You Already Are the Light

MATTHEW 5:13-16 (BSB) · SMALL-GROUP LESSON · DIGDEEPER.AI

The Big Idea

Jesus doesn't tell you to go make yourself useful and bright. He looks at ordinary people and says you already are salt and you already are light, and the only real question is whether you're going to keep hiding it.

Opening Lines

Hold up your phone with the flashlight on and drop it in your pocket. Ask the room: what good is a light nobody can see? That's the whole passage in one gesture.

Before You Teach

- Goal: Get the room to hear Jesus say 'you ARE' instead of 'you should' — salt and light are what they already are, not a project to complete. Success is someone naming one place they've been hiding the light under a basket.
- If you're short on time, cut: Cut the extended salt-and-salary history if time is short. The identity point ('you are, not become') is the hill to die on, not the trivia.
- Where the moment lives: In the moment a person admits where their faith goes invisible — the corner they cut at work, the faith they keep hidden at home. That confession, not the salt facts, is where the room changes.
- Your prep: Read verses 13-16 out loud three times until the word 'are' lands on you personally. Come knowing your own hidden basket before you ask them for theirs.

Run It In Your Setting

The same lesson, sequenced three ways. Pick the one that fits your group and your clock.

CLASSROOM · ~20 PEOPLE · 45 MINUTES

Salt-tasting opening (5) → read 13-16 out loud, slowly (3) → teach the word mōranthē with the palm-and-blow image (8) → questions 1, 2, 4 with write-then-speak (18) → commitments out loud around the room (7) → pray back their named baskets (4). Transformation lives in question 4 when someone wrestles with works-that-glorify-God-not-me. Cut first: the salt/salary history — keep the tasting, drop the lecture.

SMALL GROUP · ~8 PEOPLE · 60 MINUTES

'I'll feel like a good Christian when...' opening (8) → read 13-16 (3) → teach the word (7) → all five questions, going deep on 3 with a full seven-second silence (30) → commitments, one basket each said out loud (8) → pray their actual words back (4). Transformation lives in question 3 — the hidden-basket confession. Cut first: question 4 if time is tight; protect the confession and the commitment.

COFFEE · 2-3 FRIENDS · 30 MINUTES

Your own honest corner-cutting confession (4) → read 13-16 together (2) → the 'are, not become' point in plain words (5) → questions 3 and 5 only, personal and slow (15) → each name one baster and pray a sentence for each other (4). Transformation lives in your going first — your confession buys theirs. Cut first: nothing; just go slower on fewer questions.

One Thing Deeply

Here's a habit for every lesson you'll ever teach — this week we drill it deliberately. You will be tempted to teach everything in this passage: salt as salary, salt in the covenant, light in Isaiah, the city on the hill, the lamp on the stand. Resist it. Pick ONE thing and go deep enough that people can't shake it. This week, the one thing is the little word 'are.' Not 'become,' not 'try to be' — 'you ARE the light of the world.' Teach that one word until the whole room feels the pressure come off. Remember week 1 we practiced going first and going real, and week 2 we practiced the discipline of silence. This week the rep is subtraction: leave four good points on the cutting-room floor so one point actually lands. A lesson that says one thing unforgettably beats a lesson that says six things forgettably.

Why This Passage Matters

Most people in your room are quietly exhausted from trying to be better Christians. They hear 'shine your light' as one more assignment they're failing. Then Jesus opens his mouth and does something they never expected: before he asks for a single good work, he tells a hillside of fishermen and tax collectors what they already are. Salt. Light. Not someday. Now. The verbs are flat statements of fact. That reordering is the entire logic of the gospel packed into two metaphors — grace first, then works flow out of it. If your people walk out believing they have to manufacture radiance, you've taught them the opposite of what Jesus said. If they walk out knowing the light was already kindled in them by someone else, and their only job is to stop hiding it, you've handed them relief they didn't know was available. And there's weight here: salt stops rot in a dying world, light draws every eye to the Father. Ordinary people are load-bearing walls in God's plan to keep the world from spoiling. You get to be the one who tells them that this week. Not many jobs come with that.

Catch the Fire First

Before you teach a word of this, do the central exercise on yourself. Sit down this week and name one place your own faith goes invisible — the corner you'd cut at work if nobody looked, the prayer you skip when the kids can hear, the credit you keep for yourself. Write it down. Feel how uncomfortable it is to say out loud. Because that discomfort is exactly what you're going to ask the room to walk into, and you have no business asking them to go somewhere you haven't gone first. If you show up having already found your own basket, your invitation will have teeth. If you haven't, they'll smell

the abstraction.

Bring Your Own Story

- A time you cut a corner nobody would ever have caught — and what it did to your sense of being 'salty.'
- A moment someone thanked you for a kindness and you had a split second to either take the credit or point it upward.
- A place at home where your faith stayed hidden until someone close to you finally saw it plainly.
- SAMPLE (polished vs. real): Polished — 'I've learned to always give God the glory in my daily walk.' Real — 'My coworker thanked me for covering her shift and I almost said no problem, but I said God's been good to me, and she just went quiet.'
- Guardrail: tell it real, not raw — a story with a scar healed over, not a wound still bleeding on the table.

Three Ways to Open

CLASSROOM: "Bring a small dish of salt and pass it around. Ask everyone to taste a grain. Then say: 'Salt was so valuable in the Roman world that our word salary may come from it. Jesus told a room of poor fishermen: that's what YOU are to the world.' Let the strangeness of being called valuable sit for a second before you read the text."

A physical object anchors an abstract idea in the body before the mind argues.

SMALL GROUP: "Go around and ask: 'Finish this sentence — I'll feel like a good Christian when I finally _____.' Let the answers pile up, all the somedays and not-yets. Then read verse 14: 'You ARE the light of the world.' Present tense. Ask what changes when Jesus says are instead of when-you-finally."

A question about identity disarms the room before content arrives.

COFFEE: "Over coffee, say: 'There's a spot at work where cutting a corner would be so easy and nobody would ever know. I've been thinking about it all week because of this verse.' Then read verse 13 about salt losing its flavor. Ask: 'Where's yours?'"

One honest confession from you gives the other person permission to be honest back.

Teaching the Word

Teach the word behind 'lost its flavor.' The Greek is *mōranthē* — from the same root that gives us 'moron.' It literally means to become foolish, dull, insipid. When salt loses its flavor, Jesus isn't picturing salt that got weaker. He's picturing salt that became a fool — that forgot what it was for. Here's the physical image: hold a tiny pinch of salt in your open palm and blow on it, watch it scatter. That's 'trampled by men' — swept out onto the road, mixed with dirt, indistinguishable. The tragedy isn't that the salt got tired. It's that it stopped being salt while still looking like salt in the shaker. Ask the room: what does a

Christian look like who still shows up but has stopped tasting like anything? Then read the keepable line and stop talking: 'Let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.' [Hold the silence. Count to seven. Do not rescue it.]

Discussion Questions

1. Jesus says 'you ARE the salt' and 'you ARE the light' — present tense, before they've done anything. What's the difference between being told you ARE something and being told you should BECOME it?

Coaching note: This is the whole lesson. Don't rush past it to application. Let two or three people feel the relief of it before you move on.

If it stalls: Yes-or-no way in: 'Do you usually hear Christian teaching as you-should or as you-are? Which one is louder in your head?'

2. Salt that 'lost its flavor' is salt that stopped being salt while still sitting in the shaker. What does that look like in an actual Christian's life?

Coaching note: Watch for people describing OTHER Christians. Gently steer to first person: 'Where does that show up in you?' Don't let it become a griping session about hypocrites.

If it stalls: More concrete: 'Can you think of a habit or a corner where you've quietly stopped being different from everyone else?'

3. A lamp goes 'on a stand,' not 'under a basket.' Where in your life is your faith under a basket — real to you but invisible to the people closest to you?

Coaching note: This is the confession question. After you ask it, go silent and count to seven. If YOU jump in first with your own hidden basket (you prepped it), you make it safe for everyone else.

If it stalls: More personal and easier: 'At home, do your people actually SEE your faith, or does it mostly happen in private?'

4. The point of the shining is that people 'glorify your Father' — not you. How is it even possible to do visible good works without it becoming about you looking good?

Coaching note: This is the tension the passage lives in. Don't resolve it too neatly. The 'borrowed light / the moon has no fire' image from the gospel card is your best tool here.

If it stalls: Concrete: 'When someone thanks you for something kind — what do you actually say? What COULD you say that points up instead of at you?'

5. If Jesus already declared what you are, and the only job is to stop hiding it — what's the one basket you're going to take the light out from under this week?

Coaching note: This is the commitment. Don't accept vague answers ('be more bold'). Push for one place, one person, one action. Write them down; you'll pray them back at the end.

If it stalls: Easier: 'Name one place this week where it would be easy to hide and hard to shine. Just name the place.'

Questions You May Hear

"Why would salt lose its flavor? Isn't salt just salt?"

In that world salt was often impure, mixed with other minerals, so the actual salt could leach out and leave you with a tasteless residue that looked like salt but did nothing. Jesus is picturing something that keeps the appearance but loses the substance.

"Isn't calling ourselves 'the light of the world' arrogant, since Jesus says that about himself in John?"

That's exactly the point — it's borrowed light. Jesus is the light of the world in John 8:12; when he calls his followers light, they're the moon reflecting a sun they didn't make. The glory runs back to him, not to us.

"What did salt have to do with worship or the covenant?"

The Law commanded that every grain offering be seasoned with salt, and God called it 'the salt of the covenant.' Salt sealed agreements and marked things set apart for God, so being 'salt' means being a covenant people, not just adding flavor.

"Doesn't 'that they may see your good deeds' contradict Jesus telling us to give in secret later in this same sermon?"

No — the difference is the target. Here the works are seen so people glorify the Father; the secret-giving warning is against works done so people admire YOU. Same visibility, opposite destination for the credit.

For Experienced Leaders

- When nobody did the reading — and with a passage this short, someone always assumes they don't need to — don't scold. Guilt makes adults quietly stop coming. Just say 'let's take it fresh, someone read verses 13 to 16 slowly,' and read it cold in the room. Reading it live on equal footing is often better than half-remembered homework anyway, and it welcomes the newcomer.
- This passage is famous, so people arrive thinking they already know it. Your job is to make the word 'are' strange again. If they leave saying 'I never noticed he doesn't say become,' you won.
- The confession question (3) will die if you fill the silence. Prep your own hidden basket beforehand and be ready to name it first — then wait. Your discomfort going first is the price of admission for theirs.

Landing the Lesson

Commitments: Go around the room and have each person say out loud one basket they're taking the light out from under this week — one place at work, one thing at home, one conversation. One sentence each. Saying it out loud makes it real.

Close by praying out loud over the actual baskets people just named — the specific corner at work, the specific silence at home. Don't reach for a written prayer; say their own words back to God and ask him for the courage to uncover what they named.

If you run out of time: If the room only gets to question 3 and someone finally admits a real hidden basket, stay there. That confession is worth more than finishing your outline. Don't drag them to question 5 to feel complete.

Midweek follow-up: Midweek, text each person one line: 'How's that basket you named? Did the light get out?' No sermon, just the question.

Free at digdeeper.ai/devotionals/matthew/5-13-16/lesson

Handout

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During the lesson:

- Finish the sentence: 'I'll feel like a good enough Christian when I finally _____.'
- Jesus says you ARE the light — present tense, before you've done anything. What changes in you when it's 'are' instead of 'should be'?
- Name one basket — one place your faith is real to you but invisible to the people closest to you:
- When someone thanks you for a kindness this week, write here the one sentence you could say that points the credit up to God:
- The one basket I'm taking the light out from under this week:

Take-home actions:

- At work: pick one place where cutting a corner would be easy and unseen, and do the honest thing anyway — turn in the accurate number, admit the mistake, finish the task you were tempted to fake.
- At home tonight: let your family see your faith plainly — pray out loud before the meal, apologize first after an argument, thank God where your kids can hear you.
- In conversation: when someone thanks you, gently point the credit up — 'I'm just grateful God's been good to me' turns a compliment into a signpost.

Someone near you today is watching your ordinary faithfulness more closely than you know.