

“SALT SHAKERS”

Matthew 5:13-20 February 8, 2026

If you grew up in the American School system and I said these words, “**Four score and seven years ago...**” most of you would recognize this as the opening phrase to the **Gettysburg Address**, which **President Abraham Lincoln** delivered on November 19, 1863, during a formal dedication of Soldiers National Cemetery, now known as Gettysburg National Cemetery. This is probably the most famous, enduring, and historically significant speech written and spoken by an American President.

Ironically, Lincoln was not the main speaker of the day. That honor went to **Senator Edward Everett** from the state of Massachusetts. Not only was he a politician, but also a Unitarian pastor and a well-known polished orator. Edward’s speech was 13,607 words in length and lasted 2 hours. That was normal in the day, and it was well received by the crowd.

How would you like to be the next in line to speak? But President Lincoln rose to dedicate the Cemetery and, from the speakers' podium, addressed the crowd for approximately two minutes. His 271-word speech was just ten sentences long, yet it lives on, “**that government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the earth**”.

I was thinking about the Gettysburg Address when working with this morning’s scripture passage. It comes after one of the greatest teachings of Jesus we call **The Beatitudes**. They describe the character of those who

follow Jesus and have been shaped by the Holy Spirit. How do you possibly follow up after “**blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely, on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven.**”? Jesus follows it up with **Salt and Light**.

I. DO THIS NOT THAT

No one seems to know where the phrase came from but “**Do this Not That**” has popped up in business, the classroom, on podcasts, diet plans, financial planning, exercise videos and just about anywhere some kind of instruction is being given. The Idea behind the **Do This not That** phrase – is there are certain behaviors one should not do and instead substitute them for different behaviors. Instead of just telling a child NO, give them an alternative. Instead of hitting your brother when you’re mad, take a deep breath and use your words to say **I get angry when you take my toys without asking**. The intent of **Do This not That** is to change one’s behavior pattern.

When Jesus turns to his disciples and says, “**You are the salt of the world, you are the light of the world**” he is giving them a command, not just a nice image, and certainly not a suggestion. The **You Are** is in the imperative, meaning **DO THIS**. You go be salt, you go be light. If you are my disciples, this is not optional.

Secondly, the **You** is in the **plural form** not the singular form. If we were in the **South**, I would translate it **You all**. It is the community of faith

that is salt and light, and not the task of a lone individual. It means we must not only work together to be Salt and Light of the world, but how we work together demonstrates that we are salt and light. After giving the discipleship qualities of the Beatitudes, Jesus says do this, **You ALL go be Salt and Light.**

Well, if this is a command, and we are serious about following Jesus, then what does it mean to being salt and light?

II. BE TASTY

One of the foods I miss from my childhood was my **mom's peppers**. She canned those yellow banana peppers in quart size mason jars and stored them under the basement steps on shelves. When I wanted to add a little **zing** to my rather plain chip chop ham or bologna sandwiches, which we ate a lot, I would open one of those jars and place a pepper on top and have at it. Who wants to eat bland food?

When Jesus tells his disciples to be salt, he means **be tasty**. Perhaps a better translation to get the impact of the passage is, “**You are the hot chili peppers of the world.**” When you add hot chili peppers to food you know it. Salt was highly valued in the Roman Empire because it both preserved food and seasoned food. It kept food from going bad and it added flavor.

Christians have something good and tasty to bring to the world. We are to flavor the world with God's love, truth, grace, mercy, purity, and all

the other beatitudes. Regardless of how the world may feel about us. It needs the church's truth, grace, love, presence, service and hope.

Just to drive this point home, Jesus said, “**so that they may see your good works...**” The word for good works is **Kalos**. It means good, winsome, beautiful, attractive. In other words our good deeds are to be done with a certain amount of loveliness and charm. Don't be like the teenager who when told to clean his room, he does it like **Oscar the Grouch**. Our faith is not some grim duty but a sweet joy to serve God. **Be tasty!**

III. BE VISIBLE

When I was in Boy Scouts, LED lights were not that popular or available. When I went on camping trips, I brought a red rectangular flashlight powered by one of those **big 6-volt batteries** with the screw terminals. This made the flashlight heavy, but also rather bright. You could shoot that beam across several yards. It lit your way in the dark or in the tent if need be.

That was the purpose of the light. No one turns on a flashlight, throws it in a closet, and shuts the door. That's ludicrous! It wouldn't be doing anyone any good.

The second lesson Jesus is teaching is **Be Visible!** “**No one after lighting a lamp puts it under the bushel basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all the house.**”

To be salt and light is to be seen. It was a compliment to call someone light in the world of Jesus. What you're saying is that person is like God. Jesus says, "**I am the light of the world**". Our call is to be like Christ in the world.

To be the salt and light of the world means we have to be in and interact in the world. There is no such thing as private discipleship. That's like being a chef and never cooking. It makes no sense. We are called to be visible, however, that doesn't mean it's easy.

The challenge is our light doesn't always feel bright. Faith can flicker. Conviction can wane. We get tired, disillusioned and distracted. We forget that the world is watching, and we stop shining. And that's where Jesus' words are both encouragement and a warning. Don't fade. Don't hide. Don't forget who you are. *Stay lit — for the long run.*

Remember, Jesus isn't speaking to scholars, theologians, or preachers. He's speaking to fishermen, tax collectors, mothers, workers — everyday people. And he tells them they are light.

Light isn't just what we *do*; it is who we *are* when we belong to Christ. Just as the sun doesn't try to shine — it just does — we, too, radiate God's truth and love when we stay connected to the source. **Be Visible!**

III. POINT UP

In the 1997 film **The Devil's Advocate** Al Pacino plays a wealthy businessman who in reality is the Devil. He is trying to manipulate Keanu Reeve's character into bringing the anti-Christ into the world. What's

interesting is how this devil controls people because it is not by physical force as much as by temptation, great sounding temptations at that. Mr. Pacino repeats this line throughout the movie, “**Vanity is my favorite sin.**”

On the surface, vanity doesn't seem like such a big deal. And that's the problem. That excessive pride in or admiration of one's own appearance or achievements is subtle, at least to ourselves anyway. But vanity turns our eyes inward and away from God. It is the first step in our downfall.

One way to deal with our vanity is to celebrate the momentary achievement and move on. No matter how good a sermon may be come Monday morning I have to start next week's. No matter who wins the Super Bowl, come Monday the coaches and players start working on next year's team. Move on...If we are still celebrating an achievement from 5 years ago...it's time to move on.

Jesus said, “**...let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven.**” The third lesson is **Point Up.**

Jesus rebuked the rich young ruler when he called him good. “**Why do you call me good? No one is good but God alone.**” Jesus always pointed up. Even though he calls us light of the world, he knows where the real light comes from. We do not produce the light, we only reflect it. God is the one who lights the lamp. Any light we have is really God or

Christ shining through us. The church and its work were all created, enacted, and are sustained by God. The Gospel is about God's graciousness, God's plan, God's Kingdom, God's salvation, and God's greatness, not ours. Thus, in all our labors we direct the glory to the right place. **Point Up!**

IV. BE WARNED

Lastly, Jesus said something strange about salt. **"...if salt has lost its taste, how can its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything, but is thrown out and trampled underfoot."** Now we know Salt never loses its taste, so how does it go bad? What was Jesus thinking? He was thinking about **outdoor baking ovens**, common in the time period.

One of the uses for salt in Israel was to coat the inside bottom of these ovens. The salt acted like heat insulation and kept the oven at an even temperature. However, after a while it stopped working and by that time the salt was polluted with burnt food, grease, etc. All the people could do was scrape it out and put a fresh layer down. They threw the ruined salt on the ground.

The Fourth lesson of salt and light is **be warned**. Uselessness invites disaster. In fact, several of Jesus' parables have the same message. Jesus is urging his disciples to take seriously your call of being church in the world. Don't neglect the task of sharing in the world-remaking gospel. Always find a way to serve, to flavor, to do good and to bear witness.

I have been asking myself some tough questions this past few months. For instance, how do we be salt and light when we are living in a country when you can be stopped and arrested, simply because of the color of your skin? How do we be salt and light with scripture passages that say, welcome the alien, the stranger, treat them like family? How do we be salt and light in a country obsessed with wealth, in some cases unimaginable wealth, while others suffer for want? How do we be salt and light when asked to love our enemies, neighbors, co-workers, and those who persecute us? How do we be salt and light in a country that is tearing itself apart, and forget we are all in this together. How do we be salt and light when health care is treated like a commodity, to make its stockholders wealthy instead of taking care of people? How do we be salt in light when it is difficult to sort facts from fiction, and we prefer only to see our own “truth”. I wish I had answers to all these questions. I do know we are to be tasty, to be visible, and to point up.

It is not easy being **salt and light** and living in a world that doesn't necessarily want our zesty flavor. **Be chili peppers anyway.** There is darkness out there and it will take faith to believe the light shall overcome the darkness. **Keep shining anyway.** For Christ does not send us out alone. We have a church full of fellow lights and when our light dims, they are here to fuel us. We are salt and light together in Christ. **Amen.**

Matthew 5:13-20

13 "You are the salt of the earth, but if salt has lost its taste, how can its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything but is thrown out and trampled under foot.

14 "You are the light of the world. A city built on a hill cannot be hid.

15 People do not light a lamp and put it under the bushel basket; rather, they put it on the lampstand, and it gives light to all in the house.

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

17 "Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have come not to abolish but to fulfill.

18 For truly I tell you, until heaven and earth pass away, not one letter, not one stroke of a letter, will pass from the law until all is accomplished.

19 Therefore, whoever 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 does them and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven.

20 For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.

This is the Word of the Lord.

Thanks be To God.