

Salt and Light  
Matthew 5:13–16; Luke 6:27–36  
Sunday, October 12, 2025

Let us pray: Lord, you have the words that lead to life. May your Word live in us, so that we can live in Christ. Amen.

A few weeks ago, we heard Jesus say, “I am the way, the truth, and the life.” And we talked about how there is not a *way* that we take to *get* to Jesus; Jesus *is* the way that we follow. And if we are following the way that is Jesus, living our lives with him, then everywhere we go, everything we do, we will be doing it *with him*. So what does it look like to follow the way that is Jesus? Last week we started looking at Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount, the most extensive teaching that we have from him in scripture on what it means to follow him. There is a version of this sermon in Matthew’s gospel, and there is a version of it in Luke’s gospel, and they are fairly different, so we are looking at sections from each of those each week. Both versions start with the Beatitudes, Jesus announcing a series of blessings (on the *poor*, the poor *in spirit*, the *hungry*, those who hunger and thirst *for righteousness*). And so today we heard what Jesus said immediately *after* the Beatitudes in Matthew’s gospel.

*You are the salt of the earth.* Well, what does *that* mean? Today, that expression is most commonly used when describing a *good person*. If you say that someone is a “salt of the earth person,” that means that they are good, solid, reliable, and trustworthy. But in Jesus’ time, salt had multiple uses and layers of meaning. Salt was used when people made offerings and sacrifices to God in the temple. It was used for purification. Salt was a symbol of loyalty and faithfulness and covenant, a binding relationship. Eating together was often referred to as “sharing salt.” It was used as a preservative in a time before refrigeration. And, of course, it was used to season food and make it taste better. So there is a sense in which Jesus is telling his disciples, “You are the offering or sacrifice of the world. You purify the world.

You are a symbol of God's faithfulness and covenant in the world. You preserve the world. You give flavor to the world."

But one thing you *don't* do with salt is eat it by itself. You don't just sit down with a bowl of salt and a spoon and go to town. Unless you are our oldest son, Brandon, who will often just pour some salt on his plate, pick it up with his fingers, and eat it. But usually, you use salt *with something else*. It does not exist for itself, it exists to make *something else* better. So in that same way, Jesus is saying to his disciples (to *us*), "*You* do not exist for yourselves, for your own purposes. You exist for *others*, for the *world*. You are meant to make something else better."

The *church* does not exist for itself. We don't just build ourselves up and make ourselves better. And the primary purpose of faith is not to make me a better person. That is a *byproduct* of faith, but it is not its primary purpose. We exist for the world, to make the *world* better, to spread the preserving, purifying flavor of God's love and grace and peace throughout the world. *You are the salt of the earth*.

Then Jesus says, "You are the light of the world." Well, the purpose of light is to help us *see*. We exist to help others *see*. And in this case, what we are helping the world see, Jesus says, is *God*. When people see our good works, when they see what God calls us to and inspires in us, it shows them something about God (hopefully something *good*). So Jesus says, "Let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven." And the question I want us to focus on today is, "What does that *look like*?" What does it mean for us to let our light shine before others? How do we do that?

This is where we turn to Luke. Interestingly, Luke's gospel does not have this part about the salt of the earth and the light of the world. Right after Jesus finishes the Beatitudes in Luke's gospel, he says this (in Luke 6:27–36):

<sup>27</sup>“But I say to you that listen, love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, <sup>28</sup>bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you. <sup>29</sup>If anyone strikes you on the cheek, offer the other also; and from anyone who takes away your coat do not withhold even your shirt. <sup>30</sup>Give to everyone who begs from you; and if anyone takes away your goods, do not ask for them again. <sup>31</sup>Do to others as you would have them do to you.

<sup>32</sup>“If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them. <sup>33</sup>If you do good to those who do good to you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners do the same. <sup>34</sup>If you lend to those from whom you hope to receive, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners, to receive as much again. <sup>35</sup>But love your enemies, do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return. Your reward will be great, and you will be children of the Most High; for he is kind to the ungrateful and the wicked.

<sup>36</sup>Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.”

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How does the world around us tell us that we should treat others? The way they treat us. That is the Golden Rule of the world, “Do unto others as they do to you.” If they are good to you, be good to them. If they are *not* good to you, if they *hurt* you, then you can hurt them, or at least just walk away and ignore them.

But Jesus calls us to show the world a different way of living. A way that is based in love and mercy, treating others the way we would *want them to treat us*. Not the way they *do* treat us. Not the way we think they *deserve* to be treated. But the way *we want* to be treated.

Do you want people to hurt you? To hold grudges against you? To be impatient with you and yell at you? Do you want people to talk about you behind your back? To make fun of you? Do you want people to ignore you or abandon you when you are in need? Do you want people to steal from you? To lie to you? To remind you of your mistakes and throw them back in your face? Quick show of hands,

how many of you want people to treat you like that? Then we probably shouldn't do those things to *others*.

In contrast, do you want people to be patient with you? To be kind to you? Do you want people to help you when you are in need? To forgive you? To be truthful and honest with you? Do you want people to pray for you? To bless you? To be generous with you? Do you want people to show you grace when you aren't perfect? If that's how you want to be treated, then that's probably what we should be doing with others.

That's it. That's the sermon. We could go through all these examples and situations – *What about this person? What about that situation?* – but what Jesus calls us to here is the same for *every* person and *every* situation. Treat other people the way that you *want* to be treated. It is so simple. And it is the hardest thing you will ever have to do.

We might say, “If I do what Jesus says here – if I love my enemies, forgive them, bless them – then I will just get taken advantage of and hurt again.” Maybe. But didn't we just hear Jesus say last week that those who are meek and merciful, those who are persecuted and hated for doing the things that he calls us to do, they are actually *blessed* by God. He says that our reward will be great. Maybe not in *this* life. But this life is not all there is. The world around us might bless treating others the way that they treat us, but whose blessing really *matters*? Whose blessing are we *seeking*?

The world *expects* revenge and retaliation, an eye for an eye, treating others the way that they treat you. Where has it gotten us? In this absolute disaster of a mess that you see around us every day. Jesus calls us to show the world a different way of living. He calls us to act in love toward our neighbor *and* our enemy. We can't control how *they* treat *us*. But we can control how *we* treat *them*. And when we *do*

that, we shine the light of God into the world, and we walk the way that is Jesus. In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.