

Lesson: Matthew 5:13-20

¹³ “You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled by men.

¹⁴ “You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. ¹⁵ Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. ¹⁶ In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.

¹⁷ “Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. ¹⁸ I tell you the truth, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished. ¹⁹ Anyone who breaks one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever practices and teaches these commands will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. ²⁰ For I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven. – NIV

Prayer of the Day:

Almighty God, you sent your one and only Son as the Word of life for our eyes to see and our ears to hear. Help us to believe what the Scriptures proclaim about him and do the things that are pleasing in your sight; through Jesus Christ, your son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

Verse of the Day:

Alleluia. Let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven. Alleluia. (Matthew 5:16)

Sermon Text:

“What is the purpose of life?” If ever there was a question that seems to be the one question to rule them all, this is it. It’s the question that so often gets the error code in the mind of those who reject absolute truth and therefore a God would control it. If you don’t have purpose, it will be hard to ever feel like what you have done is fulfilling. Without purpose, we struggle to define who we are. Without purpose, well, it feels like we are adrift at sea tossed here and there without any real firm notions about where we are supposed to be headed. Without purpose, we are lost.

Ah, but then purpose can also be a double-edged sword. Because if we actually do have a purpose in this life, well then, if we aren’t fulfilling it what does that say about us? If we are supposed to be doing something and instead are doing something else or nothing at all what does that mean for us, or even for others? If we have a purpose, then we can be failures at fulfilling it and so while some will look down every rabbit hole for purpose other than what God has given, others will flee from purpose, on purpose, far too frightened by the realities it brings.

With all that in mind, Jesus continues to preach today and as He does, well, He tells us that there is a purpose for God’s people.

As Jesus speaks to us, He presents us with two pictures and a reality that accompanies them. It is summarized in three words: Salt, Light, and Law. “Salt” and “Light” are two things we can’t get enough of this time of year living in Wisconsin. Two words our Savior says the world can never get enough of, any time of the year, whenever and wherever that might be.

But then these words often give me pause, especially when we pair them with that last paragraph in our lesson today as Jesus reminds us what our relationship with the Law really is. Salt and light are to be people who live in line with God's Holy Word. I think we hear that and sometimes think "Well yeah, but I try hard so surely God's good with my effort and well I've got Jesus so if all else fails, I'll sprinkle a little of Him on it and then be on my merry way."

What does Jesus say? "*Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets (to make it insignificant or something we can simply ignore on the way to whatever sin we may be committing); I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them (back to this in a minute).¹⁸ I tell you the truth, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished.¹⁹ Anyone who breaks one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever practices and teaches these commands will be called great in the kingdom of heaven.* It sounds like Jesus wants us to take God's Law, His Law, seriously. More than that even, He wants us to make sure we are teaching others to do the same. More and more I hear, "I'm not judging, but ..." and I really want to scream out sometimes, "Well you should be! God told you too!" The judging He tells us to abstain from is unjust judging, playing favorites, pretending we are better than another because my sins are more socially acceptable than theirs are, at least at the moment. He talks about that here too. *For I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven.* At no time, as we live as salt and light in the world around us, should we begin to think we have done all of this, or that any of it earns a place in heaven, for the fact remains, *all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God* (Romans 3:28).

This is why this section of scripture so often gives me pause. Truth be told everything that I just said is really difficult to do. Well, in reality, it is quite simple but my fears, my imperfections, my sinfulness make this really difficult to do. I'm not always as salty as I should be in the face of sin and the light of God's Gospel doesn't shine as brightly as it should as a result of it. So then ... well then, Jesus says it, doesn't he? *If the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled by men.* Is this really what we have to look forward to? I get to be the rock salt tossed out on the roads destined to be crushed up under tire and foot until the spring rains sweep me away.

Well, that's what Jesus should say to us because of our pitiful performance as salt and light as we watch the world go to hell in a handbasket, but He doesn't. Instead, we don't hear conditional sentences here. If you go and do this then you are really my people. Instead, He speaks very differently. **YOU ARE** the salt of the earth. **YOU ARE** the light of the world. It's accomplished fact! We have a purpose?

I said we would come back to it and here we are. *Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them.* That's what Jesus said to those gathered around and listening. He fulfills them, every one of them, not so that He can hang them over our head like trophies in a case that tell others they better be on top of their game when they step into this place. Instead, this is for us. He fulfills the law for us that He might speak the way He does here. You Are! You are because He has done it for you. Kept the Law for you. Paid the price for your sin as He allowed the powers that be to cast Him out of the city and do far worse than trample Him underfoot as He was crushed for our iniquities, our sins. An empty tomb shines the light of the truth that in Christ we are preserved forever in the perfection He has promised, provided, won for us all. Because of Christ **YOU ARE!** You are saved. You are God's. You are an heir of heaven. But this is not some trophy to be placed on the shelf and forgotten about until we reminisce about the good old days. Because it is true, because it is fact, it changes us. It provides purpose.

As I say that, a word of caution. This is not a new law which we are now to keep in order to really secure our places in heaven. Remember what we said before, that kind of thinking, well, *unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven.* Don't start that cycle all over again.

Instead, notice again the way Jesus speaks. ¹⁴ *"You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden.* ¹⁵ *Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead, they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house.* ¹⁶ *In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.*

Because you are everything we said before, it would be kinda silly to act as we were not. Cities on hills can't be hidden, you see them sometimes from miles away. You can't change that fact it's just going to happen. If you wanted to be hidden, then the hill was the wrong place to build. So also if you light a lamp, it would be goofy to stick it under a bowl where its light would be hidden and the oxygen would eventually disappear, snuffing I out. That would simply be a waste of oil and time. If you didn't need the light, why light the lamp in the first place?

No, instead, God has made you a Christian so that you might be a Christian in the world around you. Light and Salt for all you come into contact with. That will look like a lot of different things in the lives of a lot of different people. May I simply point out one. To the parent, statistically, you are the most important factor, after God's work in the Means of Grace, in the sustained spiritual life of your child or children. The brighter you shine, the better. It's not the awesome youth group. It's not the pastor and his awesome sermons. It's not even the musical choices in worship or the rigor and prestige of the school you send them to. All of them are losing youth at about the same rate, none of them are overly successful without one key factor. In families, that attend worship regularly the percentage for passing on the faith jumps dramatically. Where those families live that faith in their everyday lives, higher still. Where they regularly have home devotions, talk about the application of Sunday's truths throughout the week, highest of all.

Start extinguishing those lights and something alarming happens. In households where church is sporadically attended a different light shines and more often than not the children learn Church just isn't important and if God's house is unnecessary then perhaps God is as well. The oxygen of faith begins to grow thin under the bowl which has been placed over it. Perhaps soon the truths of the Word will be trampled underfoot.

Now apply that same truth to the world in which we live. Yes, simply by the way we live we speak to the world around us. Maybe it's a full parking lot for the community to see as we gather together for worship. Maybe it's the way we speak about our spouses or our bosses around the water cooler at work. Maybe it's the loving way we simply interact with our friends and relatives or our neighbors. People are watching. People are noticing what Christians are doing. If we don't take God's Word seriously, why in the world would they? Again, does any of this earn you a single thing when it comes to heaven? No! But then it sure sounds like it is meaningful to others, almost like God has provided us with a purpose in our lives.

What a privilege dear Christian! What a privilege that God would come to sinners like us and make us His own and not only that but He would then call us to His work. Yes, solely by grace as God pours out His love on us all. Solely by His grace, He grants us real purpose in this world. Solely by His grace, He grants us the ability to do it. Christianity teaches that God so loved you that He gave His one and only Son to grant you life forever in heaven. Scripture teaches God so loved the world that He gave His Son for them too. Brothers and sisters, our purpose is clear and because it is fulfilled in Christ there is no reason to fear. Go shine! Be Salt! Amen!