



[Rev. Steven S. Billings](#)

**Sermon for Epiphany 5**  
February 8, 2026

## Salt and Light

### Matthew 5:13–20

<sup>13</sup> “You are the salt of the earth; but if the salt loses its flavor, how shall it be seasoned? It is then good for nothing but to be thrown out and trampled underfoot by men.

<sup>14</sup> “You are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden. <sup>15</sup> Nor do they light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house. <sup>16</sup> Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven.

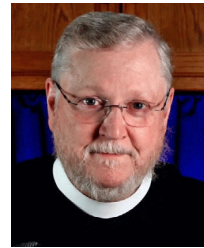
<sup>17</sup> “Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill. <sup>18</sup> For assuredly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law till all is fulfilled. <sup>19</sup> Whoever therefore breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches men so, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever does and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven. <sup>20</sup> For I say to you, that unless your righteousness exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven.”

The Ancient Romans used to say that nothing is more useful than light and salt. In today’s Gospel, Jesus is telling us that nothing is more important *for mankind* than for you, His disciples, to fulfill the function that He has determined for you, and that is to be the salt, to be the lights, that He has made you to be.

The Bible often refers to salt. It was used in sacrifice, to confirm an oath, and to purify and keep food from spoiling. Most likely, it’s that last use that Jesus had in mind when He called His followers “the salt of the earth.”

The Children of God have always been the salt of the earth. For 120 years the Lord delayed the destruction of the world because of Noah. Because of Lot’s righteousness the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah was deferred – and the whole community would’ve been spared if the Lord had found just nine more people like him! Think of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, as well as the prophet Daniel, who refused to obey the commands of pagan kings and whose actions caused those kings to declare “that in every dominion men should tremble and fear before their God, for He is the living God.” (Dan. 6:26)

And what about the early Christians? What an influence they were in the world of their day! By their confession and example they shook the very foundations of the mighty



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Roman Empire. Their influence is described in a letter written in the year 250 AD by a theologian named Cyprian to his friend Donatus. He wrote: "This is a cheerful world as I see it from my garden, under the shadow of my vines. But if I could ascend some high mountain and look very far, what would I see? Thieves on the highways; pirates on the seas; armies fighting, cities burning; in the amphitheaters men murdered to please applauding crowds; selfishness and cruelty, misery and despair, under every roof. It is a bad world, Donatus, an incredibly bad world. But I have discovered in the midst of it a quiet and holy people who have learned a great secret. They have found a joy which is a thousand times better than any of the pleasures of our sinful life. They are despised and persecuted, but they don't care. They have overcome the world. These people, Donatus, are the Christians – and I am one of them."

Have you ever stopped to think about the influence Christians have in our world today? What would our country be like without Christian churches, schools, and institutions of mercy? Christians are indeed the salt of the earth. Have you ever noticed how someone will stop using profanity just because you, a Christian, walked into the room? Pastors see this all the time, and the more you make it known that you're a Christian, the more you'll notice your effect as a salt of the earth. Christians bring out the best in people. By our word and example we lead others away from sin, away from Satan, away from hell, toward righteousness – toward God and heaven.

Beloved, never forget that you are the salt of the earth. Christian husbands ought to be the most ideal husbands there are. Christian wives the most devoted and faithful. Christian parents the most loving and caring. Christian children the most respectful and obedient. Christian employers the most thoughtful and considerate. Christian employees the most diligent and dedicated. Every Christian should be a model of purity and holiness. Brothers and sisters, we have a high and holy responsibility. The world is watching us. It needs our witness. We need to point it in the right direction. Our world will be blessed, and we too in the process.

But [what] if the salt loses its flavor? “. . . how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, but to be thrown out and trampled underfoot." This inspires some serious self-examination, does it not? What kind of salt am I? Have I been the sort of influence my Savior desires of me?

It is possible to lose your saltiness, you know – to become good for nothing, to be cast out and trampled underfoot. Sadly, it's possible for someone who's been led to know his God and Lord, who once confessed Him publicly, to lose that faith and be lost. Think of Judas. Think of Demas, a convert of St. Paul, who later forsook him because he loved this world too much. Think of the letters to the seven churches in Revelation 2 and 3 and the ultimate end of those churches. The majority of them lost their savor.



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We read in Hebrews 6:(4-6): "It is impossible for those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, who have shared in the Holy Spirit, who have tasted the goodness of the Word of God and the powers of the coming age, if they fall away, [it is impossible for anyone but God] to restore them to repentance, because, to their shame, they are crucifying the Son of God all over again and subjecting him to public disgrace." Christians, beware! The possibility is there of losing your savor, and in doing so, to lose your Savior.

To keep us from this, and to remind us of our high and holy calling, our Savior reminds every one of us: "I'm counting on you. I want to use you. By word and example, you are to be an influence for Me in the world."

Now, what Jesus said about salt, He also said about light: "You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do they 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 so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven."

In the first and highest sense Jesus alone is *the* Light of the world. But He also calls His followers "lights." Paul called children of God "lights." "You are all the children of light," he said in 1 Thess. 5(:5). "For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Therefore, walk as children of light" (Eph. 5:8). "That you may be blameless and harmless, the sons of God, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, among whom you shine as lights in the world" (Phil. 2:15).

Scripture says that, in our natural condition, we are children of darkness. In our unconverted state, we stumble awkwardly toward eternal destruction, completely unaware of how outrageous our sins really are, what an offense they are to the almighty and holy God, how depraved and hopeless we really are in and of ourselves. We Christians – we children of light – are to go to those who are lost, bewildered, and confused, with the Word of God, lifting up Christ, the Light of the world. By our very lives and by our conversation we're to radiate the love and mercy of Christ and show the world what great things God has done for us. Day by day, hour by hour, minute by minute, at home, at work, at school, out shopping, and – Lord, have mercy – online via social media, we're to "show forth the praises of Him who has called us out of darkness into His marvelous light." We have no light of ourselves, mind you; we're more like the Moon than the Sun. But, in that same way, we're to reflect the light of the very Son of God, our precious Savior, who's come into our hearts with all the treasures of His love, grace, mercy, and peace.

The Lord wants His Church to be a light for Him. Remember the words of Isaiah: "Arise, shine, for your Light is come, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon you." The Church of our Lord and Savior is a light for Him when it preaches the Gospel of full and free salvation and administers the Sacraments as He instituted them. The Church is a "light" for the Savior when it maintains Christian schools, institutions of mercy, or any other organization that brings the Word of God to bear upon the hearts and lives of men.



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But, as much as the Church as an institution shines for Christ, its service as a "light" for the Savior is at its best when the individuals who make up the church shine for Him. Throughout the New Testament, we encounter one individual after another who receives special tribute. There was John the Baptist, whose relentless preaching of repentance prepared the way for the Lord. There was Dorcas, "a woman full of good works" (Acts 9:36), Priscilla and Aquila, who made their home available as a headquarters for the Gospel. There was Lydia, who opened her house to Paul and his co-workers at Philippi. We could go on and on talking about those whom the Bible calls "burning and shining lights."

But we don't have to go back into history to find such people, do we. Recently, I read about a doctor and his wife in Texas who last year brought 59 people into their church. Their goal this year is 100. The doctor says: "Considering what the Lord has done for me, how can I do otherwise?" And we don't really have to go that far away to find these lights. It wasn't that long ago that I was visiting with a prospective member who referred to a member of our own congregation who lives in his neighborhood. He said: "She's a real Christian! No matter when I see her, whether at home or out and about, she's always the same kind, loving person. She's living her Christianity!" Another time, someone said about one of our men: "Doesn't so-and-so belong to Trinity?" When I said "yes" he replied: "Man, what a great advertisement for your church!" Thank God for these "lights!"

And you should. After all, it was just such a person shining just such a light into your life that brought you out of the realm of darkness into the brightness of Christ. Who was it? Your mother, your father, maybe a neighbor, maybe a friend? For me, it was my brother, who, at seven years of age, shared the light of Christ with his five-year-old little brother. The light began to burn in me that night, and it has ever since. I love him dearly for that. You should love him, too, because he is largely responsible for me standing before you today as your pastor. Don't you want to be that light for someone else? Don't you want to make a friend for Christ, and begin a relationship that will literally last forever?

Beloved, your Lord is reminding you today that you have a high and holy calling. You are a "light" for Jesus Christ. Be sure you know what kind of light you're projecting!

Why does Jesus ask us to be salt and light for Him? "That they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven." As Peter puts it: "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 Peter 2:12). You, dear Christian, have the high and holy privilege of sharing the joy you have in Christ with those around you. The Holy Spirit help us all to live out our calling for the salvation of blood-bought souls and the glory of our Father in heaven. In the name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen