

**Parables of Salt and Light**  
**Matthew 5:13-16; Luke 14:33-35**

“You are the salt of the earth, but if salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything except to be thrown out and trampled under people’s feet. “You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. 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. 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.” (English Standard Version – ESV)

**Background:**

- The theme is this: a disciple of the kingdom who does not live like a disciple of the kingdom is worth about as much as tasteless salt or invisible light.
- Some scholars have emphasized different uses of salt in ancient times, such as a preservative or an agent regularly added to manure. Yet, the use of salt in this parable is as a seasoning agent: “if salt has become tasteless.” In Greek, “become tasteless” can also mean “become foolish.”
- Although salt recovered from impure salt substances taken from the Dead Sea could dissolve, leaving only the impurities behind, the point here is closer to that expressed by a rabbi at the end of the first century. When asked how one could make salt-less salt salty again, the rabbi replied that one should salt it with the afterbirth of a mule. Mules are sterile, so they have no afterbirth; thus, the rabbi was saying that those who ask a stupid question get a stupid answer.
- Jewish tradition considered Israel and Jerusalem (as well as God and His Law) to be the light of the world (Isaiah 42:6; 49:6); thus, “city,” as used here, may be Jerusalem. It could also be any elevated city at night, whose torch lights would make it visible to the surrounding countryside.
- The small wicker oil lamps of this period gave little light in the average home, which had few windows, so lamps were most effective when set on a lampstand. Something large placed over them would presumably extinguish the light entirely.

**Questions:**

- + How does the use of salt as a food preservative apply to followers of Jesus Christ?  
How does the use of salt as a food seasoning agent apply to followers of Jesus Christ?  
Of those two spiritual applications of salt, which one is most significant to you, and why?  
With that particular application in view, how might your spiritual saltiness be enhanced?
- + What are the properties of light, and how should each property relate to followers of Jesus?  
Of the properties of light that relate to believers, which is most significant to you, and why?  
With that particular property in view, how might the light in you be more apparent to others?
- + If Jesus said, “I am the light of the world” (John 8:12, 9:5), but in this parable Matthew says, “Let your light shine before others,” how does “your light” compare or contrast to his light?