

Jesus Christ is the light of the world, the light no darkness can overcome. Amen.

It sounds simple. It sounds easy. **Be what you are.** People have been pushing the value of being yourself for centuries. I'm sure you've heard it. Before that job interview, before that first date: **Be what you are.**

Yet apparently being yourself is pretty difficult. You could fill a library with all the books that tell you how to be yourself. Let that sink in. You need someone else to tell you how to be you. But people want to know – they're desperate to know! – what they are. That way they can finally get around to being themselves and doing the stuff they're meant to do.

We disciples of Christ have a similar problem. You know that life is not all about you. You know that God created you, redeemed you, and sanctified you. And so you know there's all sorts of stuff that you're meant to do.

That's why today, Jesus tells you to **be what you are.** He calls you salt and light. His point is simple: Both salt and light have a purpose. In fact, salt and light are two things the world cannot do without, and so are you. **Be what you are: "You are the salt of the earth" (5:13).**

Why salt? Isn't salt a bad thing? It gets on your car and makes it rusty. It gets on your clothes and turns them dirty. It gets in your system and the doctor says, "Stop eating so much salt!"

But salt is one of the most important compounds in existence. Without salt, the human body cannot function. Salt is a good thing. Especially in Jesus' day, because salt is a preservative. Without refrigeration or freezers, salt is the only way to preserve meat. Salt kept food from going bad and kept you from starving.

So here's Jesus' point: You Christians are a preservative that spares the earth from God's wrath. After all, where is Judgment Day? Why hasn't God ended the world yet? Because "he is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance" (2 Peter 3:9). How will people repent without Christians to tell them to and show them how?

If it weren't for Christians speaking the faith and living the faith, the world would become so corrupt that God would end it. But when you speak God's Word and live God's Word, it stings unbelievers like salt in a wound. It prevents decay and makes new Christians.

Like salt, you are put on the earth to preserve it. But you need to stay salty. **"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 underfoot" (5:13).**

Back then, salt was not the highest quality. It was made from dried seawater, and the sodium could leech out. After that, salt couldn't preserve anything and you had to throw it away.

So too, if you lose your faith in Jesus, what are you good for? You can't stand out and speak out if you are no different from everyone else. Ignoring sin and embracing sin scabs over your conscience, blends you in to the earth, and kills your faith.

So **be what you are.** Be salt. Be light, because **"you are the light of the world" (5:14).** Light is made to shine, for all to see. That's why businesses use big spotlights to get attention.

You shine your light to bring attention to Jesus. Remember what Jesus says about himself: "I am the light of the world" (John 8:12). Just like the moon reflects the sun, you reflect Jesus.

Because no one can visibly see Jesus, but everyone can visibly see you. When you look at the Christian, you should see the Christ. You speak God's Word and live God's Word to dispel the darkness of sin. Not in a mean or judgmental way, but in a kind way that shows people the Light of the World.

And that light is best used out in the open: **"A town built 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" (5:14-15).** So also, don't conceal your Christian faith so that no one can tell you're a Christian. What good does that do?

No, **"in the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven" (5:16).** Light doesn't exist to draw attention to itself; light exists to draw attention to what it illuminates. Your light illuminates Jesus. Your good deeds shine a bright light on your Father in heaven.

So when you do good works for others to see, don't do them to show off. Do them to shine the light on Jesus. You don't want people to say, "What a great person you are!" You want people to say, "What a great God you have!" Direct the attention to Jesus.

Jesus pulled you out of the darkness. Jesus brought you the light of faith. Jesus gives you the power to do good works. You show Jesus in the good works that you do. **Be what you are.**

But if you know yourself, if you're honest with yourself, you'll admit that being yourself is pretty difficult. Jesus says that you are salt and light. Your words and actions should preserve the good and reflect the Savior. So how salty are you? How openly does your light shine?

It's easy to talk about the rot and darkness in our nation. Violence in the streets. A million children aborted every year. Over half of marriages end in divorce. We hear about corruption in the government, the failure of law, the breakdown of society.

But the most shocking statistic? All that happens in a country where nearly seventy percent of the population claims to be Christian. Is the problem that decay and darkness are taking over, or that Christians are failing to be salt and light?

What is it that sets you apart from the world, other than the fact that you're in church today? Is your life so laced with good deeds that you look strange compared to everyone else? Are your words so seasoned with salt that others speak better around you, or do they know that you don't care?

When your speech and your behavior blend in with the rest of the earth, you're losing your saltiness. When you don't call a sin "sin" because you're afraid of being judgmental, you're putting yourself under a bowl.

And how does that help anyone? They are still caught in their sin. And you may have it easy now, but eventually you will be thrown out and trampled, not by men, but by the wrath of God in hell. How pathetic, when you and I are nothing like the salt and light that Jesus calls us. So why does he even say it? Doesn't he know us?

But that's just the point! He does know us. Jesus does not say, "Try to be the salt of the earth." Or, "If you work hard, then you'll be the light of the world." He says, "You are salt. You are light." Jesus tells you what you are. He announces what God already made you.

You are salt. At that time, salt was precious. So much so that Roman soldiers were paid with it. Our English word "salary" literally means "money to buy salt." We still say, "He's not worth his salt."

Salt was a valuable commodity, and like salt, you are valuable to God. Value is determined by what someone is willing to pay. Back then, people were willing to pay a high price for salt. God was willing to pay a high price for you. He paid the price of his one and only Son (John 3:16; 1 Peter 1:18-19).

Jesus put his perfect life in place of your imperfect sin. Jesus gave up his perfect life on the cross to show how valuable you are to God (Romans 5:8). God baptized you to show what a precious commodity you are (Ephesians 5:25-26). You are his child (Galatians 3:26-27).

You are his light. Jesus is the true light that gives light to everyone (John 1:9). He shined that light on you, dispelled the darkness of your sin, and now the radiance of his perfection shines through you!

Do you see? It is not because of what you've done or might do that Jesus calls you salt and light. It's because of what *he* has done. It's what *he* made you. This isn't a command. It's a statement, a fact: "You are salt! You are light!"

It's like he's saying, "I have made you to be exactly what the world needs. Now, **be what you are**. Don't hide it. **Let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven" (5:16)**. Your life has purpose. **Be what you are**, and just like salt and light, you make a difference in the world.

When they see your love for people who can never pay you back, they'll see Jesus. When they see you warn against sin and tell people to repent, they'll see the truth that sin destroys us. When they see how you trust in God instead of in money, they'll see the God who promises to take care of us. And, when they see you sin – when they see you fail to be the salt and light Jesus calls you – what will they see then? Someone who repents, who trusts in God's forgiveness. And they'll see Jesus there, too. Amen.