

# Matthew 5:13-16

- Christians as salt and light for this world -

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## Introduction

- ❖ Jesus designates his disciples as salt and light for this world. Both are metaphors. They signify the prophet, disciple and preacher, proclaiming the Word of God.
  - “Preach the Word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage” (2 Tim 4:2).
- ❖ The prophetic task is one of the important tasks of the church in the world.
  - In the time of the Old Testament, the prophets spoke the word of God:
    - with regard to matters of worship – the temple and the priests, false religion;
    - with regard to political matters – the king and the leaders of the people;
      - These messages were not confined to Israel but were also directed towards all known powers of the world; Egypt, the Assyrians, the Babylonians and the city states, such as Tyre and Sidon.
    - with regard to economic matters – richness and poverty.
    - with regard to social and judicial matters – the protection of the widow, the fatherless, the poor and the alien.
    - In ethical matters – faithfulness, honesty, mercy, and righteousness, faith, hope, and love.
  - The prophets of the Old Testament proclaimed the promises and judgments of God. Foretelling the future was only a small part of their task.
    - They spoke about blessing and forgiveness, but also about the wrath of God.
- ❖ Most of these topics are also found in the Sermon on the Mount or elsewhere in the Gospel according to Matthew (and the New Testament):
  - True worship > The Lord’s Prayer (Mt 6:9-13).
  - The Kingdom of God is not confined to the boundaries of Israel. The risen Christ received all authority in heaven and on earth (Mt 28:18-20) > he will judge (Mt 25:31-46).

- The Blessing of the kingdom of God > Sermon on the Mount (Mt 5:3-10).
- The false prophets > False prophets (Mt 7.13-23).
- ❖ The church is called to speak the prophetic word of God and to unmask false religion, abuse of power, unethical behavior, the promises and the judgments of God.
  - A profound knowledge of the Word of God is needed.
  - Insight in today's developments in politics, economics, and society.
  - Insight in the human heart, his beliefs and disbeliefs.
- ❖ The context, form, and structure as well as the theological, technical and hermeneutical notes given in this sermon outline overlap somewhat with other sermon outlines taken from the Sermon on the Mount (Mt 5-7). This makes it possible to use this outline as a "stand alone" or as part of a series.

## Context

- ❖ To understand the teachings of Jesus, a brief summary of the historical background is necessary.
- ❖ The baptism of Jesus (Mt 3:13-17):
  - Before Jesus was baptized by John, he said: "Let it be so now; it is proper for us to do this **to fulfill all righteousness.**"
  - And afterward: "As soon as Jesus was baptized, he went up out of the water. At that moment heaven was opened, and he saw **the Spirit of God** descending like a dove and lighting on him. And a voice from heaven said, 'This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased.'"
    - The Sermon on the Mount teaches this **fulfillment of all righteousness.** <> "For I tell you that unless **your righteousness surpasses** that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law..." (Mt 5:20).
- ❖ The preaching of Jesus:
  - Jesus had already been preaching in the synagogues in Galilee for some time before he delivered his sermon on the mount. Matthew summarized these sermons as follows:
    - "From that time on Jesus began to preach, '**Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near**'" (Mt 4:17).
  - Jesus continued and took over the ministry of John the Baptist:
    - "In those days John the Baptist came, preaching in the Desert of Judea and saying, '**Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near**'" (Mt 3:1-2).
  - And later on, when Jesus sent out his twelve disciples:
    - "As you go, preach this message: '**The kingdom of heaven is near**'" (Mt 10:7).

- These two themes, repentance and the kingdom, are prominent in the Sermon on the Mount.
- ❖ The life of Jesus Christ:
  - Jesus taught the Law and the Prophets, and he lived according to the Law and the Prophets. The Sermon on the Mount reflects his life. He lived according to his own teachings and by doing so set an example for his followers, the disciples. A clear example is found in Matthew 5:39: “Do not resist an evil person. If someone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also.” When Jesus was arrested, he didn’t strike back.
- ❖ The future of the kingdom:
  - After his resurrection, Jesus summoned his eleven disciples to go back to the mount: “**All authority in heaven and on earth** has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations (...) and **teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you**” (Mt 28:18-20).
    - This authority is reflected in expressions like: “**But I tell you** that anyone who is angry with his brother will be subject to judgment” (Mt 5:22).
    - And in: “Not everyone who says to me, ‘**Lord, Lord,**’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but...” (Mt 7:20).

## Form and structure

- ❖ The Sermon on the Mount consists of five main parts:
  - 1. General calling to repentance and the promise of the kingdom: Matthew 5:3-10, characterized by: “Blessed are...”
    - 2. Then Jesus turns to his disciples and all who want to learn from him: “Blessed are you...” The main theme is “**the prophets**” (Mt 5:11-16).
      - 3. The central part is an exposition of the Law and the Prophets (Mt 5:17-7:12):
        - “Do not think that I have come to abolish **the Law or the Prophets**; I have not come to abolish them but to **fulfil** them” (Mt 5:17)...
        - The Lord’s Prayer is found at the very center of the sermon!
        - “So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the **Law and the Prophets**” (Mt 7:12).

- 4. After his exposition of the Law and the Prophets, he returns to the theme of the Prophets and warns against “**the false prophets**” (Mt 7:13-23). This contrasts with the second part of the sermon.
- 5. He concludes his sermon again with a general call to choose: “**Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine...**”(Mt 7:24-27).

❖ The structure of Matthew 5:13-16:

First statement (verse 13)	<p>You are the salt of the earth.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again?</li> <li>• It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled underfoot.</li> </ul>
Second statement (verse 14-16)	<p>You are the light of the world.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A town built on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl.</li> <li>• Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house.</li> <li>• In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.</li> </ul>

Matthew 5:13		Matthew 5:14-16
You are the salt of the earth.	<i>Parallel</i>	You are the light of the world.
But if the salt loses its saltiness,	<i>Parallel</i>	A town built on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl.
how can it be made salty again?	<i>Contrast</i>	Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house.
It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled by men.	<i>Contrast</i>	In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.

## Technical and hermeneutical notes

- ❖ It is important to realize that Jesus preached this sermon around 30 AD in Galilee:
  - to Jews living in a country
    - which was part of the Roman Empire;
    - who had contact with the Hellenistic (Greek) and Roman culture; this culture was prominent in a city like Tiberias (Lake of Tiberias = Sea of Galilee) and the Decapolis, nowadays Jordan;
  - to Jews
    - who frequented the synagogues and were used to listening to the teaching of the Pharisees and scribes, their spiritual leaders at that time;
    - who were expecting the promised One (according to Dt 18:15-18; Mal 4:4-5; Mt 11:3);
    - who were longing for the restoration of the kingdom of God (Mt 11:12), which was the main theme of the teaching of Jesus.
    - who were familiar with the prophetic word of the Old Testament.
- ❖ This background is needed to understand some passages of the sermon, especially those that speak of persecution (Mt 5:10-12), pagans (Mt 6:7, 32) and of hypocrites.
  - The selection of topics found in the Sermon on the Mount reflects some debated issues among first century Jews, such as divorce (Mt 5:31-32; Mt 19:3-9). Jesus didn't cover all aspects of the Law, for instance, the fourth commandment (Sabbath Day) is not found here, although it was hotly debated between the Pharisees and Jesus (Mt 12:1-8). Neither did he refer to the greatest commandment (Mt 22:37-40).
  - He especially confronted the teaching of the Pharisees and Scribes. Some of the topics found in the sermon are also found in Matthew 23, where he condemned them for their hypocritical stance.
  - Jesus didn't give a new set of rules or applications but showed a different mindset. This mindset is governed by (see application):
    - the blessings of the kingdom (Mt 5:3-10);
    - the Lord's prayer (Mt 6:9-13), the central part of the sermon.
- ❖ The Old Testament background is especially important. Jesus taught the Law and the Prophets.
  - The blessings are found in the Book of Psalms. Especially Psalm 1 is important: "**Blessed** is the man .... his delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law he meditates day and night" (Ps 1:1,2; Ps 32:1-2; Ps 106:3; Ps 119:1-2).
  - The parallels between Isaiah 61:1-4 and the first blessings are striking:

- “The Spirit of the Sovereign LORD is on me, because the LORD has anointed me  
(*The baptism of the Lord*)

to preach good news to the poor. (*Mt 5:3*)

He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, (*Mt 5:4*)

to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners,

to proclaim the year of the LORD’s favor and the day of vengeance of our God, to comfort all who mourn, and provide for those who grieve in Zion— to bestow on them a crown of beauty instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, and a garment of praise instead of a spirit of despair. (*Mt 5:4*)

They will be called oaks of righteousness, a planting of the LORD for the display of his splendor” (*Mt 5:6*).

- Jesus refers to the persecution of the prophets:
  - “Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted **the prophets who were before you**” (*Mt 5:11–12*).

## Exposition

### Verse 11-12

- ❖ “**The prophets who were before you.**” Jesus compares his disciples with the prophets of the Old Testament. It is important to study these prophets and their messages and especially the role of Jesus as a prophet and teacher.
  - The message of the prophets can be summarized with the words of Jesus:
    - “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near” (*Mt 4:17; Mt 3:2; Mt 10:7*).

### Verse 13

- ❖ “**You are the salt of the earth.**”
  - “**You**” are the disciples who were standing next to him (*Mt 5:1-2*). They will be officially sent out by Jesus (*Mt 10:1-8; Mt 28:19-20*). The gift of prophecy is not confined to the twelve. Paul underscores the importance of prophecy within the congregation of Christ (*1 Cor 14:1-25*).
    - “But if an unbeliever or someone who does not understand comes in while everybody is prophesying, he will be convinced by all that he is a sinner and will be judged by all, and the secrets of his heart will be laid bare. So he will fall

down and worship God, exclaiming, 'God is really among you!'" (1 Cor 14:24-25).

- "You" emphasizes that only the disciples will be the salt (and light), excluding others, such as the Pharisees and scribes and of course, the false prophets.<sup>1</sup>
- **"The salt of the earth."** This refers probably to the origin of salt and not to the use of the salt. Salt was a very important and precious commodity which could be used for seasoning food (Job 6:6) and as a preservative. The emphasis is not on the function of the salt, but on what follows:

❖ **"But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again?"**

- As is explained below, salt could lose its saltiness by adding sand. The word Jesus uses means also "to make foolish." When the words of God are distorted or abolished or broken, the message loses its power and becomes foolish. Jesus gives six examples (Mt 5:21-48).
  - A prophet could add his own opinions, theologies, or even distort the word of God to make it more palatable for the people.
  - An example is found in Jeremiah 6:14: "They dress the wound of my people as though it were not serious. 'Peace, peace,' they say, when there is no peace."
- **"It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled by men."** A Christian prophet (preacher, pastor, church) who distorts the message of God, will gain only disrespect by other people.
  - In the same sense: "Do not give dogs what is sacred; **do not throw your pearls to pigs. If you do, they may trample them under their feet**, and then turn and tear you to pieces" (Mt 7:6).

Verse 14-16

❖ **"You are the light of the world."** Look at John the Baptist and his preaching. **"John was a lamp that burned and gave light, and you chose for a time to enjoy his light."**

- "A city on a hill cannot be hidden."
- "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."
  - John the Baptist was drawing large crowds (Mt 3.5-7).
- Jesus himself said: "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life."

❖ **"In the same way, let your light shine before men,"**

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<sup>1</sup> Hagner, D. (1993, p. 99).

- = Like John the Baptist, our Lord himself, the prophets from the Old Testament.
- ❖ **“that they may see your good deeds”**
  - A Christian prophet leads a transparent and public life:
    - Of righteousness and full of mercy.
- ❖ **“and praise your Father in heaven.”** This glorification is the main purpose of man’s existence. He is our heavenly Father, the almighty Creator.
  - *“for yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.”*
  - “Dear friends, I urge you, as foreigners and exiles, to abstain from sinful desires, which wage war against your soul. Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us” (1 Pet 2:11-12).

## Application

- ❖ Jesus warns against worldly-mindedness, secularization and also isolationism of the church.<sup>2</sup>
  - Jesus doesn’t allow a prosperity gospel to be preached.
- ❖ Jesus describes the character of the New Testament prophet = disciple in Matthew 5:3-10.
  - The prophet is poor in spirit, studying and listening to the word of God and to the teachings of Jesus.  
The prophet will mourn because of sin, injustice, unrighteousness, and mercilessness.  
The prophet will be meek, especially for those who suffer (Mt 11:28-30).  
The prophet hungers and thirsts for righteousness in the world and in personal lives of people and he will be merciful.  
The prophet will be pure in heart (to be pure salt and a shining light).  
The prophet longs for establishing peace, shalom, with God and among the people.  
The prophet must be prepared to encounter persecution.
- ❖ The message of the New Testament prophet (disciple, apostle, preacher) can be summarized with the words of Matthew 6:33.
  - **“But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.”**
- ❖ (The prophetic) light is an important theme in the Old Testament and in the New.
  - “The light of the righteous shines brightly” (Prov 13:9).
  - “I, the LORD, have called you in righteousness;  
I will take hold of your hand.

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<sup>2</sup> Hendriksen, W. (1973, p. 282).

I will keep you and will make you  
to be a covenant for the people  
and a light for the Gentiles" (Isa 42:6; see also Isa 49:6; Isa 54:4; Lk 2:29-32; Jn 1:4-5; Ac  
13:47).

- Christians are children of the light (Jn 12:36; Eph 5:8, 9; 1 Tess 5:5).

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