

Sermon Title: The Salt of the Earth

Speaker: Jim Harris

Scripture Text: Matt. 5:13 (Sermon on the Mount #10)

Date: 9-13-20

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We are going to continue our voyage through the Sermon on the Mount this morning. As we do that, I want to invite you to come with me to Matthew Chapter 5, and we're going to just look at one verse today. We're actually going to take a little four-verse paragraph, and we're going to do it in two parts, so you'll see where we're going when we finish this morning.

We've finished what was Jesus's introduction to this Sermon on the Mount. The Sermon occupies Matthew Chapters 5, 6, and 7—and that's almost certainly not everything Jesus said in this sermon (cf. Lk. 6:20-49), but that is Matthew's inspired summary of it that we are given to nourish our souls for however much time we have until we are with the Lord. This introduction is usually filed under the heading: "The Beatitudes," or, "Blessings"—"Beatitude" is the Latin word for "blessing." They are descriptions of the kinds of people who stand—as we now have the fullness of New Testament revelation, we understand that they "stand" in the "grace" of God (Rom. 5:2); they stand "in Christ" (2 Cor. 5:17). They are descriptions of a true disciple. The kinds of people "blessed" in the Beatitudes are the ones who are true believers (Ps. 145:18).

But at the same time, you can also take those character qualities that are "blessed" and you could say that they are the *goals* of discipleship, as much as they are the blessings of being a disciple. They're the description of the kind of person that you want to strive to be (Eph. 4:24; Col. 3:10, 12). The final Beatitude is the only exception, in that—I don't know any Christian who says: "My *goal* is to go out and get persecuted." I can *help* you with that, if you really have that goal—but that's *not* our goal. It's a promise that persecution is to be expected in the normal course of living a holy life in an unholy world (2 Tim. 3:12), being a Christian in a non-Christian environment (Gal. 4:29; 1 Jn. 5:19).

The Beatitudes conclude with that change of perspective, therefore; and you might describe it this way: You could say that that final Beatitude—"Blessed are those who have been persecuted...Blessed are *you* when people insult you and persecute *you*" (Matt. 5:10-11; NASB, and throughout, unless otherwise noted)—you could say that *that* is a description of how the world affects Christians (Jn. 15:19; 17:14).

As we move to this next little paragraph, it's about how Christians can affect the world. It has very familiar words here. Jesus is going to use two metaphors—"You are the salt of the earth" (vs. 13), and "You are the light of the world" (vs. 14). I've heard those used many times in many contexts—very, very rarely with any reference to anything that Jesus said, but describing a person like: "Well, he's a really good guy! I mean, he's the 'salt of the earth!'" "She's 'the light of the world,' she just lights up the room when she comes in!" Well, that's not what Jesus is talking about; you'll see that as we work through here.

So it's familiar words, and it teaches us principles that we can never fully exhaust, and we can mine them forever—and we will. But these two metaphors—in Verses 13 through 16—connote the concept of *influence*. He's talking about how our inner spiritual life, as described in the Beatitudes, should be an influence to those around us (see Prov. 12:26; Phil. 2:15; Col. 4:6; Titus 2:10; 1 Pet. 2:12).

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---

By describing us as "salt of the earth"—and that's as far as we're going to get today—Jesus describes an *invisible* way that believers should have an impact on the affairs of people around them. If you look at the whole section, you'll see how the two parts reinforce each other; today, we're just going to dip our toes into the first of these two metaphors, but I want to show you all four of these verses before we move along.

So, Matthew Chapter 5, Verses 13 through 16. I'll read it all together, and then we'll just start this morning: "You are the salt of the earth; but if the salt has become tasteless, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled under foot by men. 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." (cf. Jn. 15:8)

I'm not even going to bother with an outline this morning; we're only going to look at the first verse of that, and to put an outline on it would be to superimpose something. You'll see it very clearly.

There are two little three-letter words here that are significant. The first one is: "you." The "you" in both verses 13 and 14—as in: "*You* are the salt of the earth," and "*You* are the light of the world"—those are both emphatic pronouns. I've been saying that all through the Beatitudes; it's just like the emphatic pronoun in each of the Beatitudes. The meaning is: "*You and you alone*—only people like *you*—are the salt of the earth."

And it's pretty obvious that Jesus was making a contrast between the disciples to whom He was speaking—and by that, I mean: the ones in the crowd who were the true believers, not just the Apostles that He had named that morning, not just any particular group, but *all* who trust in Him—He's contrasting them with "the scribes and Pharisees" (vs. 20), whom He was about to use as *bad* examples in the next paragraph. This whole sermon is a frontal attack on the religious system of the scribes and the Pharisees.

The other key word here is the little word "are." "You"—plural, collectively—"are the salt of the earth." He wants us to have a collective influence, and it's to be an *ongoing* influence. The word "are" is present tense; and the significance of a Greek present tense is: ongoing or oft-repeated action.

So, when you put this together, He is saying that "You, collectively, are to represent Me." Now, you *individually* are also meant to represent Christ. But I think a good illustration of this is to think of a mosaic. A mosaic is a whole bunch of little tiny rocks, or little tiny tiles, that are placed together in such a way that, when you step back and look at how they're arranged, you get a picture of something way bigger than any one piece of the mosaic. Each stone *is* important; and if a stone is missing, the picture is marred. But the *impact* comes by means of the thousands of individual parts, each in harmony with all the others, painting the picture. So the design of God is for *all of us* to exert influence *all the time*. It's not some short-term, one-time event—it's a lifestyle.

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---

Now, the first of the two metaphors He uses is "salt of the earth." As with most metaphors—and most of the word pictures that you'll find in Scripture—if you read long enough, you can find *all sorts* of wild interpretations of what Jesus meant by "salt." But, doing a little homework is what we have to do to figure out, just like in every passage of the Bible: What did Jesus have in mind when *He* said the word "salt"? It isn't necessarily what you and I thought of.

And understand, here's a principle of Hermeneutics—a very *crucial* principle of Hermeneutics, which is the art and science of Bible interpretation: The meaning of any passage is what the *original* writer intended for the *original* readers to understand by what he wrote. Or, if the writer was recording words that were spoken, it's what the *original speaker* expected the *original hearers* to understand by what he said.

Now, if I say the word "salt" to you, you have a pretty good idea. We think of salt, primarily, as a seasoning. We keep it conveniently in a saltshaker on the table, wherever we eat. If you go out to eat now, you have to order a side-order of salt, because you're not allowed to get your cooties on the salt shaker for somebody else—but that's a whole new wrinkle there; Jesus didn't have *that* problem.

We also think of salt as a melting agent for snow and ice in the winter; that can be very convenient for us. The people in First-Century Palestine probably weren't worried about traction on their snow tires in January; I think we can discount that one.

We also take advantage of salt's ability to lower the freezing point of water; that's the same reason that we use it to melt ice. But by doing that, we can also freeze ice cream more efficiently; that's one of the *best* things about salt in the whole wide world—homemade ice cream!

We also use salt in some forms of purification, especially to "soften" water. I bought two big old heavy 40-pound bags of salt, and dumped them into my water softener this week. How perfect—the week I'm studying *salt*, and it has *nothing to do with that*!

Salt was used as a seasoning, in some cases, in Biblical times. I mean, He mentions: "if it has become *tasteless*"—there was a taste, they understood, that was imparted by salt (Job 6:6). But that was a relatively minor use of salt in that culture.

None of those other uses that I mentioned were of *any* importance to Jesus's audience. But one use was *very* important to them, and it's probably something you've either never done, or haven't done for a very long time: Salt was highly valued because of its ability to preserve. As an antiseptic that prevents and retards decay, salt was used every day—*especially* in the preservation of meat. Imagine how valuable salt would be to you if you didn't have a refrigerator or a freezer in which to store your meat! For salt to have its intended work in that way, it has to be sprinkled over—or, better yet, rubbed into the meat. And its function was not readily visible. It was used, primarily, to combat deterioration.

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Date: 9-13-20

---

Now, I think you can see the physical use of that illustration: Just being Christians in the world—acting out our faith and speaking the truth of God—*that* serves to combat and retard spiritual decay. Now, some people around don't like being salted, in that sense. Some of them will persecute you. But isn't it true that when a known believer is in a crowd, things are *different*?

I love playing golf, and I can't tell you how many times I've had the experience of playing with someone that I don't know; usually, things are pretty normal for a hole, or two or three, and then small talk happens while you're waiting on the tee—"What do you do? Where do you work?" "Well, I'm the pastor at Heritage Bible Church." And I *always* know what's coming next! It's happened to me so many times, I couldn't count them if I *wanted to*! I almost always hear: "I have to watch my language around you!" Now, they almost never *do*, but that's what they *say*. And I always come back with the smart-aleck comment to soften them up for the serious comment. The smart-aleck one is: "If you say something I've never heard, I may write it down."—because I've heard them all; well, I've heard *one* new one in the last three years, and I don't want to ever hear it again. The next thing I say is: "Well, you know, I appreciate you caring, but it's not *me* who will be the judge of what comes out of your mouth." And then we see how it goes. Usually, it's pretty quiet for two or three holes, until they can think of something else to come up with.

But when Christians are around, sometimes the slur that *might* have been stated, doesn't get said. Profanity might be tempered a little bit, or even left unspoken. Sometimes a wicked, vengeful kind of a plan might be dropped because they realize it would be offensive to somebody. God knows, and He wants us to understand that the world is wicked; but He *also* knows how *far more corrupt* it *would be* without the restraining example and lives and prayers of the saints.

Now, it *is* our collective influence that He's talking about here; "you" is plural, and "are" is present tense—it's all of you together in your influence. But it's also individual; and sometimes, that individual effect is *tremendous*! How much better was Egypt because of Joseph? Quite a bit! How much worse might Babylon have been without Daniel? We'll never know. Do you think Esther made a difference in her generation? She sure did!

The New Testament tells us that a major factor delaying the rise of the one that we call "Antichrist" (1 Jn. 2:18; cf. Rev. 13:1-8) is the restraining impact of people who are known as "Christ-ones"—"Christians." There's a passage in 1 John that talks about "the spirit of the antichrist...already in the world" (1 Jn. 4:3)—the spirit that hates Christ and would substitute anything else for Him (1 Jn. 2:22; 2 Jn. 7; cf. Jn. 5:43; 2 Cor. 11:4). It also says "many antichrists have appeared" (1 Jn. 2:18)—meaning individuals who are particularly anti-Christian. But there is also *the one* who will be *the* Antichrist. And there's something holding back the rise of that one. Well, we know what that is—Second Thessalonians Chapter 2, Verses 3 through 7. The word "salt" is not here, but the *concept* of a restraining influence, a purifying influence, a corruption-preventing influence, is very clear. Now, in Thessalonica, there had been a question in the church there about "the day of the Lord" (2 Thess. 2:2)—"Has the 'Day of the Lord' come?" And the Apostle Paul is saying: "No, it hasn't."

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Date: 9-13-20

---

There's quite a strong connection between First Thessalonians and Second Thessalonians; First Thessalonians 4 ends with the description of the catching away of the Church—the Rapture of the Church—and then Paul talks about the Day of the Lord; and this was a follow-up question about the Day of the Lord, and Paul says: "No, it's not here yet."

And here's what he says: Second Thessalonians 2, starting at Verse 3—"Let no one in any way deceive you, for it will not come"—"it" referring to the "Day of the Lord"—"unless the apostasy comes first"—"apostasy" is "falling away" (NKJV), a rejection of the faith (cf. Matt. 24:10; 1 Tim. 4:1; Heb. 3:12), taking away that influence—"and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of destruction, who opposes and exalts himself above every so-called god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, displaying himself as being God." Now, that's the Antichrist, and that's the *ultimate* blasphemy that he is going to commit: putting himself in the rebuilt temple in Jerusalem and saying, "Worship me! I'm the One!"

And then Paul goes on to say: "Do you not remember that while I was still with you, I was telling you these things?"—referring back to when he planted the church in Thessalonica (Acts 17:1-4). "And you know what restrains him now, so that in his time he will be revealed. For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work; only he who now restrains will do so until he is taken out of the way."

Somebody asked me after the first service: "How come 'he' in that last sentence isn't capitalized?"—because we believe it is the Holy Spirit. Well, there are no capitalized pronouns referring to the Holy Spirit in the text of the New Testament. Different translations do it differently, but I think it's pretty clear that "he who now restrains" is best understood as the Holy Spirit working on Earth, primarily through the lives of believers. So you can take the "he who restrains" to be sort of a generic description of the Christian influence in the world—that would be fine. But it's clearly the Holy Spirit.

The removal of that Restraint is two-fold. Number 1—We have First Thessalonians 4 telling us: this is taking believers out of the world to "be with the Lord" (vs. 17; cf. Jn. 14:3). It's what we call the Rapture of the Church. Number 2—Removing the Restraint allows that world leader we call the Antichrist to come to power, and *with that* comes the beginning of the outpouring of the wrath of God during the seven-year "Tribulation" (Matt. 24:21; Rev. 7:14); or, we also call it the Seventieth Week of Daniel (Dan. 9:24-27).

Now, I have heard people say, and somebody said it to me just several weeks back—and this makes for a healthy conversation—"I understand the Holy Spirit will be *removed from the earth* during the Tribulation," because they've heard this. Well, I have to tweak that a little bit. How do you take someone who is *omnipresent* and remove Him? The Holy Spirit is God (Matt. 28:19; Acts 5:3-4; 2 Cor. 3:17; 13:14)—you can't *remove* Him from "the earth" (Jer. 23:24). So, what is this saying? It's saying: Through all those people in whom the Holy Spirit dwells (Rom. 8:9; cf. Jn. 14:17), there is this collective restraining influence. Why, you might even say: they are "the salt of the earth"! You remove *that*, and for the influence of human-upon-human, there will be a removing of a significant restraint, and evil can have its day (cf. Ps. 92:7).

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---

So, the Holy Spirit is going to be here [during the Tribulation]—and as a matter of fact: during those seven years, there will be *unprecedented* evangelism. The Holy Spirit will *still* be the One who teaches Scripture (1 Cor. 2:14; 12:3b; cf. Ezek. 36:27; Acts 16:14; Titus 3:5); the Holy Spirit will *still* be the One who "will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment" (Jn. 16:8); the Holy Spirit will *still* be the One who imparts "life" to everyone who turns to Christ (Jn. 1:12-13; 3:3, 5; 6:63; cf. 2 Cor. 3:6; Eph. 2:4-5; 1 Jn. 5:1).

But Jesus says: "You are the salt of the earth; but if the salt has become tasteless, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled under foot by men" (Matt. 5:13). I think it's significant to understand that, by this metaphor, Jesus is describing something that acts *secretly*; and by that, I mean *invisibly*. It combats decay; it provides a little extra flavor; but no one can actually see it perform its task, even though the influence is very real—it's very significant. This is, if you will, our *covert* identity in the world; this is our *behind-the-scenes* influence (1 Cor. 2:15b). And, if you will, it's a *negative* influence, in that it opposes, it retards something; it retards the open and full display of wickedness in the world.

Now, the rest of this verse is interesting: "But if the salt has become tasteless, how can it be made salty again?" It's one of those things in the Bible that, when you read it from our vantage point in our world, at first glance you might think: "Well, salt doesn't lose its flavor. What do You mean? I mean, you can go down that aisle in the grocery store and buy yourself a little box of salt; and that's one of those things that you can put in the back of your pantry, and open it a long time from now, and it's going to be just fine; because sodium chloride, as we know it, is a very stable chemical compound, and it doesn't lose its "saltiness"—unless you get it damp, but even then, it still tastes salty.

But this is also a verse that serves as a great example of that principle of Hermeneutics: interpreting in light of *historical context*. The words of Scripture have to be understood as they would have been understood by the *original* hearers or readers. In this case, there is something about the word "salt" that *they* understood, but that *we* wouldn't even think of.

While it's true that the pure salt like we buy is very stable—you might say it always remains salt—but the salt used by people of that culture was not the pure substance that we call "salt." Most of *their* salt was mined from the Dead Sea, and the area around it. It *did* have a lot of sodium chloride, but it was contaminated with gypsum—and gypsum looks just like salt; they're both white—and other impurities were in it as well. And the presence of the impurities caused the salt that they used in that society to react with moisture in the air, and with other substances in the environment, so that it eventually lost its pleasant taste, and it no longer worked as a preservative.

So, when that happened, the remnants of the contaminated, no-longer-useful salt would be "thrown out" into the street and "and trampled under foot by men." They specifically threw it into the *street*. They didn't want to toss it out back where the garden was, or the garden wouldn't grow. If they disposed of it any other place, it would ruin the soil *because* of all the heavy concentration of minerals and other salts.

Sermon Title: The Salt of the Earth

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Date: 9-13-20

---

So it was actually an early recycling program! If your salt won't keep your meat fresh anymore, put it out on the street—it keeps things from growing in the street; it keeps the street drier and more passable. And, hence, it would be "trampled under foot by men."

As a matter of fact, we have a statement in the Old Testament—one of those things you just might kind of slide right past—that describes the use of salt to keep things from growing. It was an act of war against the city of Shechem. It's in Judges Chapter 9, Verse 45, where we're told this: "Abimelech fought against the city all that day, and he captured the city and killed the people who were in it; then he razed the city"—destroyed everything—"and sowed it with salt." That was an act of what you might call "environmental terrorism," which rendered Shechem uninhabitable for a very long time (cf. Deut. 29:23; Ps. 107:34; Jer. 17:6; Ezek. 47:11).

I don't know if you remember a few years ago: there was a huge tsunami that struck a couple of the islands in Indonesia. That's where sea water comes in, in such a massive wave that it washes *way* inland—in some cases, a *couple of miles* inland. Some of our friends were involved in relief efforts there, and flying things in. One of the most long-lasting effects is: you can't *grow* anything where that sea water washed in, and then settled a little bit, and then washed back out, dragging out a lot of good soil with it, and polluting the soil that was left. So, not just the immediate destruction of the tsunami, but the *salting* of the otherwise arable land is a *big, big deal!*

So, it's useless; it's "no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out" in the street, where you *don't want* anything to grow. Then, there's this question: "How can it be made salty again?" The answer to that question is: It *can't* be! It's a rhetorical question. You can't "salt" spoiled salt to make it "salty" again. If you come to me and you say, "I have a barrel of salt, and it's all corrupted. Can I have some of your good salt to put with my bad salt to make my bad salt good?"—it won't make the bad salt good! It doesn't work that way.

So, there's another spiritual application that is here. There are several of them, and I think we need to look at what they are. "You are the salt of the earth; but if the salt has become tasteless, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled under foot by men."

Now, remember: We interpret according to *context*. Jesus spoke this sermon during the height of His popularity, with many in the crowd who were "Pharisees and their scribes" (Lk. 5:30), who *hated* Him; and He was making a *frontal* assault on their very bad teaching. The Pharisees and their scribes were regarded by the culture as the greatest examples of spirituality. They *loved* to show off how spiritual they were (Matt. 23:5-7); but the brand of religion that they offered was this legalistic set of rules and regulations (Rom. 9:32; cf. Matt. 23:4; Acts 15:10). Not only is that a complete failure at changing anybody's life—because it only deals with external conformity to standards, rather than dealing with the heart (Col. 2:20-23)—it was even worse than that! Jesus was saying here: "*You are* the salt of the earth! *You are* the *good* influence on the earth—and they're not!" And I know He's going to get to them, because He does it in the next paragraph.

Sermon Title: The Salt of the Earth

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Scripture Text: Matt. 5:13 (Sermon on the Mount #10)

Date: 9-13-20

---

People who get caught up in keeping rules and regulations in order to curry favor with God (Lk. 18:11-12)—they *totally miss out* on God's grace (Rom. 10:3; Gal. 3:21, 24). You have to be the kind of person who is "blessed" as one who is "poor in spirit" (Matt. 5:3)—who, when you come to God, you say: "In spiritual things, *I'm a beggar!* I have *nothing good* to offer! Not only am I lost—I can't do anything to save myself!" (Rom. 8:8; cf. Prov. 20:9; Jer. 13:23). The Pharisees were not like that. They "trusted in themselves that they were righteous" (Lk. 18:9).

And so, Jesus is saying that this is something that you need to be *the opposite of*. I have no doubt He was thinking of the scribes and Pharisees, because as I mentioned: in the next paragraph, He's going to get to them. I've already pointed you to it in some of the earlier studies in the Beatitudes, but probably the theme-verse of the whole Sermon on the Mount is Matthew Chapter 5, Verse 20—just seven verses from where we are today—"For I say to you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven."

Now, they would have thought: "*Surpasses* the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees? They're just *the most righteous people we have!* Just ask them! They'll be glad to tell you how righteous they are! What do You mean, 'beyond that'—*that's impossible!*" Oh, yeah—*that's right! It is!* (see Ecc. 7:20; cf. Gal. 3:10; Jas. 2:10) When it comes to salvation: "With men this is impossible, but with God all things are possible" (Matt. 19:26, NKJV).

So, on one hand, Jesus was teaching, in these metaphors, that man-made religion, even if it has a few good elements to it, is *worthless* for salvation—just like contaminated salt, even though it still has a *little bit* of salty taste to it, is worthless for its purpose. Between the lines here, Jesus is saying that people would be better off to throw out every aspect of Pharisaical religion—and their self-righteousness—than to hang onto it (cf. Matt. 9:14-17; Acts 15:1-11; Gal. 4:9; 5:1-4). And boy, is He going to elaborate on that! Just wait until we start working through the paragraphs of Chapter 5—you'll be *astounded*, and it'll be so clear to you!

But Jesus was *also* talking to the people listening to Him that day—and it's written in the Word, so He's talking to us by extension (see Mk. 13:37; Heb. 12:5). He's talking about the need to remain pure in our own walk with God. Remember the context: A true believer is one whose life is being "transformed" from the inside out (2 Cor. 3:18; Phil. 2:13; Heb. 13:21), because he comes to God with uplifted, empty hands (Matt. 5:3); he mourns over his sin (vs. 4); he lets God purify his heart (vs. 8); he lets God develop in him a hunger and thirst for righteousness (vs. 6); he becomes a peacemaker (vs. 9)—all of those things.

And He concluded those Beatitudes with the solemn declaration that those who live like that are going to be persecuted (vss. 10-12). *Now* He's saying—*right after* "You are going to be persecuted"—"You are the salt of the earth. How you respond—even if persecuted—is part of My plan." (see 2 Cor. 2:14-16; Phil. 1:28; Rev. 2:10)

Sermon Title: The Salt of the Earth

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Date: 9-13-20

---

Last time, I showed you Paul's summary of "Blessed are you when people insult you and persecute you" (Matt. 5:11)—Second Timothy 3:12; he put it this way: "Indeed, all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted." So you love all of those character qualities described in the Beatitudes; you realize that you can have none of them, except for the grace of God; and you realize that you want to grow in cultivating all of those things—and you get persecuted.

A professing believer who responds to the heat of persecution by caving in and crumpling under the pressure—he would be like salt that is no longer useful (cf. Prov. 25:26). If you respond to the world around you by accommodating yourself to the secular attitudes and watering down your influence for righteousness, you lose your credibility as God's representative! Now, the good news is: you can stumble, and God can restore you—we get that (cf. 1 Cor. 3:15). But He's talking in broad generalities here. And just as salt becomes useless because of foreign substances mixed in with it, worldliness mixed into the life of a Christian makes that person useless to God in the world (Jas. 4:4; cf. Jn. 15:19). Now, again—that's in broad generalities. There are a lot of other passages that teach that there is restoration, there is forgiveness, there is new hope in Christ.

But this is why it's so important to God for His children to walk consistently in the world (Eph. 4:1; Phil. 1:27; Col. 1:10; 1 Thess. 2:12; Titus 2:10). Do you realize that Jesus has no other plan for evangelizing the world than people like you and me? (Rom. 10:14) And do you realize that the Church of Jesus Christ in the world is just *one generation* away from extinction—unless we pass on the Gospel? (2 Tim. 2:2) It's *been* one generation away from extinction since it was started! But, *we're it!* You and I, by means of our influence, are the representatives of Jesus Christ in this world (see Matt. 5:44-45; Phil. 2:15; 2 Cor. 5:20; 1 Pet. 2:9, 12). We are the very message of the Gospel itself, embodied for people to see (2 Cor. 3:2-3)—living examples of what God can do (1 Tim. 1:16). This is the reason God goes to such great lengths to restore you for your own good. Hebrews 12:6—"For those whom the Lord loves He disciplines, and He scourges every son whom He receives." (cf. Rev. 3:19). He also does it for the good of the whole church. First Corinthians Chapter 5—He wants the church to be pure, so: Get the impure things out, if you will (see vs. 12).

So, come back one more time: "You are the salt of the earth; but if the salt has become tasteless, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled under foot by men." We will visit this passage again, Lord willing, seven days from now, to deal with the rest of this section; and we'll see how the other metaphor—"the light of the world" (Matt. 5:14)—strengthens what He's been saying already; and we're going to grasp it more than ever, I think, for our generation.

I didn't want to rush us, hence just the one verse. But I want you to be thinking about these things—about our collective impact on the world. And I'd like to close with an excerpt from a book that I really like. It's called "Lifestyle Evangelism." I was shocked to find out that it was almost 40 years old when it was published; but I devoured it when it was. I've given away many copies of it, and there's even a follow-up book to it. It was written by Joseph Aldrich.

Sermon Title: The Salt of the Earth

Speaker: Jim Harris

Scripture Text: Matt. 5:13 (Sermon on the Mount #10)

Date: 9-13-20

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There are many ways to describe evangelism, to encourage evangelism, to embolden people for evangelism, to train people for evangelism (Lk. 10:2; Jn. 4:35). But thinking of us as "the salt of the earth"—that's one of the *basic concepts* there! Now remember: to preserve the meat, you have to take the salt and rub it into the meat. Well, if we are "the salt of the earth," we have to find a way to take ourselves and rub ourselves into the ones that we want to influence.

The *antithesis* of Christianity is monasticism (1 Cor. 5:9-11). "Why, I'm so spiritual, I'm not going to have *any* contact with *anybody anywhere* that might pollute me!" And God says: "No, I want *you* to go out there, and I want *you* to be a purifying, restraining, encouraging, Gospel-proclaiming influence on them!" There was another book that I loved from back in that same era called "Out of the Saltshaker"—the idea is that the salt is *pretty* in the saltshaker, but it doesn't do any good until you sprinkle it.

Alright, here's what Joseph Aldrich wrote about this. This is just one little excerpt. He said: "I think it is fair to say that the majority of Christians have lost their ability to relate significantly to non-Christians. By no stretch of the imagination can the Christian community be called the 'salt of the earth.'"—That stings a little bit, but read on; I think he'll support it pretty well.

He says: "For salt to be effective, it must get out of its container and into the world of hurting, dying, suffering, sinning people. There is no impact without contact; and yet, after knowing the Lord two years, the average Christian has no significant relationships with non-Christians. Often, conversion opens up a whole new web of relationships, and the new Christian inadvertently drifts away from his non-Christian associates."

I would insert there: statistically speaking, most people introduce more people to Christ in the first two or three years of their Christian life than any other time—*because they still have non-Christian friends* who can say: "What happened to you?" That's how it's supposed to work.

Okay, back to Aldrich: "In some cases, the nature of his past associations makes separation a necessity if growth is to take place. All too often, however, he withdraws from significant contact because [he] misunderstands the biblical doctrine of separation. Frequently, the unsaved are viewed as enemies rather than victims of the Enemy. Spirituality is viewed as separation from the unsaved. The new Christian is told he has 'nothing in common' with his unsaved associates. Quite frankly, I have a lot in common with them: a mortgage, car payments, kids who misbehave, a lawn to mow, a car to wash, a less-than-perfect marriage, a few too many pounds around my waist, and an interest in sports, hobbies, and other activities they enjoy. It is well to remember that Jesus was called a 'friend of sinners.' A friend of sinners." (1981, Multnomah Books)

When we're "the salt of the earth," we are meant to be *rubbed in*, if you will—not *assimilated* (Jas. 4:4), but we're to have a purifying, upright, God-honoring, righteous, holy influence in the world. Think on that, and let's be salty until next week, when we have to get some "light" on the subject.

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You'll often see these four verses used to make a call to political action. "Do you see that? You're 'the salt of the earth'! You have to be an influence in the realm of politics for the good." I would say that's about a *tertiary* application of this. This is *not* a call to political action! Jesus said *nothing* about Rome, *nothing* about politics, *nothing* about the Sanhedrin—He was talking about *your* influence as one who has been made righteous.

But it *is* a call to *spiritual* influence. Political action is *fine*. I hear there's this big thing coming up in the first week in November, and a lot of people might be open to talking about that; but let me say this: Any political action by a Christian, any political speech by a Christian, any sharing of a political opinion by a Christian *which does not link it directly to the Gospel of Jesus Christ* is not "Christian action"! Do you get the point? We are here to represent a "kingdom" that "is not of this world" (Jn. 18:36); and how do we do that in a kingdom that is *very much* "of this world"? We need to be "salty," in a spiritual sense.

More to come—but let's pray:

*Father, how we thank You for this remarkable truth: that You have chosen to use us as Your representatives in this generation, in this place. May we be faithful to the task. May we represent You as You would want to be represented. May we be the preserving, corruption-slowng influence in the world that You want us to be. You know each of our hearts. You know, Father, how easy it is for us to become enamored with the things of the world, to be tempted by the things of the world. But Father, we know You have us in the world for something far more important, and that is to be Your ambassadors. So make that the case, we pray, and let us be salty. We ask in Jesus' name. Amen.*