

# The Sermon on the Mount: Life in the Kingdom

## Sermon #2: Salt and Light

Matthew 5:11-16

Kevin Maurice – May 29, 2022

As the youth pastor and a proud alum of the University of Texas ... [laughter from the congregation] ... I ... what am I doing wrong? That's a lot of Aggies.

Anyway, go ahead and turn in your Bibles to the Book of Matthew chapter 5. This summer we are studying the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus' most famous sermon. It's found in the Book of Matthew chapters 5, 6 and 7. Last Sunday we explored the introduction, the first eight verses that are known as the Beatitudes. The Beatitudes are known as the promises of blessing from the King to those who are in His kingdom. And they're promises about what this future kingdom of heaven is going to look like. But they're also promises about what the lives of His people here on earth will look like.

Today we'll continue our study of the Sermon on the Mount. And we're going to look at a passage, the very next passage, that tells us that if Jesus is your King, here's what happens in you and through you. I'll read it out loud for us this morning, but will you please stand with me for the reading. This is Matthew 5:11-16:

**11 Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account.**

**12 Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.**

**13 You are the salt of the earth, but if salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything except to be thrown out and trampled under people's feet.**

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

**15 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.**

**16 In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.**

Please be seated.

Jesus uses two primary metaphors to describe His disciples: salt and light. And the fact that the Creator of the universe, the King of all things, chooses to use these two things to describe His followers, is significant. It tells us something. Because God could have said anything right here. He could have used any analogy. He chose to call His followers salt and light.

And this tells us that as disciples of Jesus, we are called to live lives that are different, lives that are distinct, set apart from the world; but not to be detached or isolated or separated from the world, so that we can make a difference in the world. That's our outline for this morning. We as Christians are meant to be different, but not detached, to make a difference.

### **We Are Called to Live Differently**

Followers of Jesus the King live lives that are different. Jonathan Edwards, the great Puritan preacher, once said, **“The seeking of the kingdom of God is the chief business of the Christian life.”**

Seeking the kingdom of God will make you different from the rest of the world. As Christians, we believe that we are so sinful and the world is so broken, that two thousand years ago a Jewish man who was fully human and fully God died and rose from the dead to save us. That's not just another moral philosophy; that is different.

And because it's in such contrast to everything that the world believes, Jesus is clear: seeking His kingdom has consequences. Part of being different from the world means you will be persecuted by the world.

And throughout the Gospels, Jesus is unapologetic about this. He never hides it. There's no bait and switch. He never pulls the wool over our eyes. He says, “If I'm your King, you will be persecuted!” And you'll be blessed. Matthew 5, verses 11 and 12:

**11 Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account.**

**12 Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in Heaven....**

Jesus says we're going to be persecuted. People will hate us and speak evil against us because we're different—not because you're different on your own account, but you're different because of Him.

That's important, because if people persecute you or hate you because you're just mean or you're kind of a jerk about your faith or you take to the internet to launch your opinions into the ether, or because you do business in such a way, or you claim the name of Christ but you don't look like Him or you're not living in a Christ-like way, that's on your account. That's not on His account.

But if you follow Jesus, if you talk like Him, if you live and act like Him, if your life increasingly looks different because of Him, you'll be persecuted on His account. If you're a disciple of the King, people will treat you the way that they treated your King.

In parts of the world that are closed to the Gospel, that means overt, even violent persecution. Our Christian brothers in China and North Korea and our Christian sisters in parts of the Middle East that are closed to the Gospel face persecution to a degree that we just don't understand.

But even here in the US—yes, even in Texas—Jesus says, “Yep, you too will be persecuted.” And perhaps we're starting to recognize that more and more. There is a decreasing social capital for being a Christian.

More and more, from our students, I'm hearing stories and examples of persecution for faith. And on the one hand that makes me sad that a middle school or high school student is being mocked or bullied by people at school or online, or they're being ostracized by their peers because they're choosing to follow Jesus.

But on the other hand, I'm proud of them. And Jesus told them this would happen because they're living differently. They're living differently enough that people notice they're following a different kind of king.

And if you're a member of the kingdom, the reward in heaven is great. And here on earth you'll be persecuted because your life will look different from those around you.

And with that, let's return to the two metaphors that Jesus uses to describe His followers. Because Jesus calls us salt and light.

Salt is a common commodity. It's in all of our homes. Restaurants just give it away—it's on the tables. But if this one simple ingredient was removed from our lives, things would change tremendously because salt is in so much and salt does so much.

Just think about cooking. With meat or fish or vegetables, even in baking, salt adds flavor. It changes what it's applied to.

In the past few years I've gotten really into barbeque—not just eating it—I've always been into that—but cooking it, making it. And if watching Aaron Franklin's master class has taught me anything, it's that, aside from the beef itself, aside from the brisket itself, the most important ingredient is the salt. All these other things—trimming the fat, maintaining the temperature, the type of wood that you use—are all very important. But if you just leave out the salt, the brisket is not going to be very good, because salt brings out the best of the flavors. It enhances whatever it's sprinkled onto or mixed into.

Another thing that salt does is that it preserves. It prevents decay. For thousands of years of human history, before the advent of household refrigerators, salt was the primary means of preventing food spoilage. You would preserve your fish or your meat in barrels of salt because it slows decay and rot. Salt changes what it is a part of.

And light does the same thing. Light affects the environment around it. Light illuminates darkness, and it changes whatever area it enters into.

We're so accustomed to light. We just flip a switch and it's there. We even complain about light pollution.

But if you've ever been in a cave, or camping on a dark night, or at night trying to navigate your toddler's bedroom and their Legos on the floor, you know how important even just a little bit of light is, especially in the darkness.

Salt changes things. Light affects the world that it interacts with, because they're different, because they're in contrast to that which they're applied into or they enter into.

And Jesus said that we, His followers, are “the salt of the earth” and “the light of the world.” And it's so important here to notice and understand that the verb that Jesus uses is not an imperative. Jesus isn't commanding us to become something that we're not; He's telling us what we already are. He doesn't say that this is an optional thing. He doesn't say you can be or one day you might be. He said you are. Everyone who trusts in Jesus and follows Him as King is salt and light.

This is what God does throughout history and throughout the Scriptures. He takes a group of people and He calls them and commands them to live differently, to be set apart. And God takes those people and He looks at them and say, “You’re mine. And my people are going to live differently because of me.”

And so, ask yourself this morning, are you living a life that’s different? Is it clear to people around you that you follow a different kind of king? Is your life reflective of Jesus? Here at Grace we talk about becoming more and more like Christ in all of life. That’s not just a tag line or a bumper sticker. That’s what following Jesus means. If He is your king, your life will look more and more like His.

About one hundred years ago, a pastor named A. W. Tozer wrote a list of seven things that he would reflect on and contemplate whether he was living a life that was salt and light in the world. If you’re a note-taker you may want to write these down, because even a hundred years later, these are still relevant to today. And they’ve been really helpful for me as I’ve just thought about my life in Christ. And I ask myself, *Does my life look any different?*

So here are the seven. Tozer called it “Seven Rules for Self-Discovery”:

1. What we want most
2. What we think about most
3. How we use our money
4. What we do with our free time
5. The company, the people, that we enjoy
6. Who and what we admire
7. What we laugh at.

Are these things different about you because you’re a follower of Jesus? If we’re not any different from the world around us or from who we were before we came to know Jesus Christ, what does that say? What if I want exactly what the world wants? Or if I spend my money just like my friends who don’t know Christ? What if my free time is filled with all of the same things that I filled it with before I became a believer? Or what if I laugh at exactly what the world laughs at or who the world laughs at?

I’ll be really honest with you. That last one, for me, has been highly convicting the past couple of weeks, especially regarding what I choose to watch. Because there are movies and TV

shows, not even R-rated, but I know that they're not going to be good for my soul. But I watch them because I don't want to miss out. I don't want to be left out of the culture or the conversation. And so, I sit through a movie with such appalling language, or I turn on the TV and I watch that TV show that's just filled with sexual innuendo and content. And the more I watch it, the more I laugh, the more desensitized I become to it.

The Book of Jeremiah describes the Israelites and a time in their history when they've become so intertwined and like the culture around them. They've lost or they've given up what it was that set them apart. And so, Jeremiah in chapter 6 says, "They have no shame at all. They don't even remember how to blush."

I don't want that to be me. I don't want to forget how to blush. This is one area in my life where I'm convicted of needing to be different.

Christians, we believe that God sent His Son to die for us because we were so completely lost and hopeless in our own sin that we couldn't do anything about it. So, He rescued and redeemed us. If we believe that, it should have dramatic impact on every single aspect of our lives.

And so, I encourage you this week to spend some time in prayer. Go for a walk, sit down with a pen and some paper in your favorite coffee shop, and go over this list of seven things, and just reflect. Reflect on where you are spiritually and ask God to show you just one. What is one area of your life where you're called to be more different from the world and more like your King?

Church, we are salt and light. Let's be different.

## **We Are Called to be Different, but Not Detached from the World**

Now, there is another side to this. There can actually be a danger in trying to be set apart. And the danger comes from saying, "Okay, I'm going to be different. Starting today I'm going to live differently. I'm going to live an ascetic lifestyle. I'm going to cut off everything and everyone that's not godly or righteous enough for my life."

And that's not actually what Jesus tells us to do. In fact, He commands the opposite. He doesn't want us to separate from the world. Yes, we're meant to be different, but not detached. In most world religions the highest goal, the greatest call, is to remove yourself more and more fully from the things of this world. It's what the Pharisees believed that they were supposed to

do. It's one of the reasons they hated Jesus so much, because He didn't do that. He didn't isolate himself. He didn't detach from the world. He stepped into it.

And as His followers, Jesus didn't just say, "You're salt and light." No, He said, "You're salt of the earth." "You're light of the world."

And when we look at the world around us, it's clear, isn't it? The world's decaying. It's rotting and molding. And things left to themselves—that's what they do—they deteriorate. That's why Jesus said, **"You're the salt of the earth. If salt loses its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything except to be thrown out and trampled under people's feet."** Unsalty salt that's not doing what it's meant to do is not good for anything anymore. And Jesus calls us salt because we're meant to season the world with the flavor of the kingdom. We're meant to season this world with the flavor of Christ and be a part of slowing some of that decay.

The world's a dark place. We know that. We're constantly reminded of it. It seems each week like it's just getting darker. And Jesus says, **"You are the light of the world. A city set on top of a hill cannot be hidden. People don't light a lamp and then hide it under a basket. They put it on a stand so that it can give light to all in the house."**

Light that's covered up isn't doing what it's meant to do. And Jesus calls us light because even just a little bit can illuminate the darkness.

We're meant to be different. But we're of no use to our King if we're detached from the world that He created and loves.

This is a difficult calling, isn't it? Live differently, and yet not detached? And yet, in some ways, for some of us, it makes sense. It's tempting, even, to separate from the world, to isolate away from it, especially if we're motivated by fear: fear of the world, or fear of persecution, because we want to keep our families, we want to keep our kids safe. We don't want to be persecuted. And so, it's appealing to detach.

And you just don't watch the movies or the Netflix shows that might even have a hint of the world's flavor to them. And you only listen to Christian music and Christian radio, you only read Christian books, you only eat at Chick-fil-A. They're closed today, so maybe you go to Raising Cane's because that name is in the Bible at least. It's spelled differently. You home school your kids or you send them to private schools to keep them away from other kids who are

Christians or from other parents that don't vote like you. You only gather together with other believers. You only spend your time with other Christians.

Now listen, none of those things are bad or wrong in and of themselves. Not watching that TV show or movie—I just said this—it might be what is best for your soul and best for you seeking the kingdom of God. Not watching that YouTube video might be the best thing for you, to not allow that germ of lust to spread in your life. Home schooling your kids might be the best for you and them and for your family. Chick-fil-A is delicious. I get it. There's nothing wrong inherently with any of those things.

And in some areas of your life God will call you to be distinct. He'll call you to be different from the world, and it might even be in a way that you don't want to. But if the King calls you to that, it's absolutely right to obey.

But here's the danger. We're in danger of losing our saltiness; we're in danger of covering over our light; we actually ignore our King if the reason that we do those things is not to be different from the world, but in order to detach from the world.

When I was a younger Christian, I leaned toward this extreme. I would detach so quickly. I drew these hard lines. I'd isolate, I'd separate from whatever I felt was just too worldly. And I looked around and I realized I didn't know anyone who wasn't a Christian. Yes, we are supposed to be different from the world. But just think about how our King, Jesus, did that for a moment. Jesus lived a perfectly sinless and righteous life. And He lived in such a way that it was compelling to tax collectors and prostitutes. People wanted to spend time with Him. They wanted to interact with Him, they wanted to talk with Him, and they wanted to eat dinner with Him. And He did! And the Pharisees mocked Jesus for this and they gave Him a nickname, and it backfired on them, because I'm one hundred percent sure Jesus loved this nickname. They called Him "friend of sinners." "Friend of sinners"—that's how they described Jesus. Does it describe us?

Salt in the box, light covered up, are not doing what they are made to do. The calling from Jesus isn't just to live a different life; it's to live a different life in the world.

A great tragedy occurs when disciples separate and detach from the world that God has placed them in. Instead of going into our community, instead of going into dark places, we stay inside. We stay inside our Christian spheres, we stay hidden behind church walls. We might emerge occasionally to talk about what should change in the world, but we do it from inside and not outside. And if we do that, we keep our light hidden and the salt loses its taste.

One of the least valuable and most harmful habits that we can fall into is to complain about the world's decay with an attitude of self-righteousness, while doing nothing. And it's so easy. It's so easy to criticize the world and the lack of even basic morality, and to decry the violence in society, and the deterioration of sexual ethics and the disregard for human life and the lack of concern for the poor, and materialism and greed, and so forth. And it's easy to sit back and cross our arms and say, "This place is going to hell in a handbasket" and then parrot another talking point about why that's happening, and yet do nothing.

John Stott, an Anglican priest, once wrote this:

**"If a house is dark when nightfall comes, there's no sense in blaming the house; that's just what happens when the sun goes down. The question to ask is, 'Where is the light?'"**

**"If meat goes bad and becomes inedible, there's no sense in blaming the meat; that's exactly what happens when bacteria is left alone to breed and spread. The question is, 'Where was the salt?'"**

**"Just so, if society deteriorates and its standards decline until it becomes like a dark night or a stinking fish, there is no sense in blaming society; that's exactly what happens when fallen men and fallen women are left to themselves, and human selfishness and sinfulness goes unchecked."**

**"The question to ask is, 'Where was the Church? Where was the salt and light, and why are the salt and light of Jesus Christ not permeating our society?'"**

Salt is supposed to get everywhere and cover everything and change what it's a part of. Light should spread and fill dark corners and infiltrate under corners and shine into the darkness. That's what those things do. But they must be in proximity to do the things that they're meant to do and to change and to affect.

So, ask yourself, do you know, do you spend time with anyone who doesn't follow Jesus? Do the people in your life, neighbors, co-workers, friends, do they know you're a Christian? Do you have unbelieving family members? Do they see your life as different than their own? Do the other parents at your kid's school know that Jesus is your King?

If not, is it because you're not living a life that's any different, or is it because you're living a life that's fully detached? We're meant to be different from the world, but not to detach from the world. And here's why. Here's the point: so that we can make a difference in the world.

Like salt in rotting meat, Christians can add the flavor of Christ to the world and impede decay. Like light in darkness, we can illuminate society and show people around us a better way of life. And yes, our culture and the world around us—the Bible tells us—will continue to decline until Jesus comes back. Until we are citizens of the new heaven and the new earth, until that day, there will be no perfect kingdom in this world. There will not be.

But that's no excuse to not pray, to not hope, and to not be ministers to those around us. I'm not saying that we can completely change the world or perfect the world. Salt and light don't do that. But salt and light do something.

Even though the world will never be perfect until Christ returns, can it be different? Although our nation will never be perfectly just, can there be more justice? Our society will never have perfect mercy, but can there be more mercy? Can our city be more compassionate? Can our homes, our families, have more peace? Even if the world will never be perfectly righteous, can it be more righteous because of the salt and light of Christ?

Christians, we can't be pessimists or cynics about the world. We're people of hope. We're optimists, eternal optimists, even. It doesn't mean that we aren't realists. But we're realists who know the truth about sin and about grace and that Jesus can change the world. Because He changed me, after all. He changed you. Why would I ever believe that Christ's power to change ends with my personal brand of brokenness?

God loves the world, and as His disciples, we get to be a part of making a difference in the world. Jesus said this, that people would look at our lives and praise God because of it! **...let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.** One day the kingdom of this world will be replaced by the kingdom of God. And on that day, our lives won't look different; they won't look peculiar anymore. We won't be persecuted for following our King. On that day, the light of our lives will be absorbed into the radiance of the Son of God.

But until that day, where has the King placed you to be salt and light? Where can you make a difference for the kingdom of heaven? Where might others see you and say, "Whatever he's got, I want that. Whatever hope she has in this crazy world, I'd like some of that too." Who

is one person in whose life you could make a difference? On your street or in your apartment complex, at the gym, among your friends, maybe even in your own family?

This week, ask God to make it so clear, to give you such an obvious opening that you could step into it; that somebody, some person might ask you to pray with and for them; or that you'd have an opportunity to arise to care for someone in a way that they've never experienced before, a way that's Christ-like; or that you'd even get to share your faith or share the Gospel with them. Ask God to make it easy—that a person would ask you, “Hey, what's your deal? There's something different about you. You've got a flavor to you ... there's this brightness about you ...” And then you could tell them about your King.

Making a difference in the world doesn't have to be some big earth-shaking thing. I think what prohibits us often from seeing the difference that we could make is the enormity of the task. If we feel like the world's too dark or it's too far gone, we shrug and say, “What can be done?” And all the while, there are hurting and broken people all around us, and Jesus is saying, “Them, right there! That one. Could you just pray for them? Talk to them. Tell them about me.” You can't change the world, but maybe you can make a difference in it, in one person's life.

After I graduated from high school, I took a gap year to be a missionary in Southeast Asia. And during some week of feeling especially ineffective in sharing my faith and not seeing any major changes and not experiencing these dramatic Billy Graham-type of revivals where dozens or hundreds of people were coming to faith, I wondered, *Is anything that I'm doing making a difference?*

I shared this with an older, wiser, more seasoned missionary. He'd been on the mission field for forty years. And he sat me down and he told me this parable. He said, “One day, once upon a time, there was a fisherman who used to go for a walk on the beach every morning before he started work. And one day as he was walking along the shore, he found that the entire beach had been covered with starfish as far as the eye could see. The old man had seen this before. It had happened after any major storm. He knew that in a few hours the sun would rise, the starfish would dry out, they'd harden, and they would die. The old man thought nothing of it.

“But off in the distance he saw this little girl, and she was running around the beach and she was picking up the starfish one at a time and taking them to the water and throwing the creatures back into the sea. He thought this was cute, so he called out to her and said, ‘Hey, what are you doing?’ And she looked at him and said, ‘The starfish washed up on the shore and they

can't back into the water on their own power.' She was helping them get back to the ocean, because if they were still on the beach by noon, they would all die.

"The old man replied, 'Yeah.' He knew all that. He'd seen it happen many times before. But there were thousands of starfish on this beach. He said, 'I'm afraid you're not making much of a difference.' The little girl stopped what she was doing for just a moment, contemplating what he'd said and maybe doing the math of how many she could save before it was too late. And then she bent down and picked up another starfish and took it over to the shoreline and dropped it into the water. And she said, 'It made a difference to that one.' And she went back to the sand and she picked up another starfish, and she said, 'It makes a difference to this one.' And she continued to work."

I will never forget that story and how another disciple encouraged me. It's a reminder of the type of impact and influence that we can have in the world if we just lean into who we are as Christians. It's the type of impact that Jesus can have in our lives and through us, even in just one other person's life.

Grace, let's be salt and light. Do you need to live in a more distinct way? Or do you need to step into the world and stop being removed from it? We're salt and we're light. Let's be different but not detached so that we can make a difference.

Would you please pray with me?

*God, we come before You this morning and we're humbled by the way that You love us; God, that You chose to come to us to rescue us, to bring us back to Yourself. God, we couldn't do that on our own, and You loved us enough to do that. Help us to see the world around us the way that You do, with love and compassion. Help us to see the people in our lives that we might share that light and that love with. God, I pray this morning that You would remind us of who we are, not in and of ourselves, God, but who we are in You. I pray that we would be people who bring about aspects of Your kingdom here and now; that we could flavor the world, that we could bring light to it. So, we pray these things in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.*

