

**The Sermon on the Mount
The Power of Your Influence (Part 1)**

Matthew 5:13-16

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When God created the physical universe, He established certain laws that govern how the physical universe operates. We understand that. There's the law of gravity. There's the second law of thermodynamics. There are other laws like that, that God created, that govern how the physical world operates. You can ignore those laws. You can deny them; but if you try to deny them to a certain extent, you'll do so at your own peril. Try the law of gravity, for example. It will work whether you believe it will work or not. It is a reality. When God created the moral universe in which we live and have our existence, He also established with that moral universe, specific laws that govern it. Laws like the law of sowing and reaping. Whatever you sow spiritually, you will reap. It's a reality, as clear in the spiritual world as it is in the physical world. You can't sow corn and get lettuce. There is a principle of: what you sow, you reap, and to what extent you sow, that is the extent to which you reap. The same thing is inviolably true in the spiritual world as well. But one of the laws that governs the moral universe in which we live, that we don't think about a lot, is the law that Jesus brings us to today. We call it the law of influence. God created in His moral universe the power of influence. He determined that we could be shaped and influenced in various ways. And that we would have the power to influence others. It's a really remarkable law that God has put within the fabric of the moral universe.

But what are the ways in which this influence comes to us? How are we influenced, and how do we influence? As we begin this morning, let me just think that through with you, and give you several primary ways that we influence and are influenced. What are the primary means of influence? First of all, there's the influence of genetic inheritance. We are influenced by our genetic makeup—by the sin nature we inherited from Adam. And each of us individually is influenced by the traits and qualities that we inherited from our parents. That's not a death sentence. We don't have to be exactly like our parents in every way. But we are influenced by those genetic markers—those things that we inherit.

A second way that we are influenced is the influence of physical proximity. You can be influenced by someone just by being near them. A great example of that was in the newspaper this week in Dallas, when those two people were simply passengers in that Porsche that careened off a Dallas road and into the canal, and by their proximity to that driver (they were in his car) they too were killed. The power of the influence of physical proximity.

There's the influence of teaching and instruction. We are shaped and influenced by those people or those resources that we accept and affirm as our teachers, whether they are books you read or people. You let certain people, certain resources serve as your instructor. You sit, as it were, at their feet, and you are influenced by them, as am I. My life has been forever shaped by the men under whose ministry I have sat.

And fourthly there is the influence of moral example. We understand the power of example. In fact, all of us can think of people in our own lives who have influenced us for good. We are the people we are today, to a certain extent, because we bear the mark of their moral influence. And of course the same process falls out negatively as well, doesn't it? We can be influenced for evil. Most of us have heard some form of the saying, one bad apple spoils what? the whole bunch, or the whole barrel. That's a biblical concept. Proverbs 13:20 says "He who walks with wise men will be wise, but the companion of fools will suffer harm." I Corinthians 15:33: "Do not be deceived. Bad company corrupts good morals." We are influenced by the moral example of the people that we choose to hang with and be around. The Bible often uses the imagery of leaven to illustrate this reality. For example, Paul, writing in I Corinthians 5:6, talking about their tolerating the man who was involved in incest and not disciplining him, says this: "Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump of dough?" A little yeast is going to spread through the whole lump. You're all going to be affected by the evil influence if you let it stay. So those are the primary means of influence. That's how we are influenced in the world, by the genes that we can do nothing about, by physical proximity, by teaching and instruction, as well as by moral example.

Now, in the passage in the Sermon on the Mount that we come to today, Jesus is primarily addressing the last two of those: teaching and instruction, and moral example. And His primary point is that as His disciples, you and I have the power to influence the world around us. And not just the power, but the responsibility. In Matthew 5:13-16, Jesus deals with this issue of influence. And He uses two images, salt and light to describe the power of our influence. One of those images is negative, the other positive. Let me read it to you. Matthew 5:13. Coming out of the beatitudes, Jesus says:

"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 underfoot by men. You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden; nor does anyone light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house. 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 just to remind you of the context in which these verses occur, we've looked at the beatitudes. There are eight beatitudes. The first seven of those beatitudes describe the character of those who are truly Christian, those who belong to Jesus' spiritual kingdom. This is what they look like. This is who they are. The last beatitude, the eighth one that comes in verses 10-12 (it's kind a transition to the text I just read to you) describes not our character, but the response of the world to us. And in a word their response is persecution in various ways, in various forms. Can be a simple attitude of hatred for us. Resentment. Anger. Can be verbal abuse either to us or about us to others—verbal ridicule. Can be slander. And at times it can even be physical violence. That's how the world responds to those who are truly Christ's, who live like the beatitudes (the other seven beatitudes) describe. It's how they responded to Christ. Jesus says you shouldn't be surprised when they respond to you the same way.

Now, in verses 13 to 16, Jesus describes how we are to respond to the world. Verses 10 through 12, here's how the world's going to treat you. But let me tell you what you are to do to the world, Jesus says. Jesus explains in these verses the purpose that God has designed for every Christian to serve in the world. Here is our mission, in these two profound pictures. Reduced to its simplest form, we could say that your mission to the world is to be one of influence. It's to be influence. If you belong to Jesus' kingdom, God has given you a powerful influence in the world around you. What is influence? The English word influence comes from a Latin word that means to flow into something. The idea is that one person's power flows into the life of another. Here's how the Oxford dictionary defines influence. "It is an action exerted imperceptibly or by indirect means by one person or thing on another so as to cause changes in conduct, development, conditions, etc." So there is an imperceptible power that passes from us to another person that produces a change in how they respond. A change in how they act. That's influence, and that's the power that we've been given.

Now, before we look at what Jesus teaches here, I want to first do as we have often done. I want to step away from the text and I want to clear the ground a little bit. I want to clear away the rubble of confused thinking. Because there are a number of wrong ideas about Christian influence that are very popular in the Christian community today. And undoubtedly, we have all been influenced by them--wrong ideas about Christian influence. Specifically, let me give you three of them. Here's the way not to think about our influence. First of all, a wrong idea is using the wrong means to influence. And there are so many different skewed perspectives Christians have about the wrong means to influence the world. Let me just let you think of a couple. There are those who believe that we should use the means of becoming more and more like the world in order to influence the world. This approach goes by various names. It's sometimes called contextualization. It's sometimes called accommodation. There's a hearty debate in the Christian community, on the Christian blogs about this very issue. The idea here is that if the church does what unbelievers do, it will be better able to influence them. The closer we can get in our actions and behavior to the way the world thinks and lives and behaves, the greater our influence will be.

This approach started out innocently enough. It started out, a number of years ago now, just trying to make the services of the church more comfortable to unbelievers. Let's remove the obvious barriers to unbelievers. Nothing wrong with that. You don't want the church to intentionally be a barrier to unbelievers.

But that's where it started. And then it went another step, to say not only let's make them comfortable, or let's make them where they're not uncomfortable, but let's design the entire service for unbelievers. Let's make everything where they're perfectly comfortable. Let's make it about them. And today, that has morphed into something far more. Today, it means doing outlandish things that, in the past, the church would have never thought about doing—all under the auspices or intention of increasing our influence. You say, what does this look like? Let me give you a couple of examples. For example, one church in California, near where I used to live, decided they wanted to have a better outreach to men. Well, how do you reach unbelieving men? Well, let's make them comfortable. So instead of the traditional men's kinds of activities to reflect the priorities of Scripture or the priorities of Christian activity, instead let's have a men's event that features beer and poker. I'm not making this up. Other churches intentionally rent bars and nightclubs to have their services or meetings, because unbelievers will be comfortable there. It has become completely routine, and a number of churches around us routinely have secular music in their services when they meet. And not just any secular music, but bad secular music. Secular music with bad themes. For example, one church like this, on Easter Sunday morning played ACDC's *Highway to Hell*. Welcome to Easter.

One of the architects of this approach in American evangelicalism is the pastor of Mars Hill Church in Seattle, a man named Mark Driscoll. We would agree with much of what he believes. He's solidly reformed in his doctrine of salvation. But he believes that to reach the people of Seattle, he and his church must accommodate their lifestyle. So to accomplish that, he's done a number of things that are frankly both biblically and historically inappropriate. He has often used foul language in his messages, even cursed during his messages. He's comfortable using crude sexual jokes from the pulpit. He often references some of the worst of the culture, all in this desire to become as much like the people around him in Seattle as he can be, so that he can have a greater influence on them. By the way, Driscoll recently created quite a stir when he announced that he has visions—explicit visions of various people in his church committing various sins. Explicit visions. But this theory, this theory of accommodation and contextualization misunderstands the way to reach and influence the world. Jesus says we are salt and light. Salt is diametrically the opposite of everything that is non-salt. And light is the opposite of darkness. It's a wrong means.

Another wrong means is through political action. Of course Christians should vote. Christians should be good citizens. But there are still many Christians, in spite of the history of the last 30 years, who continue to believe that the way they can exert the greatest influence on the culture is

by making sure we get the right political candidates in office. Good luck! Our influence is not political but personal, as we will learn this morning. Another wrong means is through externals. This view says that the way Christians influence the world around them is by just being odd. By looking different, by dressing differently, by having 50 to 100 year old styles. This is the approach of legalism. It says—and by the way this is true in every faith; you can see this in just about any faith in the world—those who really think this is the way that you can provide that influence. You have to be oddly different. So often we fail to use our influence because we resort to the wrong means—means like accommodation, political action, legalism.

Now a second wrong idea that undermines our influence is not only using the wrong means, but secondly having the wrong goals. Sadly, many Christians are confused about the purpose for our influence. Many Christians have come to think that the chief reason we ought to be an influence on the world us, salt on the world around us, is making this planet or our country or our community a better place to live. Really? Folks, that's like rearranging the deck chairs on the Titanic. It may look a little nicer, but the ship is sinking, and will go down. It doesn't help. It's a wrong goal for our influence. It's not our goal. The mission God has given us, as we'll see in these verses is not about making life more comfortable for us and the people around us.

There's a third wrong idea. Not only using the wrong means, having the wrong goals, but thirdly, denying or ignoring your influence. And frankly, this is true of many Christians today. Many Christians have just stopped caring. They've stopped caring about their influence. And if you doubt that, go on the face-book pages of a lot of professing Christian people and see what they write about and what they talk about. They just don't care. For them the main thing is, they've got their ticket to heaven, and you know, the influence they have doesn't really matter. I can do whatever I want. It doesn't have to show up in who I am publicly.

So, those are the flawed ideas about our influence. But as always, I want us to come back now to the key question. What does the Bible say? Specifically in this case, what does Jesus say? In the passage we read, Jesus provides two illustrations of the power of our influence. In verse 13, we are the salt of the earth. And the second illustration comes in verses 14-16. We are the light of the world. I love this, because the images Jesus chooses were common ordinary items in the poorest of homes. Every home in the first century world would have had salt, and would have had a small oil lamp. In fact, as Jesus was growing up, undoubtedly in his home, he watched many times as Mary prepared their food with salt, and he watched as twilight came and someone lit the oil lamp that illumined their little home just like the rest of homes in that time period. So, He takes two very common items from the ordinary home and He makes them a powerful picture of our influence.

Today I want us to look just at the first illustration. Verse 13, We are the salt of the earth. Look at that verse again. "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" Now there are several questions that verse invites. The first question that we need to answer is, what's the picture? You are the salt of the earth. Let's start there. In the Greek text, the word *you* is emphatic. In the Greek language, if you want to let someone know who the verb is referring to (who's the subject of the verb) you simply create an ending. And that ending on the verb tells you whether it's he or you or whatever that subject might be. But if you want to make it emphatic, you actually put the pronoun in the sentence. And that's what Jesus does here. It's as if he's saying this, you and only you are the salt of the earth. Now, think for a moment about how extraordinary that statement is. Jesus preached this sermon early in His ministry. He's surrounded right at this moment by a huge crowd of the curious. But He makes this statement not to that crowd, but rather to the twelve men that He had just chosen that morning to be His official representatives—His apostles. And He makes it to the slightly larger group of His followers that are gathered around them. So there's the twelve, and then there's the gathering of His followers. Together probably not more than a couple of hundred people, a relatively small group of farmers and fishermen, merchants, and poor people from the back-water area of Galilee in a little tiny nation called Israel, in the first century. And Jesus says to them, You and you alone are the salt of the earth. Wow! And notice, by the way, Jesus doesn't say you are the salt of the nation Israel, but you are the salt of the whole earth. And notice in verse 14, you are the light of the what? the world. Those two metaphors together, highlight our global mission as Christians. Our life is not about our little world. It's much broader than that. But there's another important observation to make about this statement, in what Jesus doesn't say. Notice He doesn't say you should be the salt of the earth; you ought to be the salt of the earth. He says you are the salt of the earth. To the newest of those who've become His followers to those who have been tracking with Him for more than a year—to all of them He says you are the salt.

Salt was a fascinating choice for Jesus to use for this metaphor. It's a fascinating mineral substance, sodium chloride. It's formed when the unstable metal sodium reacts with chlorine gas. It's the only family of rocks that humans eat—at least the normal ones of us. Salt was very, very important in the first century world. In fact, the Romans put a high price on salt. Their first road (I don't know if you know this or not, but their first road—the first Roman highway) was the Via Solaria. It went from Rome, guess where, to the Adriatic Sea where salt was gathered. Salt is essential to human life. And I'm about to tell you more than I know here. But it regulates the water content of our bodies. All of our selves have a certain amount of salt content. And this salt content must be balanced with the liquid surrounding the cell. If there's too much salt, guess what happens. The cell dehydrates. If there's not enough salt, then water can flow in, rupturing the cell wall, so that balance is absolutely crucial. And to sustain life, all of us here this morning, while some of us may have too much salt (may have to be watching our salt intake) we still are within the range that supports life. We have to have that balance of salt and liquid.

In the ancient world salt served three primary purposes. It was a seasoning for food. We still enjoy that don't we? I had eggs this morning, and I put salt on them. And you know why I put salt on them? It's because it's biblical to put salt on eggs. No, I'm not making this up. Job 6, listen to this. I love this. "Can something tasteless be eaten without salt? Or is there any taste in the white of an egg?" The answer's no. So I put salt on. And it was used in the ancient world for seasoning as well. A second purpose of salt in the ancient world was as a cleanser, or antiseptic. You can see an example of this in Ezekiel 16. God is speaking metaphorically about the birth of Israel. And He writes of her birth, "As for your birth, on the day you were born, your navel cord was not cut, nor were you washed with water for cleansing; you were not rubbed with salt or even wrapped in cloths." These were the normal practices for a newborn in that time period. Newborns were typically bathed in or rubbed in salt in order to cleanse them. It was a way in the ancient world for them to fight bacteria. A third use of salt in the ancient world was as a preservative. To preserve meat and other food items. Those uses made it a very valuable commodity. It was sometimes included with wine and oil as a staple of life. And so, it's fascinating here that Jesus tells us we are the salt of the earth. Now that's the picture.

But that brings us to a second question, and that's what's the point.. Okay, I've got the picture. We're salt. But what's Jesus' point. Well, both of these illustrations, salt and light, are what linguists would call metaphors. Now, here's how a metaphor works. Bear with me as I give you a brief English lesson, because I hope it will bear fruit. Okay? Here's how a metaphor works. When there's a metaphor there is a topic. There's something you're talking about. There is an image. That is a picture you use to talk about that topic. And there is a third aspect of a metaphor, and that's the point of similarity. There is some point of similarity between the topic, (the thing you're talking about) and the image that you use to describe that topic. Let me give you an example. In the gospels, Jesus says this about Herod the King. He says, "go tell that fox". Okay, in that metaphor you have a topic. The topic is King Herod. Jesus describes King Herod as a fox. That's the image. So the question is, what is the point of similarity between Herod and a fox? Okay, well what are the qualities of a fox. Okay, he has red hair. That's probably not it. Four legs, definitely not it. Long snout, no. I mean, obviously, in this case, the point of similarity is that a fox is clever and sly, and Herod was clever and sly. That's the point of similarity. The question we have to ask back here in Matthew 5 is, what is the point of similarity between true Christians, true citizens of Jesus' spiritual kingdom, and salt. Now, it's important before we answer that question to remember that a metaphor can be used different ways in scripture. For example, leaven or yeast. It is often used for evil in the Bible. But it's not always used for evil. But some Christians get it in their minds it must always mean evil. Every time I see leaven it's going to be evil. So they come to Matthew 13. There Jesus uses leaven to describe the secret powerful growth of His kingdom and they're stumped. Because they are still looking for evil. So understand that different qualities, different applications of a metaphor can be different in different places. The same is true for this metaphor of salt. If you look elsewhere in the scripture, it'll be used differently. For example in Luke 14 salt is used to describe the

permanence of discipleship. In Mark chapter 9 (we saw this when we were studying the gospel of Mark) it's used to make three different points at the end of Mark 9

But here in Matthew 5, let's ask ourselves this. What is the quality or qualities of salt that are true of Christians and their influence? Are we, like salt, to be a seasoning that makes life full of flavor? Perhaps. There's truth in that. Christians add that zest to life, at least many do. Some are more like bland food. Are we, like salt, to be a cleanser, a purifier? I think Jesus' main point is the third use of salt in the ancient world. And by far the most common use of salt in the ancient world was as a preservative. And by the way, most commentators will agree with me here. Before refrigeration, the only way to keep meat from spoiling--shortly after the animal was killed was to rub salt into the meat, or soak it in a briny salt water. By soaking or rubbing the meat with salt, through the process that is called osmotic pressure, the salt actually replaces the blood. And that preserves the meat from too much bacterial growth. It causes it to move more slowly. Then when you take that meat that's all salty and you soak it in water, reverse osmosis makes it edible again. The salt dissolves and you are able to enjoy the meat. So, salt, then, kept meat from rotting. Jesus calls us salt—listen carefully—to show the power of our preserving influence in the world. Now what does that say about Jesus' perspective of the world? That it's decaying. That it's given to rotteness. Left alone, it will continue to get worse and worse. And by the way, Jesus isn't talking about the planet here. He's talking about people. He's saying that we as His followers combat the moral and spiritual decay that is all around us. Listen to what Kent Hughes writes in his commentary. He says "Christians exert an incalculable influence on society. Their mere presence reduces crime, restrains ethical corruption, promotes honesty, quickens the conscience, and elevates the general moral atmosphere. Their absence allows unbelievable depths of depravity." You can see that can't you? If you'll look at the countries of the world that have been under the influence of true Christianity, there is a preserving influence in that society and culture.

But how do we exert that influence? It is by being what Christians are to be, and doing what Christians are to do. One writer says it this way. "Christians' saltiness is Christian character as depicted in the beatitudes. It is committed Christian discipleship." Listen, you genuinely follow Jesus Christ and what He's teaching in this sermon, and you will be salt. You can't help it. You will be. D. A. Carson writes "Jesus' disciples are to act as a preservative in the world by conforming to kingdom norms." Just live out the principles of living in Jesus' spiritual kingdom that are right here in this sermon. Live in obedience to Christ. Follow Him, try to make decisions that honor Him, and you will be salt. One author, Tasker, puts it this way. "We are called to be a moral disinfectant in a world where moral standards are low, constantly changing, or non-existent" You know, it's interesting, one of the qualities of salt is permanence. It's very stable. You can't destroy it by burning it. In fact, if you put enough salt on a fire, what happens? You put it out. If you dissolve salt in water, you're not really getting rid of the salt. All that's happening is that the sodium and chloride ions separate. You take out the H₂O and there's your

salt, still there. So here's the point. Listen carefully. Jesus says to His disciples--He says to us, you and you alone are permanently the moral preservative I have put on the earth, not just for the nation Israel, but for the whole earth. Wherever you are, you are to be that preservative.

Now, I'm going to come back to how to do that, but let's look at the rest of the verse, and look at a third question. And that question is, what's the peril? What's the danger? Because there's a danger Jesus raises here in this whole concept. Look at the second half of verse 13. "You are the salt of the earth; but if the salt has become tasteless, how can it be made salty again?" What happens if salt becomes tasteless. The word tasteless really means to lose its saltiness. Unsalty, you could say. If the salt has become unsalty, how can it be made salty again. You say, wait a minute. Time out. You just said salt was permanent—can't lose its saltiness. How can it become unsalty? Well pure salt can't. Real sodium chloride can't. But, in the first century world there were two problems. The first problem was that one of the main sources of their salt was the Dead Sea. Now the Dead Sea is very salty. Some of you have been there with me, and you've tasted the Dead Sea. It's very salty, but it's salt that's mixed also with gypsum, and with other minerals. And in the process of mining the salt deposits there, or evaporating the water there in salt pans, the real salt—the real sodium chloride could leach out. And what you were left with was a mixture that had far too much gypsum, far too many other minerals, and very little real salt. So what was sometimes, in the first century-- (of course they didn't have microscopes. They couldn't examine it.) it looked like salt. They had every reason to believe it was salt. What they called salt was in fact not salt. There was another problem. The other problem was that because salt was so valuable in the first century, unscrupulous dealers would often mix in similar looking substances to pad their profits, to make the real salt they had purchased go further. So if the salt you bought somehow became tasteless, or unsalted. You discovered that it wasn't the real deal, Jesus asks how can it be made salty again. He says, notice verse 13, "it is no longer good for anything". Literally the text says it has power for nothing. It has no influence. But notice it's not just useless. It's dangerous. Most foods that spoil can be recycled. They can be recycled in the garden. They can be recycled in the compost bin. But contaminated salt can't be put into the garden, because it still has enough salt in it that it'll kill the plants. And it can't be put into the compost heap because it'll destroy certain of the bacteria that are making that process happen. So what do you do with worthless salt. There's only one thing in the first century world. Verse 13 says It is no longer good for anything except to be thrown out and trampled under foot by men. Throw it in the road or on the path. Then at least, it'll kill the weeds you don't want there, and it won't harm anything good.

What is Jesus giving us here? A serious warning. Jesus is warning us that what happened with real salt in the first century can happen to us. Our powerful preserving influence can become so mixed and so contaminated that we lose our preserving power. You say, how does that happen? Well it happens through compromise and conformity; when you and I as Christians become so interested in being like the world and the people around us that we become more like the rot

around us than the salt we're supposed to be. Too many Christians live and think and talk and work just like unbelievers. They absolutely embrace the rot. And they look just like it. You can't tell any difference. Let me ask you this morning, if you're a professing follower of Jesus Christ, is that true of you? Can the people in your life see any difference between you and them. The word translated *become tasteless* is a word play here in this text. The word translated *become tasteless* there, occurs four times in the New Testament. Two times it's describing salt. The other two times it has its more common Greek meaning. Are you ready for this? It means to become foolish. It's translated that way in 1 Corinthians 1. Become foolish. To become moronic. It's the word from which we get the word moron. Jesus is very likely using a word play. He's saying that those disciples of His who no longer function as salt have lost their saltiness and they are making fools out of themselves.

There's another danger. Another warning in this text. Not only a warning that true Christians can lose their preserving influence by becoming so mixed and contaminated by the rot around them, but the other warning is even more sobering. If we find that we have no saltiness, no preserving influence on the people around us, it may be because we're not really salt at all. Like the salt in the first century, we may look outwardly like the real thing. We may, however, not be the real thing. We may not be salt at all. We may be a simply cheap substitute. And Jesus says salt that isn't really salt is getting thrown out. Thrown out of my kingdom, because it never belonged. Listen, are you a preserving influence to the world around you? Do you arrest and keep the decay from occurring at a faster rate? Can the unbelievers around you even tell a difference? Jesus says if you're a true Christian they can. So if there's no difference between you and the people around you, it may be that you're not a Christian at all. And Jesus gives that sobering warning. You're going to get thrown out.

But if you are a Christian, as I hope and pray most of us here this morning are, how can you be salt? How can you act as a preservative in your community, or in your workplace, or in your school? How can you fulfill this mission that God has given you to be a preservative. Very quickly, let me give you three ways. Here's how you can be salt. Number one. Be in the world. Turn with me to John 17. I want you to see this in our Lord's high priestly prayer, a prayer that He prayed the night before His crucifixion. He prayed for His disciples. He prayed for us. And I want you to see what He prays. John 17:14. Referring to His followers, He says in verse 14:

"I have given them (*Father*) Your word; and the world has hated them, because they are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. (*but*) I do not ask you to take them out of the world,"

Jesus says they are not of the world. They're not of the rot. But I don't want you, Father, to take them out of the world. Instead, He goes on to say, I just want you, verse 15, to keep them from

the evil one. I want you to protect them while they're here. They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. Jesus says, listen, I left you here to be in the world. Father, don't take them out of the world. I want them in the world. Notice verse 18. "As you sent Me into the world, I also have sent them into the world" Jesus sent us to be in the world. Why? Look at the end of verse 21. Now He's praying not only for His disciples, His apostles, the eleven at this point, but also, notice verse 20, for those who will believe in Me through their word. That's us. He's praying for us. And notice why He wants us to be in the world. The end of verse 21. "so that the world may believe that You sent Me." We have a mission. And He wants us in the world to accomplish that mission. Listen carefully to me. For salt to fulfill it's purpose, it can't stay in the salt shaker. It has to be out in the rottenness. You can't be the salt of the earth if you always want to hang around in the salt shaker with the other salt crystals. What do I mean by that? Christian, do not intentionally isolate yourself from unbelievers. Our Lord never did that. And neither should we. He wants you in the world. Let me ask you pointedly, how many unbelievers do you know? I understand the challenge this is. I understand it when I was working in the secular world. I understand the challenge it is. I understand that challenge when I was working in Christian ministry. And I understand it's even a greater challenge as a pastor. You know, when I was just working at Grace To You, and I introduced myself and told people what I did, they weren't put off. Nowadays—in fact this happened yesterday. I was at a store and the man that was helping me said, uh, what do you do? I said, I'm a pastor. He started--started shrinking away as if I had some dread disease. It becomes harder. But we need to be in the world, as salt. Be in the world.

Secondly, if you want to be salt, not only be in the world, but be who you are in Christ. Notice, Jesus says that right here. Right in the middle of that passage I just read to you, He says, I want them in the world, verse 15, don't take them out but protect them. They're not of the world even as I'm not of the world. In fact, here's what I want You to do, Father. As they're in the world, I want you to sanctify them in the truth; Your word is truth. And then, I send them into the world, having been sanctified. The big picture of how to be salt is to just be who you are in Christ. Be the new person you've become wherever you are. At work, at school, at your interacting with all kinds of people in your life. Be what God made you, and what He is making you through sanctification. God has done this. He made you salt. He's the one who put you on the meat, as it were. He put you in the place where you are, to preserve against the further rotting and decaying of this world. God did it. He intentionally left us in the world for this reason, and to be salt is half of our mission. We'll look at the positive half of our mission next week, but it's half of our mission. Listen, don't hide who you are. Don't just try to blend in. I'm not saying be obnoxious, be weird. I'm just saying, be a Christian. Wherever you are, be who you are. Be a Christian. This week--I can promise you this--this week you will be faced with at least one, probably several decisions. Something will happen and you will have to make a decision. Am I going to be who I am in Christ? Am I going to be salt? Am I going to say what I believe. Am I going to be kind, but am I going to speak up, or am I just going to try to blend in. That dirty joke

comes along, and maybe I'll just, even though I don't really think it's funny, I'll just chuckle because I don't want to be weird. A dishonest business practice is suggested. Well, I guess I'll just have to go along, there's not much I can do, I'm just one person. A fellow student suggests that you cheat, make a good grade. Well, I don't want to be odd. Are you going to be salt, or are you going to go along with the rottenness? By the way, if you're salt, prepare yourself, verses 10 through 12, you might be persecuted, but that's okay. Who matters, those people and what they think of you, or what your Lord thinks of you? Be in the world. Be who you are in Christ. Live out the beatitudes. Be who you are. Instead of proud, be poor in spirit. Instead of laughing at sin, mourn over your own sin and the world's sin. Instead of complaining about your circumstances, submit yourself to God's providence in your life. Instead of being harsh with people, be gentle and gracious. Instead of longing for all the wrong things, hunger and thirst for righteousness. Instead of being unmoved by the trouble of others, be genuinely compassionate. Instead of having a heart that loves the dirt, demonstrate a love for and a pursuit of purity. Instead of being bitter and angry, be a peacemaker. I can promise you this; if you will live like that, you will be salt. Just live in obedience to Christ. Live out the rest of what we're going to study in this sermon. Be honest in your everyday interactions at your job, and your school, and with your neighbors, with the cashiers, and the waiters, and the plumbers. Demonstrate a genuine respect for human authority by doing what those in authority over you tell you to do in little things. Don't approve of those things that are opposed to God. Don't laugh at them. Don't enjoy them. Don't find yourself entertained by them. Be different.

So, be in the world. Be who you are in Christ, and if you want to be salt, one last thing. Don't lose your distinctiveness. Don't lose your distinctive character by becoming mixed with the rot around you. Don't try to be just like all the other people are. Our Lord's a perfect illustration of these things isn't He? Think about it. He was in the world, but He was never of the world. He was always influencing and never the one influenced. The world never changed Him—not one bit. He was always the preserving influence. And He is the model for us as well. May the Father help us to be just like Jesus. Like it or not, Christian, you are salt of the earth.

Let's pray together. Father, thank You for this powerful picture of the influence You've given us in Christ in the world. Father, I pray that You would help us to be in the world—to intentionally be alongside unbelievers, living in the world, whether it's at work, or neighborhood, or school, or wherever it might be. Father help us to see our mission. And then Father, when we're in the world, don't let us keep our mouths shut. Don't let us be ungracious and obnoxious, but Father help us to be Christian, wherever we are. And Father, help us never to lose our distinctiveness, to always be that preserving influence You intend us to be, by simply being who You've made us in Christ, and living out what He commands. Father, we can't do this on our own. We recognize that. We pray for Your strength and Your grace. May the Spirit of Christ embolden us to be salt. Father I pray for the person here today who maybe has worn the disguise of salt, has appeared to be a Christian. Everybody thinks he or she is, but they have absolutely no preserving influence

in the lives around them. Lord, help them to see the warning You gave. Help them to see that they're the salt that gets thrown out. And may this be the day when they come to genuine faith and repentance, and when You change them. We pray it in Jesus' name. Amen.