

THE TRUE DISCIPLE: THE SALT OF THE EARTH MATHEW 05:13

Introduction

There is so much in this little parable, but the main thrust is *distinctiveness*. Salt is distinctively different from the thing upon which it is put. By nature and by purpose it is different. So are believers. They are distinctively different by nature and by purpose. *By nature* believers are a new creation, born of God (2 Cor. 5:17; 1 Pet. 1:23); *by purpose* believers are to penetrate and change the very taste of the earth. They are like salt.

- I The disciples' character: salt (v. 13).
- II The disciples' place to salt: the earth (v. 13).
- III The disciples' mission: to salt the earth (v. 13).
- IV The disciples' danger: becoming useless and destructive (v. 13).

I. *Mathew 05:13 The Salt of the Earth*

The disciples' character is like salt. Believers are *called and designed* (made) to be the salt of the earth. Several things can be said about salt that point out just what Jesus means.

1. Salt is *distinctive*. It is totally different from the food or object upon which it is put. The power of salt lies in this difference. Believers, just as salt, are to be different from the world. The power of their lives and their testimony lies in their being different and distinctive. They are to "keep [themselves] from being polluted by the world" (Jas. 1:27).

Rom 12:2 *Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is — his good, pleasing and perfect will.*

2 Cor 6:17-18 *"Therefore come out from them and be separate, says the Lord. Touch no unclean thing, and I will receive you. I will be a Father to you, and you will be my sons and daughters," says the Lord Almighty.*

James 1:27 *Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world.*

1 John 2:15-16 *Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For everything in the world — the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does — comes not from the Father but from the world.*

2. Salt *preserves*. It keeps things from going bad and decaying. It cleanses and disinfects. Believers, just as salt, are to cleanse and preserve the world. They are to
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disinfect the world and keep the germs of the world from causing things to go bad. They are to save the world from corruption.

1 Pet 1:22-25 Now that you have purified yourselves by obeying the truth so that you have sincere love for your brothers, love one another deeply, from the heart. For you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring word of God. For, "All men are like grass, and all their glory is like the flowers of the field; the grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of the Lord stands forever." And this is the word that was preached to you.

3. Salt *penetrates*. It inserts a new quality; substance, and life. It changes that upon which it is put. Believers are likewise to penetrate the world and insert a new life into it.

2 Cor 5:17 Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!

Eph 4:24 And to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.

Col 3:10 And have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator.

4. Salt *flavours*. It influences the taste of things. It takes a bland, tasteless food and makes it enjoyable. Believers are to so flavour and influence the world for Christ. They are to take the bland and the tasteless and salt them, making them enjoyable and desirable within the world.

Gal 5:22-23 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law.

1 John 1:3 We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ.

5. Salt is *quiet*. It is visible, but it works silently, making no noise whatsoever during its work. Believers, the salt of the earth, are to work quietly and discreetly.

1 Pet 3:4 Instead, it should be that of your inner self, the unfading beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is of great worth in God's sight.

6. Salt *spreads*. Its flavour spreads all around. A sprinkle of salt has a widespread effect. A believer's salt spreads far and wide.

Acts 4:20 For we cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard.

Col 4:13 I vouch for him that he is working hard for you and for those at Laodicea and Hierapolis.

1 Pet 3:15 But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect.

1 Th 4:11-12 Make it your ambition to lead a quiet life, to mind your own business and to work with your hands, just as we told you, so that your daily life may win the respect of outsiders and so that you will not be dependent on anybody.

7. Salt is *irrepressible*. Once applied, it cannot be stopped. A believer's salt, his testimony, is irrepressible; it cannot be stopped.

Isa 55:10-11 As the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return to it without watering the earth and making it bud and flourish, so that it yields seed for the sower and bread for the eater, so is my word that goes out from my mouth: It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it.

II. *Mathew 05:13 The Place of Ministry*

The disciples' place of ministry is the earth. The world is the place where believers are to move about and salt (live and minister). Why? Because the World is (1) bland and tasteless, (2) decaying and rotting, (3) corrupting and foul.

Thought 1. Too many believers live as though they are already in heaven: safe and secure from all harm. They do not pay enough attention to this earth: its needs, its turning bad, its decay, its corruption. While on this earth, believers are called to salt and flavour the earth, not heaven.

Thought 2. In one sense the church is the salt factory and the world is the market place for the salt. Too much salt is being stored and locked up at the church. There is not enough salt being sent out into the market-place. The result? The world is not being salted and flavoured enough.

Luke 10:2 He told them, "The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field."

John 4:35 "Do you not say, 'Four months more and then the harvest'? I tell you, open your eyes and look at the fields! They are ripe for harvest."

Ga16:9 Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time He will reap a harvest if we do not give up.

III. *Mathew 05:13 The Great Mission of the Disciples*

The disciples' mission is to salt the earth. Note a critical point: believers are the salt of the earth, not of heaven. They can do nothing to salt heaven. They cannot penetrate, flavour, or preserve heaven. Any relationship whatsoever they have with heaven is a gift from heaven. However, believers are the salt of the earth; they can penetrate, flavour, and preserve the earth. But two things are necessary *before a person can salt* the earth.

1. Believers must have salt in themselves.

Mark 9:50 *“Salt is good, but if it loses its saltiness, how can you make it salty again? Have salt in yourselves, and be at peace with each other.”*

2. Believers must spread out into the world. But one thing must be known when a believer *scatters* into the world: his salt is necessary and useful. There is no salt other than the believer’s salt. There is nothing else that can salt the earth, nothing whatsoever. The task is upon the believer alone. The success of the mission rests upon the believer and him alone.

Col 4:6 *Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone.*

Mat 28:19-20 *“Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”*

Mark 16:15 *He said to them, “Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation.”*

John 20:21 *Again Jesus said, “Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.”*

Acts 1:8 *“But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”*

1 Pet 3:15 *But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect.*

IV. Mathew 05:13 Judgment: Cast Out

The danger of the disciple is that of becoming useless and destructive. Salt does not lose its saltiness and flavour. However, in the time of Christ the salt of Palestine was gathered in such a manner that dirt and other impurities were often mixed with it. The salt was thus useless and good for nothing. In fact, it actually destroyed the fertility of the soil. Therefore, it was not only useless, but destructive. (See Mt. 25:30.) Two significant points are:

1. This is a picture of the backslider, of a believer who loses his flavour and saltiness or testimony. Three things can be said about the backslider.
 - a. He becomes useless just as salt does.
 - b. He is of no value. He may as well be cast out and trodden underfoot.
 - c. He actually destroys the fertility of some out in the world by becoming a stumbling block and by not being able to salt them.

Luke 9:62 *Jesus replied, “No one who puts his hand to the plough and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God.”*

Luke 11:26 *“Then it goes and takes seven other spirits more wicked than itself, and they go in and live there. And the final condition of that man is worse than the first.”*

Heb 10:38 *“But my righteous one will live by faith. And if he shrinks back, I will not be pleased with him.”*

2 Pet 2:20 *If they have escaped the corruption of the world by knowing our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ and are again entangled in it and overcome, they are worse off at the end than they were at the beginning.*

Rev 2:4 *Yet I hold this against you: You have forsaken your first love.*

2. If the believer’s salt loses its flavour, the believer will experience the judgment of God.

a. He will be thrown out.

Mat 5:13 *“You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled by men.*

b. He will be disqualified.

1 Cor 9:27 *No, I beat my body and make it my slave so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified for the prize.*

c. He will experience loss when he appears before the judgment seat of Christ.

2 Cor 5:10 *For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive what is due him for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad.*

1 Cor 3:11-15 *For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ. If any man builds on this foundation using gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay or straw, his work will be shown for what it is, because the Day will bring it to light. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality of each man’s work. If what he has built survives, he will receive his reward. If it is burned up, he will suffer loss; he himself will be saved, but only as one escaping through the flames.*

Thought 1. If salt loses its flavour, what is going to restore its flavour? There is nothing. Once the saltiness is gone from salt, it is gone. It can no longer salt the earth.

Thought 2. There is no one other than Christ who can salt and save a person from decay. A person who professes to have salt and remains bland, tasteless, and corruptible has no hope of ever being salted. No one else can salt him. He either lets Christ salt him or else he is never salted.

Thought 3. A person who has not been salted and saved from decay is doomed to ruin. He is good for nothing but to be thrown out. (Jn. 3:16-18; Heb. 9:27). ■

THE TRUE DISCIPLE: THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD — SHINING FOR GOD MATHEW 05:14–16

Introduction: Believer, Light

“God is light” (1 Jn. 1:5). Jesus Christ said, “I am the light of the world” (Jn. 8:12; 9:5). Here Jesus says, “You are the light of the world.” What an enormous compliment! God is light, Christ is light, and each believer is said to be “the light of the world.” The believer is what God and Christ are: light. No greater compliment could be paid to the believer. But to be identified with God is an enormous responsibility as well as a compliment. Whatever light is and does, the believer is *to be and do*.

Four things are said about the believer as the light of the world. See *Believers, Light*, Jn. 12:35-36; *Jesus the Light*, Jn. 8:12).

- I The disciples’ character: light (v.14).
- II The disciples’ place to shine: the world (v. 14).
- III The disciples’ unavoidable witness (v. 15).
- IV The disciples’ purpose (v. 16).

JOHN 12:35–36 BELIEVERS, LIGHT

Light is one of the great themes of Scripture.

1. God is light and in Him there is no darkness at all (1 Jn. 1:5).
2. Jesus Christ is the Light of the world — the very embodiment of the heavenly light (Jn. 8:12; 9:5).
3. The light of the knowledge of God is seen in the face of Jesus Christ (2 Cor. 4:6).
4. Jesus Christ “gives light to every man” who comes into the world (Jn. 1:9).
5. Believers are said to become “children of light” through belief in the Light, Jesus Christ Himself (Jn. 12:36).
6. Believers have been transferred from the dominion of darkness into the Kingdom of Christ, the inheritance of light (Col. 1:13).
7. Before they come to Christ, believers are not only in darkness but are an embodiment of darkness. But when they come to Christ, believers are placed in the Light and become an embodiment of the Light itself (Eph. 5:8).
8. Believers are the light of the world (Mt. 5:14-16).

9. Believers are to set their light on a lamp stand — to make their light conspicuous (Mt. 5:15).
10. Evil doers shun the light (Jn. 3:20f).
11. The creation of light is a picture of the expulsion of spiritual darkness (Gen. 1:2f). □

JOHN 08:12 JESUS THE LIGHT

*When Jesus spoke again to the people, he said, “I am the Light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.” **John 08:12***

Jesus is said to be the *Light of men* (Jn. 1:4) and the *Light of the world* (Jn. 8:12; 9:5; 12:46). It is possible for the Light, Jesus Himself, to be *in men* (Jn. 11:10; see Col. 1:27) and for men to become children of Light (See *Light, Believers*, Jn. 12:34-36).

Apparently, Jesus used the word *light* often. John uses the word twenty-four times. What is meant by calling Jesus the Light?

1. Jesus, the Light, is light by nature. Light is what He is within Himself, within His being. His nature, His essence, His character. Scripture says...
 - that “God is Light” (1 Jn. 1:5);
 - that Jesus is “the image of the invisible God” (Col. 1:15);
 - therefore, “Jesus is Light.” He is “the Light of the world.”
2. Jesus, the Light, tells us that He is holy, righteous and pure. Light is the symbol of purity and holiness. Light means the absence of darkness and blindness; it has no spots of darkness or blackness, nor of sin and shame.
3. Jesus, the Light, reveals. His light shows clearly the nature, the meaning, and the destiny of all things. His light shines in, spots, opens up, identifies, illuminates, and shows things as they really are. The light of Jesus Christ shows the truth about the world and man and God. The light of Jesus Christ reveals that He loves and cares for man and wants man to love and care for Him.
4. Jesus, the Light, guides. His light allows a man to walk out of darkness. Man no longer has to grope, grasp, and stumble about trying to find his way through life. The path of life can now be clearly seen.
5. Jesus, the Light, does away with darkness and with chaos. His light routes, wipes out, strips away, and erases the darkness. The empty chaos of creation was routed by the light given by God (Gen. 1:3). Jesus Christ is the Light that can save man from chaos (Jn. 14:1, 17; 12:46; 16:33).

Jesus proclaimed Himself to be the Light of the world at the great Feast of Tabernacles (Jn. 7:2). The very first ceremony of the Feast holds great significance for Jesus' claim. It was called "The Illumination of the Temple" and was held in the Court of the Women. The centre of the Court was surrounded by large sections of stadium-like seats. In the open space of the Court sat four huge candelabra. When darkness fell the candelabra were lit, and the elders danced and led the people in singing psalms before the Lord all night. The brilliance and glow from the burning flames of the huge candelabra were said to be so bright that the light could be seen throughout the whole city. It was against this background that Jesus cried out, "I am the Light of the world." □

I. Mathew 05:14 Believer's Role: Reflect the Light of Christ

The disciples' character is light. Christ said, "I am the Light of the world" (Jn. 8:12; 9:5). Here He says the disciple is to be like Him — "the light of the world." The disciple is to undergo a radical transformation: he is to *become like* Christ more and more and *to reflect* the light of Christ (2 Cor. 3:18; 4:6-7). Light is and does several things.

1. Light is clear and pure. It is clean, that is, good, right and true.

Eph 5:8-9 For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light (for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness, righteousness and truth).

2. Light penetrates. By nature it cuts through and eliminates darkness.

1 Th 5:5 You are all sons of the light and sons of the day. We do not belong to the night or to the darkness.

3. Light enlightens. It enlarges a person's vision and knowledge of an area.

John 12:35 Then Jesus told them, "You are going to have the light just a little while longer. Walk while you have the light, before darkness overtakes you. The man who walks in the dark does not know where he is going."

4. Light reveals. It opens up the truth of an area, a whole new world, and it clears up the way to the truth and the life.

John 14:6 Jesus answered, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."

John 12:36 "Put your trust in the light while you have it, so that you may become sons of light." When he had finished speaking, Jesus left and hid himself from them.

5. Light guides. It directs the way to go, leads along the right path.

John 12:46 "I have come into the world as a light, so that no one who believes in me should stay in darkness."

6. Light strips away the darkness.

John 3:19-20 *“This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but men loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil. Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that his deeds will be exposed.”*

7. Light routes the chaos.

Phil 2:15 *So that you may become blameless and pure, children of God without fault in a crooked and depraved generation, in which you shine like stars in the universe.*

8. Light discriminates between the right way and the wrong way (Eph. 5:10; 5:8-10).

John 8:12 *When Jesus spoke again to the people, he said, “I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.”*

9. Light warns. It warns of dangers that lie ahead in a person’s path.

Eph 5:11-14 *Have nothing to do with the fruitless deeds of darkness, but rather expose them. For it is shameful even to mention what the disobedient do in secret. But everything exposed by the light becomes visible, for it is light that makes everything visible. This is why it is said: “Wake up, O sleeper, rise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you.”*

10. Light protects. It protects a person from the dangers of darkness, from stumbling, falling, and injuring himself.

Rom 13:12 *The night is nearly over; the day is almost here. So let us put aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armour of light.*

Thought 1. Believers are now the light of the world. Jesus said, “While I am in the world, I am the light of the world” (Jn. 9:5). Jesus is no longer in the world, not bodily. His light is now shining in the lives of believers. Believers are *reflections* of Him.

Thought 2. A person’s light is only a reflective light. He reflects “the light of the Lord.”

Eph 5:8 *For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light.*

Thought 3. The character of light is pure. The believer is to walk in light, that is, in purity.

Eph 5:8 *For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light.*

Rom 13:12 *The night is nearly over; the day is almost here. So let us put aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armour of light.*

Phil 2:15 *So that you may become blameless and pure, children of God without fault in a crooked and depraved generation, in which you shine like stars in the universe.*

II. **Mathew 05:14** *Place of Ministry for Believers*

The disciples’ place to shine is the world. The world is the place where believers are to move about and reflect their light (live and minister). Why? Because the world is...

- unclear
- in chaos
- stumbling
- in darkness
- groping
- in trouble
- falling
- in danger
- unseeing
- unaware
- indiscriminating

The light is in the world; the city is in the world, and the lamp-stand is in the home. The same is true of believers: believers occupy prominent place in the world. Wherever that place is, they are to let their light shine.

Thought 1. “You are the light!” The world has no other light. “You are it” — the light. Therefore, the light is to be placed where its influence can be *best used and felt*. What a lesson for believers in their life and work and play! Every community, city, state, and nation — the whole world — is to be illuminated by the light of believers.

Acts 13:47 For this is what the Lord has commanded us: “I have made you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring salvation to the ends of the earth.”

Phil 2:15 So that you may become blameless and pure, children of God without fault in a crooked and depraved generation, in which you shine like stars in the universe.

III. *Mathew 05:14–15 The Spirit of Witness*

The disciples’ unavoidable witness. Two things are said about the city: it sits on a hill and it cannot be hid. Two things are said about the candle: it is put on a lamp-stand, and it gives light to all that are in the house. A significant point is that the disciples’ light is in the world, on a hill, and in the house.

Thought 1. Several lessons can be learned from this parable.

- 1) Believers shine as lights in the world. They are like cities and like candles in a dark world.
- 2) Light has different strengths. It can be strong or weak, bright or dim. In fact, it can be so dim and provide so little light that a person may stumble and fall.
- 3) Some places in the world are brightly lit; others are dimly lit. Some cities have many bright lights, other cities have few bright lights. Some homes have strong lights; other homes have weak lights. Every city, every home — every place on this earth that has the witness of a Christian believer — has some light, either weak or strong.
- 4) A light that becomes so weak is of no use.
- 5) A light is not lit to be hid. It is lit to be seen and to give light. Therefore, a light is conspicuous. It has many eyes upon it.

Thought 2. There are occasions when everyone wants light — at least for some time. They seek it out, admire it, walk in it, reap its benefits, joy in it and suggest its use.

2 Cor 4:6 For God, who said, “Let light shine out of darkness,” made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ.

Eph 5:13-14 But everything exposed by the light becomes visible, for it is light that makes everything visible. This is why it is said: “Wake up, O sleeper, rise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you.”

IV. Mathew 05:16 Mission of the Followers of Christ

The disciples’ purpose. The believer has light. The light is already within him. He is the light of God upon earth. Recognise the exact words spoken by Christ: “Let your light shine.” The believer can refuse to let his light shine. He can turn it off, refuse to turn it on, shade it, darken it, turn it away, direct its beam in another direction. Concentrate on the two purposes for *letting* our light shine.

1. Believers are to let their light shine in order to show forth good works. The command “Let your light shine” means *let your good works be seen*. The believer is to show good works to the world, but he must be careful how he does his works before others (Jas. 3:13).

1 Tim 6:17-19 Command those who are rich in this present world not to be arrogant nor to put their hope in wealth, which is so uncertain, but to put their hope in God, who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment. Command them to do good, to be rich in good deeds, and to be generous and willing to share. In this way they will lay up treasure for themselves as a firm foundation for the coming age, so that they may take hold of the life that is truly life.

Titus 2:7 In everything set them an example by doing what is good. In your teaching show integrity, seriousness.

Titus 3:8 This is a trustworthy saying. And I want you to stress these things, so that those who have trusted in God may be careful to devote themselves to doing what is good. These things are excellent and profitable for everyone.

Heb 10:24-25 And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another — and all the more as you see the Day approaching.

James 2:17 In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead.

1 Pet 2:12 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.

2. Believers are to let their light shine in order to stir men to glorify God. This is the supreme reason why our light is to shine before men: to stir men to glorify God. The glory of God is to be the primary aim of all believers (1 Pet. 4:11; 5:11). The very way God is glorified is by the light, the good works of believers shining before men. Two things are relevant:

- a. God is glorified when believers get out into the darkness where men are.

- b. The good works of believers are to be done out in darkness, not within cloistered walls with other lights.

John 15:8 *“This is to my Father’s glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.”*

John 15:16 *“You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit-fruit that will last. Then the Father will give you whatever you ask in my name.”*

1 Cor 6:20 *You were bought at a price. Therefore honour God with your body.*

1 Pet 4:11 *If anyone speaks, he should do it as one speaking the very words of God. If anyone serves, he should do it with the strength God provides, so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ. To him be the glory and the power for ever and ever. Amen.*

Thought 1. There are several significant facts in this point.

- 1) Light has one purpose: to shine *before men*. Light is not seen unless it is placed *before men*. If there are no people, there are no eyes to see the light. A believer must not seclude himself from others.
- 2) It is the people in darkness who need light. Believers! “Let your light shine before men” — before men out in darkness! Believers are not to be secluded in the church, moving only among other lights. The more light that is put out in the darkness, the more the darkness is eliminated.
- 3) Believers are not the only ones who are to glorify God. They are to go out and cause those in darkness to glorify Him. ■