to communicate non-verbally to the world that the world has a better idea because the church is following it. The church prefers the world's ideas and therefore proves the church has nothing really substantial to offer in its place.

This is the problem that Jesus anticipated. Now, it did not occur in the lives of these people to whom he was speaking. They did not lose their savor.

They had all died martyrs. They stayed hot. They stayed on fire for God and lived without compromise for the most part.

And we see their lives in the book of Acts having just the impact that one would expect. They impressed people. Great fear came upon everybody when they saw the holiness and the power in the life of the Christian community.

Yes, there was persecution. Jesus indicated that would be the case. But persecution does not mean that no influence was being had.

Even in times of persecution, the church had influence. The first martyr, Stephen, was probably one of the main contributing influences toward the conversion of Saul of Tarsus and who knows how many others besides. And we know that when martyrs died, that too was part of the influence the church had because it challenged one of the major cultural attitudes of the world and that is that staying alive is what matters more than anything else.

And the strongest human instinct is survival. But when someone says, not mine, my strongest instinct is to be faithful to Jesus Christ and die in his altar. To die is gain.

That's a slap in the face of the world's philosophy. And it makes the world stand up and notice. And not only that, but the way they handled their money.

The way they sold their goods to get to anyone who were poor and had need. And many

other things they did. The purity and the holiness of the community.

The alternative society that existed. And the countercultural expression that was exhibited among the Christians. It gained respect and you can tell when the church is respected somewhat by the fact that it's persecuted.

When men trample salt underfoot, they're not persecuting it, they're just ignoring it. If you throw your old, unseasoned salt out on the street, people walk all over it. Not because they're persecuting it.

They're not trying to grind it into the ground out of hostility toward the salt. They just don't even know it's there. They're paying no attention.

It just becomes part of the soil. And in America, there is no persecution of the church for the simple reason that no one knows it's even there. I mean, they know there's something they call a church.

They just don't pay any heed to it, don't pay any attention to it. Now, the church is persecuted in some countries. In the very countries where it's making progress.

In the very countries where it's salty. And it's hard to really know what's contributing to what. Does the persecution make the church more salty? Or does the saltiness of the church challenge the culture so much that the powers that be feel threatened and react in persecuting them? In any case, to persecute the church is to take it seriously.

And where the church receives no persecution, it is not really being taken seriously by its opponents. And that is one of the worst things that can be said of it. And so, the church of Jesus that he started with these few disciples, who were and continue to be salty in the ways that he described in his Beatitudes, had a tremendous impact on their world.

And it did prevent their nation from going under for a full generation. Basically, during the lifetime of these men. The nation of Israel did not collapse.

About the time they died and the Christians left Jerusalem, then it went down real fast. Unfortunately, so did the church. It wasn't very many generations before much corruption in the church, both theological and moral and other kinds of corruption came into the church.

It wasn't instantaneous, but within a few centuries, the church had become utterly corrupted, lost its savor, and not only did it prevent, did it not prevent society from going foul, but it contributed to the corruption in society for a thousand years, until God infused some new life into it through movements like the Reformation. Now, the question, of course, that would be on our minds, rightly, would be what is going to happen to the society in which we live? Is the church going to have an impact for improvement or not? We don't know yet. But it certainly will not with its present habits.

With the church's present behavior, there will be no improvement in society, as long as Christians are seeking the same things the world seeks. As long as the most important thing to Christians is that they be comfortable, well-to-do, respectable, these very things that the world desires. As long as Christians are still petty, fighting among themselves, taking each other to court, which happens a fair bit, these things are going to prevent the church from having any impact, and it will be trampled underfoot of men, and when the society goes down, they will go down with it.

Now, in addition to likening the church to salt, Jesus likened it to light. I should point out before we move along to talk about light, that salt is a term that's used figuratively in a few other places in the Scriptures. In Mark chapter 9, for example, there's a very difficult passage in the closing verses of Mark 9. Jesus said something about salt that resembles this, but was different.

And I can show you the passage, but I can't tell you what it means, because I don't know. It's very difficult. But in Mark 9, 49 and 50, Jesus said, everyone will be seasoned with fire, and every sacrifice will be seasoned with salt.

Salt is good, but if salt loses its flavor, how will you season it? Now, that of course is a repeat of what we just read in the Sermon on the Mount, but then he goes on, have salt in yourselves, and have peace with one another. Now, have salt in yourselves probably means just what we've been talking about. Have the distinctive character of the Christian in yourself, so that you might function as salt in society.

It's not clear what is meant by everyone will be seasoned with fire, and every sacrifice will be seasoned with salt. That's a very difficult statement. But Jesus does exhort his disciples to have salt in themselves and be at peace with each other.

Over in Colossians, and I did not plan to use this scripture, so I'm not sure I can find it immediately. I think it's in Colossians 3. Paul mentions that your speech should be with grace, seasoned with salt. It might be chapter 2, but I thought it was chapter 3. Maybe someone else can tell me where that is, if you look at it before I do.

Is it 4.6? Thank you. That's right. Let your speech always be with grace, seasoned with salt.

Colossians 4.6. That you may know how you ought to answer each one. So, your speech should be gracious. It should also be salty.

It should also have a saltiness about it. It should have a sense in which it challenges the corruption. When you talk with people, you need to challenge sin.

You need to challenge corruption, and hopefully retard the corruption in their own lives, but do it graciously. Your speech is to be predominantly with grace, but it needs to have an edge. It needs to have a little bit of an edge there, that you're not just a milk toast.

You're not just Mr. Nice Guy. When you're around people who are corrupt, your speech should have a bit of a sting to it, like salt in a wound, and that will help to heal in many cases. So, the Christian, by their speech and by their life, are to have a salty influence upon the world.

Now, going on to the second metaphor of light, this one's extended a little longer than the salt metaphor. In verse 14, you are the light of the world. This is Matthew 5.14. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden, nor do they light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house.

Let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven. Now, as salt is beneficial to retard rot, light is beneficial to provide, obviously, insight, to provide knowledge, to provide awareness, to give some direction, some guidance. If you are in a place devoid of light and the light has never been on there, you've come into a room totally darkened and you've never had light in there, you don't know what is there.

You're totally ignorant. You don't know the size of the room. You don't know how it's furnished.

You don't know whether you're alone in the room or whether others are there. You don't know how to walk in that room because you don't know if you'll trip over something that you don't know to be there. You don't even know what direction to go because you don't know where the next exit might be or where a light switch is.

I mean, you don't know. You're ignorant, and you cannot navigate when you're in total darkness. And light is often used with the idea of providing guidance.

As in Psalm 119, when David said, your word is a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path, giving light in darkness so I know where to go. Jesus said, I am the light of the world. He that follows me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life.

Not walking in darkness. This idea of walking in darkness and not knowing where you're going is something that is an image used frequently, especially in John's writings. John records Jesus' statements along his life, plus John says things in the epistles of John, like this in 1 John 2. It says, again, a new commandment I give to you, in verse 8, which thing is true in him and in you because the darkness is passing away and the true light is already shining.

He who says he is in the light and hates his brother is in darkness until now. He who loves his brother abides in the light and there is no cause for stumbling in him. He who hates his brother is in darkness and walks in darkness and does not know where he is going because the darkness has blinded his eyes.

So the idea of light and darkness has to do with knowing where to walk, knowing where

to go, knowing what's going on. Of course, it says back in 1 John 1, verse 7, if we walk in the light as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another. In the blood of Jesus Christ his son cleanses us from all sin.

So we are to be walking in the light. He that loves his brother is walking in the light. He that hates his brother is walking in darkness and does not know where he is going because he is stumbling all over the place.

And that is, of course, the need of people in a darkened world is for light. They need to know which way to go. Jesus said that the people that he viewed in the crowds were like sheep without a shepherd, a similar image.

They don't know where to go. Sheep need guidance. They don't intuitively know which way to go to safety.

Likewise, when someone is in the dark, they don't know where they are going. They stumble. And so the church is here to give light to the world.

And the light that we give is not only in giving instruction, but in our lives. The way we live is supposed to illustrate to those who look on the right way to be. Paul said that we need to present our bodies as a living sacrifice to God and be transformed by the renewing of our mind, he says, so that we might prove what is that good and acceptable will of the Lord.

If people look at your life and it doesn't prove to them what is the will of God, then they are not getting any light. They are not learning anything. You can tell them what is right and convince them that you are right.

Then they still have remained in darkness. They still don't know. And therefore, to be light requires that we not only know the truth to speak it, but that we live the truth and that we live it visibly.

Jesus said, when he said, you are the light of the world, a city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden. God has not put the church under a bushel. People don't take a lamp and light it and hide it under a bushel.

They put it up where everyone can see it. Now, there have been seasons where the church has been underground. There have been seasons when the church has not been visible.

It's difficult to know how to evaluate that in the light of what Jesus has said here. I think in general, the church is supposed to be visible. At least some portions of it ought to be visible.

Yet there were times when Jesus and even the apostles would run and hide. There were

whole centuries of persecution where the Christians kind of had to lay low and not be too outspoken, unless they wanted to be put to death, which could be argued maybe they should have done that. Maybe they should have remained on a candlestick, on a lampstand.

Maybe they should have just gone down publicly in the streets rather than hiding out. It's a hard call to make. But I personally believe that Christians should not be in any way ashamed of what they stand for, even if it's very unpopular, even if it will bring death to them.

There are times, perhaps, where the prudence of God in them tells them to flee to a safer place or to hide or to remain obscure for a period of time for the safety of someone else or maybe even for themselves. Because we do find the apostles fleeing, for example, by night, places. And apparently they did not consider that to be a violation of what Jesus taught.

In general, however, we should never remain obscure simply because we're ashamed of the difference between our thinking and that of the world. Again, it's the difference between light and darkness that makes light valuable to those who are in darkness. There are Christians who will not speak up against sin and will not speak up about their faith for the simple reason they know that people won't agree with that and people won't like them.

People will think evil of them and they will not receive persecution willingly because they're ashamed of their faith. Paul said, I'm not ashamed of the gospel. In Romans 1.16, he said, I'm not ashamed of the gospel.

It's the power of God unto salvation to all who believe. If you're in a place where somebody is representing some wicked philosophy or whatever and you have opportunity to speak, but you're afraid to do it because it's an unpopular position, then you're trying to keep the light under a bushel. Now, there are times, as I said, where discretion is the better part of valor and where he who doesn't speak up in one situation may preserve his right to speak up to the same people in another situation.

I'm not saying that a person has to be careless in his speech, but rather that we need to be willing to speak up for Christ even if it's unpopular. There are times when caution is also called for. Now, Jesus said in verse 16, let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works and glorify your father in heaven.

Now, it makes it clear here that the light that men are to see in your life is your good works. And good works simply means good behavior in general. It has to do with your lifestyle in general.

Your behavior should be superior in moral quality. You should exhibit enlightened

behavior. Your works beheld by your neighbors should advertise to them that you have light that they lack.

That you're doing things that are obviously more wise. Now, a lot of times when people do what Jesus said, it looks stupid at first. People think that Christians are fools.

But the end result is what proves that you're right. I mean, when people see that Christians, because they follow Jesus Christ, their teenagers don't become rebellious, don't get into drugs, don't go out and get pregnant out of wedlock, don't end up in jail, that their children, even their toddlers, are not out of control, that their marriages are not breaking up in divorce, that they do take care of one another, and that the Christians in a Christian community are not neglected by their brethren, when people observe that Christians are not taking psychiatric drugs to learn how to cope with life because they have love and they have joy and they have peace and the Holy Spirit, when people see that the psychiatrists and the psychologists are not being kept alive by the business of Christians, then they can see that there's something about Christianity that is desirable and right. There's something right about this.

Their families work. What they're doing is working. Now, this is supposed to be the case.

When people look at the church, they should see a lower incidence of rebellious youth, a lower incidence of people needing psychiatrists and psychologists than the national average. They should see a lower incidence of divorce, a lower incidence of drinking, and of other substance abuse. But that's not what they see.

And just as this church can be salt that's lost its saltiness, the church can be light that's become very dim. That has become actual darkness. Jesus later on in Matthew chapter 6 talks about if that light that is in you is darkness, how great is that darkness? Where he said the lamp of the body is the eye in Matthew 6, 22 and 23.

He says in the final part of verse 23, if therefore that light that is in you is darkness, how great is that darkness? Now, this is perhaps connected somewhat to being light of the world, but it has another context also with another point he's trying to make, which we'll discuss at a later time when we come to chapter 6. But if the church's light becomes dim or dark, then how great is the darkness of the society that depended fully on the church's light to know anything of God? If the church is saying the right things but not living according to its standards, then it might as well be saying nothing. It simply advertises itself as a group of hypocrites, is what the world often thinks the church to be. And so, it's necessary for the world to see your good works and glorify your Father.

Now, there's an interesting thing. It doesn't say that the world may see your good works and glorify you. Mother Teresa did many good works and probably there are many who glorify the Father because of her.

She got a lot of attention too, of course. She got a Nobel Peace Prize and other things like that and was very famous. A lot of people thought she was a wonderful person and a lot of people no doubt glorified her.

That's not, I believe, what she was seeking. I believe that whatever she did, I don't think she did it for the praise of man and I don't think she's lost any reward for having been recognized. But I do believe that some people would like to be like her because they'd like people to think of them like they think of her.

In fact, they'd like it better if people thought that way about them without them having to be like her. A lot of people would like to pretend to be godly and have just enough good works that men will glorify you, that men will recognize you as a saintly person, but not really enough to impress God. And that's why later on in Matthew 6 in the Sermon on Jesus says, when you do your good deeds, don't do them to be seen by men.

The Pharisees do that, the hypocrites do that, and they have their reward. Their reward, you've got it. But Jesus says you should do your good works in such a way that men don't glorify you, but men glorify God.

Now your good works can be seen and should be seen. And if someone thinks there's maybe a contrast or a contradiction here between that and Matthew 6, where it says don't do your good deeds to be seen by men, you simply need to recognize the difference in the passages about motivation. If you live consistently a good life, it is impossible not to be noticed, unless you're invisible.

Your life is lived in a society around other people. If you're doing good deeds, people will know it. But you are not to do them to be seen by men.

Now it doesn't mean that you must insist that no one sees you, or else you'd have to skulk around in the darkness and make sure no one was anywhere that you were going to be doing anything that's good. He's talking about motivation. If you do your good deeds to be seen by men, to get their approval, to get their praise, then you have no reward from your Heavenly Father.

But if your good deeds are done not for that purpose, but for the glory of God, that men will see your good works and glorify God, then there's every reason that you should hope that your good works are noticed. But it's not so much that my personal good works will be noticed by society and some credit will be given to me for it, but rather that the good works of the Church as a whole will prove that God's way is the best way, and God will receive glory as a result of the lives of his people. And that is the desirable thing.

That is what it's all about. Now, he does go on and talk in chapter 6 about being secretive about your works, but I personally believe that he's using hyperbole there when he says to make sure you, before you pray, go into your closet and shut the door.

Obviously, Jesus didn't always do that when he prayed, nor did the disciples.

When he said, don't let your right hand know what your left hand knows what your right hand is doing, obviously that's a hyperbole, since hands don't know anything anyway. When he talks about being totally secretive about good works, he is not necessarily insisting on a literal secrecy. What he's saying is make sure you do things in such a way as to guarantee that you're not seeking man's attention, man's approval, that you're doing it rightly motivated to please God, so that God will be glorified and pleased, not that man will know and you'll be glorified.

Now, that is the influence that the church is supposed to have in the world. And it requires, of course, that we walk in the light so that the light is reflected to the world. Now, Jesus here, in saying to the church, you are the light of the world, of course, you know that Jesus said elsewhere that he was the light of the world.

In John 8, 12. In John 8, 12, Jesus said, I am the light of the world. He who follows me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life.

Now, it's interesting that he'd say, you, or I am the light of the world, and then he'd say to his disciples, you are the light of the world. A little further down, let's I am in the world, I am the light of the world. Now, that's an interesting twist.

When he was in the world, he could say, I am the light of the world. But he said that that's only true while I am in the world. While I'm in the world, I'm the light of the world.

But he conferred some of his light to his disciples, so that when he was no longer in the world, and they were, they are now the light of the world. And the same thing is true, those who follow him shall not walk in darkness. The church should be such that those who follow us shall not walk in darkness.

Unfortunately, too many Christians are walking in darkness, not walking according to the word of God, and people who follow them, follow them into oblivion. Just like Jesus said of the Pharisees, you'll cross land and sea to make one convert, one proselyte, and once you've made him, you'll make him twice a child of hell as yourself. There are religious people, they mean themselves as Christians, who are living so poorly, so compromised, so worldly, that the converts they make are being made as bad as them.

Those who follow them are still walking in darkness. Now, Jesus said, while I'm in the world, I'm the light of the world. It's often been pointed out, and I think it's an apt illustration that the sun and the moon in the sky provide an illustration of Jesus and the church in terms of both giving light to the world.

During the daytime, the sun can be seen by those on planet earth. When you're on the earth, and looking up in the sky in its daytime, you can see the sun, unless the clouds are there, of course, but on average, you can see the sun. Its light is directly giving light

to the world.

But it eventually goes over the horizon in the evening and is no longer seen. But in its place, there is the moon. And the moon then gives light to the world during the night season while the sun is away, but the sun comes back, and a new morning dawns.

And the Bible in various places talks about the coming of Christ, his first coming and his second, as the dawning of a new day. When Jesus was born, actually when John the Baptist was born, before Jesus was born, Zacharias, the priest, prophesied that the day spring, or the daybreak from on high, was dawning on the people of Israel, and that Jesus the Messiah was coming. It says of Malachi about the first coming of Christ, under you who fear my name shall the sun of righteousness arise with healing in his wings.

It says in Isaiah 9, which was quoted in Matthew as being fulfilled in Jesus' ministry, those who sat in the shadow of death, upon them a light has dawned. Jesus' coming was like the dawning of a day, and it was daytime while he was here. He was like the sun in the sky during the daytime hours.

He was the light of the world while he was here. But he went over the horizon. He disappeared.

He went away. And the night fell. But the night will end.

Paul said in Romans 13, the night is far spent, the day is close at hand. There's another day to dawn, and that's when Jesus comes back, when the sun reappears. In the meantime, though, in the night season, between the evening, where the sun disappeared, and the next dawn, when the sun reappears, there is the moon.

And the moon differs from the sun significantly, in fact, in almost all ways, because the sun is inherently bright. The sun is inherently luminous. The sun gives off radiance from its very nature.

The moon does not. The moon is not luminous inherently. It does not give off radiance from its inherent nature.

It is just a gray piece of rock, however, of a very reflective kind of material, apparently, because the sun's light reflects very well off of it and gives light to the world. The reason that the moon can give light to the world is because it is in the heavens. When the sun is no longer visible from the inhabitants of earth, the moon is elevated high enough it can still see the sun.

The sun's rays still hit the moon, and they are reflected back to the earth. And, of course, that's an irresistible illustration for preachers to use, and I think it's a biblical one, that we are like the moon. We are not intrinsically light, but we become the light of the world because we are seated with Christ in heavenly places.

Even though the world sees him no more, we see him. And it is our view of him that makes us light. We are not light by nature.

He is light by nature, and as long as he is in the world, he is the light of the world. When he comes back, he will be the light of the world again. It says of the new Jerusalem and the new earth, the city had no need of the sun or the moon to shine in it, for the glory of God and of the Lamb were the light of it.

Jesus will be the light. There will be no more night there, it says, because it will be all day, all the time, because Jesus, the sun, will be back. But we live in that night season between the departure and the return of Christ, and as we remain focused on him, as we behold the glory of the Lord and are changed from glory to glory in that same image, as we keep our eyes on Jesus, then it is possible for us to receive and to reflect his light to the world, and that's what we're supposed to be doing.

That's why we study the life of Christ. That's why we meditate on him. That's why we cultivate a relationship with him.

That's why we want to know him, so that we can make him known to others. And someday he'll come back, and our task will be, at least this task will be over. We'll have some other assigned duties, I'm sure, when he gets back.

But while he is gone, we are the light of the world, and we must remain visible, and the light must remain pure. And it is pure exactly insofar as it is reflective of his light. As our lives reflect the character of Jesus, and the holiness of Jesus, then the world has a light to look at, has something to be instructed by and guided by.

And therefore Jesus teaches his disciples that that is their noble and dignified role on the planet Earth. They may be persecuted for righteousness' sake, but there's a great dignity in their existence. They are chosen by God to fulfill a vital function to the world and to the environment in which they live.

And it is my contention, as you know, that the Church ought to be living so differently than the world in so many respects, and challenging every cultural norm that is not found in Scripture to see whether it is agreeable with Scripture or disagreeable with Scripture. And then living according to the biblical patterns and principles, even if it goes right across the grain of the cultural norm, even if it brings persecution. I believe that as the Church does this, then it will begin to have salt again, and whether it is too late to help this society is not known.

A very good example of this, I can think of, is in the homeschooling movement. And of course I'm in the homeschooling movement, and you might think that because of that I want to put in a plug for it, but it's sort of the other way around. It's because I believe in it that I'm in it.

It's not because I'm in it I believe in it. I believe that the homeschooling movement is a very good example of what needs to be done in many areas of our culture. Our culture has assumed for the longest time that parents should surrender the raising of their children to the state, or to the church, or to somebody else to disciple them, even though the Bible clearly says that parents should do this.

And it's just been an unchallenged assumption for almost a century now. Public school is about a century old in this society, and it so was assumed that when people began to homeschool in any significant numbers about, I'd say it must have been about 25 years ago, I first began to hear about people homeschooling. Or maybe even a little later, it might have only been 20 years ago when I first heard about people homeschooling.

It was something that there was embarrassment about sometimes. People sometimes didn't want to mention that they homeschooled because they'd get criticism, people would think they're not doing right by their children, people would think that they're, you know, anti-social or whatever. And there was a bit of embarrassment, a bit of persecution, there still is a bit of persecution, of the movement.

And people who decided to go against the stream, almost everyone who asked them where their kids go to school and were told, well we homeschool, they were in a position to have to give a defense for themselves because it was thought to be weird or wrong or crazy. But now, of course, Christians who do this almost never have to give any answer anymore. These days, when we tell people we homeschool, even non-Christian people in today's business, they say, oh I know someone who does that, their kids are really doing really well, that's a really good thing.

Yeah, those homeschool kids, they're, you know, I wish I could homeschool, I didn't have to work or whatever. I mean, people, these days, it's totally different. Some group of pioneers back there, before I was in it, had to cut through the ice, really, of the culture and say this is more biblical.

What we're doing is taking the biblical responsibility for our families that the Bible says we're supposed to take, and which previous generations of Christians for the past few generations have neglected to a large extent. And to a large extent, they lost their children. And many Christians are still losing their children.

But there's a group, there are a group of pioneers saying we're going to do this no matter how much we have to swim against the tide, no matter how much resistance we get, and you know what, there's a breakthrough. I'm not saying that all, you know, we're out of the woods yet because there's still a reaction. The educational system of the world doesn't want anyone homeschooling because, well, there's financial reasons.

For one thing, the public schools get about \$5,000 per student from the federal government that's enrolled in school. Every homeschool student is \$5,000 that's taken

out of the pocket of the public school. And get a family of four, that's \$20,000 the school's losing.

That's, you know, six students homeschooled is a teacher's salary not coming in. And so there's strong economic pressure and political pressure because if the kids are homeschooled, then the political agendas of those who run the schools and want to create world citizens and statists and little socialist intolerant people, you know, who don't think anything is ever wrong except intolerance, you know, it doesn't work. You can't get to the kids if they're at home.

And so there are, of course, powerful forces, the same forces that persecute Christianity are persecuting homeschooling. Now, I'm not trying to make homeschooling the Christian issue. What I'm saying is this, that in my experience, the Christians who are homeschooling are the Christians who care about being salt and light in the world.

Now, there are people who care who don't homeschool. I don't want to make that group, you know, coextensive. I don't want to make homeschooling the mark of being a dedicated Christian.

But I will say this, though there are dedicated Christians who don't homeschool, there are not very many homeschoolers who aren't dedicated Christians. OK, let me put it that way. You will find dedicated Christians who do not homeschool, but you don't find very many homeschoolers that aren't dedicated Christians.

And therefore what we could say is that homeschooling is one factor in a Christian cultural upheaval that is growing rapidly. Over a million families are homeschooling in America right now, and it's growing all the time. Some of them are not Christians, and some are possibly not very dedicated Christians, but the vast majority appear to be homeschooling because they care about the spiritual development of their children more than anything else, and they're determined that, you know, though they may live on one income or they may have, you know, they may have to suffer in some ways and make some sacrifices in some ways, the one thing needful to them is that their children are raised in the faith and that their children are raised to know God and are not corrupted by the world system.

And there's more things can be said maybe pro and maybe even con about homeschooling than what I have to say here. I didn't, I don't mean to make it the issue. I make it an illustration.

There are other issues additional to this. There is the movement to reject dating as a means of finding a mate. There are other movements of people moving into Christian community and so forth so that they can have more of a sharing of goods, and there's various things that people do in order to try to follow a cultural norm that they feel is biblical and it goes against the grain of the culture at large.

And these people who do so, generally speaking, they receive criticism at first, but as they continue in it, the world looks on and says, you know, these people, they're pretty good people. They're getting some results I wouldn't mind getting in my life. You know, it wouldn't be all that bad if we all lived that way.

And eventually, by the Christians bucking the system, going against the grain, against the flow, and doing what the Bible says they should do, they typically have an influence on people's thinking. Whether, as I say, it may be too late for our society, it may not be. It remains to be seen.

But if our society is to be solved, I've heard this, I've heard like, I've heard talk show hosts who are not even Christians say this, they say that they believe the hope of American future is in the homeschooling movement. And they're saying that not because they necessarily know a lot of homeschoolers, but because they know how bad the schools are. You know, I mean, they just know that if America is going to be saved, we've got to get the kids out of these public schools that are corrupting the nation.

But it is true in a way that these secular talk show hosts may not even realize. And that is the hope of the nation, the hope of any society, is that the salt will be salted, and the light will be bright. And that if it isn't in this generation, that maybe there's hope that the next generation will be.

And those who have a vision for being salt and light, of course, also have a vision for their children to be. And that being the case, there is some, there is some light, there is some salt. And it's not just in the homeschooling movement, believe me, but that's a very good illustration of the kind of thing that I believe needs to be more of in more areas of life.

There needs to be more challenging of the world's entertainment industry. There needs to be more challenging of the world's concept of affluence and the desirability of being affluent and living affluent lifestyles. The kind of cars people drive and things like that.

I mean, Christians are just caught up, to a large extent, in all the same pursuits as the world is, and not challenging their values, the world's values. And that being so, the world is simply ignoring the church, because the church definitely does not appear to have an alternative to offer. And yet there is an alternative.

And Jesus describes it in the Beatitudes. He describes it in the Sermon on the Mount. He describes it in his own behavior, in his own lifestyle.

And the disciples are seen later as doing so in theirs. I'm not quite sure how it is that modern Christians can read the life of Christ that are the disciples and somehow just feel like, well, that was then, this is now, or something. You know, that's how it was back then.

We don't do that these days. And yet see the terrible corruption of our culture that has resulted from that mentality. Well, the next portion of the Sermon on the Mount is a portion that will require a fair concentration of attention, a very difficult portion, verses 17 through 20 of Matthew 5. I'm going to close this session early so that I don't begin to dip into that section and then find myself just getting started and out of time.

So next time we'll come back and talk about what Jesus said about the law. He didn't come to destroy the law, but to fulfill it. What does that mean? What is the relationship of the Christian today to the law? And in what sense is it fulfilled? And in what sense is it still binding? These are hard questions.

And they all arise out of the passages before us, and we'll have to examine them with some carefulness next time.