

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 underfoot. ¹⁴ “You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden. ¹⁵ 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. ¹⁶ In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven. ¹⁷ “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. ¹⁸ For truly I tell you, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished. ¹⁹ Therefore anyone who sets aside one of the least of these commands and teaches others accordingly will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever practices and teaches these commands will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. ²⁰ For I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven.

GOD'S VALENTINES TO UNBELIEVERS

Did you hear what Jesus said about you? Jesus is talking to his disciples in this text, and you are his disciple and Jesus says, “You are the salt of the earth,” and “You are the light of the world.” Jesus thinks very highly of you. Jesus’ high assessment might tempt you to look over both shoulders and point to yourself, asking, “Me”? “Is Jesus talking to me?” Yes, Jesus is talking to you. You are God’s valentine and Jesus is your gift. But God also loves the unbelievers on this earth and God considers YOU, yes you, as his gift, to unbelievers. Jesus identifies you as salt. Jesus identifies you as light.

1. U R salt & light.

Salt and light, like the great conjunctions “and” and “but”, have functions. The salt Jesus speaks of in our text functions as a preservative. In ancient times people were paid with salt. They called it a salarium. Today, we still use the word of being paid a “salary.” This salt Jesus speaks of in our text functions like our refrigerators and freezers. The food you want to serve at the party today might have decayed or spoiled before the Big Game today if you didn’t have a refrigerator. The same is true of our earth if believers are not on it. Through our faith God is giving the unbelievers on planet earth more time.

Our Lord wasn’t bluffing when he said long ago, *“My Spirit will not contend with humans forever, for they are mortal; their days will be a hundred and twenty years”* (Gn 6:3). A worldwide flood is a part of our world history. So is a critical conversation the Lord had with Abraham about the twin cities of Sodom and Gomorrah. Do you remember that conversation? It was a long conversation, at the end of the conversation the Lord answered Abraham, *“If I find ten righteous people in the city of Sodom, I will spare the whole place for their sake”* (Gn 18:26 & 32). Imagine if just your row of people were in Sodom at that time. I know not all our rows have ten people in it, but some of them do. And all it would take is one of these rows of disciples to spare a whole city. Yes, Jesus thinks highly of you!”

But are you functioning as salt, or have you as Jesus taught lost your saltiness? What kind of sermon does your life preach? Does your life personify, “in the world, but not of the world?” or does your behavior blend with the behavior of the unbelieving world? There is a clear distinction between fresh water and salt water, but what about the words of your mouth? Is the mouth you praise God with today going to turn into a mouth that curses during the week? This should not be. And what about your

actions? Throughout the week are you showcasing the fruit of the Spirit: love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control? Or have you adopted the win at all costs, survival of the fittest mentality of this self-centered world?

Salt that has lost its saltiness, like a broken refrigerator or freezer, won't make much of a difference for food. And neither will a believer who looks and sounds like an unbeliever. But even worse than a Christian that does sound or look like Christ, is a Christian who never lets God's Word shine from his mouth. I suppose I could advocate for witness wear Wednesday. Or plead, you like and share all the Grace social media posts. I have been asked to tell you to leave our worship folders at your doctors' and dentist's offices. We want to do anything and everything to shine the light of the gospel, but God's Word is a lamp for your feet and a light for your path and when your words reflect God's Word you are functioning in a way that helps people see Jesus as their Savior too.

2. You ❤️ righteousness.

Jesus anticipates this salt and light teaching to be interpreted as something new and revolutionary. And so, before Jesus launches into a sermon series on salt and light living Jesus connects salt and light living with the Old Testament Law and Prophecies. The fulfilling of the Old Testament Law and Prophecies was not about an outward performance. If living as light and salt was just about an outward performance, then the Pharisees and the teachers of the Law could serve God's people until their secret sins were revealed. God demands more than outward righteousness. God's focus is on the heart, your heart.

Easter is celebrated on the first Sunday after the first ecclesiastical moon or after the spring equinox. This means Easter can be celebrated as early as March 22 and as late as April 25th. This year Easter is April 5th and that means our Sunday Epiphany readings end today. And that means this year I don't have to worry about saying too much about the readings for Epiphany 6 or Epiphany 7 because we won't have those readings this year. Those readings talk about murder and adultery and other outward behaviors, but Jesus preaches about anger and lust and hate and greed, sins of the heart. That's a kind of righteousness only God can see. People look at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart.

It wasn't enough for Jesus to suffer and die for our sins even though Jesus suffered and died for our sins. It wasn't enough for Jesus to look the part as our substitute under the law. Jesus had to love his heavenly Father with all his heart and with all his soul and with all his mind. And Jesus had to love us as we love ourselves. And that's what Jesus did. Jesus wasn't just righteous in his words and in his actions. Jesus hearted righteousness. And because of Jesus you heart righteousness too. And that's our goal. We love because he first loved us. Amen.