

“You Are the Salt and Light of This World”  
(Matthew 5:13-16)

Introduction: The Lord says in His Word that one day He is coming to destroy the heavens and the earth. Peter says that that day will come just like a thief. It will come when people are unaware of it. When it comes, “the heavens will pass away with a roar and the elements will be destroyed with intense heat, and the earth and” everything in it “will be burned up” (2 Pet. 3:10). That day is coming. And it may come sooner than we think.

But why hasn’t it come already? Why hasn’t the Lord sent His judgment yet? The answer must be that He hasn’t yet finished calling out His elect, those whom the Lord Jesus came to save. Jesus earned a perfect righteousness for them. He died for them. And He even lives for them now in heaven and is actively calling them out of the world by His Word and Spirit. The Lord cannot send destruction upon the world, until He has gathered every last one of them to Himself. He can’t put an end to all things until He has finished His plan. Otherwise, He would be denying Himself. But once it is completed, He will act swiftly. He will send His Son to gather those who are living, raise the dead, and bring them all into judgment. At that time, or perhaps while the judgment is taking place, the old heavens and earth will be melted down and purified. And out of it will come the eternal dwellings of both the saved and the damned.

But until that time comes, until the last one of Christ’s sheep is gathered, the Lord waits. He waits while His sheep are being gathered. While He waits, He preserves the world from destroying itself. And He shines the light of the Gospel into it to show His people the way to heaven. What I would like all of us to consider this morning is that

*We are one of the means the Lord uses to preserve this world and the primary means by which He shines His light. Jesus says we are the salt of the earth, we are the light of the world.*

**I. First, I would like for us to consider what it means to be salt in this world.**

A. Different ideas have been suggested.

1. Some have suggested that the white color of salt is what Jesus refers to. It indicates purity. And what Jesus means here is that we are to be pure and holy in this world.
2. Others have pointed to the fact that salt enhances the flavor of food, and that we should therefore add a kind of relish to the life of those around us.
3. Others have suggested that salt creates a thirst in those who eat it, and that Christians are therefore called to create a thirst in those around them for the gospel.
4. Still others have suggested that it is the stinging effect of salt, when it is put in a cut, that is meant here, and that Christians should prick the consciences of others by living and speaking the truth.
5. Now I want you to realize that all of these things should be true of Christians, regardless of whether or not this is what Jesus has in mind here.
  - a. We are to be pure and holy. An unholy Christian is a contradiction in terms.

Christian means Christ-like, and if we're not like Christ, if we're not holy and growing in holiness, we're not Christians at all.

- b. We also need to show the world that living like Christ adds new meaning to everything that we do. Life is not senseless. Its not just a cosmic accident. There is meaning to life when it is lived in the presence of God.
  - c. We also need to be creating a thirst in others for Christ. We need to be telling them about Him, and living the life which He has called us to live, as a means to bring them to Him. The world should be able to see the peace and purpose which Christ gives to us when we serve Him, as well as how we patiently endure persecution, when God sends it upon us.
  - d. And it is undoubtedly true that we should, by the way we live and speak, prick the consciences of those who are in sin. Our lives should convict them. If they look at us and don't see any difference, then most likely there isn't any.
- B. But I would suggest to you this morning that what Jesus primarily means here is that we are to be the preservative of the world.
- 1. In those days, remember, they didn't have refrigeration.
    - a. Therefore, if they wanted to keep things from spoiling, they would need to put salt on them.
    - b. We do the same thing today. Have you ever eaten any beef jerky? All it is is cooked beef which has been seasoned and salted. You don't need to put in the refrigerator because the drying and the salting preserve it.
  - 2. If this is the meaning, then Jesus is saying that we as Christians are a preservative in this world. But how is this true?
    - a. Well, I believe in two ways. First, the Lord tells us, as I have already said, that He is holding off the day of judgment until He gathers all of His people into His fold. The fact that we are in this world, and that there are others of God's elect that He has yet to gather in, are the main reasons why the Lord holds off His judgment. God tells us that He has not appointed us to wrath, but to the obtaining of salvation through Jesus Christ (1 Thes. 5:9). God's wrath is for the ungodly, for those who live impenitent in any sin, not for those who live according to His Word.
    - b. But we also preserve the world in another way. It is by salting the earth with God's truth. Whenever we live in a way which convicts others, whenever we stand up for the truth or speak the truth to those who believe the lie, we are helping to preserve the world from further corruption.
    - c. A couple of weeks ago, at a meeting of the Credentials Committee, we were interviewing a possible candidate for the work in Sunnyvale. During the questioning, he said that what this nation needs is the Gospel, not morality. He said this because he believes that those who adhere to Theonomy only want to moralize this nation and not seek for its conversion to Christ. Well beside the fact that is an absolutely false caricature of what Theonomy teaches, it was also a very dangerous statement. I asked him, "So it doesn't matter to God whether or not the people of this nation keep His Law?" He said, "Apart from the Gospel, it doesn't." And so I told him about a conversation I once had with

someone who held the same opinion, but for a different reason. I asked this man, “Which would God prefer? Would He prefer a boy scout to help an elderly woman across the street, or would He prefer that the boy scout throw her into the path of an oncoming car?” This man answered that He would rather that the boy scout throw her into the path of the oncoming car, because he would at least be honest with what was truly in his heart. I asked the man we were examining, “Do you agree?” At this point, he was silent, because he realized what he was saying. Yes, it is true that when an unconverted person keeps the Law of God, that this is still not pleasing to God, because it is not done out of love for Him and out of a desire for His glory. But it is still more displeasing to God when, on top of this, that person disregards His Law altogether. I believe that God would rather have the boy scout help the woman, than hurt her. This is what He tells us in His Word.

- d. The point is that what we do and say as Christians makes a difference in this world. Back at the very founding of this nation, there were people who believed so strongly what the Bible said, that they lived it, they taught it, and they sought to enforce its obedience on others. The result was that society was a lot less wicked, at least outwardly. Man’s heart was still the same, but you must remember that man will go as far as he can in sin, unless there is something to restrain it. There were Christians then who were willing to go on record that the works of darkness were evil, and that God’s ways were right. They stood against sin, and the Lord blessed their work.
- e. That which moves the Lord to destroy a nation is when things get so bad He must destroy it, or else it will destroy His world. This is what He did in the days of Noah. He destroyed the world, so that He might carry out His plan of redemption through Noah and his family.
- f. One of the reasons why things are as bad as they are today is first of all because there are not that many true Christians in the world. But another reason is that those who are Christians are not salting much of the world around them. They are not taking the teaching of Christ, and salting others with it.
- g. We need to realize that ideas are powerful. That which shapes this world is really the ideas which men hold. We need to use God’s ideas to restrain the wickedness of world. We need to bear witness to God’s righteousness, to the world’s wickedness, and to God’s only solution to that wickedness, which is the Gospel of Christ.
- h. And we must remember, that as wonderful and powerful the truth of God is, it is absolutely powerless, until we use it.

- C. And this brings us to the warning which Jesus gives us here. He says, “You are the salt of the earth; but if the salt has become tasteless, how will it be made salty again? It is good for nothing anymore, except to be thrown out and trampled under foot by men.”

1. Now I don’t believe that Jesus is speaking here about a person who is a Christian, who loses his effectiveness as a Christian, and who then is cast off by Him.
  - a. We know that this can’t be true, because the Lord plainly tells us in His Word, “My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me; and I give

- eternal life to them, and they shall never perish; and no one shall snatch them out of My hand. My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand" (John 10:27-29).
- b. Those who hear the voice of Christ, who follow Him wherever He leads them, and who do whatever He tells them to do, are those who have eternal life. That life would not be eternal if it could be lost. It would only be temporary life. None of Christ's sheep can ever lose this gift of God. But the reason they won't lose it is not because they, in their own strength, will remain faithful, but because the Lord in His faithfulness will not allow them to become unfaithful. He will give them the strength to persevere to the end.
  - c. Jesus is not speaking here of a true Christian.
2. What Jesus is talking about here is a person who professes to know Him, but who does not really give his life to Him, who does not really love Him and live according to His Word.
- a. There are many today who profess Christ, but who never take one step toward true obedience.
  - b. Yes, there are those who pretend to serve Christ when they think that what He asks of them is easy and doesn't require any self-denial or sacrifice. But there are really very few who are truly willing to deny themselves, pick up their crosses, and follow after Him (Matt. 16:24). There are really very few who are willing to give up their own lives in this world, to gain them in the next (v. 25).
  - c. It is to those who are not willing to do this that Jesus directs this statement.
    - (i) When those, who identify themselves as Christians, continue in the Lord's teaching for a while, and then drop off in their obedience altogether, they no longer have the effect of salt.
    - (ii) Jesus says here that they become tasteless, they lose their strength, they become ineffective. And if they lose this saltiness, Jesus says with what will you make them salty again? They are good for nothing anymore. They are cast out. And men despise them.
    - (iii) It actually comforts the ungodly when they see those who profess to be Christians fall. It gives them a reason to despise Christianity more, and to excuse themselves for not following Christ. But it also gives them a reason to despise those who fall, for they see that they are nothing but hypocrites.
    - (iv) But I should also mention, that if they are despised of men, then how much more of God? Those who know the truth are much more culpable than those who do not. Peter says, "For it would be better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than having known it, to turn away from the holy commandment delivered to them" (2 Pet. 2:21). Jesus says, "And that slave who knew his master's will and did not get ready or act in accord with his will, shall receive many lashes" (Luke 12:47).
  - d. Now this stands as a warning to us lest we should lose our saltiness. If we are true Christians, we will be salt in this world. If we are true Christians, we will strive to salt it even more. But if we are not salting those around us, if we are not restraining them from sin, we must beware that there may be no salt in us.

**II. The second statement here of Jesus is very much like the first, but it is also different. He says, “You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do men light a lamp, and put it under the peck-measure, but on the lampstand; and it gives light to all who are in the house.”**

- A. Salt is a preservative. It works from within and keeps things from becoming more corrupt. But light works from without to allow people to see in the darkness.
- 1. This world is full of darkness, the darkness of ignorance and the darkness of sin.
  - a. It has been this way since the Fall. God’s intention was that the world would be filled with His light, the light of the knowledge of Him, the light of the knowledge of His Word. But the entrance of sin into the world brought it under a great darkness.
  - b. People’s minds are darkened with ignorance. They do not know the truth. They are aware of some things through nature. But they do now know the truth as it is in Jesus.
  - c. And their hearts are darkened. Even if they knew about Christ, they would still hate Him, because their hearts are full of sin. They even hate what they know about God in the Creation, and they do all they can to tear down that knowledge.
- 2. But it is in this world of darkness that Jesus says Christians are lights. “You are the light of the world.”
  - a. Where else could the world see the light except in Christians? From where could they learn the truth, except from those who know it?
  - b. Jesus said, “I am the light of the world; he who follows Me shall not walk in the darkness, but shall have the light of life” (John 8:12). And again He says, “While I am in the world, I am the light of the world” (John 9:5).
  - c. And when Jesus left the world to go to heaven, He did not leave the world without light. He gave us the light, through His Word and Spirit. He has made us to shine in this world.
  - d. It is not His intention that we hide that light.
    - (i) When someone builds a city on a hill, he does so that others may see it.
    - (ii) Jesus says that when you light a lamp, you do not put it under a bucket, but on the lampstand, so that it will light up your house. Which one of you turns a light on in your house, and then covers it to hide the light? You turn on the light so you can see.
    - (iii) *In the same way, Jesus has made each one of us here this morning, each one of us who are truly Christians, lights, lights to shine in this world, lights to shine for Him. We must not hide that light.*
- B. But how are we to shine? He says, “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” (v. 16).
  - 1. Jesus says first of all that you are to shine by doing the good works which He has told you to do.
    - a. He wants you to show acts of kindness and love to others.

- b. He wants you to speak the truth to your neighbors, friends and loved ones.
  - c. He wants you to take the Gospel to others, and to do all that you can to promote that truth in the world. Yes, people are going to hate you for it. But the Lord will also use you to bring His people to Himself.
2. But secondly, you are to do it in such a way that God receives the glory and not you.
- a. God hasn't given you His Spirit to enable you to do good works, so that you could bring glory to yourself, but to Him.
  - b. He wants all men to see the light, but to know where this light came from, so that they might come to Him and receive the forgiveness of their sins in Christ.
  - c. Children, "Why did God make you and all things?" "For His own glory." God wants you who know Him to do His works, so that He might receive the honor for them.
3. Lastly, having seen that Christians are salt and light, I would ask you this morning, are you salt and light?
- a. Does your presence in the world retard, at least in some small measure, the corruption of those around you? Are you doing the works which Christ has called you to, so that there are at least some who see that light and give glory to God, knowing that this light comes from Him?
  - b. If so, give glory to God, for this is His work in your life. And this is another means by which you may know that you are truly His.
  - c. But if these things are not true of you, I would urge you to come to Christ this morning, and take hold of Him for everlasting life. Apart from the work of God's Spirit in our hearts, we do not preserve this world, but hasten its destruction. Apart from the Lord Jesus Christ, we do not enlighten the world, but only increase its darkness. If that is the case with you this morning, I invite you to come to Christ. He alone can heal your corruption and make you salt. He alone can relieve your darkness and give you His light. The Lord bids you to come. He wants you to come. He will not turn you away, if you come, but receive you to Himself. Come this morning, and find in Jesus eternal life.  
Amen.