

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

I'd like to start with one of the deepest and most profound questions a person can ask. What is your purpose in life? [Repeat.] Our goal today is to answer that question satisfactorily. And we won't leave today until we know! So get comfortable.

Just kidding. Well, sort of. I am serious that we won't leave today until we know the answer to that question. But I'll say up front that this question has two main answers to it, and today we want to talk primarily about the second answer or the second part of our purpose for life here on earth. And even when we're done talking about that second part of it, you're going to have to spend the rest of this week thinking about it.

I know a lot of you are already thinking about the Super Bowl, so let's get right to answering the question. What is your purpose in life? I'm going to propose an answer, and you tell me how you like it. "My purpose in life is to know Jesus Christ as my Lord and Savior, trust him fully, have sins forgiven and relationship restored with God, and finally live forever with God in heaven." [Repeat.] What do you think?

I like this answer. I do. I like it because it summarizes the main teaching of the Bible. I am disobedient and have fallen short of what God requires of me. I'm not holy like he is, and this upsets God greatly. But he sent his one and only Son, who is true God and true Man. He lived for me. He died for me. He forgave all my sins. He restored me to my God in heaven. And yes, heaven is my home. These are objective facts and truths. And these joyful, peace-giving facts apply to you as well.

So, so do we say "amen" here and head home to get ready for the Super Bowl? Not so fast. I told you there are two main answers to the question, "What is my purpose here on earth." What we just talked about was the first and most important purpose. But today we're going to focus in especially on the second purpose God put us here on earth.

Now, I say "second" purpose, but the truth is, it's so closely related to and dependent on the first purpose we just talked about, that it's not really right to separate it.

Now here's the problem. If God's purpose for you in your life is only that you come to know Jesus, receive forgiveness and be set for eternal life... if that is IT... if that is ALL... then the question is... now what? Why aren't we already in heaven? What is God waiting for? Why has he left us here on earth to live out our lives? Why doesn't he whisk up into heaven each person the moment he or she becomes a believer?

Our text for today answers this important question for us. **What is your purpose on earth as a child of God?** In Matthew 5:13-16, Jesus says to us:

13 "You are the salt of the earth. 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.

14 "You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. 15 Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. 16 In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.

In the verses preceding our reading, Jesus had just finished telling his disciples how they could expect the world to treat them. Jesus said in essence, “Expect persecution and rejoice when you are persecuted.” This is the attitude the world will have toward you. The sinful world will try to change us, tempt us, corrupt us, and if that doesn’t work, they will persecute us. It’s no wonder many Christians through the centuries have drawn the conclusion, “If that’s how the world will effect us and treat us, then God must want us to avoid the world and separate from it.” Monasteries and cloisters were begun for this reason. Some Christian groups have separated from the world to form all Christian societies. A man named John Calvin even tried to establish and run an entire Christian city.

But is this what Jesus wants us to do? No! In fact, the verses which we just read show us that although believers are totally different from the world, we are also closely related to the world.

What is our purpose on earth as a child of God? Our text says, “You are the salt of the earth. You are the light of the world.” Jesus purpose for believers is that they live **in** the world, but not **of** the world. Jesus wants us to have a positive effect on the world in which we live.

First Jesus says, **“You are the salt of the earth. 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.”** In Jesus’ time, before refrigerators, salt wasn’t only used for flavoring, but also as a preservative. Therefore, salt’s purpose was one of prevention. It helped keep food from decaying.

There are two types of decay that a Christians help prevent. One is truth decay. The other is moral decay. Truth decay happens when the word of God is changed, distorted, ignored or forgotten. Until the time that Jesus returns in glory, we Christians are here on earth to prevent this truth decay. Our God wants us to preserve his truth, just as salt can preserve meat.

We also prevent moral decay. By living lives of love to the glory of God, are constantly combating moral and spiritual decay. Years ago, a couple months after the birth of one of our children in Russia, I had to go to travel to Moscow to the American Embassy there to register the birth of our baby and get passport. A fellow missionary went with me because his family had also been blessed with a baby. While we were filling out forms in the embassy, an American came in to renew his passport. While he was waiting, he started talking to us. He had the filthiest language I have ever heard! Every single sentence contained curse words and profanity! After several minutes, he asked us what we were doing in Russia. “We’re Christian missionaries here,” we answered. He looked a little embarrassed and said, “Then you are probably shocked at my bad language!” He changed the topic and continued talking for several minutes more. But in the rest of our conversation, he never used another bad word! When he knew he was talking to Christians, he changed his speech habits and cleaned up his foul language.

Christians are salt in the earth... a preserving influence keeping it from being more rotten than it is. You are salt when defend someone’s reputation when gossiping begins... you are salt when warn someone about the wrong thing they intend to do. You are salt when you limit the time your children get to watch TV or play video games. You are salt when you pick your friends carefully. You are salt when you encourage someone who made the right choice. Christ has made you a preservative in a decaying world. You are the salt of the earth.

Jesus also includes a warning to the salt of the earth: **“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.” We know it is not chemically possible for pure salt to lose its saltiness. But the salt in Jesus’ time came from the Dead Sea and was mixed with many impurities. It was possible for this salt to lose its saltiness. If this happened, the “salt” was worthless. You couldn’t even through it in a field or it would kill the plants. It was put along the walkways where nothing could grow anyway. So also if a Christian loses his faith and stops being salt in the earth, he becomes worthless to God while on earth, and unfit to live with God in heaven.

What, then, is our purpose on earth as children of God? Christians are constantly combating truth decay, and moral and spiritual decay in this world. We do this when we live lives of thanks and praise to our God who saved us.

To prevent corruption and decay is only one effect Christians have. Jesus also describes our purpose in positive terms. Jesus says, **“You are the light of the world.”** Because we are connected to Jesus, the light of the world, we also shine and give light to the dark world around us. We in truth light reflectors. The moon does not produce its own light, it simply reflects the light of the sun. A light bulb gives no light when it is sitting by itself. But when it is connected to power and turned on, then it shines and gives light. There is no human being who can be a light by himself. But when we know and believe in Jesus, the light of the world, then we can reflect his light. Only when we are connected to Christ can we shine in this dark world.

Jesus said, **“A city on a hill cannot be hidden.”** As children of God, it is not possible to hide who we are, just as it is not possible to hide a city which sits up on a hill. It is lit, and people are watching! People know you are a Christian, and so they watch your words and actions. You are a city on a hill!

Jesus continues, **“Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house.”** No one would be so foolish as to light a lamp, and then hide it so that it can’t give its light. The whole purpose in lighting it is that everyone may see by its light.

In the same way a follower of Christ will send out rays of light to the world. Jesus said, **“In the same way, let your light shine before men.”** So we are light to the world in two ways. We are shining the light of Christ to the world when we speak the truth of Christ to the world. Shine the bright holiness of God to expose the sinfulness of people. Where there is sorrow and repentance, shine the bright gospel truth of Christ’s unconditional forgiveness.

The second way we shine brightly is when we show our love for God and by loving our neighbor. What is our purpose in doing these good works? We don’t do them to glorify ourselves. You are to do them so that unbelievers **“may see your good works and praise your Father in heaven.”** Our purpose in doing good works, is that when others see them, they will ascribe to God the reverence which is due him. God’s will is that our lives of love and service to him will lead others to find out about our loving God.

Now notice that in this reading, Jesus doesn’t command us, saying, “You should be the salt of the earth! Try your very hardest to be the light of the earth!” Rather, Jesus says, “You **are** the salt... you **are** the light of the world.” If you are a believer in Jesus Christ, then you already are salt and light! This isn’t something we strive to become with great effort. It’s what Jesus has already made us. How did we become this way? Jesus said of himself, **“I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life** (Jn 8:12).” God made us salt and light when he made us followers of Jesus. We were redeemed by

the grace of God. We were called to faith by the grace of God. We are the salt and light of the earth by the grace of God. The apostle Paul said it well: **“By the grace of God I am what I am”** (1 Corinthians 15:10).

Sometimes Christians are accused of being so heavenly minded that they are of no earthly good. If your attitude is that you are forgiven and heaven is your home, and therefore you're just biding your time until you finally get to heaven... if you're attitude is that you will avoid all contact with the people of this world whenever possible, and do everything you can not to interact with those outside our church, then the accusation is truth. You're so heavenly minded your no earthly good. What's more, you don't understand the second vitally important purpose you are still on earth and not already in heaven. May God forgive us when we've had such an attitude. And that's just what he's done for us in Christ Jesus.

Dear Christians, you are salt and you are light. Your purpose here on earth couldn't be more important! You are a preserving influence amidst the decay. You are light in the middle of the darkness! Don't shy away from this earthly purpose God has given you as his children. Keep the Word of God in your heart, but actively show in your life that you treasure the words of God. Rejoice that the light of the Gospel has shown in your heart... but let that Gospel light shine forth in your life in both your actions and your words. Being a child of God is not an intellectual fact that you accept by faith, it's a life changing truth that completely transforms.

So what is your purpose on earth as children of God? He works through you to preserve and illumine others! Praise God for the privilege of being what he has made us. May God's great salvation motivate us to shine brighter with His love. Amen.

“To him who is able to keep you from falling and to present you before his glorious presence without fault and with great joy— to the only God our Savior be glory, majesty, power and authority, through Jesus Christ our Lord, before all ages, now and forevermore! Amen”
Jude 1:24-25.