Lord Jesus, in you are hidden all of the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. Enlighten our minds by your Holy Spirit and grant us that reverence and humility without which no man can understand your truth. For your name’s sake, amen.

Well, we began last week our studies in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus’s portrait of Jesus’s people, with an introduction and with the Beatitudes. And as I was a little hurried in my conclusion, I thought I’d just enlarge on it a little bit. And so that the standards and the perspective of Jesus with regards to what the “good life” is are totally at variance with the standards and the perspective of the world. And the eight beatitudes, makes this abundantly plain. I could sum it up by saying that the world judges the rich blessed, not the poor, whether in material or in spiritual affairs. The world judges the happy-go-lucky and the carefree blessed, not those who take evil seriously and mourn over it. The world judges the strong and the brash blessed, not the meek or gentle; the full, not the hungry; those who mind their own business, not those who meddle in other man’s matters or occupy their time in do-goodery whether in sharing mercy or in peacemaking. The world judges blessed those who attend their own ends, even if necessary by devious means, not the pure in heart who refuse to compromise their integrity. And again, the world judges blessed those who are secure and popular and live at ease and not those who have to suffer or to be persecuted.

And if one puts them in opposites in that way, I think one sees clearly how Jesus Christ challenges the standards of the world and requires totally different standards in the citizens of His kingdom. Indeed, one would have to go further and say that this reversal of human standards is fundamental to biblical Christianity. The ways of the God of Scripture appear to be topsy-turvy to mankind. God exhorts the humble and abases the proud. He calls the first last and the last first. He ascribes greatness to the servant. He sends the rich away empty, and He declares the meek to be His heirs.

And it needs a real mental revolution in order to thinkbiblically,
to think in a godly way, as opposed to a worldly way, and we are constantly, of course, exposed through television and the other mass media to the insidious standards of the world. And we need constantly to check our standards by the standards of Christ. And I think I finished last week by saying that in a word Jesus congratulates those whom the world most pities and calls the world’s rejects blessed.

And that brings us to our subject today, which follows very naturally from it: the two metaphors of the salt and the light in verses 13 to 16. A short paragraph, perhaps to occupy us for a whole hour, but one which shows great implications, and I have to draw some of these out this afternoon.

If the Beatitudes describe the essential character of the citizens of God’s kingdom, the salt and light metaphors indicate their influence for good in the world. And speaking of the influence of such people, should, I think, immediately bring us up with a start. Influence did you say? Influence for good? What possible influence in the community can people like this have, the people described in the Beatitudes? What influence can they exert in this tough, harsh world? Many ask this question. They don’t follow Christ because they think they can’t do anything in the world. If they do, what lasting good can the poor and the meek and mourners do? Those who try to make peace and not war? Wouldn’t they simply be overwhelmed by the flood-tide of evil? What can they accomplish; men whose only appetite is a passion for righteousness and whose only weapons are mercy and purity of heart? Aren’t they too feeble to achieve anything, especially if they’re a small minority in the world?

Well, it’s against that background of thinking that I hope we’ll encourage one another by seeing that the Lord Jesus was of a very different opinion. And He goes on immediately from the last beatitude which tells us that the world may persecute the church, to the church’s calling to serve the world in verses 13 to 16. As Rudolf Stier says in his great volumes on The Words of the Lord Jesus, “This must be your only retaliation; that is, if the world persecutes you, this must be your only retaliation—love and truth for hatred and lies.”

Now I want you to try and picture the scene as Jesus was surrounded by not just the apostles, but, no doubt, many hundreds of other people. Disciples or would-be disciples gathered on the Mount of Beatitudes listening to this sustained teaching over a period time. And no doubt, they were a group of largely illiterate Palestinian peasants. They were certainly not university graduates or even undergraduates. They were not VIPs in the bud let alone in the
bloom. And yet of these people Jesus said, “You are the light of the world, and you are the salt of the earth.” What these illiterate Palestinian peasants who couldn’t put two words one after the other, the salt of the earth and the light of the world, incredible as it may sound, this is what Jesus said.

It’s also amazing, if I may digress just for a moment, that in this gospel, the first gospel, the most Jewish of all four gospels, there should be this reference to the whole earth and to the worldwide influence of the disciples of Christ.

Well, Jesus used these two domestic metaphors in order to describe the influence of His people in the world and very simple metaphors they are; every household, both then and now, has used salt and light. However poor the home might be. However reduced in circumstances the family might be, light and salt are essential in the home. And the boy Jesus, must, in the Nazareth home, often have watched his mother both use salt in the kitchen and light the lamps in the evening when the sun went down. Salt and light then are essential household commodities. Light to dispel the darkness of the night and salt, both as an essential component of our diet and especially, and more important in days before refrigeration, for preservative purposes to keep meat wholesome and to prevent decay. That was the major use of salt in those pre-refrigerator days. Salt and light. Even Pliny wrote, “There is nothing more useful than salt and sunshine.”

Now what is common to both these metaphors, is this: that they set the church and the world apart as essentially distinct communities. They set the church and the world over against each other, for on the one hand there is what Jesus calls “the earth,” and on the other hand, there is “you” who are to be the earth’s salt. Or again, on the one hand, there is what Jesus calls “the world,” the totality of mankind, and on the other again, there is “you” who are to be the world’s light.

Now this is a simple but important part in these days in which the distinction between the church and the world is being blurred by many theologians and there are many liberal and radical theologians who are wanting to call all mankind “the people of God.” But Jesus here, and of course in John 17 in His great intercessory prayer before He suffered and died, makes it very clear that there are two distinct communities. There in John 17 He says, “I pray not at this moment for the world (that is the secular community), but for these whom you have given me out of the world, for they are thine and you’ve given them to me.” Here, again, is a very clear delineation of two communities: the larger one,—the world, and the smaller chosen out of the world,
—the people of God who belong to Christ, and it is these people in the wider world who are the earth’s salt and the world’s light.

Further, these metaphors tell us something about both communities. We’ve seen they’re distinct from each other, and the two metaphors tell us something about the communities. First, the world. The world is evidently a dark place with little or no light of its own, so that an external source of light is needed in order to illumine it. That’s why He says, “You are the light the world needs; the world is dark without you.” That tells me something about the world. It’s a dark place. The other metaphor tells me that the world manifests a constant tendency to deteriorate. A constant tendency to putrefy; that’s why it needs salt. The world cannot stop itself from going bad. It needs you, Jesus said to His people. “You are the earth’s salt. You must stop it going bad.” So that tells me a lot about the world; —it’s dark and it’s putrefying.

But it tells me something also about the other community, —the church, —which is set in the world with this double role. As sort, to arrest or at least to hinder the process of social decay, and there’s light to illumine the darkness.

Well that’s an introduction, really, to these verses, and I want us now to look in greater detail at both the metaphors, and you’ll see that both are worded in order deliberately to be parallel to one another. They are very similar; they are very parallel statements. In each case, Jesus first makes an affirmation, “You are the salt of the earth. You are the light of the world.” He begins with an affirmation.

But then, secondly, He adds a condition or rider, the condition on which the affirmation depends; that is, “You are the salt of the earth,” is the affirmation, but the salt must return its saltness. That’s the condition, if the affirmation is to be true. Again, “You are the light of the world,” is the affirmation, but you must let your light shine. That’s the condition on which the affirmation depends.

Salt is good for nothing if it’s saltness is lost. Light is good for nothing if the light is concealed. And I want us to look at the relation between the affirmation and the condition in both cases. Firstly, then, we’ll take the first matter for the salt of the earth, verse 13. The affirmation, “You are the salt of the earth.” The New English Bible, “You are salt to the earth” or to the world, actually the NEB puts.

Now what this means then is that when each of these two communities that we’ve distinguished from each other, when
each of the two communities is true to itself and its own nature, the world decays like rotten meat or fish, while the church can hinder its decay. That is the fundamental teaching, isn’t it? That when the communities are true to each other, the world decays and the church can hinder its decay. The church can be salt to stop the world from putrefying.

Now, of course, God has set other restraining influences in the secular community. He has Himself established certain institutions in His common grace; that is, His favor shown to all mankind, irrespective of whether they are redeemed or not. And He has established these institutions in order to curve man’s selfish tendencies and to prevent society from slipping into anarchy. For example, there is the institution of the state. The powers that be are ordained of God, and God’s purpose in instituting the state and the judiciary and the police and so on, and all the instruments of the state, if they’re rightly used, is to punish the evil, reward the good, and to seek to hinder the world from lapsing into its own utter self-centeredness and decadence.

There is also His institution of marriage and the home and family life, which is a creation ordinance. Marriage hasn’t only to do with Christians and redeemed people, marriage was instituted in Genesis 2 before the fall of man. It was God’s purpose in the beginning, and it continues to be a divine ordinance. And it’s an institution that helps to sanctify human love, even in those who are not redeemed. So there are these other restraining influences of God in the secular community. They have a wholesome influence.

Nevertheless, God intends the most powerful of all restraints within sinful society to be His own redeemed, regenerate, and righteous people. Professor Tasker puts it in his commentary, “The disciples are to be a model disinfectant in a world where moral standards are low, constantly changing, or nonexistent.” Page 63 of his commentary.

Well, that’s the affirmation: “You are the salt of the earth.” Now the condition. He goes on to say, “If salt has lost its taste, how can its saltiness be restored. It’s no longer good for anything except to be thrown out and trodden under foot by men.” That is obvious; if salt is to be effective and arresting the putrefying process, it must return its saltiness.

Now I’m no chemist, as some of you may be, but understand from our rather amateur inquiries on these matters, that sodium chloride itself cannot be changed. At least it is an exceedingly stable chemical compound and it is resistant to almost every attack
upon itself. But nevertheless, salt or sodium chloride can become contaminated through mixture with impurities, and when it then becomes contaminated with these impure elements, it becomes useless and in some cases even dangerous, so the desalted salt or contaminated salt whose saltiness is disturbed is unfit even for manure, even for fertilizer on the soil.

So to a Christian. What is Christian saltiness? Surely there is only one answer to that question. It’s Christian character as exhibited in the Beatitudes. We’ve got to be a people like that if we want to be the salt of the earth, and Christian saltiness is Christian character, Christlikeness of character and conduct. Committed Christian discipleship. Jesus refers to this and uses the same metaphor in Luke 14:34, “Salt is good, but if salt has lost its taste, how shall it’s saltiness be restored. It’s fit neither for the land nor for the dung hill. Men throw it away.” And that comes just after the passage in which He has said, “Unless you’re willing to renounce all that you have and even hate your parents (that is, put Me before them) and take up your cross and follow Me, you cannot be My disciple.” He’s setting high standards of Christian discipleship, of total commitment to Jesus. And then He comes again immediately to the salt metaphor, so that saltiness means committed Christian discipleship.

For effectiveness, then, the Christian must retain His Christlikeness, just as salt must retain its saltiness, and the Christian must not become contaminated by the impurities of the world. If he does become assimilated to the world, if his Christian sodium chloride becomes contaminated with impurities in the secular community, then he loses his influence for good.

So let’s learn this important lesson that the influence of Christians in and on society depends on our being distinct rather than on our being identical. We must identify with the world in all things not sinful, but otherwise our influence depends on being distinct, on being like Christ rather than like the world; godly rather than worldly. Otherwise, we’re useless. We might just as well be discarded like saltless salt, thrown out and trodden under foot. “But what a downcome,” says Professor A. B. Bruce in his commentary commenting on trodden underfoot. “What a downcome, from being saviors of society to supplying materials for foot paths.”

So much for the salt of the earth. Now let’s look at the light of the world, verses 14 to 16. The affirmation first, “You are the light of the world.” True. Jesus was later to say as recorded in John 8:12, “I am the light of the world.” But by derivation, we are the world’s light too, shining with the light of Christ. We are to shine in the
world like stars in the night sky. Full text of the metaphor, I don’t know if you know the verse in Philippians 2:15 when he says they are to be “obedient children, holding forth the word of life,” and in the midst of an adulterous and crooked generation, “a man whom you shine like stars.” It’s rather a lovely concept really. If you sometimes go out on a clear night when there are no clouds in the sky and you look up into the sky. Think of Christians in the dark world like that. I sometimes think how good it would be if secular people came up to us and said, “Twinkle, twinkle little star. How I wonder what you are.” And if they saw, in fact, that we shone with a light, which they don’t altogether whose source, they don’t altogether recognize or understand.

Well what this light is, Jesus clarifies as good works. Verse 16, “Let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works.” The light which they see is the good works we do that manifest our Christian character. It’s only fair, I think, to add that since light is a common biblical symbol for truth, the Christian shining light is more than his character and conduct and good works, and will include his spoken testimony as well.

And, thus, the Old Testament prophecy that the servant of the Lord; you know, the servant songs in Isaiah, that the servant of the Lord would be a light to lighten the Gentiles or the nations is applied in the New Testament both to Christ Himself and to Christians who bear witness to Christ. Thus, it’s applied to Christ, for example, by the aged Simeon who took the baby Jesus in his arms in the temple and referred to Him as the “light to lighten the nations and the glory of Thy people Israel.” So he saw in this baby in his arms, God’s salvation, the light that God had given to give light to all the darkened nations.

But this same verse is applied by the apostle Paul in his first missionary journey to the missionary outreach of the church, so that when he preached in the first missionary journey that great sermon recorded in Acts 13 in the synagogue in Pisidian Antioch and the Jews rejected his message, Paul and Barnabas spoke out boldly saying,

“It was necessary that the word of God should be spoken first to you. Since you thrust it from you, and judge yourselves unworthy of eternal life, behold, we turn to the Gentiles. For so the Lord has commanded us, saying, ‘I have set you to be a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring salvation to the uttermost parts of the earth.’

Again, quoting the same text from Isaiah.
So the fact that Christ says, “I am the light of the world,” and says, “You are the light of the world,” is consistent with this double fulfillment of that Old Testament prophecy. So that’s the affirmation.

Now the condition: “Let your light shine.” Just as salt can lose its saltiness, so the light in us can become darkness. A phrase Jesus uses in the next chapter of Matthew, verse 23. “But we are to let our light shine before men.” He gives two illustrations in verse 14: like “a city that’s built on a hill and cannot be hid.” It isn’t concealed way in some ravine or galley where you can’t see it, it’s built right up on a conical hill and when the lights are turned on at night, you cannot hide this city, and we’re to be like that.

Or verse 15, we’re to be like a lamp, which in a household is set on a lampstand and put in a prominent place in the lobby or in a room in order to give light to the house, and it’s not stuck, as the New English Bible puts it, “under the meal tub,” or as J. B. Philips puts it “under a bucket where it can do no good.” No, if you’ve got the lamp alight, put it in a prominent place and let the light illumine the house. Simple metaphors and what they mean is clear that as the disciples of Jesus, we are not to conceal the truth we know, and we are not to conceal the truth we are. We are not to pretend to be other than what we are. We are to be ourselves, our true Christian selves as depicted in the Beatitudes, and we are not to be ashamed of what Christ has done for us and means to us. “Then men will see us,” Jesus says, “and seeing us, they will glorify God,” because they will inevitably recognize that it’s by the grace of God we are what we are. Or, again, they’ll recognize that our light is His light and our works are His works done in us and through us. It’s the light, they will pray not the lamp that bears it.

Three lessons from the salt and light metaphors to apply them to today, which I think is important. I’ll give you the three straightaway and then enlarge, and the first will only take a moment, the second longer, and the third longest.

One, there is a fundamental distinction between Christians and non-Christians. Or if you like, between the church and the world. Two, we must accept the responsibility which this distinction puts upon us, and three, we must see that this responsibility is two-fold—we are salt and light.

Now I’ll go through them at greater length. One, there is a fundamental distinction between Christians and non-Christians or the church and the world. Now it’s quite true this doesn’t always appear to be so. There are some non-Christians, especially
in a Christian or post-Christian culture, who adopted deceptive veneer of Christianity and appear to be Christian when they are not. Similarly, some professing Christians seem indistinguishable from non-Christians, because they’re living at such a low standard. Yet, in spite of that phenomenon, the essential difference remains. Christians are different from non-Christians and vice versa, and these metaphors make it plain. We might say they are as different from chalk from cheese. Jesus said they’re as different as light from darkness and as different as salt from decay and disease. That’s the first lesson I think these metaphors teach.

Secondly, we must accept the responsibility that this essential distinction puts upon us. “You are the salt of the earth; therefore, retain your saltiness.” Don’t lose your Christian tang. Again, “you are the light of the world and therefore let your light shine before men.”

Now I want to emphasize this need to accept this responsibility that Jesus Christ gives us by calling us by these metaphors, describing us in this way, because I think it’s at least a partial answer to a problem in which many younger Christian people are involved today, if I’m not mistaken. There are very many who feel frustrated. I’m thinking particularly of the more thoughtful, younger Christian generation, and they feel frustrated because the problems of the world are so great and they feel so small and feeble and insignificant and ineffective. “What can I do?” they say. They feel in despair. Now alienated, I suppose, is the popular word to describe this condition. It’s a noxious word, originally, as I’m sure you will know, and it has changed its meaning to some extent, but it’s a very common word that is used today. And alienation describes this feeling of frustration, when a man is alienated from his society.

Now, one of the best examples of this or expositions of it I’ve recently read is some that Jimmy Reid whose name I think some of you may know over here, although he’s British. He’s a communist counselor in the city of Glasgow, and he’s been the chief spokesman and leader of the Upper Clyde Shipyard workers, and last year or earlier this year, he was elected by the students of Glasgow University their rector, which Malcolm Muggeridge was some years ago until he resigned, you know, over the pill issue, but the rector in Glasgow University is rather a unique kind of person. He’s selected by the students to represent the opinions of the students to the governing body and this kind of thing.

So Jimmy Reid, this highly intelligent, working class, communist counselor, shipyard worker, docker, now elected as rector of Glasgow University, and in his inaugural address to the students
of Glasgow, and let me see if I’ve got the date here. It was in May this year, a few months ago, he spoke about alienation. And I want to quote from it, because these words could very well have been written by a Christian.

“Alienation is the cry of men who feel themselves to be the victims of blind economic forces beyond their control. Alienation is the frustration of ordinary people excluded from the processes of decision-making. It’s my sincere contention” he says “that anyone who can be totally adjusted to our society is in greater need of psychiatric analysis and treatment than anyone else. Real fulfillment for any person” he says “lies in service to his fellow men and women. The challenge we face is that of rooting out anything and everything that distorts and devalues human relationships. As an illustration of this distortion,” he went on “I offer the common acceptance of both the concept and the term the ‘rat race.’” The picture it conjures up is of people scurrying around, scrambling for position, trampling on others, backstabbing, and all in pursuit of personal success. To the students of this university I address this appeal: reject these attitudes. A rat race is for rats. We are not rats. We are human beings. Let us gear our society to social needs, not personal greed.”

When he finished, he had a standing ovation from the students for many minutes.

I just wish Christians were as outspoken as that about our society today. I suppose those of you who read Herbert Marcuse will recognize overtones of the kind of thing he is saying about the illiberal nature of [...][... called Liberal Democracy and about the way in which he cannot take forces in the western world do enslave mankind. And a lot of what Marcuse and other Marxists are saying is true. It doesn’t necessarily make you a Marxist to say that it is true, but it is true.

Now, I’m simply saying that to tell you that an increasing number of young people all over the world are suffering from alienation. This sense of frustration. They’ve rejected the standards of the society in which they find themselves, but what can they do? They feel overwhelmed by political, social, economic forces over which they have no control. They’re strangled in their own language by “the system.” They’re crushed by the machine of modern bureaucracy and technocracy.

Now what do we say to Christians who feel like that? I hope the
students here at Trinity who feel like that, what do you do? Well, it's in the soil of this frustration that revolutionaries are being bred all over the world, dedicated to the violent overthrow of the system, because of their sense of alienation and frustration. But I simply want to say it can be from the very same soil that revolutionaries of Jesus can arise to spread his revolution of love and joy and peace and justice. And that this peaceful revolution is more radical, even if it seems trite to say that, than any violent revolution, both because of its incorruptible standards. One of the great problems of revolutions, if you study the revolutions of history, is that the pure standards, the high ideals of the younger revolutionaries, before the revolution takes place, becomes corrupted either during or after it, and very soon society becomes ripe for the next revolution. But at least one must say that the standards of Jesus are incorruptible. You cannot change them, and again, His revolution is more radical because it does change people.

I like a quotation of Luther in his commentary on the Sermon on the Mount in which he says, “With His, Christ's, single word (that is, with the gospel of Jesus alone), I can be more defiant and boastful than all of them with their power, their swords, and their guns.” Luther’s conviction of the power of the gospel when it is set loose in His people who are acting like salt and light in the community. So I want to say to fellow Christians, we are not as powerless as we may sometimes feel ourselves to be. If we have Jesus Christ, and if Jesus Christ is all the salt and the light this dark and rotten world needs, then we can do something.

Now, obviously in order to do that, as we've seen, we've got to have salt in ourselves, we've got to let our light shine. Let me give you one or two other illustrations to show of the influence we have. I rather like the man in Britain. I think he is Dr. E. F. Schumacher, till last year, the economic advisor to the National Coal Board, who said, “I don’t object to being called a crank, because a crank is a small instrument that causes revolutions.” And Christians are called to be revolutionary.

Let me give you another couple of quotations that relate both to salt and light. Take Barbara Ward. Now Barbara Ward, I think, is one of the most brilliant exponents of the Christian conscience in view of the ecological crisis and the magnitude of world need in the developing countries today, and she has written in a book called Christians in a New World, “Christians straddle the whole spectrum of rich nations.” That is, here we are, you see, in the world. “Christians straddle the whole spectrum of rich nations, and, therefore, Christians are a lobby.” To use a political phrase. “Christians are a lobby, or can be a lobby, of incomprehensible
importance in this field.” If we don’t do it, if we don’t exercise our influence of Christ, she means, in the community, then when we come to see God ultimately, He will say, “Did you feed them? Did you give them a drink? Did you clothe them? Did you shelter them?” and if we say embarrassed, “Well, sorry, Lord, but we did give 0.3 percent of our gross national product,” She says, “I don’t think it will be enough.” “Christians are a lobby.” I like that word. I wish Christians were a lobby in the world and using their influence to stir public opinion.

That’s salt or light. Take Malcolm Muggeridge. “I’m sometimes asked,” he says on television and radio panels or being interviewed, “what I most want, what I should most like to do in the little that remains in my life, and I always nowadays truthfully answer, — and it is truthful, —I should like my light to shine, even if only very fitfully, like a match struck in a dark cavernous night and then flickering out.”

Well that’s my second point. We must accept the responsibility that the distinction lies upon us. Christ has set us as salt and as light in the community, and we must accept this double responsibility.

Now I come, thirdly, to the most important part. We must see that this Christian responsibility is two-fold. The effects of salt and light are complementary. Salt is negative. It prevents decay. Light is positive. It illumines the house. And so Christians have a double influence on the secular community, —negatively arresting its decay; positively bringing light into its darkness. For it is one thing to seek to stop the spread of evil, as sort; it’s quite another thing to promote the spread of truth and beauty and goodness. And putting these two metaphors together, it is surely legitimate to discern here the proper relation between evangelism and social action in the total mission of Christ in the world. The subject that vexes many evangelical believers, but really need not do so.

Now if I’m allowed to quote an archbishop of Canterbury in this august evangelical assembly, I’ve recently read, and I think only finished last week, a little book of his called the Christian Priest Today. I don’t like the world priest, personally, although the English word is harmless enough. It’s only a contraction of presbyter and presbuteros is a good New Testament word for the minister. Anyway, it is a collection of his ordination charges, of sermons he’s preached to young men on the eve of their ordination to the pastoral ministry. And he has a chapter, one of his charges, called the “Priest and Politics.” And he says what I think are wise words. “I suggest that there are three broadly contrasted procedures. It is possible to preach the gospel of conversion without any sight of its social context.” Next, “It is possible to preach a social gospel,
which omits the reality of conversion to Christ. But be it your wisdom,” he goes on, “to preach the gospel of conversion, making it clear that it is the whole man with all his relationships who is converted to Jesus as the Lord of all he is and does.”

Well there is one statement of the relation between these two aspects. So what is our Christian duty in the secular society? First as salt and then as light? First our vocation to be salt. We are given at the end of Romans 1 a vivid picture of what happens to a society when it rejects what it knows and extinguishes the light which it has by nature. And the answer is it deteriorates. It’s values and its standards steadily decline until it becomes utterly corrupt and God gives man up, you know the phrase comes three times, “to their own evil passions” and society stinks in the nostrils of God and of all good men.

Now, Christians are set in secular society by God to hinder this very process. God intends us to penetrate the world. The trouble with most Christian salt is that it is secure in elegant little ecclesiastical salt cellars instead of being rubbed into the meat that it is supposed to be stopping from going bad. Christians should be rubbed into the secular community, pervading it, immersing themselves in it, and unless salt does that, it’s ineffective. So we need to be more, to give you a few examples, we need to be more outspoken in condemning evil. Don’t be afraid of being negative. There’s a great cry nowadays, you’ve always got to be positive; never be negative. There is a place for the condemnation of evil.

Luther almost entirely understands the salt of the earth in terms of the condemnation of evil. It means more than death, but I think it includes it. And we must stand boldly for decency, public decency, and righteousness in the neighborhood in which we live and in our whole community. And we must seek not only to help the casualties of a sick society. Christians, evangelicals, are usually good at doing that: —the drug taker, the alcoholic, the bum, the down and out, and so on. Christians seek out these casualties of a sick society and seek to heal them, but we mustn’t only be concerned with that. We should concern ourselves with preventive social medicine. Doctors ought not to be only interested in curing disease and prolonging life, but in preventive medicine. In standards of hygiene. And in the same way, we should be concerned with preventative social medicine and higher standards of moral hygiene. And Christians should play their part, however small, in seeking to create better social structures and foster higher ideals of justice and legislation and civil rights and industry and race relationships and the rest.

I hope there’s nobody here who despises these things or avoids
them or who imagines this is no part of a Christian’s duty. It is. They are part of God’s purpose for His people, and whenever Christians are conscientious citizens, they are acting like salt. Sir Frederick Catherwood in his contribution to the little book Is Revolution Change? says “To try to improve society is not worldliness, but love. To wash your hands of society is not love, but worldliness.” So that’s our vocation to be salt.

Our vocation to be light is because fallen human beings need more than barricades to stop them from being as bad as they could be. They need regeneration. They need new life through the gospel. And the truth of the gospel is the light, contained it’s true in very fragile earthenware vessels, but shining through our very earthenness with the more conspicuous brightness.

So to sum up and conclude, these complementary effects of salt and life, don’t let’s put salt and light, that is our Christian social and evangelistic responsibilities, over against each other. Don’t let’s exaggerate or disparage either. The whole world needs both. It’s bad; it needs salt. It’s dark; it needs light. And our Christian vocation is to be both. Jesus said so and that ought to be enough.

Perhaps I could add just an illustration or so. You know probably better than I that here in the US one of the ministries described is on the edge of the Jesus Movement, known as the Jesus Christ Light and Powerhouse, administered by the well-known Hal Lindsey, author of the Late Great Planet Earth and Bill Counts is a kind of Christian commune in Westwood who are there with a difference that students understand they’re not dropouts and its seeking to give some biblical depth to its students in teaching them. But when I read about it, the Jesus Christ Light and Powerhouse, I said to myself, “When will somebody establish a Jesus Christ Salt and Light Company, Incorporated?”

We have in Britain today a spontaneous and exuberant, youthful movement called the Festival of Light. It started partly as a protest against pornography and for public sexual decency and partly as testimony to Jesus, and we thank God for its courageous witness. But I sometimes have thought it ought to be called the Festival of Salt and Light, because it seeks to combine both. Don’t let’s be shy of this double vocation. Don’t let’s separate what Christ has united.

Let me first commend the little book Is Revolution Change, which I think is published by InterVarsity over here. It’s a symposium and it’s edited by Brian Griffith who’s a lecturer at the London School of Economics. It includes a contribution from Alan Kreider, assistant professor of history at Goshen College, Indiana, and it
includes contributions by Samuel Escobar and Rene Padilla from the IFES in Latin America. Is Revolution Change? And his catalyst quotation is “To try to improve society is not worldliness, but love. To wash your hands of society is not love, but worldliness.”