

Message: “Changing the Game in the Case for Christ”, Week Six of “Is He Really Who He Says He Is? Series”, presented by Reverend Kristen Lowe on 04-09-2017 at Crossroads United Methodist Church, Waunakee, WI.

To discover the meaning of the salt metaphor in today’s reading, we need to understand the function of salt as it would be understood by Jesus’ original first-century audience. Scholars have identified no less than eleven different functions of salt in the ancient world, making it highly valuable. Salt can be a preservative, an antiseptic, a fire catalyst and a fertilizer. The most likely use of salt that Jesus is referring to in this scripture is salt as seasoning.

Also, salt is not an element useful to itself. Its value comes in its application on other things. So, likewise the followers of Jesus are called to exist for others.

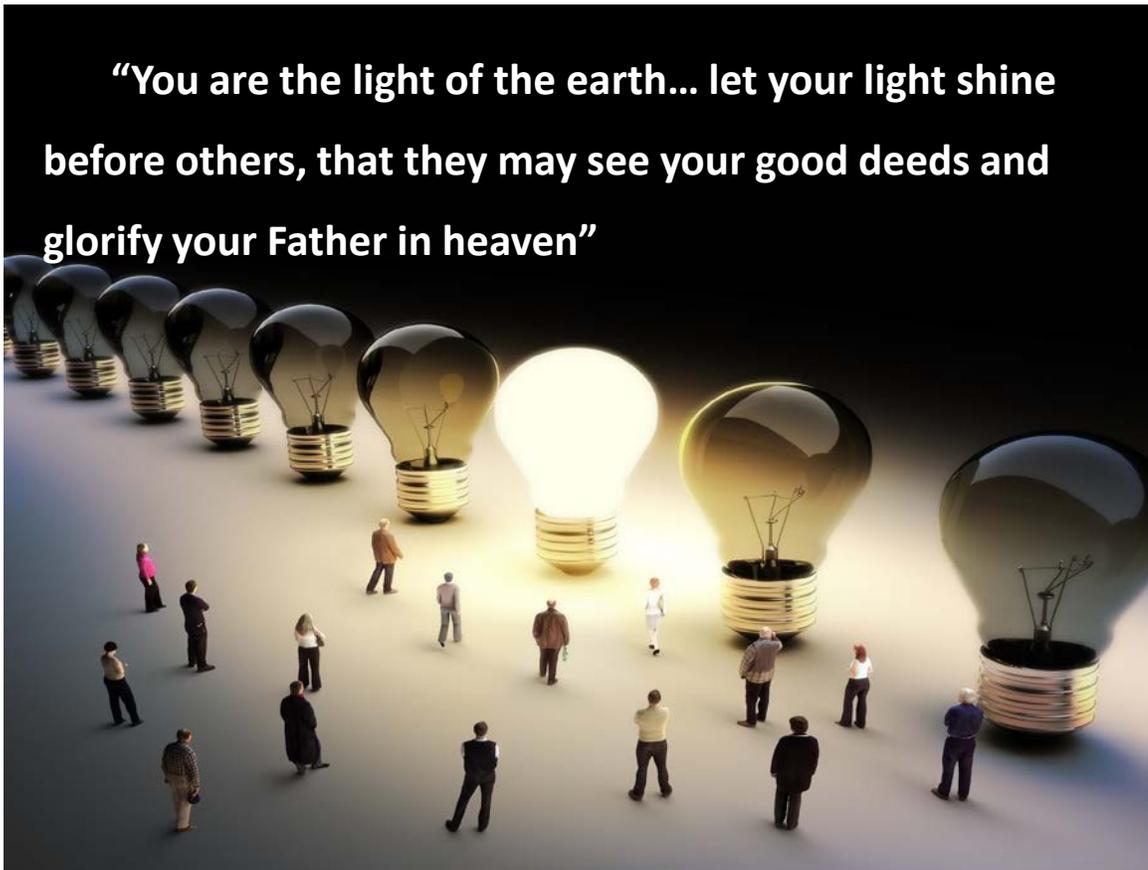
In Matthew 5:13-16 Jesus tells his disciples:

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 underfoot.

You are the light of the world. A city built on a hill cannot be hid. No one after lighting a lamp puts it under the bushel basket, but on the lamp stand, and it gives light to all in the house. 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.

May you be salt and light in this world.

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“You are the light of the earth. A city built 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. In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.”

This was part of a message Jesus gave. Today we call it the Sermon on the Mount.

Jesus wants us to live lives that make people thirst for God. Jesus tells us, “I want you to live lives that shine my light and grace and love and hope and compassion into dark places.”

How do we do this today?

Once we have believed and received the life of Christ to become his follower and child, what does it mean for us to want to be stronger salt and brighter light as we live out and explain the Good News of Christ to others?

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Living in the way Jesus described looks like an unexpected adventure, because I’m convinced that when we are motivated to engage with people about Jesus, when we make ourselves available, when we are prepared and prayerful about doing that, then we never know what’s going to happen. Your day might start out average and routine, but you just don’t know how God might ambush you with an opportunity to be salt and light and use you to have a conversation that could change someone’s eternal destination. When you are motivated, available, and prayerful, you never know what God will do. That’s the unexpected adventure of the Christian life.



Back when I was living in Cedar Rapids, IA, I had a rummage sale. It’s a great opportunity to get rid of stuff, make a few bucks and meet some really interesting people.

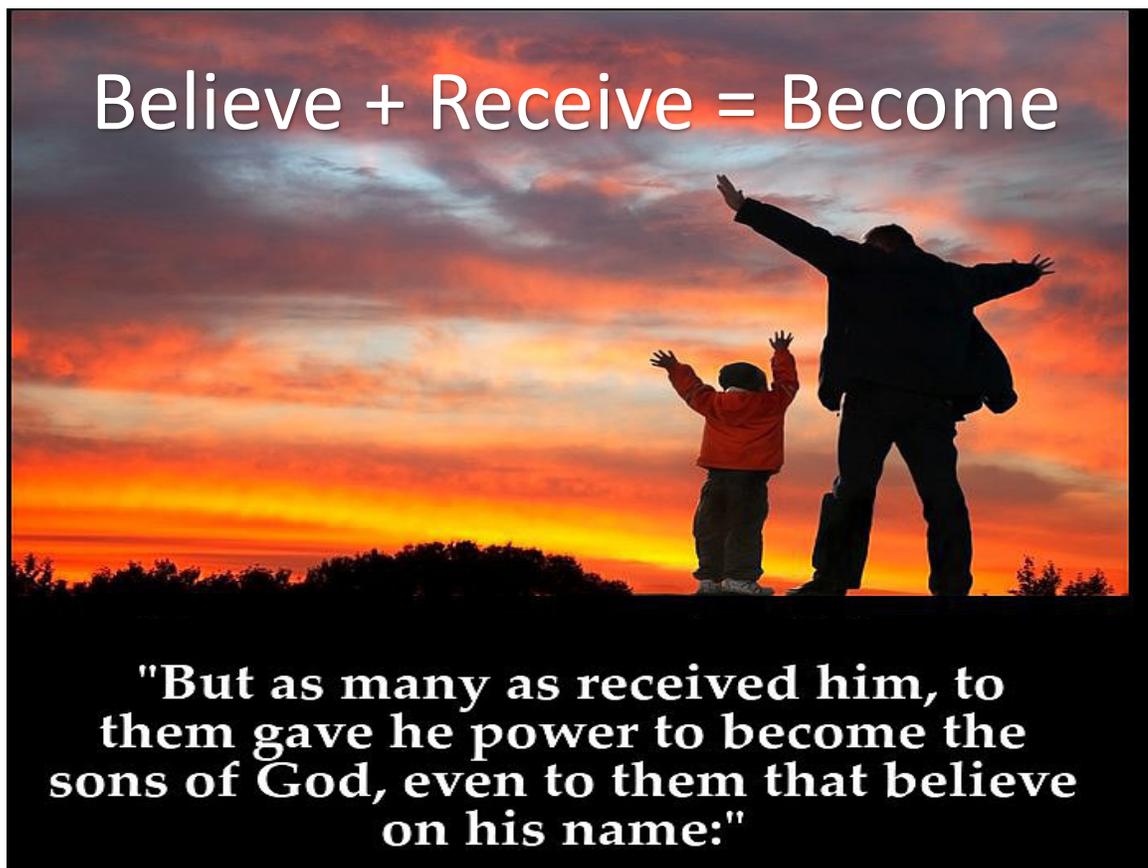
One man who showed up with his wife in a pickup truck struck up a conversation with me. I thought he was pretty bold by asking me if I was a Christian. “Well, yes,” I declared. I was a kind of taken aback at his pluck for asking. Then he said, “Kristen, God has big plans for you. Do you know that he is going to use you to spread his word? I believe that you are going to use your gift of speaking to glorify God as a vocation.” Even though I was a believer, I kind of laughed him off because I was a broadcaster... a far cry from what he was describing. But... this conversation lingered in the back of my mind for many years. Did he have something to do with me being here now? You never know! What if he had not had the courage to approach me that spring day in 1998?

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Jesus came to earth and died on the cross for the express purpose of giving “his life as a ransom” (Mark 10:45) so that we could be forgiven and adopted into his family. Do you believe this?

It’s not enough to just passively nod our heads and say we agree with the information that’s been shared about Jesus. We need to receive him into our lives and make him a priority. Because a relationship with Jesus changes everything!

When these two things happen, we become a child of God, at the very moment we put our faith in Christ!



When this happens to us, and when God uses us to share this news with others, we begin experiencing more and more unexpected adventures in our lives. We are living out the Great Commission of making disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world. We experience miracles!

This is where the excitement happens in the Christian life. It’s when our prayer life takes on a whole new dimension because we are praying to God for help and listening for his direction.

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It's when our Bible study takes on new relevance because we aren't just looking for abstract ideas; we're looking for ways to help our friends know Christ. It's when our worship becomes more heartfelt because we are worshiping the God of the second chance who loves us even more than we can possibly love each other. It's when our dependence on God is at its greatest because we know that, apart from the work of the Holy Spirit, there is nothing we can do by ourselves to bring anybody to faith.

When we study the life of Jesus, we can learn lessons about how to be salt and light in our world. Today I want to visit the first of three questions: “What if Jesus lived in my house? What would he do? How would he interact with the neighbors?”



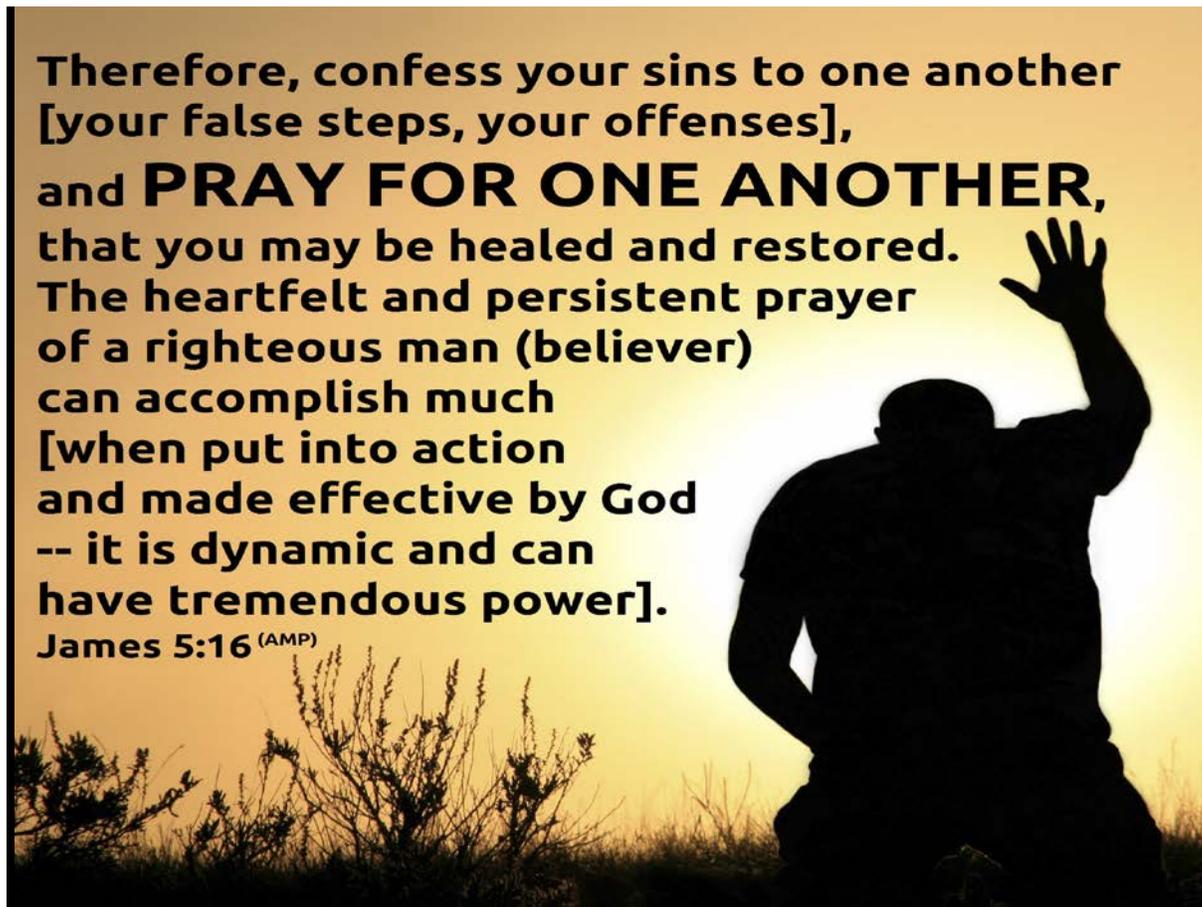
If he lived in my house, Jesus would talk to our neighbors about the Heavenly Father, he would talk to his Heavenly Father about his neighbors.

Jesus would pray. Before Jesus embarked on anything important, he brought it to the Father in prayer. In fact, Jesus' prayers for spiritually lost people continued up to his last breath on the cross.

The imperfect tense of the biblical account in Greek suggests that Jesus seems to have prayed for his tormentors actually while the iron spikes were being driven through his hands and feet; he kept praying, repeating over and over, “Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do.”

If Jesus prayed for his enemies all the way through the torture of the crucifixion, then how can we justify our failure to pray for the people we love and care about but who are living in quiet rebellion against God?

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If Jesus lived in my house, he would pray specifically, consistently, and fervently for his neighbors. Are we doing that? Are we praying for those who don't know the Good News?

I know that we can't force someone, through our prayers, to become a follower of Christ. But James said that the prayers of righteous people make a difference—they are not wasted but are “powerful and effective” (James 5:16). There is a quote popularly attributed to Archbishop William Temple that says, “When I pray, coincidences happen. When I stop, they don't.”

When I was in my early 20s and my radio career took off, I lost my way for a period of time. Although I never stopped believing, shiny things became my God. Late Saturday night gigs took precedence over early Sunday mornings of praising God. My Grandma Elda, who prayed for me every day since the day she knew me, ramped up her prayers. I believe a good reason why I am here today, sharing the word with you, is because of the people in my life who spoke up... who prayed... who boldly approached me with their faith.

I've seen miracles happen. A friend of mine prayed for her brother for eight years. He wasn't interested in God at all. But then one day, out of the blue, his heart was opened and he called me to talk. He wanted to accept Christ into his life.

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Yet even as you hear that, you might be saying to yourself, well, she was only getting started. Because you’ve prayed for a wayward son for ten years, a spiritually confused parent for fifteen years, or a best friend from high school for twenty years. And you haven’t seen any evidence whatsoever of a spiritual awakening in them. A thousand times, you’ve been tempted to stop praying for them. What’s the use? Nothing is happening!

My friend and my Grandma would tell you: Never give up. Never cease praying. Never stop lifting them up to the throne of grace. Because this is life-changing stuff!

“If Christianity is false, it’s of zero importance. But if it’s true, there’s nothing more important in the entire universe.” - C.S. Lewis

If it’s true, It would change how we view and approach everything. It would change our very lives and everything around us. Amen.