

February 15, 2026
Pursuing the Kingdom: The Visible Life of the Kingdom
Matthew 5:13-16
Vernon Advent Christian Church

Introduction... Have you ever walked into a room and immediately felt that something was different even before anyone said a word? Maybe it was the warmth of the people. Maybe there was the tension you could feel in the air. Something invisible, yet undeniable, that shaped the environment of the room? Most of us know what that's like. And often times it not the loudest or the raw authority of a person that have the most impact on the environment of a room but a person's presence. And so a person's presence has the most impact on others.

Years ago, historians noticed something curious when they studied ancient cities. Long before modern refrigeration, there was one thing that kept food from rotting, armies from starving and civilizations from collapsing during long winters. It wasn't gold. It wasn't strength. It was small, ordinary and easily overlooked, but absolutely essential. Believe it or not, it was salt. When salt was present, decay slowed. When it was absent, corruption accelerated.

Light works the same way. You don't need much of it to change everything. A single candle can completely light up a dark room. Darkness doesn't argue with light. It doesn't resist light. It simply gives way to it. And here's what's remarkable. Salt doesn't announce itself and light doesn't make speeches. They just do what they are.

When Jesus issued his "kingdom manifesto" on a hillside in Galilee to a group of his followers made up of fishermen, tax collectors, people without influence or authority, he didn't tell them how to take over the world. He didn't give them a strategy for power or control. He said something far more surprising. "You are the salt of the earth and you are the light of the world." Not you should be. Not you might become. He says, "You are..."

Before Jesus ever told His disciples what to do, He told them who they were, and in doing so, He revealed how God intends to build his kingdom and change the world. Not through dominance, but through their presence. Not through force, but through faithfulness. Not by blending in, but by living holy and distinct lives that quietly restrain the moral breakdown of the world while boldly reflecting God's truth.

Today, as we turn to Matthew 5:13–16, Jesus invites us to wrestle with a challenging question. When we walk into a room, a neighborhood, a workplace, or a city what changes because we are there? Let's listen carefully to the words of the King and discover what it means to live as salt and light in a world that desperately needs both. If you are able, please stand with me as I read the Word of God. [Read Passage]

Last week, we started into Jesus' Sermon on the Mount as we looked at the beatitudes where Jesus described the inner character of those who belong to the kingdom of heaven. Here, Jesus spoke to the heart, or the inner man, and described his disciples as those who were poor in spirit and who mourned over sin. Those who were meek and who hungered and thirsted for righteousness. Those who showed mercy and were pure in heart.

And those who actively were set on making peace and who would endure under persecution.

Now, in Matthew 5:13–16, Jesus turns outward. The question shifts from the inner character of the disciple to what the disciple is supposed to outwardly be. You see, much to the chagrin of many of us, the life of the kingdom is not meant to remain hidden or private. It, by its very nature, is meant to express itself visibly through our influence. Jesus tells His disciples that if they truly belong to the kingdom, their lives will have an affect on the world around them as they function as salt and light.

Jesus begins with a declaration, as was said earlier, not a command: “You are the salt of the earth.” It’s important to know that this a plural “you” meaning “you all” or “all y’all.” While we have all to take personal responsibility for our own lives, we realize that we individually belong to a whole, the body of Christ and this has been the emphasis of the teaching of our community groups, what it means to belong to a family of families, the Church. Again, notice he does not say, “Try to be salt,” or “You can become salt if you work hard enough.” He states a reality. By virtue of their relationship to Him, His disciples already possess a distinct identity.

Salt, in the ancient world, again as I mentioned earlier, was both valuable and essential. It was used to preserve food, to enhance flavor and even as a form of currency. Roman soldiers were sometimes even paid in salt, which gave rise to the phrase of someone being “worth his salt.” To call His disciples salt was to say that they have a preserving and enriching role to play in a decaying world.

Now, this metaphor of salt speaks first to distinctiveness. Salt is only effective if it is different from what it touches. When salt loses its saltiness, Jesus says, it becomes useless. Now, chemically speaking, pure salt cannot lose its saltiness, which suggests that Jesus is indeed speaking metaphorically here.

The danger is not the salt ceasing to be salt, but the salt becoming so diluted that it is indistinguishable from its surroundings and it is no longer doing what it was purposed to do. The point is clear and sobering. Disciples who lose their distinctiveness lose their usefulness for the kingdom.

This challenges a common misconception about our Christian influence. Some would say, and would probably much prefer, that the best way for a Christian to influence the world around them is to blend in, to blur the lines between the spiritual and the secular so much that we can toe that line and have just enough “fun” without actually going all the way over ourselves, all the while, trying to make our faith palatable for those outside of faith.

We do so with the movies we watch or the music we listen to and even in our conversations, instead of taking a stand for Christ we compromise, trying to come up with every which way to try and make the gospel attractive. But the Bible tells us that that “the Gospel is foolishness to those who are perishing.” (1 Cor. 1:18)

Brothers and sisters, Jesus is telling us we cannot not influence the world for Christ by blending in, but by being set apart. The disciple is called to be “Holy as I am Holy,” (1 Pet. 1:16) not in being perfect, for our perfect righteousness comes only through Christ’s righteousness on our behalf, but in being set apart. Salt does not preserve meat by becoming like the meat. It preserves it by remaining, distinctly, itself.

Likewise, the church does not impact the world by mirroring the world's values, but by embodying the values of the kingdom, the character traits we talked about last week in the Beatitudes. When Christians act like the world and adopt its priorities, its power, self-promotion and comfort at any cost, they lose their "saltiness" so to speak, and the Church loses its influence.

Just as salt has the many benefits of preservation, purification and seasoning, believers are supposed to influence the world for good. We must preserve the world from spiritual and moral decay, pursue the holiness of God, enhance the lives of those around us with all that we say and do. All the while, we must maintain a distinct identity from the world by remaining connected to Christ. And in doing so, we will not be like salt that has lost its saltiness.

Jesus then shifts metaphors in vs. 14 when he says, "You are the light of the world." Now, light cannot fulfill its purpose if it is hidden. Jesus underscores this by saying that "a city set on a hill cannot be hidden." In the ancient world, cities were often built on elevated ground for protection. And at night, the lamps of those cities would be visible from miles away. Jesus uses this image to describe the public nature of discipleship. Kingdom life is not meant to be a private thing, it's meant to be a visible testimony.

Now, there are several purposes of light. Think of why we use a flashlight. It exposes what is hidden, it guides those who are lost, but more importantly and quite simply, it chases away darkness. The interesting thing about darkness is that it doesn't exist as an independent physical entity or thing, it is simply the absence of light. And light does not negotiate or argue with darkness, like if it could talk, it doesn't ask, "Excuse me, may I shine here?" No, it overcomes it. In the same way, the presence of faithful disciples pushes back the spiritual darkness of our world not through aggression, but through faithful witness.

Jesus continues, "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." This illustration draws from everyday life. In a first-century home, a single lamp would light up an entire room. Covering it would defeat its purpose. The children's song, "This Little Light of Mine" picks up on this when one of the lines says, "Hide it under a bushel (basket), NO! I'm going to let it shine." Jesus' point is simple but profound. God does not transform lives so they can be hidden. The same grace that saves us also sends us out into the world to proclaim the same gospel message that saved us.

Yet, notice something important here. Jesus does not say the light draws attention to itself. He says, "Let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven." The goal of visible faith is not self-promotion, but God's glory. Meaning the light we shine reflects the character of God. Just as the moon reflects the sun's light, believers reflect the glory of God through transformed lives and living out the gospel.

Imagine a stained-glass window in an old church. From the outside, it appears dark and unimpressive. But when light shines through it from within, the beauty becomes visible. The window does not produce the light, it transmits it. In the same way, we as followers of Jesus are not the source of the light, we are the vessels through which God's light shines into the world.

And so, salt and light together form a balanced picture of Christian witness. A key thought in both metaphors is, again, distinction. Salt is needed because the world is rotting and decaying, and if our Christianity is also rotting and decaying, it won't be any good. Light is needed because the world is in darkness, and if our Christianity imitates the darkness, we have nothing to show the world. To be effective we must seek and display the Christian distinctive. We can never affect the world for Jesus by becoming like the world.

Charles Spurgeon, the famous preacher from the 1800's, once said, "Hear this, ye humble men and women, ye who have made no figure in society, ye are the light of the world. If ye burn dimly, dim is the world's light, and dense its darkness."

So this passage invites us to examine our lives honestly. Have we lost our saltiness by compromising with the world? Have we hidden our light out of fear or comfort? Or are we faithfully living in a way that points beyond ourselves to God? The goal is not perfection, but faithfulness.

It's also important to remember that Jesus speaks these words to people who have just been told they will be persecuted back in vs. 10-12. The call to be salt and light is not a call to popularity. Light often exposes what people would rather keep hidden, and salt can sting when applied to wounds. Have you ever been in the kitchen and gotten salt in an open cut? Or gone in the ocean and found out you had those same cuts? Faithful witness often provokes resistance. Yet Jesus assures His disciples that their visible obedience has eternal significance. In other words, what we do for the kingdom has meaning and eternal value.

This passage also reminds us that the church exists not only for itself, but for the world. We are saved out of the world, yes, but we are then sent out into it. As we've already stated before, the kingdom of heaven is already here being built up through Christ's Church, but not yet fully realized. Until Christ returns, His people serve as visible signs of that kingdom working as salt and light. May the Lord help us in that endeavor.

As we come to the end of Jesus' words in Matthew 5:13-16, notice what He does not do. He does not hand His disciples a checklist. He does not give them a bunch of "how to" strategies. He certainly doesn't tell them to try harder or be louder. He simply reminds them of who they already are, "You are the salt of the earth. You are the light of the world."

The question we all need to ask ourselves this morning is, "Are we living in alignment with what God has already declared us to be?" Salt works quietly. Light works visibly. Neither one strives for attention. Neither one forces results. They simply remain what they are and trust God with the outcome. And that is where this passage gently presses on our hearts.

Some of us may realize that our saltiness has been diluted, not through rebellion, but through the pursuit of our own comfort and desire to "fit in." We've blended in where God called us to stand apart. We've stayed silent where obedience required courage. Others may recognize that we've hidden our light, not because we deny Christ, but because we fear the cost of being seen.

If this describes you, and it probably describes all of us more than we would like to admit, notice there is no condemnation here, for "there is, now, no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus." (Rom. 8:1) But Jesus invites us back to our purpose as his

followers. And He does so with hope. Because the power to be salt and light does not come from our own willpower, it comes from our communion with Him.

Christ is the true Salt who preserves us by His grace. He is the true Light who shines into the darkness and is never overcome. Our calling is not to generate what only He can supply, but to reflect what He has already given us to a world that desperately needs it.

So the call of this brief passage today is not to strive harder to be influential, but to remain faithful to our identity in Christ. “You are the salt of the earth.” “You are the light of the world.” Live in such a way that when people see our good works, our integrity, compassion, generosity and forgiveness, they do not praise us, but are drawn to the Father who changes lives by his grace. This is the visible life of the kingdom, lived not for our glory, but for His. Let's Pray.

Benediction: May the Lord send you out as salt in the earth and light in the world, living with quiet faithfulness and visible love, so that others may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven. And may the grace of Christ, the love of God, and the power of the Holy Spirit go with you now and always. Amen.