

THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT – MATTHEW 5-7

Salt and Light: The Identity and Duty of Kingdom Citizens

Matthew 5:13-16

Faith Church of Linden

By Daniel Patz on May 24, 2026

SERMON AIM: *Because God has, by grace, made His people salt and light in a rotting and darkened world, they are called to let that identity shine openly — not for their own glory but for the glory of their Father in heaven. This sermon calls us to receive the privilege of who we are in Christ and then to live it out courageously and gladly in every corner of ordinary life.*

THE TEXT: MATTHEW 5:13–16 (ESV)

“You are the salt of the earth, but if salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything except to be thrown out and trampled under people’s feet. You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.”

INTRODUCTION

Last week we ended the Beatitudes with the first command in the entire Sermon on the Mount. Jesus has been painting a portrait — blessing upon blessing, describing the kingdom citizen from every angle — and then He looks His disciples in the eye and says: *Rejoice and be glad*. That is the first imperative. A command. Leap for joy.

This week we come to the second clear command in this sermon: *let your light shine*. These two commands belong together. We rejoice and are glad — even in mourning, even in poverty of spirit, even in persecution, even in the costly work of peacemaking — and that gladness is itself part of how we shine. A rejoicing people in a despairing world is one of the most powerful lights there is. We will come back to that.

We have spent weeks in the Beatitudes — what God’s grace produces in a human life: poverty of spirit, mourning, meekness, hunger for righteousness, mercy, purity of heart, peacemaking, perseverance under persecution. Jesus has been painting a picture of what it looks like to be fully, deeply, lastingly happy in Him.

But the Beatitudes were never meant to stay purely inward. What God works in His people does not end inside them. It flows out into the world. And now, as Jesus brings the introduction of His sermon toward its close, He turns His disciples outward — and He says two things. **You are the salt of the earth. You are the light of the world.**

He is speaking to all of His disciples. All ages. All stages. Not just the mature or the theologically trained. Not just the adults. Every kingdom citizen sitting in that crowd — and every kingdom citizen sitting in this room — is included in this declaration.

And **if** you are here this morning and **you do not yet know Christ** — if you are not sure you are a Christian, or you know you are not — I want you to lean in rather than check out. What Jesus is describing here is what a human life looks like when it has been restored. You were made to be this. The darkness and rottenness this passage implies — that is not the way things were meant to be, and it is not the way they have to stay.

Think about what **their world** looked like. A world **without refrigeration** or **lightbulb**. A village without electricity sitting in the kind of darkness most of us have never experienced — so total you could not see your hand in front of your face. A darkness where evil hid and fear thrived and death crouched. Into that world, Jesus says: you are the salt. You are the light.

Three movements this morning: the Christian's identity, the Christian's danger, and the Christian's duty.

1. THE CHRISTIAN'S IDENTITY

"You are the salt of the earth... You are the light of the world."

The Indicative Before the Imperative

The first thing to notice is that Jesus does not say, *become* the salt or *try to be* the light. He says **you are**. This is a declaration. An indicative statement of fact. Not a command.

This is the **grammar of grace** throughout the New Testament. God declares who His people are before He calls them to live accordingly. You are a new creation — walk as one. You are children of light — walk as children of light. The indicative always precedes the imperative. Identity always precedes duty. And this matters enormously, because if we get it the wrong way around, the Christian life becomes a performance. But Jesus says: you already are this. Now live from it.

This identity is not something you manufactured. It is what God's grace has done to you. Look back at the Beatitudes. The poor in spirit, the mourning, the meek, the pure in heart, the peacemaker — these are not achievements. They are the fruit of the Holy Spirit working in those who have been born again, saved by the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ. The salt and light identity is the **outward face** of everything the Beatitudes describe. It is what that grace-shaped inner life looks like from the outside, in the world.

Salt and Light: What Jesus Means

Jesus does not tell us exactly which property of salt He has primarily in mind — and the commentators are not entirely agreed. We should look at biblical and historical context.

The first is **preservation**. In an age with no refrigeration, salt kept meat from rotting. Without it, decay was inevitable. Salt arrested it. Christians who are being shaped by grace — growing in true righteousness, becoming merciful and meek and pure in heart and peacemaking — live very distinctly from a rotting world. A world so messed up, so out of touch with reality and beauty and glory and truth. And their character, their integrity, their holding fast to Christ — this is a grace to a decaying society. It preserves.

The second is **purity and covenant**. Salt in the Old Testament was closely tied to the covenants of God and the salt was connected to purity and holiness. Numbers 18:19 speaks of a “covenant of salt” — the faithfulness and permanence of God’s promises. Jesus tells the disciples to have salt in themselves as they sought to have a true purity inward in their ministry. There is a sense in which we, as those who carry the message of Christ, go into the world as bearers of the new covenant promises — declaring that God has been faithful, that the Messiah has come, that forgiveness and life are available. We are salt as we bring the gospel and as we live the gospel, having been changed by it, with the law written on our hearts.

And then: you are the **light** of the world. Jesus says in [John 8:12](#), *“I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness.”* And here He says to His disciples: *you* are the light. This is not a contradiction — it is a direct consequence. Because Jesus is the light, those who are in Him, who carry His life and Spirit, become lights themselves. We do not generate our own light. We **reflect** His. We carry it. A city on a hill at night in the ancient world — when darkness was total and frightening and dangerous — was visible for miles. It gave orientation. It gave hope. You knew where you were. That is what we are to a world that does not know where it is.

This light is a life lived and a message delivered. It is the peacemaker bringing the gospel of peace to someone at war with God. It is the merciful person forgiving the undeserving and showing them what forgiveness looks like. It is love lived out in real life — the good works that God has prepared in advance for us to walk in.

You and No Other

Now we must take note of something Jesus says that is easy to pass over but is enormously important. He says *you* are the salt of the earth. *You* are the light of the world. There is no other.

You cannot look around and hope somebody else will do it. It is you. The church is called to be this in the world. Not that God *needs* us — He could cause the rocks to cry out if He wanted to. But He has ordained that it would be done through His people. That is His plan.

This is not a statement that says: praise us, look how special we are. It is a statement that says: we have a calling that no one else has. And because we love the One who rescued us from the rottenness and delivered us from the darkness, we carry that on. What a privilege. What a responsibility.

Reflection Question: When you think about your workplace, your neighborhood, your family — do you feel the weight of being the only salt in the room? Does that move you to prayer? To courage? To a deeper dependence on the grace that made you who you are?

2. THE CHRISTIAN'S DANGER

“But if salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything except to be thrown out and trampled under people’s feet.” — Matthew 5:13

The “But” of Verse 13

Notice that word. **But**. Jesus has just declared the identity — you are the salt, you are the light — and immediately He sounds a warning. “**But if salt has lost its taste...**” This is what this sermon does throughout. It woos us and warns us. It commands us and encourages us. It reminds us and reprimands us. This is how Jesus preaches.

Salt in the ancient world was often impure, mixed with other minerals. If the salt content became so **diluted** — so overwhelmed by what was mixed in — that there was very little actual salt left, it became useless. And that is the image. Oh, how easy it is to just be like the world. To share the same values. To pursue the same things. To be so blended in with the culture that there is very little left that is distinctively Christian.

John 17 Jesus prays - "They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world... I do not ask that you take them out of the world, but that you keep them from the evil one." That's the tension held together in one breath — not of it, but in it. Jesus doesn't pray for extraction. He prays for preservation within engagement.

This whole Sermon on the Mount must be seen in the light of this warning, and this warning must be seen in the light of the whole sermon. The sermon repeatedly calls us toward a greater righteousness, a wholeness, a single-mindedness, a purity of heart. This is what salt is. And when we lose it — when we become double-minded, loving the world and loving money, living anxious lives chasing everything the world chases — we lose our savor. We become diluted.

When Christians are not living in truth, when they are hypocrites, when they are double-minded and impure — they will not have the courage and joy to shine. They will not be devoted to the King and His message. The basket gets placed over the lamp not by one dramatic act of denial but by a slow accumulation of divided loyalties.

A Grace Word for Those Who Recognize Themselves

If you are here and you feel like you have not been salt or light in the world let me speak carefully to you.

It may be that **you are a Christian**, and this is God's means of convicting you and bringing repentance. That is a mark of a true believer. He who confesses and forsakes sin receives mercy. The history of God's people is the history of their wandering and their coming back. In the new covenant, in the new birth, there is not perfection — but there is a true and real work of the Holy Spirit in the hearts of all true believers. We stumble and struggle and battle and fall and get up again.

But it may also be that **some of you must come to grips with the fact that you are not yet a Christian**. You thought you were, but you are not. This sermon is light, and it

is shining into your life right now, and what it is illuminating is that you need to fall on your knees, repent of your sins, and receive Christ. Perhaps you have done that in word only — not with true conviction of sin, not with a genuine turning, not with a real pleading for mercy from One before whom you know yourself to be truly poor in spirit. Do that today. God is so gracious. Jesus is a wonderful Savior for sinners.

Let the warning and the danger in this text be a grace to you today.

Reflection Question: Where has the salt become diluted in your life? Is there a particular area where you have been so blended in with the world that there is very little of Christ left visible? Bring that honestly to Him today.

3. THE CHRISTIAN'S DUTY

“In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.” — Matthew 5:16

Duty Is Not a Bad Word

Duty. It is not a popular word in some contexts. It sounds heavy and joyless. But here grounded in identity it is a glorious thing. Our identity drives our duty. We are salt — therefore preserve. We are light — therefore shine. And Jesus closes this passage with a **command** that flows from everything He has declared: *let your light shine*. This is the duty. And it is a duty of delight.

Remember the first command in this sermon: *rejoice and be glad*. Now comes the second: *let your light shine*. These belong together. **A rejoicing people in a despairing world is itself one of the most powerful lights there is.** We shine in our good works, yes — but we shine in doing them with gladness. We rejoice in persecution and in prosperity. We rejoice in our mourning and our hungering and thirsting and peacemaking. A Christian who is genuinely, inexplicably joyful in hard circumstances is a city on a hill.

For the Father's Glory, Not Your Own

Jesus will address this in chapter 6 — the danger of doing your righteousness *to be seen by others*, performing for human approval. He says those who do that have received their reward. The difference between chapter 5 and chapter 6 is motive and audience. In chapter 5, the light shines and people see it and glorify *the Father*. In chapter 6, the lamp is put on a stand (by hypocrites) so people think well of *the one who lit it*. God intends for us to live publicly. But public for His name and not ours. He is actively showing off His glory through us. May we pursue that! What a glorious relationship we are called to and have with our Father!

What the Good Works Look Like

So what does this actually look like? What are these good works that people are meant to see?

They are **not primarily spectacular religious acts**. They are the whole of a life lived from the inside out. It means being people of integrity. Working our jobs as those who are serving the Lord — because we are. If you work in a fast food restaurant, the world gets to see what a kingdom citizen looks like who serves drinks and cleans the floor and prepares the grill with fullness and purpose. You have been made full by Christ. You have His resources, His contentment, His peace. That goes with you.

It means that in the **workplace**, when you deal with difficult people and difficult situations, you are not alone — and people get to see that. A peacemaker who does not retaliate. A merciful person who does not gossip. A meek person who does not grumble. Paul tells the Philippians that one of the great good works is simply this: *do all things without grumbling or disputing, that you may shine as lights in the world* (Philippians 2:14–15). In a world that grumbles constantly, a person who does not is remarkable.

It means faithfully and joyfully embracing **motherhood and fatherhood**. Disciplining your children in gospel love that is purposeful and persistent and sacrificial — probably very different from what the world around you is doing. It means opening your home and being generous and hospitable in ways that are otherworldly, countercultural, unexplainable apart from grace.

It means giving yourself to **relationships** with those who do not know Christ — with the purpose of loving them for Christ's sake, knowing that love always pursues what is best, and what is best for them is that their sins would be forgiven and that they would have life in Christ. Which can only happen through the gospel.

Of course good works include taking the gospel to the ends of the earth, supporting gospel work in the church and in missions. Good works include anything in words and actions that fulfills what God has given us: to love Him with all our heart, and to love our neighbor as ourselves. These things **start in the heart but they do not end there**. They are meant to be seen — not because we are showing off, but because God is.

A Word to the Young

If you are a young person — a teenager, a child old enough to know Christ — hear this directly: God has saved you and is at work in you *now*. Do not underestimate how He intends for you to be salt and light in your family, in this church, and among those He puts into your life. You are not too young for this.

Obedying your parents for Christ's sake is letting your light shine. Honoring them because you love God — not because you have to — is a good work that shines. Praying for your siblings, for people in this church. Going and talking to new people, greeting adults with respect and honor — do you know how remarkable that is in our culture? Most young people do not do that. That is okay. Shine. That is exactly the kind of thing that makes people ask: what is different about that kid? Desire to grow in the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. Seek Him. You are salt. You are light. Do not wait until you are grown to live like it.

A Word to the Older and the Elderly

And if you are in a later season of life — if you are a senior, if age has slowed your body and narrowed your world — this is not a season in which you coast or retire from being salt and light. In some ways, you can shine like no one else can.

Your prayers. Your phone calls. Your love and concern and warmth and generosity. Your genuine interest in the young people around you. What a way to shine a light. There are people your age who are close to dying and do not know Christ. They need the hope of salvation. They need peace with God. And you can bring it to them in a way that someone half your age cannot — because you have lived it, you have seen it hold, you know it is real.

I know of a woman in this church who is in her nineties. She did not really begin to grow deeply in her faith until she was in her seventies. It is not too late for you to grow in saltiness and in the power of light. Do not believe the lie that your best days of kingdom usefulness are behind you. They may be right in front of you.

The Slow Dawning of a Day

Being salt and Light: This rarely happens in a flash. It is a slow shining. A dawning. Just as the day does not suddenly flash on but comes moment by moment — a gradual brightening until the sun is fully up — so the light of a Christian life comes day after day, year after year. People see us. They watch. And over time, through the faithfulness, the integrity, the mercy, the inexplicable gladness, they see the light — and hopefully, if God is pleased to use it, they give glory to our Father in heaven by receiving Christ.

It might begin simply by getting on your knees and saying: God, show me in my duties and responsibilities, in my time and money, how to pursue good works in love. Help me to let my light shine before my children and my church and my coworkers and my neighbors. Help me to be salt in this rotting place where You have put me. Help me to be light in this darkness. Help me to be a rejoicing, glad people — so that the world sees something it cannot explain and gives glory to You.

And start now with those in your household or your church or even your Christian friends. Make me a light and salt to them...that I may be always shining...

Reflection Question: Who in your life is watching you over the long haul? Are they seeing something they cannot explain apart from God? What would it look like to give yourself more deliberately to shining for the Father's glory in one specific relationship this week?

CONCLUSION

Last week the first command in this sermon called us to rejoice and be glad. This week the second calls us to let our light shine. **We shine by rejoicing.** We let our light shine when we are genuinely, unmistakably glad people — glad in Christ, glad in the gospel,

glad even in the hard things because we know what we have and what is coming. That gladness in a despairing world is itself a city on a hill.

You are the salt of the earth. You are the light of the world. Not because of anything you have produced in yourself, but because of **what grace has done to you** — the same grace that made you poor in spirit and merciful and pure in heart and a peacemaker. That grace has not left you as a private blessing. It has sent you into the world.

May we be captured by the light of life and love with our Father and shine that message to the world. May we shine the peacemaking message of our peacemaking God and His goodness to the world through the gospel of Jesus Christ.

For those who do not yet know Christ: maybe you came this morning and something in you recognized the darkness this passage is describing. Maybe you have felt for a long time that something is wrong — not just in the world but in you. A guilt you cannot shake. A restlessness that comfort and success have not touched. A sense that you were made for something you have not found. You are right. You were made for this. You were made to be salt and light, to live in the fullness of what God designed human beings to be. And what has kept you from it is not a lack of effort or willpower. It is that you are living outside of the only One who is the light of the world.

His gospel is this: He came into the darkness Himself. He did not stay at a safe distance and call down instructions. He entered it. He bore the judgment that belonged to those living in it — your guilt, your rebellion, your war with God — in His own body on the cross. He died for His enemies. He rose from the dead. And He is offering light today — not to those who have cleaned themselves up, but to the poor in spirit, to those who know they are in darkness and are desperate for what only He can give. Come to Him today. Receive the light. And become, by His grace, a light yourself.

"Let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven." — Matthew 5:16

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. Jesus says "you are" — not "try to become." How does grounding your calling in identity rather than effort change the way you approach being salt and light this week?
2. The first command in this sermon is *rejoice and be glad*. The second is *let your light shine*. How does your joy — or the lack of it — affect how brightly you shine? Where do you need to obey the command to rejoice?
3. Where has the salt become diluted in your life? Is there a specific area where you have been so blended in with the world that there is very little of Christ left visible?
4. Who in your life is watching you over the long haul — coworker, neighbor, family member, fellow student? What would it look like to give yourself more deliberately to shining for the Father's glory in that relationship this week?
5. Whether you are young or old — what is one concrete good work God is calling you to pursue in your particular season of life right now?