

**THE CHRISTIAN'S MISSION IN THE WORLD**

Matthew 5:13-16

**Intro:** We are all in the habit of selecting verses from our Bibles, often memorizing them, and frequently for some, especially pastors, of preaching on them, without taking the time to notice the place that they occupy in the chapter, or even the book, in which the Spirit of God has given them to us. In other words, we fail to notice the context.

What is the context? Literally it means that which is *with the text*. The larger answer to that question is that the context is the book in which a particular verse is found. But it especially includes that part of the book or chapter which leads up to a particular verse or verses, as well as that which follows after it. The immediate context of Matthew 5:13-16 is Matthew 12:1-12 and Matthew 5: 17, as well as what follows.

In our text we find that the Lord made two very amazing statements to the people He was teaching. Who were they? Well, for the answer to that question, we go to verse 1, and we find that He was speaking to those who were His disciples. We should know that these were people, in all likelihood, the twelve, who had become followers of the Lord Jesus Christ. A disciple is actually a learner, and we read in verse 2 that what the Lord was doing, was *teaching* them! And we know that He began by giving them nine beatitudes. In these beatitudes He was teaching them the kind of people that He wanted them to be – humble, repentant, meek, people whose chief desire in life was to be righteous, merciful, morally pure, peacemakers, and people who would not be frightened away by opposition and whatever persecution they might be called upon to experience. Instead, they would rejoice in it knowing that they would be rewarded in heaven.

And then, as we come down to verse 13 we see that He called His disciples “the salt of the earth,” and then in verse 14, “the light of the world.” We know from the Gospel records that the disciples were those whom the Lord Himself had chosen, and that twelve of the disciples were called to be apostles. The apostles were not educated men. Four of the main ones were fishermen. When Paul wrote to the Corinthians about how they had become Christians, he said this:

26 For ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called:

27 But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to

confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty;  
28 And base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are:  
29 That no flesh should glory in his presence.  
30 But of him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption:  
31 That, according as it is written, He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord (1 Cor. 1:26-31).

I refer to this passage so that you will see that in calling people to salvation, He did not concentrate on the wise or the mighty or the noble. He called some of them. The Apostle Paul was probably, by far, the most educated of all of our Lord's apostles. But mainly the Lord worked with the common people. John Mark tells us in his Gospel that "the common people heard him gladly" (Mark 12:37).

I call your attention to this because it was to these common people, largely unnoticed by the world, and not liable to attract attention much attention. But to them he said, "Ye are the salt of the earth," and "ye are the light of the world." It would have been amazing if the Lord had said, "Ye are the salt of Israel," or "Ye are Israel's light," but instead He said, "Ye are the salt of the earth," and "ye are the light of the world." And yet none of them ever got beyond the boundaries of the Roman Empire, or even close to seeing all of it. How are we to understand our Lord's words to His disciples?

The Lord was speaking words which still have meaning for those of us today who are followers of Christ because we have been chosen, and called, and drawn to Christ, and saved! These are words which apply to all who are trusting in the Lord Jesus Christ. We are "the salt of the earth"; we are "the light of the world." The world doesn't know this. In fact, the world would be glad if we didn't even exist. The world hated our Lord, and He said that we could expect to be treated like He was. He was hated. We are not to boast about what the Lord has called us. But we need to know it, and then fulfill our roles as "salt" and as "light."

Let's think for a few moments about the first of our titles.

## **I. "THE SALT OF THE EARTH" (Matt. 5:13).**

I looked up the word “salt” in the dictionary, and this is what I learned:

**Salt** ... 1. Sodium chloride, NaCl, a white, crystalline substance found in natural beds, in sea water, etc., *and used for seasoning and preserving food, etc.* (italics mine) (Webster’s New World Dictionary, p. 655).

You all know what salt is. We all have it in our homes. But I wanted to give you this definition because it tells us that salt has two main purposes: seasoning and preserving. It is important for us to know that if we are going to know what our ministry is as “the salt of the earth.”

The Lord did not call His disciples “the salt of the earth” because He expected each one of them to cover the earth during their lifetime, but He did mean that wherever you go on the face of the whole earth, the only place you will find “the salt of the earth” is in the people of God.

What is our ministry, our mission, in the world? It is to spread the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Do people want it? No, they don’t! Do they like it when they hear it? No, they don’t? But we are still called by God to preach the Gospel to every creature. That is right!

Salt seasons. Salt makes food tasty and inviting. How can we do this to the Gospel?

The Apostle Peter was used by the Holy Spirit to give us a very interesting and important word regarding our witness for Christ. It is found in 1 Peter 3:15. This is what Peter said:

15 But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts: and be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear:

This verse is saying exactly what the Lord was indicating when He said, “Ye are the salt of the earth.” And it is very possible that Peter was present when the Lord gave the Sermon on the Mount.

The fact that the Beatitudes, giving some of the basic features of true Christian living, followed by “ye are the salt of the earth” and “ye are the light of the world” was the Lord’s way of saying that the most powerful presentation of the Gospel is when the person who is giving the Gospel is living evidence of the power of the Gospel. And this is the message of 1 Pet. 3:15. It is the testimony of a godly life in presenting the Gospel that gives seasoning to the Gospel.

Peter's words were, "But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts." By this he meant that we are to fear the Lord, submitting ourselves to Him, and doing His will from our hearts. This is a person who is living in fellowship with the Lord, and his life becomes a powerful witness to the truth of the Gospel.

Such a person will also be careful not to water down the Gospel in any other way, proclaim a different message entirely although he may call it the Gospel. Now I don't know if salt can ever completely lose its savor, its seasoning power, *but a Christian certainly can! And one who thinks that he is a Christian, but really isn't, like Judas, certainly can! And he did!* And the rest of verse 13 applies to Judas.

But even Christians who are not walking in fellowship with the Lord, must have been in our Lord's mind as He spoke these words.

When Paul wrote to the church at Colosse, he spoke of salt. Perhaps you remember Col. 4:6:

6 Let your speech be always with grace, seasoned with salt, that ye may know how ye ought to answer every man.

It is possible that if we are really concerned about the testimony of our lives, that in casual conversation we can show that we are "the salt of the earth."

But now let us move on to the second title the Lord used for His disciples.

## **II. "THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD" (Matt. 5:14-16).**

This world is a world of darkness, spiritual darkness. What people need is light, spiritual light. They need to have the truth of the Gospel, and of the Word of God generally, shine forth in its power. The world has light, the light of the sun, and the light of the moon, and the light of the stars. But while they shine and give light to the world by day and night, yet they do not give spiritual light. That comes to people who do not know the Lord, and who never read the Word of God – that spiritual light comes through people who know the Lord, and who manifest the Beatitude-characteristics because they are walking in fellowship with the Lord.

A city which is set on a hill cannot be hidden, and neither can a person who really knows the Lord and who is in fellowship with him. Neither was a light made to be hidden under a bushel, but to give light to all who

are in the house. So a child of God is called “the light of the world” because God intended for him to shine. A Christian’s “good works” are those characteristics that are listed above in the Beatitudes. There is nothing more powerful than the testimony of the Gospel given by a child of God who in his or her life is manifesting the fruit of the Spirit, to state it another way.

We have an illustration of what our Lord was talking about in the life and testimony of Stephen, who was not an apostle, but a deacon. However, his story shows that such a witness is not always successful in turning people to the Lord. And yet Saul of Tarsus was there that day, and he heard the testimony of Stephen. We don’t know what impression it made on Saul who was to become the great Apostle Paul. But this is what Luke recorded about the influence of Stephen upon those Jews who disputed with Stephen when he did great works among the people. This is what Luke said: “And they were not able to resist the wisdom and spirit by which he [Stephen] spoke” (Acts 6:10).

We are often told even by well-meaning Christian leaders that, if we are to win people in the world, we must be like them. We must do what they do. We must talk like they talk. We must dress like they dress. We must think like they think. *But the Lord Jesus said just exactly the opposite of this! We are to be what He wants us to be. We are to live like He wants us to live. We are to glorify God in our talk.* This is what the Lord meant when He said, “Let your light so shine ...” Charles Simeon stated it this way as he preached on this subject. He said,

If whilst the world around them are “living after the flesh,” and “walking in the broad road that leadeth to destruction,” *they* “walk after the Spirit,” and confine themselves to “the narrow way that leadeth unto life,” how *can* it be that they should escape notice? Their whole spirit and temper and conduct differ from the world, as much as light from darkness. We will suppose, their light is but small; and if exhibited before the meridian sun, it might easily be overlooked; but the smallest taper attracts notice when shining in the midst of darkness: And this is precisely their case: the splendor of their conduct may not be such as of itself to command admiration; yet it cannot but be seen by reason of the surrounding darkness (Vol. 11, pp. 86, 87).

We are living in a day, not when the darkness is darker than it has been in the past, but certainly where the darkness is more prevailing than in the

past. God's ways for reaching non-Christians has not changed. It still is a godly person giving testimony to the true Gospel. But we need to remember that we do not have the power to determine what the outcome of our testimony is to be. That is in God's hands. Only He can save sinners. The results are in His hands, and they always have been. Our responsibility is to obey Him both as to the way we live and as to the message we proclaim; He determines how fruitful it will be. Paul told the believers at Corinth,

3 But if our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost:

4 In whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them.

5 For we preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord; and ourselves your servants for Jesus' sake.

6 For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

7 But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us (2 Cor. 4:3-7).

If we know the Lord, the light is there. It has to be. We have to be careful that we do not obscure the light in any way by what we do, but that, by God's grace we do all that we can to please God, that the light of our lives may shine forth brightly to God's glory, and possibly, if God wills, to the salvation of the one who sees the light.

**Concl:** In the verses that follow in chapter 5 we have a number of illustrations as to how we can let our light shine, ways in which the life of a Christian is different from the world, and, therefore, where the light can be seen. Let me just deal with one of them in closing. Please turn to verses 43 through 48 here in Matthew 5. (Read.)

What if you had an enemy who treated you as the Lord described the situation in verse 44? His motive is to ridicule you because you are a Christian. That is implied in the word "persecute." He curses you, but you bless him. He persecutes you, but you pray for him. How will he feel? You never can tell. He may show regret himself, or it may make him treat you even worse. How he reacts is not the point. We are to treat him like God treats His enemies (which we used to be) because our object in life is to do what our heavenly Father would do. Is it hard? Yes. But

it is the way a child of God will act because he is the light of the world.

Let me say one more word about our being “the light of the world.” Most of you will remember that the Lord Jesus taught when He was here on the earth that He was the light of the world. You find this in John 8:12 where it is recorded that our Lord said,

I am the light of the world; he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life.

So letting His light shine was always what the Lord did, and for us it means doing what He would do.

But in John 9:4 and 5 we read these words which our Lord spoke:

4 I must work the works of him that sent me, while it is day: the night cometh, when no man can work.

5 As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world.

All the time that the Lord was here on earth He kept His light shining. It never went out, even on the Cross. But now that He is in heaven, where does the light come from? It comes from the Word. I am going to talk about that tonight. But what if people do not read the Word, or will not read the Word; where will they see the light now? The answer: in your life, and mine. We are like so many moons; we shine by light reflected from Him Who is the Light of the world.

But we should ask, as Paul asked, when he considered what the work of the ministry really was: “Who is sufficient for these things?” (2 Cor. 2:16). His answer is our answer: “Our sufficiency is of God” (2 Cor. 3:5).

May God enable each one of us to live in such a way that we won’t have to tell them that we belong to the Lord because they will be able to see it in the way we live. This is our mission in the world.