

***You Are the S.A.L.T. of the Earth***  
**Be Ready to Share** 2016 Summer Sermon Series  
Kenwood Baptist Church  
Pastor David Palmer  
August 21, 2016

**TEXT: Matthew 5:1-16**



We continue in our summer series, *"Be Ready to Share,"* and this morning is a bit of a summary and response. We have raised a number of questions that we have heard from the culture around us, perceptions and misperceptions about the Christian faith. Today we are going to consider our response to this. What are we supposed to be and do? We will consider that we are to hear Jesus' Word, that we are the *salt* of the earth. Earlier this spring, we hosted an apologetics conference at Kenwood, and Dr. Brian Miller spoke and really challenged me personally. He gave us an acronym around this image of salt that is in our passage this morning. It has stayed with me, and I commend it to you as well. It is a mode of being; it is a way of thinking as we approach and talk and relate to people. Jesus says: "You are the salt." He doesn't you should be the salt or should try to be. He says: "You are this. So, be this." S.A.L.T. is an acronym for: **Start** a conversation; **Ask** questions; **Listen**; and **Tell** the story of what God has done in Christ. To be *SALT* in our relationships around us is an extraordinary privilege that Jesus gives to us. As we approach this image of salt, we come to Jesus' Sermon on the Mount. This is the first great block of teaching that we hear from Jesus in the New Testament.

The Sermon on the Mount begins with a staggering set of blessings that are given to God's people. Matthew 5 is strong evidence for the divinity of Jesus Christ right at the beginning of His teaching, because He confers blessings that are only God's prerogative to give. As He begins the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus has great crowds following Him, and the disciples move up close to Him and Jesus gives these staggering blessings. He confers on them the very Kingdom

of God. The Kingdom of Heaven is equivalent to Kingdom of God. It is a circumlocution that Matthew uses. Occasionally you hear strange Christian teaching that the Kingdom of God and the Kingdom of Heaven are different things. That's like saying my bride and my wife are different people. So, the Kingdom of Heaven is ours, Jesus says. Jesus gives us comfort. Jesus gives us an inheritance, and not a small one. Jesus confers inheriting the earth. Can you imagine that? Jesus, in a sense, writes your name on the deed, together with His. Jesus promises satisfaction, true satisfaction, a staggering blessing. Jesus offers mercy. He offers seeing the living God. Jesus offers the status of being adopted as God's children, and He rounds off these blessings with the unshakable certainty of possessing the Kingdom, even when we experience difficulties and persecution in this world.

For many of us, we hear these blessings, and, like the original disciples, we move forward towards Jesus on the mountain and say: "This sounds great!" We are often tempted to receive the benefits of participation in the Kingdom of God without ever pausing to consider what the obligations are, what the requirements are that go with that. If I am adopted as a son or daughter of the Most High, then, belonging to the King, I have responsibilities in the world to represent Him. We see that the Sermon on the Mount begins with these blessings, but then Jesus quickly moves from these blessings to convey that we are blessed to be a blessing, just like the call of God on the life of Abraham. When God summoned Abraham out of Ur of the Chaldeans, He blessed him, and then He said: "All the families of the earth will be blessed in you." To be blessed, to receive Jesus' Word, is the great privilege of the Kingdom, but it is a blessing received that is to be given away, not to be hoarded like manna in the wilderness. Jesus conveys this to us, then, with two powerful images. The first image is salt; the second is light. We will spend more time on salt this morning.

Jesus says in Matthew 5:13:

*"You are the salt of the earth."*

He doesn't say: "You should be salty," but, "You are this. You are the salt of the earth." What does this mean? Salt is a vital nutrient. It is a purifying agent, and salt provides a satisfying taste. In the time of Jesus, salt was a very highly-prized commodity. Until about 100 years ago when modern chemistry and geology revealed the prevalence of salt in the world, salt had tremendous value. We don't perceive salt as a very expensive, valuable item because in 2014, the United States mined 44 million metric tons of salt. We are used to having salt. Fifty-one percent of those 44 million metric tons were used to salt our roads. Throughout history, salt has served as currency. It has been responsible for trade routes, the establishment of great cities. It has provoked and financed wars. Taxes on salt have secured empires and inspired revolution. Mahatma Gandhi began the nonviolent protest against British rule in India by harvesting salt

from the ocean as a protest against the salt tax. The Erie Canal was financed through salt tax. The lack of salt was a significant factor in the Confederate defeat in the Civil War. For a long time, the Roman army was paid in salt, and this is the origin of the word *salary*, from the Latin *Salsus*, meaning *salted*. This is where we get the expression: “worth your weight in salt,” or “to earn your salt.” So, whenever you cash a check or you think of your salary, just remember: “You are the salt of the earth.” Sodium is one of the primary electrolytes in the body, and it is available in unrefined salt. Too much or too little salt in our diet leads to muscle cramps or dizziness. A severe electrolyte disturbance can be fatal. Jesus tells us here that as salt of the earth, we are essential for human life. We are extremely valuable, and life can't happen without salt. You and I have a nonnegotiable role towards others that has the highest possible stakes. When people end up in the emergency room or ICU area, there is often vivid concentration on salt levels in the body. Salt is a matter of life and death.

Not only is salt a vital nutrient, salt is a purifying agent. In biblical times, it was a disinfectant. Newborn babies were rubbed in salt to prevent disease. Salt was commonly used to preserve and store food by preventing decay. Today we have refrigeration, freeze-drying, and canning. It is difficult to imagine life without these methods of preserving our food, but prior to this, salt was the primary way to store food. Again, it is a matter of life and death. Salt played a significant part in the Bible in worship. Salt is included in the Levitical offerings, emblematic of permanence and purification. In Leviticus 2, God commands: “Every offering you shall offer with salt.” Did you know that salt is offered as part of every single offering in the temple worship? Salt symbolizes purity. It is a preservative for the sake of the world. Not only is salt vital for life; not only is it a purifying agent. Salt is a satisfying taste. When food is seasoned to our taste, it becomes palatable, and consuming a savory meal can be wonderful. Jesus tells us that the believing community supplies a taste that satisfies. Psalm 34:8 says:

*“Taste and see that the LORD is good; blessed is the man who takes refuge in Him.”*

Paul writes in Colossians 4:6 that we should:

*“Let your speech always be with grace, as though seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to respond to each person.”*

This is really an extended application of our whole series this summer. Let your speech be sprinkled with salt. Let it be savory. Let the way that you to speak with others be appropriate to the setting. Season the conversation with salt so that it is palatable. Too much salt can be a problem. I remember the first summer I worked as a Christian camp counselor, and my best friend and I were working in the kitchen one night, with all these junior high and high school campers just having the time of their lives. We were grilling burgers, and we were salting the burgers as they were finishing out. I noticed from the side as I was flipping burgers and my friend was salting them, that the top of the salt container was a little bit ajar. I wondered if that

was okay, but we kept flipping burgers as hundreds of kids were coming and going. But, I looked over and saw my best friend take this saltshaker, the big, commercial-grade kind, and as he shook it, the top popped right off, and there was one burger that was extra salty as about half this container dumped down onto it. I thought: "What do we do now? Do we remove that one from the assembly line, or do we just let one camper have a memorable experience?" We weighed those options, and we decided that we were serving that burger. I never found out what happened to that. No camper went into a hypovolemic shock or anything like that as far we know, but there was one burger that was extra salty at that event!

Jesus tells us in His Word to apply the salt that is required for the moment, and that is so vital in our conversations. You have to make contact with the food to have an effect, and Jesus then gives us the stark warning at the end of this passage. Jesus says in Matthew 5:14:

*"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."*

How does salt lose its saltiness? Some modern readers of the Bible accuse Jesus here of scientific inaccuracy. In one of our recent evangelistic opportunities that we had at the Cincinnati Observatory, we were trying to share Christ with a man we met there. He was a PhD in biology, and as we got talking, he had all kinds of questions/objections about the Bible, and many of his objections were that the Bible is scientifically inaccurate in a way. We had a really fun time debating and discussing, and what was powerful about that, as we circled all these topics and there was no movement, was that at the end of the conversation, he said: "You know, I'm having knee surgery tomorrow to replace my knee." As we finished, I said: "Can we pray for you?" After an awkward silence, I thought: "I'm going for it," and I just prayed. Then we sent Bruce Swallen down the next morning, and Bruce visited him at 5:30 in the morning. I call that pre- evangelistic pastoral visitation. God is at work. Are you willing to be available for all these opportunities? If you're not, Jesus gives us this warning. It is a powerful warning. He says: "If you're not going to be the salt, and then you are of no value to Me." This is something you never want to hear Jesus say.

Sodium chloride is a very stable substance. It does not lose its essential properties. However, what happens to salt, especially salt in the first century, is this. The majority of salt in Jesus' day was harvested through evaporation from the Dead Sea, and salt from the Dead Sea can lose its saltiness by the presence of magnesium and boron in the water, and over time, it can get mixed with impurities. The Roman philosopher and naturalist Pliny the Elder, a contemporary of Jesus, said this: "Rome does not like to get salt from the Dead Sea as over time it becomes tasteless." It is not that sodium chloride stops being salt. It is that the salt gets mixed in with impurity, and then it is no longer tasty as salt. This is the danger. Martin Luther said:

“There is no great injury or decay in Christendom than when the salt, which should season and salt everything else, has itself lost its taste.”

What often causes us to mix in as impurity is fear. It is compromise with the world or fear of persecution from the world. Augustine, the leader of the church in North Africa in the 4<sup>th</sup> century said this:

“Jesus judges as insipid (tasteless) those who, either in the eager pursuit after abundance of earthly blessings, or through the dread of want, lose the eternal things which can neither be given nor taken away by men.

“Hence the savorless salt is good for nothing, but to be cast out, and trodden under foot of men. It is not therefore he who suffers persecution, but he who is rendered savorless by the fear of persecution, that is trodden under foot of men.”

This is a profound insight. How do you end up thrown out into the street, trodden underfoot? Augustine says it is the person who is compromising with the world, that gets so mixed in with other things that you can't even taste them. Or it's the person who is so fearful of suffering persecution that they try to stay inside the saltshaker and eventually are tossed out. Salt is tasteless when indistinguishable. It is tasteless when hidden away for fear of negative consequence. Salt must be poured out. It must make contact with the food. It must make contact with the person around us. The Lord gives us an almost infinite number of opportunities to season and savor those around us with this unique taste of Jesus Christ.

Stuart Holden, a pastor in England, relates this story. I love this. It was an English soldier who told him this story. Holden was visiting Egypt, and he was going through the English ranks of the military when met a rough man from Scotland, the Scottish Highlands. As he listen to this man, pressed through his accent and his rough demeanor, he realized that this rough highlander was a believing Christian, and he said: “How did you come to know Christ?” He told him this story:

“There was a private in this same company who had been converted in Malta before the regiment continued on to Egypt. We gave that fellow an awful time. The devil had a willing accomplice I me, I confess, and I made that man's life a terrible burden for him. Of course, I did not realize then, as I know now, that I was in the devil's service as I persecuted that poor man. One wet and rainy night, this young soldier, a recent convert to Christianity, came in from his turn at sentry duty. He was very tired and very wet, but before getting into bed he got on his knees to pray. My boots were heavy with mud, and I hit him on one side of the head with my left boot, and then on the other side of his head with the right one, but he simply continued with his prayers. The next morning I was shocked to find my boots beautifully cleaned and polished by my bedside! This was that private's reply to my wicked treatment of him, and it broke my hard heart. That day I repented and turned to God and

Christ.”

The young men never spoke, but his prayer was visible and he responded to persecution by polishing the boots. *“You are salt of the earth,”* Jesus says.

Not only are you salt of the earth, but Jesus gives a second image in Matthew 5:14:

*“You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden.”*

Jesus’ disciples need to hear this. We need to hear this at Kenwood Baptist Church. We are on display, and there's nothing we can do about it. Do you know how the life that we live, the websites that we visit, just accumulate this on-going evolving portrait of who we are? Much more significant than that is that the world around us sees us, sees how we act. We can't hide it. You can't hide the city, Jesus says. It is seen. We had a whole group of family visiting this weekend, and we took them to Kings Island. I haven't been there in a number of years, and I'm still getting over it. We were racing around to what we wanted to do as a family, kind of a tradition to catch the last ride. We ran across the entire park of Kings Island to try to catch the last ride of the Diamondback as the full moon was rising. As we just got into the line before it closed, there were several people there, and this woman thought we ran ahead of her to cut in line. She was furious at me, and she started cursing, calling me all these terrible things. I thought, “Wow,” and tried to explain how we had gotten separated, but she just went ballistic. I don't know if you've noticed, but that's an increasing behavior of our society. It really is. So, how are you going to be salt and light in that setting? I said to her: “Please, go in front of us,” and she said: “I will,” but she continued this tirade. I was taken aback as we were waiting to get on the train, and I realized I was wearing the *For the City, Kenwood Baptist Church* tee shirt, so I couldn't hide. I've got this beam here that says in essence: “Gather around your local pastor,” while he's just accosted and cursed at. I was struggling with what to do. I finally just gathered myself and walked over to her, and I said: “Look, I just want to apologize for any misperception you might have had of us. I'm a pastor in the city, and we had no intention of cutting in front of you, and I don't want you to end your night feeling so upset.” As soon as the words came out of my mouth and I apologized, she just melted, and it was diffused. I realized you can't hide. How can you do that? You can only offer apology and move with forgiveness if you yourself have received it. I'm shameless about offering forgiveness, even if I didn't do anything wrong, because I have been forgiven. So have you if you have trusted in Christ. Jesus will give us countless opportunities to be salt and light in the world. You can't hide it. Jesus uses the image of a lamp. He says in Matthew 5:15:

*“Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house.”*

That's what lights do. Salt seasons, preserves; lights illuminate, and you can't hide it.

Some of you feel on the one hand fearful of persecution. You don't want anyone to think poorly of you. You want to stay in the safety of that glass saltshaker. You want to stay in the relative safety of being underneath the bushel. That is one side of holding yourself back. There's another side of holding yourself back, and that is the super-spiritual response. You say: "I don't want to say anything. I don't want to be seen in any way, because I'm afraid that people will see me and they will think too much of me." Have you ever had that response? "I don't want call attention to myself." It is not the fear of persecution. It's the fear that says almost with self-righteousness: "You know, what I'm doing here so good and so noble, and I just want to stay anonymous." Jesus knows us very well. He knows we are afraid of persecution. We are also afraid sometimes of in our super spirituality, but Jesus tells us not to worry about that. We have no reason to fear people thinking too well of you. In fact, when pour yourself out, when you illuminate, look what happens in Matthew 5:16. It's remarkable what Jesus says:

*"In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven."*

When we let our light shine, and this is true of salt being poured out, people see it. They see the



light; they taste the salt. They see our good works, and what do they do? When they see it, the light comes on and the room is lit up, and people can see the truth and respond to it. The salt is poured out. They taste and see that God is good. They hear that; they see that; and what do they do? They give glory to our Father who is in heaven. They don't even see you and me. They don't even taste you and taste me. The

New Testament says that we are the aroma of Christ. You can smell it; you can taste it, and when the salt is poured out, the taste that people get is not a taste of you and me, it's a taste of Jesus Christ. When the lights come on and people see, they give glory to God, not to us. So don't worry about persecution on the one hand, and don't worry about people's thinking to well of you. They won't even see you. Jesus says you are the salt. What does this mean for us? It means that we must be this, be the salt of the world. Jesus says that the salt has this effect, and notice that the salt can have this effect only if it is poured out. It has to be dumped out of the shaker, if you will. Salt has to make contact with the food.

What have we been learning all summer? We've been learning in various ways of these things: S.A.L.T. Can you remember this with me? **S**tart the conversation; **A**sk questions; **L**isten; and **T**ell the story. There are innumerable ways to start the conversation, entry-level ways like: "Where are you from? What part of town do you enjoy?" I learned from Dave Hansen one of the most

productive questions to ask someone at the very beginning of the conversation. I use this all the time. I ask someone: "What did your father do?" and the answer to that question will open up a world to you. You will find out about someone's family, their home life. You'll find out if they have a good relationship or a bad relationship with their parents. You'll find out a little bit of the context, and most people are disarmed by that question. It can be asked with great sincerity. Sometimes when we ask people "What do you do?" that comes off as just a ranking and posturing. So be careful of that. I also like to ask people: "Tell me what you like about your work." That's nonthreatening. You can be an executive for Procter & Gamble and say: "Let me tell you what I like." You can run the Emergency Room at University Hospital and say: "This is what I like about it." You can be an elementary school teacher; you can run an AV business. It doesn't matter, but if you ask someone: "Tell me what you like about your work," sometimes you get a response. Find some way. With families, I'll often ask: "How did you choose your children's names? Do those names have a meaning?" You find out the beginning of a whole world. Find a way to start the conversation with people around you, then move a little closer and ask some questions: "Are you a person of faith?" "Do you have a positive or negative reaction to the word 'Christian'?" "Would you describe yourself as a religious person?" This is a really safe question to ask in the **A** section. Ask people: "What is most important to you right now in your life?" Don't ask it like it's a pop quiz. Ask it as an invitation, and it opens up a universe of discussion. When that discussion starts happening and you make eye contact with someone and you actually ask them with sincerity, then that's the time for the hardest spiritual discipline of all—it's time to shut up, just be quiet. It's so hard. You start seeing all these ways to present the gospel. Scripture passages pop into your mind. You start thinking of all the things you want to say, but you just have to strap in, be quiet and listen. Where is someone coming from? What do they think? What's holding them back? When you listen to what someone starts to share, you find out where people really are.

The questions we been asking this summer: Does God exist? Can I know Him? Hasn't science made religion unnecessary? Can you really trust the Bible? Has it been transmitted faithfully? Why does God allow such suffering in the world? Why does He allow so much suffering in my life and my family's? Why doesn't God just let me do whatever I want? How can Jesus be the only way to God? Why are Christians so anti-gay? What is going on with that? Why are Christians such hypocrites? Is heaven real? Is hell real? If you listen, you will hear these questions in various forms. So, listen! After you listen for a while, wait, and Jesus will give you an opening to tell the story. It is important make a difference between your own testimony, or your own life story, and telling the story of Christ. My testimony is not my life story. My testimony is legal evidence for the trustworthiness of Christ's story. Sometimes we get on a roll, and we leave people with the impression of what an amazing story that person has, and we never share Christ. In telling your story, you can include what God has done for you, but the

dominant note of telling the story is telling the story of who Jesus is, what He has done, and inviting that person to receive Him. Most of us don't feel comfortable or confident doing that. It doesn't have to be terribly complicated. The man who led me to Christ, I thought he had taken some 10-week course on personal evangelism. I thought he had a full script written out. He told me later his heart was pounding in his chest and he didn't know what he was doing. He just stumbled out: "Jesus Christ died for you, and you can pray to receive Him now." I thought: "Okay," and then he said: "Just follow me and pray after me."

I want to end this morning with it a modeling of S.A.L.T., if you will, from our Lord Jesus Himself. The Gospel of Luke ends with the scene of two men walking along the way on the Road to Emmaus. They were about seven miles from Jerusalem, and they were talking with each other about the daily news. So there was a conversation already happening. While they were talking and discussing together, Jesus Himself drew near to these two, and He went with them and He said to them in Luke 24:17:

*"What is this conversation that you are holding with each other as you walk?"*

He started the conversation. Do you see that? They were already talking, and Jesus came up with proximity, and He started the conversation and simply asked what they were talking about. Can you do that? That's pretty easy to do. They were talking about the news. One of them, Cleopas, kind of insults Jesus. He says in Luke 24:18:

*"Are you the only visitor to Jerusalem who does not know the things that have happened there in these days?"*

It was like saying: "Are you the only one in the city without a newsfeed? Are you just out of the loop?" I remember getting into an elevator at the University Hospital and some men got on with me, and I could tell they were all tech guys. I was feeling intimidated. They were talking with each other about who had *gingerbread* and who didn't. I was thinking about the gingerbread my mom used to make, but I didn't know what they were talking about. I finally mustered up the courage and asked: "What's *gingerbread*?" They explained it was some type of platform technology that was nicknamed *gingerbread*. I still have no idea why, but we started a conversation. These men on the Road to Emmaus responded negatively to Jesus initially. If they responded negatively to the resurrected Jesus as He starts conversation, don't worry about how they react to you. Jesus asked them: "What things?" He doesn't turn to them and say: "You idiots. How do you not know this? Look at Me. That was Me. I died. I rose again. You need to believe or you'll go to hell." That's not what He says. Rather, He says: "Tell Me a little more. What things?" and they start talking, and Jesus starts listening. Jesus hears them talk. They tell Him in Luke 24:19-21:

*"Concerning Jesus of Nazareth, a man who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before*

*God and all the people, and how our chief priests and rulers delivered Him up to be condemned to death, and crucified him. But we had hoped that He was the one to redeem Israel. Yes, and besides all this, it is now the third day since these things happened.”*

Jesus just keeps listening. Talk about divine restraint! Then, after He listens for a while, Jesus finally then tells the story of Himself. He says in Luke 24:25-27:

*“O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into His glory?” And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, He interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself.”*

He told them the story. What happens to these two men? It is often the case that when you start the conversation, it ends incomplete and you don't know. We need to be very careful about seeking quick results. Never schedule 15 minutes of evangelism into your schedule: “Here I am, Lord. I have 15 minutes. Let's convert some people.” We find out what happens to these two men a little later. We also find out later what they experienced during the conversation with Jesus. Luke tells us that later on they reported in Luke 24:32:

*“Did not our hearts burn within us while He talked to us on the road, while He opened to us the Scriptures?”*

We find out later that they meet Jesus, and He is recognized by them, and they had become believers. Their minds are opened. Notice that that is a divine passive. You don't have the power to do that. Their minds are opened, and Jesus is recognized. At the very end of Luke 24, these two men, who were talking and insult Jesus, end up hearing Jesus say: “You are witnesses of these things. You are blessed to be a blessing.”

As we leave today, I want to encourage you to practice on one another. Practice S.A.L.T.: **S**tart a conversation; **A**sk some questions; **L**isten; and **T**ell the story of what Christ has done in you. It's a practicum. Would you pray with me now, and let's embrace as a church this call to be SALT. Let's pray.

Lord Jesus, we extol You this morning. We hear Your Word to be *SALT*, and I pray, Father, that You would help us this week to get over our fear of persecution or fear of being overly-noticed, and that, Lord, we would glorify You. Help us start conversations, ask some questions, listen—and for some of us that will be the hardest part of all—and then tell the story of what You have done. We give You praise. We delight in You, and we ask You to help us to walk by faith, together, side-by-side.

In Jesus' Name, Amen.