

Salt-Light and Your World Conference Message

by Warren Wiersbe

As Christians, we are called to be salt and light in a decaying and dark world, and to bring about change through our presence and actions.

Duration: 37:56

Scripture: Matthew 5:13-14

Topics: "Christian Witness", "Salt And Light"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker addresses the concerns about the future of the nation and the Church, as well as the difficulty of making a positive impact in a large city like Chicago. The speaker emphasizes that as Christians, everything we do should be to the glory of God and that our ministry is to prevent decay and bring seasoning to the world. The solution to the decay problem is not to resort to violence or destruction, but to turn more darkness into light and more clay into salt. The speaker encourages individuals to be the salt of the earth and to be witnesses for Christ, as God is looking for individuals to make a difference rather than relying solely on committees or organizations.

Transcript

Our Lord Jesus used many different comparisons for us to understand what it means to be a Christian. The Christian life is so rich and so full and so wonderful that the Lord compares us to sheep and to branches in a vine, and through the Apostle Paul he compares us to stones and temples. We're even compared to a bride.

But there are two comparisons that our Lord uses in that famous section called the Sermon on the Mount that I would like to focus our attention on for this message. Matthew chapter 5, reading verses 13 through 16. Now, let me explain why we are looking at these verses.

All of us are concerned about the future of our nation and of the church, of individual people to whom we're witnessing. Sometimes we find it difficult to get a handle for all of this. I minister in the city of Chicago.

We are surrounded by some four million people, and if you go out to the outskirts you have twice that many. And sometimes I say to myself, where in the world do I get a handle to do anything? We have

crime. We have vice.

Every city does. We have all sorts of problems on the streets and off the streets. And here is one pastor in one church with a marvelous group of people, and I'm saying to myself, what is the handle? What is the thing we get a hold of to be able to make some changes and bring about some of the righteousness that's needed in Chicago and Cook County and Illinois and across the country and around the world? I think our Lord has the answer to this in Matthew 5, beginning at verse 13.

He speaks to us as believers over the shoulders of his disciples, and he says, "...ye are the salt of the earth, but if the salt have lost its favor, with what shall it be salted? It is therefore good for nothing but to be cast out and to be trodden under foot of men. Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill should not be hid.

Neither do men light a lamp and put it under a bushel, but on a lampstand, and it giveth light unto all that are in the house. Let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works and glorify your Father who is in heaven." And now, Father, though this word was spoken many years ago, it still speaks to us if we have ears to hear. And so our prayer just now is that the Holy Spirit of God will illumine the pages of the Word and will speak to our hearts and instruct us, and then, Father, enable us to practice it.

This we ask through Jesus Christ. Amen. To you and me today, salt and light are not much of a problem, but they were tremendously important commodities back in our Lord's day.

We walk into a darkened room and we flick a switch and on come the lights. There was a tremendous power shortage a couple of years ago. I guess it still is here, but we're not conscious of it.

A few years back, the East Coast went into a complete blackout, and at that point, people began to realize how important light really is. You never appreciate light until you lose it. Salt is not much of a problem for us.

We can go down to the store and pick up containers of salt. Back in our Lord's day, salt was a very important commodity. In fact, our word salary comes from the Latin word which means salt money.

We've used the phrase, ah, she's not worth her salt. That comes from an old idea and the old practice of years ago when salt was a part of the salary. In fact, the word salt and salary come from the same basic word.

Salt was very important in our Lord's day. Light was very important. They had those little lamps with the oil and the wicks, and light was a very important commodity.

Our Lord used these two symbols of the believer, and in using these two symbols, the Lord is giving to me and to you some very valuable insights into what it means to be a Christian. Now, I think from these verses we can find four valuable insights that help me understand what it means to be a Christian and how I can do something about the world in which I'm living. Insight number one, our Lord gives us an insight into our salvation.

Now, once again, salvation in the Bible is compared to many different things. It's compared to the finding of a lost sheep. It's compared to the finding of a lost coin.

It's compared to birth. It's compared to a runaway son coming back home again. It's compared to resurrection from the dead.

It's compared to the cleansing of a leopard. It's compared to the washing of a body. But in this particular instance, the Lord Jesus is giving us two remarkable pictures of what happened when you were saved.

Now, just take a good look at them. When you were saved, clay became salt, and when you were saved, darkness became light. Ye are the salt of the earth, ye are the light of the world.

Now, before I became a Christian, I was just simply clay, and physically speaking, I'm still clay. When God made man, he just reached down and took the dust of the earth, and he made the first man. I keep telling my congregation at the Moody Church that the women are made out of much better material than are the men, because the women were made from the man.

We're made of dust. We're made of clay. Now, when I received Jesus Christ as my Savior, a miracle of the chemistry of God's grace took place, and a brand new ingredient was added.

God took the clay, and God said, I'm going to put into that clay my own divine nature. And when God's divine nature, through the working of the Holy Spirit, moved into me, clay became salt. Now, that's a miracle.

It means that Christians are different from other people. In some respects, we are better than other people because we have a better life, and we have a better love, and we have a better future. We don't compare ourselves with lost people in terms of IQ.

There are many unsaved people who are much more intelligent than some of us who are Christians. We don't compare ourselves with unsaved people on the basis of economy or good looks. God doesn't always choose, you know, the wise.

He sometimes chooses the foolish, and God doesn't go by the outward appearance. God goes by the heart. But when you and I compare ourselves in the light of God's Word with the unsaved person, honestly, we can say this.

We are different. We are different because a whole new ingredient has been added to our lives, and clay has become salt. Now, this is why the world doesn't understand us.

This is why when we speak, the world can't hear us. This is why when we sing, they don't know what we're singing about. This is why when we make decisions, they think we're crazy.

You read straight through your Bible, and you'll find Abraham was different because Abraham was salt, and David was different, and Paul was different, and you and I ought to be different because a new ingredient has been added. Clay has become salt. Secondly, darkness has become light.

I used to tell unsaved people, you are in the dark, but Paul makes it much more vivid than that. Over in Ephesians chapter 5 and verse 8, Paul says this, for ye were sometimes darkness. Paul doesn't say, I was in the dark.

He says, I was darkness. Just as the Christian is the light of the world, so the unsaved person is the darkness of the world. That's why when you find sin being pictured in the Bible, it's pictured by darkness.

And this is the condemnation, said Jesus, that light has come into the world, and men love darkness rather than light because their deeds are evil. Satan is called the prince of darkness. Death, hell are identified with darkness.

Now, my friend, if you have been born again, if you have trusted Jesus Christ as your Savior, this new ingredient has been added to your life, and clay has become salt, and this new change has come into your life, and darkness has become light. Therefore, you and I have a tremendous privilege and an awesome responsibility because we live in a world that is different from us. Now, this leads us to our second insight.

By comparing us to salt and to light, Jesus gives us insight into our salvation. Clay has become salt, darkness has become light, and secondly, he gives us insight into the world in which we are living. If God has made me into salt, then the world must be decaying, and if God has made me into light, then the world must be full of darkness.

God does not waste his grace. God does not waste his miracles, and when God saved you and me, he saved us to live in a world that needs us. Now, the believer's relationship to the world is a difficult thing.

I just wish it were as easy as some of the chapters in the books make it. Over in the bookstore just a few moments ago, I was having the privilege of autographing some books, and here came up one of the ladies who had been a member of my first church. First church I pastored, and I said, my, you look wonderful, and she did, and she still does.

She said, I'm 85 years old. I said, I just can't believe that. She said, how are you? I said, I'm a lot dumber than I was when I was your pastor.

I thought she'd say you were pretty dumb then, but she was very kind. I said, you know, back in those days, I knew so much, but the longer I study God's word and the longer I live, the more I see how difficult some of these things are. I used to have a lot of rules and regulations that made it very easy for me to be a good Christian, and then as I began to grow and God began to deal with me, I began to realize that this business of being salt and light is a difficult thing in a difficult world because salt and light are no good unless there's contact.

See, my rules and regulations kept my salt in the salt shaker and kept my light under a bushel, and I wasn't where I was needed, but if I went where I was needed, I was afraid something might happen to me because I live in a difficult world. Now, by using these two symbols, Jesus is telling me something about the world I'm living in and the world you're living in. He says, first of all, the world we live in is a decaying world.

You see, salt is used, as you know, among other things, for the prevention and the restraint of decay. Now, if you want to know what a person's theology is, ask him what he thinks of the world. If he says, oh, the world is getting better and better, just every day in every way the world is getting better and better until one of these days it's going to be so wonderful you know something about his theology.

If he says to you, oh, this world is just getting worse and worse, it's decayed, you know something about his theology. Now, I'm not talking about the world God made. The heavens still declare the glory of God.

When there's no smog in Chicago and you can look up and see the stars, they still declare the glory of God. You can look down and see your feet, and the firmament still shows forth his handiwork. Even the snow can be beautiful when it's not on the streets.

I'm not talking about the world God made. I'm talking about the civilization men have made, and Jesus is comparing this civilization to a rotting corpse. Now, he doesn't do it only in Matthew chapter 5. Over in Luke chapter 17, our Lord makes an interesting observation when his disciples ask him a question.

He has just been talking about his coming as it shall be as it was in the days of Noah, Luke 17, 26, as it was in the days of Lot, Luke 17, 28, verse 37, and they answered and said unto him, Where, Lord? And he said unto them, Wherever the body is, there will the eagles be gathered together. He says this civilization is just becoming a decaying corpse, and when the end of the age is reached, those carrion-eating birds are going to be hovering around just waiting to swoop down upon man's civilization. John says the same thing over in the book of Revelation when that final battle is going to be fought.

He says, Come and eat the flesh of kings, and the flesh of captains, and the flesh of mighty men. God looks upon this world as a decaying world. Now, Peter had the same idea.

Over in 2 Peter 1, verse 19, he says this, We have also a more sure word of prophecy, unto which ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place. Now, the word that's translated dark here is not the ordinary Greek word for dark. It's the word that means murky.

Squalid. It's the picture of a dry area that's decaying. And so Peter tells us, and Jesus tells us, that this great civilization, with its neon signs and its satellites, its great institutions, is a decaying, rotting corpse.

Someone says, Pastor, you are very pessimistic. No, I'm realistic. There was a time in my ministry when I was very idealistic.

Now, a realist is not someone who's lost his vision. A realist is someone who has sharpened his vision, and this world today is still a rotting, decaying corpse, and that's why you and I are here as the salt. I don't have to go into detail to tell you how sordid things are.

There are times when I'm out visiting in the city of Chicago when I see things that I can't figure out why they're permitted to be here, that they're here, and not only Chicago, but any other city, any other place. I read about a Christian college that 100 years ago, it's an old school, 100 years ago, wrote in its catalog, our campus is located 40 miles away from any known sin. Now, I never heard of a college being organized for angels, but that one must have been one.

How in the world could you organize anything 40 miles away from any known sin? Wherever you go in this world, you're taking with you sin, and this world today is a rotting corpse. It's rotting politically. Daniel saw that centuries ago.

Daniel saw that image with gold, and then silver, and then brass, and then iron, and then clay. It's rotting politically. We have many politicians with very few statesmen.

We have many people out to promote a party, but very few out to promote a cause of righteousness. It's rotting morally, you know this. It's rotting religiously.

I'm sorry, I appreciated what Dr. Banks had to say about the gospel of Jesus Christ, and one doesn't have to go too far away to find institutions that a few years ago were standing for the gospel of Jesus Christ, but today they laugh at it. We're salt because this world is rotting, and we're light because this world is a dark world. We're calling this an age of enlightenment.

It's wonderful to be so enlightened, and yet Romans chapter 1 tells me that men have rejected the light. You and I who are here today who believe the Bible, and the multitudes who share in this conference by radio who believe the Bible, are fat numbers. We're oddballs.

We're square pegs and round holes because we don't believe man is working his way up to a glorious enlightenment. We believe that for centuries man has been sliding down, down, down, for when they knew God, they weren't thankful, nor did they want to keep God's truth, but they deliberately abandoned the truth of God and believed the lie. Now, inasmuch as the world is a decaying world and a dark world, you and I have a ministry which leads us to our third insight.

When Jesus Christ called me salt and light, he gave me insight into my salvation. Clay turned to salt and darkness turned to light, and he gave me insight into my world, a decaying world and a dark world. But thirdly, he gave me insight into my ministry.

What is my ministry? To be salt and to be light. Now, Jesus didn't say I should be, he said I am. People come to me and say, Pastor, pray that I'll be a witness.

I say, Friend, you are a witness, either for or against. Now, I'm to be salt. There are two forces at work in the world today, the force of decay and the force of preventing decay.

There's leaven and there's salt. Now, leaven, in the word of God, is a picture of sin, and salt is a picture of righteousness. The solution to the decay problem in the world today is not to shoot the unsaved people.

It's not to get a hold of a bulldozer and take all these wretched institutions and push them into the lake. No sooner will you have cleared the land than something else is going to crop up. The solution is to turn more clay into salt.

The solution is to turn more darkness into light. Our job as Christians is to be the salt of the earth and seek in every way we can to prevent decay. Now, someone says, but Pastor, I'm only one person.

That's our usual argument. We are so caught up in this slide rule mentality, this computer mentality that says, no individual can do anything unless you have a committee or an organization. Don't you believe it? My Bible tells me in several places that God was running around looking for a man, not a committee.

Now, I'm not against committees, most of them. A committee is a group of people who individually can do nothing and collectively decide nothing can be done. But God isn't looking for a committee.

God's looking for a man. He said through Ezekiel, I'm looking for a man to stand in the gap, to hold the wall up. Isaiah, he said, I'm looking for a man to be an intercessor, a man.

A few years ago, God got a hold of a man, a shoe salesman, and he shook the world with him. Still is. God's looking for one person like Daniel who would dare to be salt in a corrupt society, a Joseph who would dare to be salt in a corrupt society.

Salt not only prevents corruption, salt seasons. You know, the unfaithful crowd doesn't realize what we Christians put into the good things of this world. I see people going down to our lovely Art Institute.

They don't realize that much of that great art has its beginning in the Bible. And people at Christmastime listen to great music, all of which goes back to the Word of God. We have seasoned things, but they don't realize it.

They won't realize it till we're gone. Then it's going to be too late. As salt, we not only hinder corruption and season, but we sting.

Now, some Christians like that ministry. There are some Christians who, instead of being witnesses, are prosecuting attorneys, and they run around with a revolver in their pocket, looking for someone they can disarm. Now, God never meant for us to go around like that, but whether you like it or not, wherever you find a wound, and this body of society is wounded and decaying, wherever you find a wound, when the salt gets in there, it hurts.

Just a few weeks ago, one of the members of the Moody Church took a registration card and phoned a man who had visited the church, and that man told him in no uncertain terms, don't you ever call me, I'm never going to come back, and I'm not interested, and boom, he slammed up the phone. The fellow was completely demoralized by it. But that's the way it happens.

When the wounds come in contact with the salt, it stings, it hurts, and the thing they don't realize is we have the answer. As salt, we're supposed to create thirst. It's an interesting thing that Jesus attracted sinners.

Did you ever notice that? Now, the religious sinners he repelled, they hated him and crucified him, but the publicans and the sinners flocked to hear the Lord Jesus. Luke 15 starts, and the publicans and sinners drew near to hear him, and the Pharisees said, look, he's the friend of publicans and sinners. I can't think of a greater compliment.

You know, we have the idea that the more we become like Jesus Christ, the farther away unsaved people want to stay from us. Where do we ever get that idea? The Lord Jesus Christ attracted these people. You know why? They saw something in him for which they were thirsty.

Now, it should be this way with me. You say, yes, you're a pastor, you're pretty well secluded, to some degree. I was telling a young man recently I was grateful for the three years I worked for the Rockwell Manufacturing Company in an office where I could be lied about and cussed at and abused and persecuted.

My boss, one of them, was an outspoken agnostic, and those three years taught me that it's possible by the power of the Holy Spirit to have a certain quality that attracts people. Oh, there are those who will be repelled, but salt makes people thirsty. And if you and I are the salt of the earth, people are going to come and say, you know, I don't understand you, and I don't totally agree with all this Bible stuff you've got, but I want you to know something.

There's something about you that's different, and I like it. Now, what is it? Salt makes people thirsty, and salt penetrates. I want to deal with that a little later on.

I'll just drop that into your heart now. My ministry is salt, and my ministry is light. There's a beautiful balance here.

Salt is hidden. There are things you do that only God sees. Light is open.

Let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works. Now, we don't do our good works just so men can see them and come and say, oh, you're such a good person. You got your reward.

The Pharisees were this way. The Pharisees prayed and fasted. You could always tell when a Pharisee was fasting.

He looked like a cheerleader for an accident. He'd be walking down the street. And some Christians are this way.

No, our Lord is not saying you deliberately try to please men. He says, do your good works for the glory of God, and men will see your good works, and they'll glorify God. That's the difference between good works that I do to glorify me and good works I do to glorify God.

They'll see God. The light has to do with my character, while the salt has to do with my character, while the light has to do with my conduct. The two go together.

You can't separate character and conduct. If my character is one thing and my conduct is something else, there's a word for this. Hypocrisy.

Both of them have to give of themselves. You can't burn a light without it costing something. You can't have salt without it costing something.

As light, I'm serving. As light, I'm busy. As light, we are to be doing good works.

Now, we evangelicals are so anxious that people understand that we're saved by grace and not by good works that we forget that the grace we're saved by leads to good works. And he didn't say passing out trash. Nothing wrong with that.

He didn't even say preaching sermons. Nothing wrong with that. He said doing good works, which simply means finding out what my unsaved neighbor needs and trying to help him.

You know, we Christians are sometimes locked in and programmed to a certain kind of conduct, and we'll talk to our neighbor if we want to invite him to church, but we won't talk to him until the next church meeting. This is terrible. We don't find out if somebody's sick and I bring you a bowl of soup, or who's going to take care of the washing, who's going to mow the lawn.

These are the good works that our Lord's talking about, and we Christians need to be involved in things like this, because to a Christian there's no such thing as secular and sacred. I will now go do a religious act for my neighbor. No, everything we do ought to be to the glory of God.

So, what is my ministry? My ministry is to prevent decay, to bring seasoning, to create thirst that people might be saved. What is my ministry? To let my light shine, let people see that the good works come from the love of God, and whether it be giving someone a ride to the doctor, or carrying a bag of groceries for somebody who can't do that, this is done in the name of the Lord. Now, you may not lead that person to Christ immediately, but you're a part of a chain reaction that ultimately could bring a person to Christ, which leads us to our fourth insight.

Our Lord has given us insight into our salvation. He's given us insight into our ministry, into what the world is like. Finally, he gives us insight into the dangers that are involved.

Danger number one, the salt could lose its flavor. Now, immediately our chemists jump up and say, hold it, the salt we have doesn't lose its flavor. Our Lord was talking to people back in his day, and the unrefined, impure salt they had did lose its flavor if it came in contact with the earth.

I was reading that classic work, which I hope you have in your library, *The Land and the Book* by William Thompson, a marvelous, marvelous old work, but a good work. He tells the interesting story about a merchant who had a big find of salt, and he wanted to store it, and so he rented four or five houses, empty houses, and he just threw his salt through the front door, just filled the houses with salt. When he came back to get his salt to sell it, he found out that much of it had lost its flavor.

It had come into contact with the dirt floor and lost its flavor. And so, when Jesus said if the salt has lost its savor, its saltiness, the people knew what he was talking about. You see, here's the problem we face.

I face the problem of the salt having to come in contact with the world I'm trying to reach without the world tearing me down. That is the problem. Now, people have solved this problem in several ways.

They have solved the problem by isolation, and so they're way over here, and they're going through the motions of religion, but the people that need them are way over here, and some of our churches have become citadels where once a week or twice a week the army marches around inside the citadel and has bayonet practice and so forth, but they never come into contact with the enemy. It's the salt kept in the salt shaker and never coming and being applied where it's needed. That is one of the biggest problems we face today.

Now, others have solved the problem by saying it makes no difference where you go and what you do, become a part of what you're trying to reach, and that has its problems. I marvel at the Lord Jesus Christ when Dr. Banks was talking about the glory of his person. Don't you marvel that Jesus Christ was the friend of publicans and sinners, and yet he was holy, harmless, undefiled, and separate from sinners? How do you do this? Only through the power of the Holy Spirit.

Now, some of you are so afraid of being contaminated, you've kept yourself off in the canister someplace, and you've missed the joy of contact that can lead to conversion. We're so afraid of being polluted. Now, we have to watch out for danger.

We must. You and I dare not isolate ourselves and insulate ourselves, but there's a danger here. It's the danger that in coming in contact with this decaying body, we start to lose our flavor.

That's what happened to Lot. Now, Lot was a believer, and Lot got into Sodom. He shouldn't have been there, but he got into Sodom, and then Sodom got into Lot.

Now, I used to read the story of Sodom and Gomorrah and cheer, and when the fire and brimstone come down, hooray! That terrible wound, that awful, festering sore is wiped out. Praise the Lord! Then it dawned on me one day that thousands of people went to hell. You can't rejoice over that, and if Lot had just one, his own family, and two of his neighbors, he would have spared that city from being destroyed.

You see, there was Lot. He was a believer. There was Mrs. Lot.

I'm not sure about her. He had two unmarried daughters, and he had two married daughters, so we've got ... and he had two sons-in-law, so he had eight people. There were eight people in Lot's immediate family.

If he had won his family, and the mailman and the milkman, those thousands of people wouldn't have gone to hell. I have to watch myself as I ride through the city and say, oh, those godless people, they should be wiped out. Oh, but they'd go to hell.

We don't want our nation to go to hell. Had Lot been salt, if he had made contact without contamination, he would have spared those people. It is God promised Abraham, if I find ten righteous people, I'll spare the city.

If Lot had been light, but he wasn't, when you get to Genesis chapters 18 and 19, it's darkness, darkness, darkness. Oh, God comes to Abraham at noon because Abraham's walking in the light, but the angels come down to Sodom at evening because Lot's walking in darkness. I think the finest thing I can do as a Christian citizen is to be salt and to be light and try to win people to Jesus Christ, and I've got to watch out for the danger of the salt losing its tang and the light being put under a bushel.

If I'm not careful, I can't have any ministry. And so, what's Jesus saying? He's saying, I'm not looking for an organization, I'm thankful for them. I'm not looking for a committee, I'm thankful for them.

I'm looking for one person, somebody over in this block and someone in that little town and somebody in this church, just looking for somebody who'll be salt and who will be light, who has learned through the Holy Spirit to have involvement without contamination, who can be holy and harmless and undefiled and separate from sinners and yet have contact with sinners and lead them to Christ. Our nation wouldn't be where it is if we had more salt and more light, and you can't blame the unsaved people for that. You've got to blame ourselves.

And so, I'd like for us, I'm speaking to my own heart, it'd be nice for us, it'd be good for us to realize how wonderful it is to be a Christian. The clay has turned to salt and the darkness has turned to light. What a marvelous ministry we have.

What a marvelous opportunity we have. And from this day on, just in our own quiet way, to the glory of God, start touching lives. And if enough of us do this, God could spare the judgment.

If enough of us do this, we may have that one thing that so many have been praying for for so long, revival. Heavenly Father, forgive us. Forgive us, O God.

We've been so afraid to get involved. We've been so afraid to make contact. I pray, Father, help us each one.

You have already told us what we are. Now help us by faith to apply it. Help me to do it.

Help each one of us to do it. And have the joy of touching the lives of others and leading them to Christ. For Jesus' sake, amen.

Audio: <https://sermonindex1.b-cdn.net/13/SID13364.mp3>

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/warren-wiersbe/salt-light-and-your-world-conference-message/>

Grow in Your Walk with Christ

Listen and read messages that will stir your heart for Christ and point you to deeper repentance and devotion.

- 50,000+ Sermons from speakers past and present
- 3,900+ Classic Christian Books freely readable online
- 1,200+ Bible Translations and Commentaries
- Over 450k forum posts — Join our vibrant online Christian forum

www.sermonindex.net