

Title: Reaching the World
Text: Matthew 5:13-16; 28:18-20
Main Point: How Christians can “reach the world” in service to God.
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Series: Castine’s 5 values

REACHING THE WORLD: INTRODUCTION

On August 8, 2012, while serving in Afghanistan, Captain Florent Groberg was leading a security detail escorting senior American and Afghan leaders. When he noticed a suspicious man approaching the group, he immediately placed himself between the threat and those he was assigned to protect. Realizing the man was wearing a suicide vest, he rushed forward and physically pushed the attacker away from the formation, despite the danger to himself. The bomber detonated moments later, severely wounding Groberg, but his actions disrupted a coordinated attack and saved many lives. [cmohs.org], [mohmuseum.org]

Captain Groberg suffered the loss of 45% of his left calf; significant nerve damage; a blown eardrum; and a mild traumatic brain injury. He spent three years recovering at Walter Reed National Military Medical Center. Captain Groberg medically retired from the Army in 2015. He received the Medal of Honor for his heroic actions of duty, honor, and self-sacrifice.

As I speak today about the ultimate purpose of Castine’s goals and values, “to reach the world,” I face significant challenges. One challenge is those who have forgotten duty, honor, and self-sacrifice to their Savior, the One whom they are to serve. They no longer reflect on God’s expectations for them to reach His world. Heaven will be their home, and that is “good enough.”

Another challenge is the group mesmerized by cultural chatter. They no longer feel the pressure of eternity, that some will not be in heaven, perhaps some in their own family. The overpowering voices of shows, sports, social media, and popular culture have “quenched” (1 Thessalonians 5:19) the Holy Spirit’s convictions. This group focuses primarily on its priorities, not God’s.

A final challenge I face is the group that may not know Jesus’ expectation for reaching the world or how to accomplish His commission. No one has taught them biblically of their responsibility to reach the world or how to do it.

As I begin, I want you to know I have each group in mind. I have no illusion that I, personally, can move any group closer to God’s design. My only hope is to handle God’s word accurately so the Holy Spirit can work in your inner life and transform you to reach the world.

I find Paul’s words to Timothy helpful at this point: “Share in suffering as a good soldier of Christ Jesus. No soldier gets entangled in civilian pursuits, since his aim is to please the one who enlisted him” (2 Timothy 2:3-4). We please our commanding officer, Jesus, by offering Him our duty, honor, and self-sacrifice to reach the world.

REACHING THE WORLD: MATTHEW 5:13

1. This verse fits into a section of the Bible often called the “Sermon on the Mount.”

- 1.1. “Of the five discourses of Jesus in Matthew, the Sermon on the Mount (chaps. 5–7) is the first, the longest, and the most prominent. Following Matthew’s introduction to the person of Jesus (1:1–4:25), the sermon comprises the first words of Jesus to confront the reader and because of the arrangement of the canon, it holds the place of honor in the New Testament. Since the postapostolic age it has attracted more attention than any other section of the Bible and was considered the quintessential expression of Jesus’ teachings. The study of its interpretations is the history of the development of theology. Luke’s parallel, the Sermon on the Plain (6:17–49), with its 33 verses compared to Matthew’s 107 or 109, does not match its detail, organization, complexity of interpretation, and unequivocal demands. Luke locates many parallels to Matthew’s Sermon in other episodes of Jesus’ life and not his Sermon on the Plain. Where Matthew’s Sermon has the Lord’s Prayer as part of a general instruction given by Jesus to the disciples (6:9), Luke has the disciples asking Jesus to follow the example of John the Baptist who taught his disciples to pray (11:1). Mark has no similar discourse and his parallels are few (4:21, 24–25; 9:43–48; 11:25).” (David P. Scaer, “Sermon on the Mount,” in *Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, electronic ed., Baker Reference Library (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1996), 723)
2. In this verse, Jesus speaks to creation by the word “earth.”
 - 2.1. By “earth,” Jesus means the sphere of human existence. No place on the planet exists where His followers do not implement His values and mission. In this verse is His followers’ mission statement.
3. Christians are “the salt of the earth” (5:13).
 - 3.1. The Greek word translated “lost its taste” is *μωραίνω*, meaning: “make tasteless” [in the passive form, the use here]. (William Arndt et al., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 663.)
 - 3.2. “Various scholars have emphasized different uses of salt in antiquity, such as a preservative or an agent regularly added to manure; but the use of salt here is as a flavoring agent: “if salt has become tasteless [see below for a different understanding] . . . Real salt does not lose its saltiness; but if it did, what would you do to restore its salty flavor—salt it? Unsalty salt was worthless.” (Craig S. Keener, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993), Mt 5:13.)
 - 3.3. “Has lost its taste is difficult to interpret. Salt that is used for food does not lose its taste or its saltiness even if unused for a long period of time. This expression must therefore refer to the salt being diluted or somehow mixed with other substances so that it becomes ineffective. . . . Scholars have suggested many possible explanations. One is that Jesus is referring to salt being mixed with other substances, making it no longer effective. Another is that the salt retrieved from the Dead Sea contains other substances, and that if the salt is washed out and lost, only those worthless substances are left. . . . We must not assume that Jesus and his disciples knew nothing of the properties of salt.

Instead, it is important to recognize the function of this saying of Jesus. First, it is better to regard the figure of salt as referring to preservation of food rather than to improving the taste, although both may be involved. . . . Second, he is saying that the disciples are the people who have the spiritual knowledge, wisdom, and way of life by which to preserve this world in a proper condition, and it is not the religious leaders or government officials who can do it. Third, he is warning his followers against a useless discipleship, one that is weak or diluted so as to become ineffective.” (Barclay Moon Newman and Philip C. Stine, *A Handbook on the Gospel of Matthew*, UBS Handbook Series (New York: United Bible Societies, 1992), 118–19.)

- 3.4. I see no reason for the interpreter to debate the fine point of salt. I agree that salt’s primary uses in biblical culture were preservation and seasoning. Both ideas fit the context well. Jesus intends His followers to preserve culture from decay with His truth and, consequently, bring God’s seasoning to His world. I believe Jesus taught through a common method of hyperbole: He knew salt could not lose its saltiness; the thought was so radical that it would draw attention to His point: If His followers are not promoting His agenda on earth, they have lost a significant purpose for their existence.
4. *For those in my class, Living By the Book, I have completed “observation” and “interpretation,” and now I move to “application.”*
5. If Christians are to preserve and flavor the world, they should be aware of certain things.
 - 5.1. Christians lose their “taste” when a distinction between them and the culture blurs. If they differ little from the culture, why would the culture notice? If your anxiety level, perseverance in adversity, hope, and joy are similar to those of an atheist, how can you change the culture around you?
 - 5.2. Christians lose their “taste” when they lack the spiritual power to overcome evil spiritual forces. The fullness of the Holy Spirit (power) is in direct proportion to holiness (increasingly being like Jesus).
 - 5.3. Christians lose their “taste” when they are not being transformed. Only consistent growth in the Bible enables Christian to fulfill their role as salt in an evil culture.
 - 5.4. I think it is helpful, at this point, for you to ponder Jesus’ words: “Whoever seeks to preserve his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life will keep it” (Luke 17:33). When Christians release their life to become salt to the culture, they find their spiritual life with all its meaning.

REACHING THE WORLD: MATTHEW 5:14-16

1. Salt, unlike light, is often unseen yet makes a difference. In this context, light directs those lost in a world of “darkness.”
 - 1.1. By “world,” Jesus refers to every human being. All humans bear His image, and His great love for all seeks to rescue them from a dark world.
 - 1.2. “Jewish tradition considered Israel (Is 42:6; 49:6) and Jerusalem (as well as God and the law) the light of the world. The ‘city’ here may thus be Jerusalem; or it may 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; they would be most effective by being set on a lampstand. Something large placed over them would presumably extinguish the light altogether.” (Craig S. Keener, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993), Mt 5:14-16.)
 - 1.3. “Again we have an emphatic You as words are introduced that apply not to people at large but to those committed to Jesus. The light of the world implies that the world is in darkness (despite its continuing claims to enlightenment!). It is an expression applied to Jesus (John 8:12; 9:5; cf. John 12:35); thus it is interesting to find it used also of his followers. The sense is, of course, quite different; Christ is himself the light, whereas his followers are no more than pointers to and reflectors of Christ the Light (they are “light in the Lord,” Eph. 5:8, and they shine “as lights in the world,” Phil. 2:15). But in this way they bring the light to the world and the world to the light in a way that would not take place apart from them. World in this verse, like earth in the previous verse, points to no small and mean task. The task of the disciples is to bring light to the whole world. Jesus goes on to point out that, being who and what they are, giving light is inevitable. It is quite impossible for a city set on a hill to be hidden. Its situation makes concealment impossible. The disciples are not to be worldly people, indistinguishable from the people among whom they live.” (Leon Morris, *The Gospel according to Matthew, The Pillar New Testament Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI; Leicester, England: W.B. Eerdmans; Inter-Varsity Press, 1992), 104–5.)
2. When applying “light,” Christians should consider the strength of their light.
 - 2.1. Question: If your children and grandchildren follow your “light,” where does it take them?
 - 2.2. Question: What “good [godly] works” does your “light” display to a dark world?
 - 2.3. Question: What about your “light” would cause someone to wonder about the God you serve?

REACHING THE WORLD: MATTHEW 28:18-20

3. I finish with the commanding officer's orders:
 - 3.1. "And Jesus came and said to them, 'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.'"
 - 3.2. I end where I began: Reaching the world requires faithful disciples who understand "duty, honor, and self-sacrifice" for Jesus.