Salt & Light
Message 5 in “Living The Salt Life” Sermon Series
(A Study of Jesus’ Sermon On The Mount)
Matthew 5:13-16 (NKJV)

As we continue with our series of messages from Jesus’ Sermon on The Mount, please turn with me in your Bibles to the fifth chapter of Matthew’s gospel.

Matthew 5:13-16 (NKJV)

13 “You are the salt of the earth; but if the salt loses its flavor, how shall it be seasoned? It is then good for nothing but to be thrown out and trampled underfoot by men.

14 “You are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden.

15 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.

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

PRAYER
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INTRODUCTION

Today we are looking at the portion of Jesus’ Sermon On The Mount that is commonly referred to as “the similitudes”

A similitude is something that bears a likeness or resemblance to something else.

Jesus uses two “similitudes” in our scripture text: “You are the SALT of the EARTH” and “You are the LIGHT of the WORLD.”
Notice the first three words of both similitudes: YOU......ARE......THE. Three little words, consisting of only three letters each, and yet they are very powerful words.

*First, Jesus says, **YOU**

You, My Disciples! You, My Followers! are the salt of the earth and the light of the world. Jesus doesn’t say “Everybody in the world is the salt of the earth and the light of the world.” He says, **YOU! You Christians! You brothers and sisters** —— **in Christ!** Oh what a wonderful privilege you and I have been given to be “the salt of the earth and the light of the world.”

*Next Jesus says, **ARE** “You ARE”

Now what is the importance of that seemingly insignificant three letter word? Jesus doesn’t say, “I WISH you were the salt of the earth and the light of the world.” Or........ “I HOPE one day you will become the salt of the earth and the light of the world.” He says, “**YOU ARE!**”

That means you and I ALREADY are “the salt of the earth and the light of the world.” We don’t have to “work up” to becoming these things, WE ALREADY ARE “the salt” and “the light.” We became these things by God’s grace when we received Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior.

*Next Jesus says: **THE** “You are THE.”

**THE** means we are “exclusive.” We are **THE ONLY** salt and **THE ONLY** light God has in this world. If there were NO Christians in this world there would be no “spiritual salt.” If there were NO Christians in this world, there would be NO “spiritual light.”

**YOU.....ARE.....THE.....”salt of the earth” and “light of the world.”**
Now let’s take a closer look at these two “similitudes.”

I. You Are The SALT Of The EARTH (v.13)

1. What is Jesus saying? He is clearly implying there is **MORAL DECAY** in this world.

   This world is “rotting” and “decaying” in sin!

2. The world is literally “eaten up” with the cancer of sin. **Tumors of VIOLENCE……WAR……GREED……HATRED……SEXUAL PERVISION……FALSE RELIGION……DRUNKENNESS and ADDICTION……**are all over the earth.

3. Despite the fact that man has greatly increased in his knowledge of **SCIENCE….MEDICINE…and TECHNOLOGY**, man is totally incapable of changing the basic sinful nature of this world.

4. No matter how much man’s knowledge improves, the Bible clearly tells us that **man’s moral depravity** will continue to grow worse and worse until the Day of God’s wrath comes upon the world.

5. Why hasn’t God already destroyed this world? Why has He put up with man’s sinfulness this long?

   In short, **BECAUSE WE ARE STILL HERE!** The “Salt of the earth” is still present!

6. Salt is used for a lot of purposes. **Salt FLAVORS food. Salt intensifies THIRST. Salt is used for MEDICINAL purposes.** In ancient times **SALT was given to soldiers as payment.** If a soldier was derelict in his duties he was said to be, “Not worth his salt.”
7. But one of the primary uses for salt in Jesus’ day as well as today is that it is used as a **preservative**.

The presence of “salt” in packed meats or other food products **slows down the decaying process**. Were it not for the presence of “salt” many food products would “rot” within a day or two and become unfit to eat.

8. When you and I live the kind of life that Jesus has just described for us in the Beatitudes, our presence in the world has the same effect as “salt” in food.

Our presence here preserves the righteousness in a world that is filled with unrighteousness.

Our presence here preserves the truth of God in a world that is filled with lies and deception.

Our presence here slows the moral decay and rottenness of the world.

9. You see, you and I have the Holy Spirit living within us, and according to II Thessalonians 2:7 the Holy Spirit is “the restrainer.” Because of the Holy Spirit’s presence in us, and our presence in the world, the moral decay of the world is being restrained.

10. Now this brings up a very critical truth that we must not overlook and that is this: In order for us to have any kind of impact on the world around us we cannot isolate ourselves from the world.

    Salt in a salt-shaker doesn’t do any good. It is only when salt is sprinkled out of the salt shaker that it can fulfill its purpose of flavoring or preserving food.
11. As Christians, we are in the world, but we are not of the world. That doesn’t mean we are to isolate ourselves from the world, but rather that our lives as Christians must come in contact with others in the world around us in order for us to fulfill our purpose as “the salt of the earth.”

12. Think of this Church building as “a salt shaker.” Right now we are in “the salt shaker.” Right now all “the salt” is together. That isn’t a bad thing, in fact the Lord commands us to be together in worship on the first day of each week.

13. But right at this moment we aren’t having any impact on the world around us are we? It is only when we “leave the salt shaker” and go out into our communities, our neighborhoods, our places of work, our schools, and places of business, and restaurants, and among our non-Christian friends and relatives, that we truly make a difference as “the salt of the earth.”

14. Now Jesus poses a very soul-searching question in VERSE 13. “But if the salt loses its flavor, how shall it be seasoned?”

How does salt lose its “saltiness?” In and of itself it doesn’t ever lose its saltiness. Salt can sit in a container for years and years and never lose its salt flavor.

It is only when salt is mixed with something else that it loses its saltiness or its distinctiveness.

FOR EXAMPLE: If you filled a salt shaker with one half salt and one half black pepper and shook it all together, the salt would no longer be pure in taste or appearance. The salt would “lose its savor” “lose its distinctiveness.”
15. When we as Christians live such worldly lives that the world can’t tell the difference between us and them, we lose our “distinctiveness.” We become “salt that has lost its savor.”

16. Jesus says when that happens, we become “good for nothing, but to be thrown out and trampled under foot by men.”

Brothers and sisters, listen carefully! When the world can’t see any difference between our lives and theirs, they will trample all over us as hypocrites and imposters! We will lose our witness and effectiveness with the world!

17. Can we ever get our “saltiness” back? Can we ever regain our effectiveness for the Lord?

ANALOGY: Let’s go back to our illustration of the salt and pepper mixture. Once this salt has become mixed with pepper, it can never be just salt again, so you have to throw it away and start all over again, by refilling the container with nothing but pure salt.

18. Likewise we can’t ever get our “saltiness” back as a Christian so long as we continue to live like the world. The only way to get our saltiness back is to repent of our sins and start over.

Let’s move on now to that second similitude......
II. You Are The LIGHT Of The WORLD (vs. 14-16)

1. Now what is the difference between “the salt of the earth” and “the light of the world.”

*SALT relates to our CHARACTER, LIGHT relates to our CONDUCT.

*SALT relates to our INWARD influence. LIGHT relates to our OUTWARD influence.

*SALT is needed because the world is DECAYING. LIGHT is needed because the world is in DARKNESS.

2. Just like “salt” LIGHT HAS A NUMBER OF PURPOSES.

*Like headlights on a car, LIGHT POINTS THE WAY.
*Like a flashlight, LIGHT EXPOSES WHAT'S IN THE DARKNESS.
*Like a lighthouse, LIGHT GIVES DIRECTION.
*Like a cozy fireplace, LIGHT GIVES COMFORT.

3. But in the context of this passage, LIGHT represents RIGHTEOUSNESS.

So when Jesus says, “You are the light of the world” He is saying.......  

*You are THE LIGHT OF RIGHTEOUSNESS in a world blanketed in THE DARKNESS OF UNRIGHTEOUSNESS.

4. Brothers and sisters, the righteousness and holiness and purity of Christ should be so evident in our lives it causes us to stand out in this world of darkness.

Our lives should be so markedly different from those who are living in darkness that they can’t help but see the difference.
5. Like the moon reflects the light of the sun, you and I are to reflect the light of the SON of GOD!

6. Jesus uses two analogies to show the importance of being the LIGHT.

(A) First, in VERSE 14 Jesus says, “A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden.” In Jesus’ day, cities were set on a hill for a number of reasons. For one, IT WAS COOLER ON A HILL and in that arid mid-eastern land, being on a hill was the only air-conditioning available at that time. Another reason cities were “set on hills” was for PROTECTION. A city on a hill was much easier to defend than a city in the lowlands. But the point Jesus is making is that the chief feature of a “city set on a hill” is its VISIBILITY. In the day time, travelers could easily see the white limestone houses and buildings. And at night, the lights coming from those homes could be seen for miles.

Like a “city on a hill” you and I are to live our lives by a HIGHER STANDARD. And like those white limestone houses the purity and righteousness of Christ should be evident in our lives.

(B) From the “glow of a city” Jesus now zooms in on “the glow of a house.” Look at VERSE 15 “Nor do they light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a lamp stand, and it gives light to all who are in the house.”

In Jesus’ day they didn’t have electric lights like we do now. Homes were lit by small oil lamps. Since most Jewish homes were modest “one room” structures, placing a small oil lamp on a lamp stand would cast light throughout the house.

Using some humor his audience would clearly understand, Jesus said, “People don’t light their oil lamp and then cover it up with a basket, do they? That would be absurd!
This analogy should be very clear to us. Right now our “light” is shining brightly while we are here in this worship service. We've been singing praises to the LORD! We have offered prayers and communed with the LORD!

For us to leave here and go back out into the darkness of our places of work......our schools......and our communities is about as absurd as lighting a lamp and putting it under a basket.

7. How do we “let our light shine?” Jesus tells us in verse 16, “Let your light shine before men so they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven.”

8. Some Christians say, “I don’t ever talk about the Lord or the Church, I just let my good works do the talking.” Well that all sounds well and good. But actually what Jesus is talking about here is our WALK and our TALK.

9. Our good works are to be an avenue to open the door to talk to others about the Lord.

We aren’t to do “good works” “God’s work” so people will give honor and glory to us, we are to do “good works” so they will give honor and glory to God!

10. Just like the moon must give the glory to the sun for its light, we must give glory to the Son of God.
At some time or another we've all had this experience. One of the breakers is thrown in the “breaker box.” We grab a flashlight to see which breaker it is, and its then we realize the flashlight doesn’t work.

We click the button on and off a couple of times........we shake it vigorously and tap it on the palm of our hand a few times. And still no light. And if the truth be known we have all mumbled under our breath, “Stupid flashlight” as if “insulting” the flashlight might actually make it come on!

What good is a flashlight that won’t put out any light?

In many ways a Christian that won’t let his or her light shine before men is a lot like a “dead flashlight.” It doesn’t matter how good they look on the outside, if there is no light shining forth from within, then what good are they?

I leave you with these words of the late J. Wilbur Chapman.....

“If I am to stand at the judgment seat of Christ to render an account for the deeds done in my body, what shall I say to the LORD if my children are missing, if my friends are not saved, or if my employer and fellow employees should miss heaven because I have failed to be “the salt of the earth” and “the light of the world?” (EDITED)