

Victory Lutheran Church- Jacksonville, FL
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Worship Series: *The Savior's Sermon*
Service Theme: *You are...So Be...*

Sermon Theme: *You are...So Be...So That...* (February 2, 2023)
Matthew 5:13-20

What is this? Yes, this is a hammer. And since you know that this is a hammer, I'm sure you can also tell me the function of a hammer? That's right, hammers pound things. I know, I'm weaving some really deep thoughts together here. But that's kind of the point. Those answers were obvious because we understand that an object's form—what it is—reveals its function—what it does. Hammers pound. Forks jab. Pens write. Fire burns. Ice cools.

That's important to understand, because Jesus uses the same truth to teach us about being his disciples. In the second portion of the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus says, "***You are...***" our form. Then, he tells us, "***So be...***" our function. But Jesus also teaches us the all-important third aspect—the purpose of the form as it performs its function.

Purpose is all-important for this discussion, because even if the form and function match, if the purpose is wrong, everything goes awry. Like we said, hammers pounds things. But for what purpose? We might say hammers pound things to make construction easier. So, if you took a hammer and pounded something—but instead of using that hammer so that construction is easier, you instead used that hammer to pound on your brother's head as an act of revenge, no one would say you're used that hammer for its intended purpose. Especially the police!

So today, Jesus teaches us that discipleship is about knowing our form, function, and purpose. ***You are...So Be...So That.***

First, Jesus tells the gathered crowd of disciples their form: "***You are the salt of the earth.***" "***You are the light of the world.***" Now, it's

important to note that Jesus is specifically addressing Christians here. Which means he's pointing at you when he says, "You are salt," "You are light." It's also important to note that Jesus doesn't say, "you will be salt and light someday," as if its an identity we're still trying to achieve. No, you are salt and light! Through Jesus, right here, right now, that is who we are! But what exactly does that mean?

Let's start with salt. In Jesus' day, and really, throughout history, salt has been one of the most valuable, important, and significant substances. Salt was so valuable, because in the days before refrigeration, salt was all-important for preserving food. So one function of salt is preservation.

And popcorn lovers can't forget the immense value and impact that salt has on food! Adding salt to food can better draw out and enhance flavors, giving it another valuable function for taste.

So which function of salt does Jesus have in mind? Preservation, or flavor? I'd say, yes! We can't say which definitively, nor can we say definitively that Jesus doesn't have both in mind! But regardless, Jesus is telling his disciples, "You are something valuable that has a profound impact on the things you come into contact with.

Jesus also says, "***You are the light of the world.***" The function of light is a little easier to pin down, right? Light illuminates! Light shines brightly in unmistakable contrast to darkness! Jesus drives that function home with his imagery, "***A town built on a hill cannot be hidden.***" Think about the darkness of backcountry roads, only to have the darkness broken by a big city, shining like a bright beacon in the distance. Or look up pictures of the bright shining lights of Las Vegas, visible from Space! Light shines so brightly in contrast to darkness that you can't miss it. And as Jesus says, "***People light a lamp and...put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house.***" Light shines so brightly to chase away darkness that those around it are able to see.

Understanding the functions of physical salt and light helps us understand Jesus' intended function for us as he calls us spiritual "salt and light."

To be the salt of the earth means to have a preserving effect on a world going rotten. Day after day, this world reeks of decay like when your freezer breaks while you're on vacation. But as the salt of the earth, God calls us to be models and examples for others to follow of the kind of love for God and love for others that slows the rot of this sin-broken world. And as the salt of the earth, we're called to bring out the flavor of God to the world. Through our words, attitudes, and actions, to give little tastes of God's goodness, love, forgiveness, mercy, care, and truth to the world, and the people in our lives. You are salt...so be salty!

To be the light of the world means to shine into the darkness of this world—to be Christians; literally, little Christs. John's Gospel refers to Jesus, "***The light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not understood it.***" And later, "***The true light that gives light to every man was coming into the world.***" We live in a world of darkness. Just think about the latest mindsets, ideologies, and worldviews that people espouse on their social media, or that are being taught in university classrooms, or being written into the scripts, lyrics, and manuscripts of the arts, or being enforced by governmental leaders.

All of it is evidence of a world plunged into darkness by sin and unbelief; a dark world where people wander around, tripping all over themselves, falling down, and latching on to anyone else they think might know the way; groping and grasping at every square inch of the walls, hoping to find the door knob that will lead them into the light...but only finding more darkness.

Into such a world of darkness, for such a world of darkness came the true Light! And into such a world of darkness, for such a world of darkness, the true Light sends those he has called to be the light of the world! To shine brightly in unmistakable contrast to the darkness of this world.

We shine that light with our attitudes, actions, and words. The way you react to literally every situation in your life is an opportunity to shine the light of God into the darkness. The way you grieve with hope. The way you maintain joy even in hardship. The way you forgive the undeserving. The way you respond to hatred with love. The way you walk the narrow path of God while the multitude choose the wide road of popular opinion. The commitment and hard work you display in your job, education, or marriage, while so many others take the path of least resistance. The way you prioritize God and his Word, when there are so many other things you could be doing with your time, talents, and treasures.

Every moment of every day is an opportunity to shine in an unmistakably Christ-like way; to stand out in this dark world like a city on a hill, like Vegas from space, like a lantern in the living room when the power's out. You are light of the world... so be the light that shines in the darkness!

But the question is...do you? Do people get a little taste of God from you? Or a bland, savorless flavor that tastes like so much else in the world? Do people see you preserving this rotting world? Or do you smell like the rest? Do you shine the light of Christ into the darkness or people's lives? Or do people see you as just another blind wanderer, stumbling around next to them, searching for brightness from darkness in a "black as ink" world?

It's an all-important question for every Christian's self-evaluation: Does your function match your form? It's all important, because if our function doesn't align with who we are in Christ, what good are we? Jesus warns, "***If salt loses its saltiness...It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled underfoot.***" As we said earlier, salt was incredibly valuable, but only if it was accomplishing its function. Otherwise, it was worthless; good only to toss out your back door into the street.

A form that loses its function loses its value. If you're trying to use a hammer to play a guitar, it won't be valuable. Or if you're trying to use the guitar to make your construction project easier, it won't be

valuable. Likewise, Jesus convicts us that if we aren't carrying out our functions as spiritual salt and light, we're failing to be who we are, like saltless salt, or ***“a lamp put under a bowl.”***

I said Jesus convicts us, because we often fail to be the salt and light God calls us to be in the world; how often we've failed to give the world a taste of God by our words and actions. How often we've kept our light hidden under a bushel. Seems like God ought to cast us out into the street, or snuff us out for good.

Especially considering what Jesus says in the next 4 verses. There, Jesus reiterates the importance of the Law; how we can't pretend God's law no longer applies to us, since none of it will go away until the end of time; how our righteousness must surpass the most obedient of Israel's religious leaders if we want to get into Heaven. Sounds hopeless, right?

On our own, yeah. But we're not on our own! As Jesus said, ***“Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them.”*** Jesus is saying that the Law and Prophets haven't become null and void; they're still important and necessary.

But the purpose has shifted. Because Jesus came and fulfilled the law, keeping it perfectly! And that means, our righteousness actually does surpass ***“that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law,”*** because Jesus is the only one who was perfectly righteous. And not just in a “going through the motions” sense, but a complete heart, mind, and actions righteousness. Jesus, The Light of the World that no darkness can overcome. Jesus, the God-man who gave the world the fullest taste of God it's ever experienced this side of Heaven. Through faith in Jesus, right now, you are salt, and light, and righteousness, just as God says you are!

That means the purpose of all these things has become entirely different. No longer do we need to struggle to be salt and light and righteous, obedient law-keepers so we can earn eternal life. Because Jesus has done all of that as our substitute, now we get to be salt, light,

and righteousness for a different purpose: ***“Let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.”***

The purpose of light shining, salt being salty, and the law being obeyed isn't so that people will glorify us, or to make us feel really good about ourselves. No, we do those things, so that God will be glorified! We live such an unmistakably contrasted life from this world of darkness, so that people will ask, “How do you do it? Why are you so different?” To which you get to respond, “Let me tell you about God!”

With that entirely different purpose, we can look at each moment and interaction of each day as an opportunity—an opportunity to let people see the light of Christ that frees them from darkness; an opportunity to give people a small taste of God, so that it can become a taste that they crave, and find fully in him!

With an entirely different purpose, God's Law, those 10 Commandments of “do” and “don't” that God has given us, are opportunities. The guidebook of what it looks like to live as salt and light. Because those 10 Commandments can be summarized into two simple concepts: Love for God, and Love for Neighbor. That's what being salt and light is all about!

Now, admittedly, it might seem daunting to be “the light of the world,” or “the salt of the earth.” But you don't do it alone. Las Vegas isn't visible from space because of one single light shining. It's the combination of billions of individual lights shining. And if you check the nutrition label, it's not just one grain of salt that gives a bucket of movie popcorn its delicious flavor. It's hundreds of grains of salt being salty together. If we're going to be the light of the world and the salt of the earth, we do it together, with each Christians performing their function!

But you don't need the Vegas strip to light up your living room, or classroom, or office. As individual Christians, we can each shine the light of the world into our individual circumstances! And when we

each do that, think how much light we can shine in this dark world?
How much we can preserve this decaying world? How much of the
flavor of God we can bring out in this tasteless world?

You are salt; You are light. So be salty; So be the light that shines in
the darkness; so that the world might see it, and glorify him who made
you the salt and light that you are.