



BEN WASHINGTON BAPTIST CHURCH

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Wednesday Noon Bible Study

April 22, 2026

SERMON SERIES

“Kingdom Living: The Sermon on The Mount”

Part 2 – “Salt, Light, and Righteousness”

Now Jesus speaks on where he wants his disciples to display their discipleship.

Matthew 5:13-20

13. Ye are the salt of the earth: but if the salt have lost his savour, wherewith shall it be salted? it is thenceforth good for nothing, but to be cast out, and to be trodden under foot of men.

14. Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on an hill cannot be hid.

15. Neither do men light a candle, and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick; and it giveth light unto all that are in the house.

16. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.

17. Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil.

18. For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled.

19. Whosoever therefore shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven: but whosoever shall do and teach [them], the same shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven.

20. For I say unto you, That except your righteousness shall exceed [the righteousness] of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven.

This passage is part of the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5–7).

Jesus has just delivered the Beatitudes, describing the character of Kingdom citizens. Now He shifts to:

- **Their influence (vv. 13–16)**
- **Their relationship to the Law (vv. 17–20)**

Salt of the Earth (Matthew 5:13)

Jesus told his disciples “Ye are the Salt of the Earth”

- Disciples are like salt because they are “PRECIOUS” (Salt was a valued commodity)
- Disciples are like salt because they have a “PRESERVING INFLUENCE” (Salt was used to preserve meat and slow decay)
- Disciples are like salt because they “ADD FLAVOR” (Salt was used to enhance the flavor)

Salt must maintain its purpose or else “what good is it?”

Jesus used the concepts of salt and light a number of different times to refer to the role of His followers in the world. One example is found in *Matthew 5:13*: “*You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled by men.*” Salt had two purposes in the Middle East of the first century. Because of the lack of refrigeration, **salt was used to preserve food, especially meat, which would quickly spoil in the desert environment.** Believers in Christ are preservatives to the world, preserving it from the evil inherent in the society of ungodly men whose unredeemed natures are corrupted by sin (Psalm 14:3; Romans 8:8).

Second, salt was used then, as now, as a flavor enhancer. In the same way that salt enhances the flavor of the food it seasons, the followers of Christ stand out as those who “enhance” the flavor of life in this world. Christians, living under the guidance of the Holy Spirit and in obedience to Christ, will inevitably influence the world for good, as salt has a positive influence on the flavor of the food it seasons. Where there is strife, we are to be peacemakers; where there is sorrow, we are to be the ministers of Christ, binding up wounds, and where there is hatred, we are to exemplify the love of God in Christ, returning good for evil (Luke 6:35).

In the analogy of light to the world, **the good works of Christ’s followers are to shine for all to see.** The following verses in Matthew 5 highlight this truth: “*You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden; nor does anyone light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house. Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven*” (*Matthew 5:14-16, NASB*). The idea here is similar—the presence of light in darkness is something that is unmistakable. The presence of Christians in the world must be like a light in the darkness, not only in the sense that the truth of God’s Word brings light to the darkened hearts of sinful man (John 1:1-10), but also in the sense that our good deeds must be evident for all to see. And indeed, our deeds will be evident if they are performed in accordance with the other principles that Jesus mentions in this passage, such as the Beatitudes in Matthew 5:3-11. Notice especially that the concern is not that Christians would stand out for their own sake, but that those who looked on might “glorify your Father who is in heaven” (v. 16, KJV).

In view of these verses, what sorts of things can hinder or prevent the Christian from fulfilling his or her role as salt and light in the world? The passage clearly states that the difference between the Christian and the world must be preserved; therefore, any choice on our part that blurs the distinction between us and the rest of the world is a step in the wrong direction. This can happen either through a choice to accept the ways of the world for the sake of comfort or convenience or to contravene the law of obedience to Christ.

Mark 9:50 suggests that saltiness can be lost specifically through a **lack of peace with one another**; this follows from the command to “*have salt in yourselves, and be at peace with each other.*” And in Luke 14:34-35, we find a reference to the metaphor of salt once again, this time in the context of **obedient discipleship to Jesus Christ.** The loss of saltiness occurs in the failure of the Christian to daily take up the cross and follow Christ wholeheartedly.

Losing saltiness = losing spiritual effectiveness

It seems, then, that the role of the Christian as salt and light in the world may be hindered or prevented through any choice to **compromise or settle for that which is more convenient or comfortable, rather than that which is truly best and pleasing to the Lord.** Moreover, the status of salt and light is something that follows naturally from the Christian's humble obedience to the commandments of Christ. It is when we depart from the Spirit-led lifestyle of genuine discipleship that the distinctions between ourselves and the rest of the world become blurred and our testimony is hindered. Only by remaining focused on Christ and being obedient to Him can we expect to remain salt and light in the world.

Light of the World (Matthew 5:14-16)

Jesus gives the Christian both a great compliment and a great responsibility when He says that we are the light of the world, because He claimed that title for Himself as He walked this earth (John 8:12 and John 9:5).

When we are Lights of the World it means we are:

- Light Receivers
- Light Givers

Key Truth: Light exposes darkness and provides guidance.

Interpretation:

- Light is visible, not hidden
- A "city on a hill" symbolizes public witness
- Good works are meant to point to God, not self

Jesus never challenged us to **become salt or light**. He simply said that we are - and we are either **fulfilling or failing** that given responsibility.

Let your light so shine before men: The purpose of light is to illuminate and expose what is there. Therefore, light must be exposed before it is of any use - if it is hidden under a basket, it is no longer useful.

The Goal:

"That they may see your good works and glorify your Father..."

Application Questions:

- Is my faith visible or concealed?
- Do my actions point people to God or to me?

A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden: Such a city is prominent and can't be hidden. If you see such a city from a distance, it is hard to take your eyes off of it. In the same way, Jesus wanted the people of His kingdom to live visible lives that attracted attention to the beauty of God's work in the life.

Nor do they light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a lampstand: The idea of a lampstand gives the sense that we are to be intentional about letting this light shine. Even as lamps are placed

higher so their light can be more effective, we should look for ways to let our light shine in greater and broader ways.

That they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven: The purpose in letting our light so shine by doing good works is so that others will glorify God, not ourselves.

The Law and True Righteousness (Matthew 5:17-18)

Jesus here began a long discussion of the law and wanted to make it clear that He did not oppose what God gave Israel in what we call the Old Testament. He did not come to destroy the word of God, but to free it from the way the Pharisees and Scribes had wrongly interpreted it.

I did not come to destroy but to fulfill: Jesus wanted to make it clear that He had authority apart from the Law of Moses, but not in contradiction to it. Jesus added nothing to the law except one thing that no man had ever added to the law: perfect obedience. This is certainly one way Jesus came to fulfill the law.

- Jesus fulfilled the doctrinal teachings of the Law and the Prophets in that He brought full revelation.
- Jesus fulfilled the predictive prophecy of the Law and the Prophets in that He is the Promised One, showing the reality behind the shadows.
- Jesus fulfilled the moral and legal demands of the Law and the Prophets in that He fully obeyed them and He reinterpreted them in their truth.
- Jesus fulfilled the penalty of the Law and the Prophets for us by His death on the cross, taking the penalty we deserved.

Key Truth: Jesus fulfills—not abolishes—the Law.

Important Entity: Jesus Christ

Interpretation:

Fulfillment includes:

- Prophecy completion
- Perfect obedience
- Full revelation of God's intent

The Law remains authoritative and purposeful

Theological Insight:

Jesus is the culmination of the Old Testament, not its cancellation.

Our Relationship to the Law (Matthew 5:19-20)

The Christian is done with the law as a means of gaining a righteous standing before God. One passage that explains this is Galatians 2:21: For if righteousness comes through the law, then Christ died in vain. However, the law stands as the perfect expression of God's ethical character and requirements.

Key Comparison Group: Pharisees and scribes

Key Truth: External obedience is insufficient.

Interpretation:

- The Pharisees practiced outward righteousness
- Jesus calls for **internal transformation**
- Kingdom righteousness = heart-level obedience

Critical Statement:

“Unless your righteousness exceeds...”

This introduces a deeper standard:

Not just behavior → but motives, desires, and integrity

Application Questions:

- Is my righteousness internal or performative?
- Am I obeying God from love or obligation?

Jesus calls His followers to a **visible, transformative**, and **authentic faith**.

The world doesn't need hidden believers—it needs distinct, radiant disciples whose lives point unmistakably to God.