

The Salt of the Earth

The Beatitudes

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Well, Christ came in order to procure a people for himself. Christ came in order to save us, to save a people that would be with him throughout all of eternity and give him praise and thus become, as it were, a bride for him, to be with him in his glory throughout all of eternity and Scripture tells us what those people will be like during their time on earth in the Sermon on the Mount. If you'll turn with me to Matthew 5, Matthew 5, which is our topic of our passage that we are considering over a few months here at Truth Community Church, and we have just completed Matthew 5:3-12, a section known as the Beatitudes where Christ described the character of his people, what they would be like inside and how that would manifest in their attitudes. He said that his people would be those who were poor in spirit and mourning over sin. He said that you could tell his people, the people who belong to the kingdom, by the fact that they hunger and thirst for righteousness; that they have a desire for the righteousness of their King who himself is righteous; that they would be a people, verse 7, merciful, pure in heart and peacemakers. So we have examined that at length this section of Scripture, Matthew 5:3-12, and we have said there at the bottom of it in verses 10 through 12, that the world would reject the people of Christ; that they would persecute them; that they would insult them. And Christ said, "Don't sweat it," as it were. Christ said, "Don't let that discourage you or distract you. Understand that that comes with the nature of being in my kingdom. So you can rejoice. You are blessed because your reward in heaven is great." God does not suffer his people to bear the insults and persecution of wicked men lightly. God allows us to go through it, he brings us through those times, sometimes minor insults, sometimes much more severity in the persecution as the annals of church history will show us, but at the end of that is a reward, is blessing from God at the end. Your reward in heaven is great, that is what Christ describes as the character and the effect that this will have on the people in the kingdom.

Now we move to a new section in the Sermon on the Mount. Jesus having spoken the Beatitudes, having described the character of his people, now he moves into a critical section to tell his disciples how they will influence the world around them, what the impact will be. And friends, it's a surprising impact when you realize that the world rejects the people of God, rejects the people of Christ; they persecuted Christ and they persecute his people as well, you would think that the world would be insulated from the way that they push us away, you'd think they'd be insulated from the influence that the

people in the kingdom of God have. Nothing could be further from the truth. There is a surprising impact that believers have on the world around them.

Look at verses 13 through 16 which will be our text for this morning and then we'll pick it up again after the first of the year. In verse 13, Jesus said,

13 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. 14 You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden; 15 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. 16 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.

Now, beloved, there's a basic very simple fundamental truth that underlies this passage that I would not want you to miss, it is this: that the kingdom of God and the world in which we live are distinct entities. Jesus says there is the earth and there is the salt of the earth there in verse 13. So he describes his disciples, he describes the people of the Beatitudes as being like salt in the midst of the earth in which they live. And it's important for us to remember the context here, beloved, so very important if you would understand and enter into this teaching of the sovereign Lord. Jesus is building on what he has already said. He has not started a new section of his sermon here that is distinct, unrelated, and completely separate from what he had just said. He has been describing the character of people in his kingdom and having completed that section, like links in a chain, he now says, "This is how it is linked to the world. This is what will happen in the world as a result of the presence of my people." So, beloved, this section is vitally related to what he has just said.

You could ask the question this way: what are a group of people, what is a body of people who are marked by humility, who are marked by sensitivity to sin, who are marked by hungering for righteousness, who are peacemakers at heart, and who are united in an undivided heart of desiring Christ and desiring to follow and honor him, what is the influence of people like that going to be? You can ask it, in one sense, you can ask it in a collective sense: what is the effect of the people of God upon the world? And that manifests itself and that works itself out on an individual basis. What is it like for you, what is the nature of your influence in the world around you as you walk faithfully with Christ? It is easy to get discouraged, to think, "My life is not counting for anything; that the people that are around me have no interest in the things of Christ, the things I say to them are falling on deaf ears, and even as Christ said, as I just try to live this godly life, they insult and reject me." It might seem like it is all a waste of time vis-à-vis your interactions with the world. Jesus here tells us that nothing could be further from the truth, that there is an impact, that we are like salt on the earth, that we are like light to the world and that's what he's going to describing these four verses.

Now, beloved, look, as our world gets increasingly secular and increasingly separated from any kind of biblical format, any kind of biblical framework in its thinking and people are increasingly ignorant of the things of the Gospel, the things of Scripture, the things of Christ, we are just moving into the world in which Jesus lived when he spoke this. Think with me for just a moment, if you would: Jesus came into this world and lived in a secular world that was dominated by the Roman authorities where Emperor worship and all kinds of pagan idolatry dominated the life and the thought and the mind of the people of the world at that time. When he spoke, when he taught, he was teaching primarily Jews, teaching Jews – watch this – in a spiritual world that was dominated by the external religion and the hypocrisy of the Pharisees. We'll see more about that next month. So he's in the secular world that has nothing to do with the true and living God. He is in a spiritual world where the Jews had distorted his teaching and externalized everything and the leaders were known by their pomposity and their greed and their desire for the praise of men. It is a world that is completely alien to the nature, the character, of what Jesus described in the Beatitudes. He lived and taught in a world that had nothing to do with poverty of spirit, hungering and thirsting for righteousness, and having a pure heart in seeking the true and living God.

He was an alien, so to speak, in the world in which he was teaching. Indeed, Scripture says that this world did not welcome him when he came. Think of the utter absurdity of this. Christ creates the world, sustains the world, is gracious even in his common grace even to wicked men, causing the sun and the rain to rise and fall on them, and they want nothing to do with him. The world rejects its Maker. The world rejects its Sustainer. In John 1:10 and 11, speaking of Christ it says, "He was in the world, and the world was made through Him, and the world did not know Him. He came to His own, and those who were His own did not receive Him." In other words, he came to the Jews and they rejected him.

So how are we to think that anything is actually happening in a scenario like that? And yet, beloved, as Christ taught, as he walked and ministered patiently without social media to amplify his influence, little by little as he sent out call, lowly disciples gathered around him, lowly disciples that aren't really any different than you and me. People without worldly influence, without stature, without position. People who were peasants, fishermen that had no prominence among the Jews and no rank in Rome, and these people gather around this itinerant teacher. Here's what you need to see, beloved, and here's what's happening today in this hour in this room as we look to the word of Christ from the word of God: Jesus comes in that first century setting and he starts teaching – watch this, watch this and nail it down in your mind – Jesus teaches ordinary people who were outside the halls of secular power and were outside the halls of religious power as well. And to people like that, people like you and me, of no rank, that no one takes note of in any kind of secular way, Jesus says these words to them found in Matthew 5:13. Look at the verse with me again, and with that context, to realize what would seem from a human perspective to be the utter absurdity of what he's saying here in verse 13. He says to people like that, ordinary people without influence that are simply marked by a character that comes from having been born again, he says to them in verse 13, "You are

the salt of the earth." You are the salt of the earth. He is telling them that, "Your influence, ordinary and unknown as you may be, will impact the world."

We're going to look at two aspects of what Jesus taught them here in this verse, looking only at verse 13 for this morning, and in this, beloved, what you see is you see part of the purpose for your existence. Why is it that God would have you live an unnoticed, ordinary life, as it were, just going through the faithfulness and the fidelity and the loyalty of walking with Christ day by day and perhaps having no one notice you? Why is it that a mom would just spend her days being faithfully discharging the duties of being a faithful mother in the small realm of the household that God has given her? Why would God have her do that and not give her a massive platform where hundreds of thousands would listen to her? Why would God come to a construction worker and to others in what would seem to be menial labor and just give them a life like that and have them faithfully living in the context of a local church and fidelity there and just being faithful? And what's the point of that according to worldly standards? If it's not going to result in fame and fortune, why do we do that? Well, Christ lays this out for us in part with what he describes here. There is an aspect of the godly life, there is an aspect of spiritual character, that God uses in the world around us even though you don't see it, even though you don't understand it, even though you probably don't even think about it that much. But what Christ is saying here is that God has a distinct purpose for his people in the midst of a rotting and decaying world, and as we understand how God uses us, it elevates our sense of the glory and the nobility of being a child in the kingdom, of being a citizen in the kingdom of God as we go through this world.

What is that? First of all, we're going to see the reality of Christian influence. The reality of Christian influence. And even in what Jesus says here, you're going to find that there is an understanding and an expectation, there is a presupposition that Christians will be in the world, that we will be out and moving about in the midst of unbelieving people who reject our Christ. In this verse you will see a rejection of the idea that Christians should withdraw and go into monasteries or go into communities that are utterly excluded from any interaction with the outside world. That is contrary to the total expectation of what Jesus describes here in verse 13.

Now, the reality of Christian influence. Just to reset one final time as we pivot now. The Beatitudes describe a spiritual character not meant to be lived in isolation. Beloved, think about it this way: if you take the time and I would encourage you to do this, take the time as we're going through the Sermon on the Mount in the coming weeks to just take the time a few times each week to just read through Matthew 5, 6, and 7 and get familiar in your own mind, in your own Bible, with the overall flow of the thought. What you will find is that the Sermon on the Mount deals extensively with personal relationships. As Christians manifest godly character, we bump up against unbelieving people; we bump up against those who reject us and persecute us; we bump up against those who have disputes with us, for example; we bump up against those who in our marriages, you know, and Jesus talks about divorce and things like that; bump up and we see interactions with people who are telling things that are not true.

Look at verse 39, for example, Jesus says, "I say to you, don't resist an evil person; but if he slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him as well," all of this presupposing relationships in an unbelieving world. Verse 2 of chapter 6, "When you give to the poor," again, interactions with people, and on it goes. Chapter 7, you could even say, verses 1 and 2, "Don't judge so that you will not be judged for in the way that you judge, you will be judged, and by your standard of measure, it will be measured to you. Why do you look at the speck that is in your brother's eye but do not notice the log that is in your own eye?" Here's all I'm saying, beloved: is that the presupposition of the Sermon on the Mount is people of Beatitude character going into the world and having common, ordinary, daily interactions with the people around them. The idea of withdrawing and being alone as a manifestation of the Christian life is foreign to Scripture. So we gather together like this on a Lord's day and then we scatter into hundreds of different directions in our lives. What happens when we go out? It's the reality of Christian influence that Jesus describes.

Let's look at the text, Matthew 5:13, one last time here. Jesus says, "You are the salt of the earth." That "you" there as is often the case in the Sermon on the Mount, it's emphatic. It is distinguishing his disciples and he says, "You and you alone, only you, only people like this, those who are in my kingdom, you are exclusively the salt of the earth," he says, "distinct from all others, distinct from the people in the world. I have something to say to you about what you are and who it is that I have called you to be," and he says, "You are the salt of the earth."

Now, something that hardly needs to be said but it's worth saying. When Jesus uses "the earth" here, he's not referring to the physical soil. He had just been describing inner character which has nothing to do with physical soil. He's using "the earth" to refer to men without Christ, men who are not under his Lordship, men who are not in his kingdom, the whole world system, and he says, "You're the salt of the earth." What does that mean? That's critical to the whole understanding of the passage. Somehow believers are like salt in the way that salt was used in the first century. You shouldn't think about it as, you know, a salt shaker thing like we are used to in the 21st century. What did that bring to mind to those who heard him in the day? Well, in ancient times, as you know, people did not have refrigeration in order to preserve perishable food and so they used salt as a preservative. They would rub it into meat to prevent the meat from decaying, and the effect of that would last for a long period of time. It's an ordinary illustration and you can picture it. You leave a piece of meat out on a hot summer day and pretty soon it's going to turn rancid. But as they used the salt and they rubbed it into the meat, that meat would be preserved so that they would have it to eat upon later. It would keep the meat and keep it from undergoing the natural process of decay. It would delay that. What Jesus is doing here now, beloved, with the simplicity of that illustration in mind, what Jesus is saying is that, "The people of my kingdom, the people who manifest the characteristics of the Beatitudes, they have an effect on the world that is like the effect that salt has on meat. They preserve and prevent and hinder decay in the world around them. They retard spiritual decay."

Beloved, the world is wicked. That's not a newsflash, is it? The world loves its sin. The world and men love themselves and they rebel against God. They do not give thanks to God. They plunge further and further into darkness. They worship creatures rather than the Creator and the darkness just develops and envelops them more and more and the results of that are bad. But what happens is, and what Jesus is describing here, is a remarkable spiritual consequence of having people of Beatitude character, having regenerate people in the world scattered throughout and flung throughout the nations, what happens is this, is that the very consequence, the very nature of godly people living godly lives, has an effect of slowing down and moving back the process of decay; that spiritual process where men get worse and worse is slowed down by the fact that there are believers in the world.

How does that work? Well, go to the end of Matthew's Gospel for one thing. There are several ways that you could look at this. I'll just try to give you one broadly and one illustration simply. Matthew 28:19 and 20. This is Jesus' culminating commission to his people. As he speaks to the apostles here, he sets the agenda for what his people would do until he returns. And what is it that the church primarily does? Beloved, it's not manning soup kitchens. That's not the point of the church. It's not about social reformation. It is not about alleviating poverty. Jesus said, "The poor you will always have with you." That is not our main purpose. Maybe incidentally it fits into something else but it is not the purpose of the church. Jesus describes and commands by his authority and his people and says, "This is what you must do as my people." And he says in verse 19, actually look at verse 18 just to reinforce the point. Jesus says, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even the end of the age." How is it, what is the process by which the people of God have a spiritually constructive influence on the world around them? How is it that we are the salt of the earth? What is it that we do that produces that result? There it is: it is found in the proclamation of God's word; it is found in the simplicity of being a faithful church that observes the ordinances of baptism and communion and a people coming under the authority of Jesus Christ and living lives that are obedient to him.

Going further, think about it this way: as you and I are faithfully sharing the Gospel in evangelistic settings and as we speak to people whose lives are devoted to sin and they are going further and further into sin and then God uses us and we speak the Gospel to them and they are born again and they start to manifest the characteristics of a new life that Christ has given them, and they repent and they turn from sin and now instead of pursuing sin, they are pursuing righteousness, what has happened in that one life, in that one individual is, that there has been a deterrent against further sin because they've been born again. They have come to Christ and the decay and their contribution to the expanding wickedness of the world has been removed and now their lives are directed towards the force of righteousness.

So in evangelism and as Christians grow, we find that God calls people out of sin so that their lives are not the cesspool of iniquity that they used to be and they start to pursue

righteousness in their own lives and bit by bit in unseen ways, that influence for evil is removed and people are moved in the direction of righteousness all because of the force, the power of Christ, all because of the force and the power of the word of God and the sanctifying influence that it has on those who come under its authority, that come under the authority of Christ, that come under the authority of the word of God, who seek first his kingdom and his righteousness. You see how when there are scattered throughout the world countless numbers now who are devoted to this, they have been drawn out of that and they are no longer contributing to the advance of wickedness, they are now contributing in a way that leads to righteousness.

How do Christians have this sanctifying influence? How is it that we act as salt? Beloved, it is not difficult. It is not something extraordinary. It is not something that requires massive funding, and it is not advanced through self-promoters who get up and talk about themselves. It is advanced through people quietly, faithfully looking to Christ, looking to his word and as they look to Christ, they are transformed from one image of glory to another. He sanctifies us. He makes us more like him and the influence spills over into the world around us. And this can happen on an individual level as well, and you can see this and I would venture to say that all of you if you thought about it, could come up with things that you see in your own life that are just like this. This is just one example.

An individual case, we talked about it in a macro level, I just want to bring it down to an individual case. I have a close friend, that may be hard for some of you to believe, "He has a close friend? I never would have thought that." No, but I do. I have a close friend who told me a story about his wife. This was a friend who was in the military and I believe this was a military setting. I might be mistaken about that. But his wife was with a group of unbelieving women. The setting called for her not to be in a church but to be in the midst of unbelieving women and these women were saying awful things about their husbands. They were complaining about them. They were critical of their husbands and they were just saying really bad things about the men to whom they were married. Now, my friend's wife didn't make a big point and say, "Oh, you ladies shouldn't talk like that!" It wasn't like that. It wasn't a big confrontation of it. She just simply didn't join in on the discussion and by contrast what she did was she said, "Well, my husband is a good man and I love him and he's faithful and he's good to me." And there was this complete distinction of the way that she was speaking out of the natural sanctification of her heart, out of the natural love that she had for her own man, she spoke that way, distinct and separate from the world environment in which she found herself at that particular point. She wasn't trying to make a point. She wasn't trying to rebuke them. She was just naturally speaking well of her husband. The effect was amazing. When the women started to hear that, they stopped. They no longer spoke that way about their husbands. They moved on to other things. They conformed their mouth to the standard that she set with her simple godliness and the way that she was living.

That gives you a picture of how it works and I don't hesitate to suppose that all of you who are Christians and who have lived in the world have seen something like that happen. You see it even in the way that people resent your presence because they don't feel the freedom to sin around you that they do when you're not around. They don't feel

like they can run to the same excess somehow when you're there or even if you're not saying anything. That is a picture of the restraint that godly people have on the world around them. It's not because we're trying to tell people that they have to live by a certain law. We're not trying to conform them outwardly, morally to that. They recognize the presence of something different and the holiness, as imperfect as it may be, of a godly life, speaks to their conscience and convicts them and says, "I've got to slow down here. I can't just let myself go in the presence of whatever this is." That is the salty influence that believers have on the world around them.

Those of you that maybe came to Christ later in life, I daresay that you can remember there were instances where you came across a Christian kind of unexpectedly, didn't know they were a Christian, and there was something about their joyful spirit that convicted your dark heart. There was something about the love that they showed to you that convicted you of the hatefulness in your own heart. There was something about their generosity that made you say, "I'm selfish and self-centered." And their very life, even though they weren't even trying to do anything, spoke to you and the light shone into your heart and said, "There is darkness in me." Now, maybe that wasn't when you were converted but it awakened you and it made you realize that there was something distinct from the realm in which you had always thought and lived and spoke. That's what Jesus is describing here.

And I want to show you something really beautiful about it, beloved, something that should encourage you from the top of your head down to the soles of your feet and all points in between. Go back to verse 13 with me in Matthew 5. At one level, you might think, "Wow, this is a lot of responsibility for me to have." It's not like that at all. It's not like that at all. Jesus doesn't say, "You be the salt of the earth." He isn't commanding us to be the salt of the earth with this character that we have, he makes a declarative statement. He is simply stating a fact. "The reality of life in my kingdom is this: you are the salt of the earth. Your godly life has this impact whether you realize it or not." The effect of having Christ's people in the world, there is an impact like this unlike any other and Jesus says this is the natural outgrowth, this is part of what the Holy Spirit does through us as we live and manifests godliness. This influence naturally happens and so it's a statement of fact, not a command for you to go out and do. I find that very encouraging. The natural effect, beloved, of salt in meat is to preserve it. The natural effect of godliness is to hinder ungodliness in the realm around us in our circle of influence and, beloved, that should be a wonderful encouragement to you.

I realize that you bump up against a lot of opposition. I realize that people are antagonistic to you but, beloved, trust the word of God. Trust the word of your Lord who says that this is happening even if you're unaware of it. You know, you could look at that meat and you could not see the preservative process happening. It's something that's hidden and somehow it's embedded in the nature of things and you don't observe it happening, "Oh, look at that grain of salt retarding decay in that section of meat." It's not like that. And in the same way, you may not be able to quantify it, all of their opposition may make it look like you're not having any effect at all, but Christ says we have an impact.

We have a restraining influence and, beloved, the truth of the matter is if people's eyes could be opened to the spiritual reality of the nature of the world, everybody in the world should give thanks to the people of God, give thanks more preeminently that God has put his people in the world because the world would be a far worse, far more wicked, far more dangerous, deceptive place if God's people were not in it. If people were unhindered by the teaching of the word of God, unhindered by evangelism, unhindered by godly lives, they would rush into sin with far greater ease than they do. So the presence of God's people in the world is a measure of common grace to God that the world is not as bad as it could be if God's people were not there. This is to the glory of God, not to us.

Now, there is one teacher, who shall remain nameless, who looks at this passage and says, "Well, what salt means here is that your life will make people thirsty for the Gospel"; you know how you eat too much salt and it makes you thirsty. That is not what this passage is talking about. That's not what it means. It couldn't possibly be what it means if you've encountered that idea on this. Do you know how you know? You know because you have the ability to read verses 10, 11 and 12, the immediately prior context. It talks about persecution, rejection, insults. What our lives bring to the world and what it provokes in them is not a desire that they want, it's not a desire that that's what they want. They want to silence it. They want to stop it. Why? Because they want to pursue their sin and yet your presence and the presence of godly people restrains it and so they react and strike out against it. It's not necessarily that people will want to come to Christ as a result of seeing a godly life, Jesus says what they're going to want to do is silence you. So to say that the purpose of salt is that everybody automatically wants Christ because we are around is foolishness, and that's not the point. It sets up a false expectation of what life is going to be like for you. Your life will bring opposition to those who dislike and dishonor Christ. It will bring opposition to you and what Jesus does here is he gives you a word of encouragement, he gives you a word of insight to say, "Don't let that mislead you. Don't let that discourage you. Not only is your reward in heaven great, but even while you're here, you are having a sanctifying influence on your realm, your circle of influence, even if you don't see it." So that all of a sudden the purpose of being a Christian is elevated beyond what it can do for us in our personal lives and we realize that God has established a transcendent purpose for his people being in the world, a transcendent purpose that we are part of the agents of restraining wickedness in a world that prefers Satan to Christ. That's a pretty lofty purpose. That's a good reason to live. That's a good reason to exist.

The lives of ordinary Christians just like you with all of your sweet encouragement to the people around you, with all of the gentle, patient, persevering way that you go through trials, the lives of Christians just like you has an influence when you're not even trying because that's what God does with his people; that's what God does with the life that he produces in us when we've been born again. And that's why it would be wrong for us, that's why it would be wrong for us to withdraw from the world and have no contact with it. We are agents of even common grace to the people around us, to the world around us. It's not for us to receive this and be selfish and to keep it to ourselves. We go out, we live our lives, we work our jobs, we do our thing, and this is what happens, the world is a less wicked place as a result.

Now, secondly, we've seen the reality of Christian influence, I want to speak for a moment about the rejection of Christian imposters. The rejection of Christian imposters. Jesus after saying, "You are the salt of the world," goes on to distinguish true disciples from those who are only imposters; those who name the name of Christ but are not genuinely part of his kingdom; have not truly been born again, have nothing to do with the character of the Beatitudes which he describes.

Look at verse 13 again. Jesus says, "You are the salt of the earth; but," now he's going to make a contrast, now he's going to talk about something a little bit different, he's going to add a nuance to it, he says, "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, strictly speaking, true salt cannot lose its saltiness but the salt in the ancient world often contained impurities which diminished it and what appeared to be salt might just be a deluded residue. It looked like salt, it looked like the real thing, but it didn't have that preservative value because it wasn't pure salt, and that kind of "salt," so to speak with air quotes for those of you listening on subsequent media, that "salt" was simply thrown out. It was just thrown out in the street and people walked on it and it was rejected and thrown out because it had no value whatsoever. The purpose of salt in that day was to preserve and if a substance did not do that, then it was only fit to be thrown out into the street.

Now, you say, "Okay, what does that have to do with anything? What does that have to do with the impact of true disciples on the world around them? What is Jesus saying here?" Now, many commentators get nervous here and the first thing that they want to say is not what Jesus means by what he says, but what he doesn't mean, and they say Jesus is not saying that a true Christian can lose his salvation. So he's not saying that. And according to them, Jesus is saying that true Christians who are contaminated by sin are no longer effective and so that's what he means. They have impurities in their life, they are no longer effective, but he's not saying that they are going to be thrown out of the kingdom.

Well, what do we think about that? I agree that true Christians cannot lose their salvation. Jesus said most plainly, "No one can pluck them out of my hand." But I don't think that Jesus is warning against contaminated Christians at this point. Remember the context and, beloved, what we're talking about right now is just the simplicity of biblical interpretation, and remember what Jesus is talking about here: he's talking about those who manifest the characteristics of godliness as described in the Beatitudes; those who are hungering and thirsting after righteousness; those who are peacemakers. So he's talking about the real deal. And could someone who was a real deal be someone of whom, look at verse 13 with me, if Jesus is comparing this to true Christians who are contaminated, could the real deal, could it be said of him rightly, "no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled underfoot by men"? Could that possibly be what Jesus is saying here? Could a true believer born again by the Spirit of God, destined to see Christ in heaven, could someone in whom the Spirit of God dwells and for whom Christ specifically died on the cross, could we possibly say that someone like that

was not good for anything? To me, that's crazy to talk like that. That's not what Christ is saying here. It's the nature of salt that it's salty. It's the nature of Christians that they have influence. It's just the nature of things. It's the way things really are.

So what is Jesus saying here? Jesus is saying a "Christian," air quotes again, a "Christian" who has no moral influence is not a Christian. You see, imposters never have that sanctifying impact. The peoples whose lives are inwardly corrupt don't have this impact of those who are manifesting the spirit of the Beatitudes. Jesus is saying that his true disciples will have this impact because they are the salt of the earth and if you don't see that impact, if you don't see this influence coming out of a group or out of their lives, then you can make a conclusion that they're not the real thing. This gets thrown out. Why? Because it's corrupt. Because it's not the real thing.

The Apostle Paul describes this in Titus 1:16. You don't need to turn there, I'll just quote the verse for you. Paul said, "They profess to know God, but by their deeds they deny Him, being detestable and disobedient and worthless for any good deed." So you might have, Jesus is recognizing here that there might be people who claim that they know Christ, that they are a disciple of his, and that they have given their heart to Jesus. We don't embrace that language here at Truth Community Church but I'm just making a point. And yet by their drunken prolific and profligate life, their sinful lives, their disregard, they have no desire for God's word, they have no desire for the glory of Christ, they do not long for his return, they have no desire to pray unless they want something from God, Jesus says someone like that is not a Christian. That's not salt. That has no influence and in that condition they are only fit to be thrown out.

To be joined with those, think about it this way, Jesus comes to it at the end of the Sermon on the Mount, go to Matthew 7 with me, if you would, and you can see how Christ in the genius of his mind in the sermon that was preached on a single occasion, had different themes that were running through everything that he said, and later on toward the end of the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus makes a sharp distinction between those who know Christ and those who did not. Verse 21, you could go all the way back to 15 but we won't do that. He says, "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven will enter." Let's stop there for a second. Salt, verse 21. This is salt. "Those who do the will of My Father who is in heaven," there's the salt. What's the false residue? That which isn't real. Those in verse 22 who "say to Me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?' And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; Depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness.'" So here in verse 13, Jesus is saying the real deal, those who have been born into my kingdom, they are like salt and they have influence. He is recognizing in a way that he confirms later in the sermon that there will be those who name his name but do not have the spiritual reality corresponding to their profession and he says they are worthless. They will be thrown out in judgment unless they repent. And the mere fact that they made a verbal profession of Christ at some point in time, has nothing to do with the reality of life in his kingdom if they have not truly been born again.

So, beloved, where does this leave us? Christians, both collectively and individually have an influence on the world around them. And beloved, here's the thing and if we were able to communicate this to all of the downtrodden faithful Christians in the world, we would love the opportunity to do that, that their cumulative impact has an influence that is far beyond their earthly stature, far beyond their earthly suffering. Beloved, think about it: we can still read today about the martyrs over the past 2,000 years and we can read about them and they were people of no rank, of no influence, and the secular authorities brought down the sword upon their neck. Where are those secular authorities today? No one remembers them. The testimony of those lives are still recorded in the pages of history, they still testifying to the reality of the Christ that those people loved. So we say without hesitation based on the word of Christ that the world is a better place because Christians are in it, and we embrace the opportunity, the privilege and the responsibility that is ours to live this way in order that what Christ says will happen through the lives of his disciples would happen through you and me.

Let's bow together in prayer.

Father, we give you praise as the God who saved us through the death and the resurrection and the shed blood of your Son, our Lord Jesus Christ. Father, we were like decaying meat in days gone by in our days of sin. We were rancid. We were unfit for your kingdom. And yet in an act of mercy, Father, you reached down and you brought us to new through faith in Jesus Christ and, Father, new life flowed from us and you changed us and we thank you so deeply for that. Thank you for your mercy on us in our sin. Use us now in accordance with what Jesus described here as he called us the salt of the earth. And Father, for those who do not know Christ, Lord, may your Spirit draw them to him even now as the reality of Christian salvation has once again been presented to their minds, appealed to in their conscience, and driven home by the power of your Spirit in their hearts. Father, please, we ask you, extend your mercy a little further to those who are here who have not received Christ. Extend your mercy further. Work in their hearts so that they might repent of sin and put their faith in Christ for salvation, the one who made a blood atonement for sinners just like them, just like me. We pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen.

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