

The Disciple's Influence

Matthew 5:13-16

Introduction

In the Sermon On The Mount Jesus speaks of the King's Constitution and citizens in that Kingdom. Who are these citizens? They are poor in spirit (v.3); they recognize their spiritual impoverishment—leading to a real recognition of dependence upon the King and the Kingdom. The citizen's mourns over sin (v.4); grieving the nature of sin both in self and others. The citizen is meek—willing to live under the King's authority (v.5). The citizen hungers and thirsts for righteousness (v.6); accepting the rightness that comes from God. The citizen is merciful—giving undeserved relief to those who face misery, pain and difficulty (v.7). The citizen is pure in heart—clean on the inside—with a character committed to God's will and God's standards (v.8). The citizen is a peace-maker; not a peace-faker or trouble maker; committed to reconciling warring parties (v. 10). This prompts persecution from those who are in rebellion towards the King and His Kingdom (vv.10-12).

The poor (v.3), the peace-maker (v.9), the persecuted (v.10) now becomes the one with unprecedented influence! You are salt and light (vv.13-16)!

The salt speaks of influence, preservation; salt speaks of that powerful influence that brings things subject to corruption or decay and retards or delays that decay. Light speaks of an outward example or testimony of good works that points to both the King and His Kingdom! We must keep our lives pure so that we can be that salt; we delay corruption; we postpone judgment so the Gospel can be preached and practiced! Warren Wiersbe says; "Our good works must accompany our dedicated lives as we let our light shine" (*Wiersbe's Expository Outlines*; p. 30).

The citizen in Christ's Kingdom is a disciple of the King. Living the beatitudes will cause the disciple to function as salt and light in a corrupt and dark world. How many Christians live in America and what difference is it making? "By modest estimate more than a quarter of the entire population of the United States have professed an evangelical conversion experience. William Iverson wryly observes that "A pound of meat would surely be affected by a quarter pound of salt. If this is real Christianity, the 'salt of the earth,' where is the effect of which Jesus spoke?" (*Christianity Today*; June 6, 1980; p. 33).

What do Americans claim? Almost 9 out of 10 claim they have never doubted the existence of God! 8 out of 10 believe they will one day stand before that God and give an account of their life and "answer for sin"! 81% considered themselves Christians! This all sounds great until you ask a few more questions and get some more specific information! Only 42% knew Jesus delivered the Sermon on the Mount! Less than half

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were able to name the authors of the four gospels! Only 37% believed the Bible infallible! When asked what book has the greatest influence in their lives barely 1% mentioned the Bible! Gallup writes; “Now, the disparate survey items are not only interesting in themselves—and perhaps, in some cases shocking—but they also shed light on the complex picture of religion in America today: the widespread appeal or popularity of religion, the glaring lack of knowledge; inconsistencies of belief; in part, the failure of organized religion in some respects to make a difference in our society”!

What if Christians started living like Christians? You would think our lives would start to sting our culture like salt in an open wound!

John MacArthur writes; “The Church cannot accept the world’s self-centeredness, easy solutions, immorality, amorality, and materialism. We are called to minister to the world while being separated from its standards and ways. Sadly, however, the church today is more influenced by the world than the world is influenced by the church” (p.239).

The message of Jesus suggests we can influence others as much as God in Christ has influenced us! Jesus calls us to be salt and light. In salt and light nature and function are one; as salt believers are a preservative to impede the spread of evil in society; as light they bear a true witness to that society; if what the disciples really are is clearly seen, non believers will glorify the heavenly Father by becoming His children (see Baker Commentary on the Bible; p.729).

The Disciple As Salt (v.13)

Matthew 5:13 (NKJV)13 “You are the salt of the earth; but if the salt loses its flavor, how shall it be seasoned? It is then good for nothing but to be thrown out and trampled underfoot by men.

The Romans in the first century had a saying; “There is nothing more useful than sun and salt.” Many people think of salt as a flavor for food or essential ingredient for tasty Margarita’s. In ancient times some Roman soldiers received an allowance of salt for partial payment of wages. The word ‘salary’ comes from that ancient practice. Salt was a valuable commodity (it still is). In an age with no electrical refrigeration salt served as a preservative for foods that would otherwise spoil. Salt in the Roman world and to a certain extent Jewish world represented purity, preservation and flavor.

Jesus is saying in effect you provide purity and preservation. You retard corruption and make a bland world tasty. The pure in heart (v.8) help purify the world. “. . .*but if the salt loses its flavor, how shall it be seasoned?*” Jesus is saying “if you don’t make a difference in this world—who will?” In the ancient world if you got a hold of bad batch of salt, you could not and would not throw it in your garden or in your orchard or any place were plant grows. Salt kills

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plants. The place to throw the salt was on a path or road where it would do no harm. Does Jesus imply that Christians who have lost their flavor or usefulness become objects of deserved persecution (trampled underfoot by men)? At least a few Bible writers have suggested such a thing; Dale Bruner writes; “This kind of persecution most often takes the form of simple contempt or complete disinterest; these Christians are not jumped on, ambushed or attacked; they are merely ignored or shrugged off. They are so insipid they are hardly worth persecuting” (p. 161).

What does Jesus say about salt gone bad? Or useless salt?

If salt becomes corrupt—it becomes useless! There are certain things—if spoiled for one use—can be used for something else! **But the corrupt Christian can only misrepresent the Gospel**
The corrupt Christian can never preserve their surroundings from moral decay! The corrupt Christian can only serve as a bad example!

But mercifully—corrupt Christians can experience the power of mercy and grace and restoration! We can be restored to power and blessing!

We are salt whether we like it or not. The real issue is what kind of influence are we having in our world? What difference are we making? Salt from the Dead Sea was mixed with gypsum. This kind of salt only made everything smell bad and taste bad. Pure salt was needed to flavor food. Pure salt was necessary to preserve food. James 1:27 says “Pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their trouble, and to keep oneself unspotted from the world”.

The world needs salt because it is both bland and corrupt. Some cultures used salt as a mark of friendship. When two people shared salt they were obliged to watch out for each others' interests. If your worst enemy ate salt with you, you were obliged to treat that person as a friend. Unbelieving spouses are said to be “sanctified” by a believing spouse (1 Cor.7:14) and God offered to spare Sodom for the sake of only 10 righteous people (no mention whether they vote Democrat or Republican or are a part of the Christian Coalition). If 10 righteous people could be found within (that is the City of Sodom and Gomorrah) implied their physical presence was important. Why does God sometimes defer judgment? Could it be the presence of the Church?

Some have suggested that the Christian life and the Christian life-style is ‘flavorful’! Outsiders looking in don't always have that impression! For some the word Christian means dangerous and still others dull! Julian the Apostate, Roman Emperor and nephew of Church historian Eusebius wrote; ‘Have you looked at these Christians closely? Hallow-eyed, pale cheeked, flat-breasted, they brood their lives away unspotted by ambition. The sun shines for them, but they don't see it. The earth offers them its fullness, but they desire it not. All their desire is to renounce and suffer that they may die.’”

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Oliver Wendall Holmes was said to have had ambitions to enter the ministry but changed his mind when he thought most acted like undertakers. The world judges Christians to be hypocritical, self-righteous, judgmental and truly boring!

But when believers are faithful and Christ-like their lives are anything but boring! What happens when a Christian begins to live life to the fullest? There is an aroma of life and an unmistakable fragrance that leads even unbelievers to envy!

Swim in the Dead Sea with an open wound and it will hurt. Salt stings.

Salt is a preservative. In the original language the sentence begins with the word “you”—as a matter of emphasis. In what way? You are the only salt—you are the only light. The world's corruption and the world's darkness like an advancing cancer will not be arrested unless you are what you are supposed to be salt and light. John MacArthur points out; “The very ones who are despised by the world and persecuted by the world are the world's only hope” (p.240).

Why is the world corrupt? Sin. The Bible is clear that it is sin that corrupts and kills. James 1:5; “Then, when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death”. Even the most casual reading of the book of Revelation tells us the Christ rejecting world is not going to make the judgment cut. G.K. Chesterton once stated; “countless acts by millions of self-centered, instead of God-centered individuals may reasonably be thought to be destroying the world”. We shake our heads and watch the evening news and say; “What's wrong with this world?” The right answer; “I am what's wrong with this world”. The late Dave Hunt answered a question in his newsletter *The Berean Call*, “The Leadership of our country has become so corrupt that I would think you would cry out against the evil. Yet you say nothing. How can you keep silent in the face of blatant injustice. . .(etc)? His answer is helpful; “The Roman government in the Lord's day was probably more evil than we can imagine, yet He never addresses any of its misdeeds and corruptions. Nor did the early church organize demonstrations against or try to influence the local rulers or Caesars in Rome. We are to preach the gospel, not attempt to reform the world, and must follow the scriptural example. . .”

The Disciple As Light (v.14a)

14 “You are the light of the world.

The world needs light because it is dark. Again the emphasis is on “you”. Salt is hidden in the earth but light is out in the open. Salt works secretly, light works openly. Salt works on the inside, come from the outside. If salt is the indirect influence of the gospel to the world, the light is the full frontal attack—visible—open obvious. Salt can retard corruption, but it cannot make the corruption go away. Light is more positive. Light not only reveals what is false and wrong, but it invites what is right and true. We use the expression—“we will bring this out into the light”. David wrote (Psalm 36:9); “For with You is the fountain of life; in Your light we see light.”

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C.S. Lewis said something similar; “I believe in Christianity as I believe that the sun has risen: not only because I see it, but because by it I see everything else.”

Light must be visible and available to be effective.

We are to be a light to the whole world! To the secular world. To the religious world. To the broken world. We are to bring the whole Bible to the whole world.

The Bible teaches that God is the source of light (God is light) and the substance of light “I am come a Light into the world” (John 12:35, 36,46). We are commanded to walk in the light (1 John 1:7) and declare the gospel of light (2 Cor.4:6). We are given armor of light (Rom.13:12). Light protects—and light separates “what communion has light with darkness” (2 Cor.6:14).

You are the light of the world. You serve as a reflection of the true light (Jesus). Light is our badge and identification; “you are children of the light” (1 Thess.5:5). We possess light (you have the light of life”; John 8:12). Reflection; Identification; Possession; satisfaction; “we are full of light (Luke 11:34,36).

Shine

Make 'em wonder what you've got
Make 'em wish that they were not
On the outside, looking bored

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The Disciple As Witness (v.14b-16)

A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden.

Not hidden. Conspicuous to all.

Plato said we can excuse a child for being afraid of the dark. But what about the man who is afraid of the light?

15Nor do they light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house.

This is the quiet, steady, shining of a consistent life!

What will a consist Christian life lived in our homes do? Husbands and wives begin to doubt their unbelief and wonder whether or not the Gospel is true! Children are exposed to the Word of God and the character of God.

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16 Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven.

This is the application of the section! Let nothing hinder you from letting Christ shine in you!

The expression “good” works translates the Greek word (*kalos*). This is not so much the quantity of works but the quality of the work—its attractiveness.

In chapter 6:1—Jesus warns; “Take heed that you do not do your charitable deeds before men, to be seen by them, otherwise you have no reward from your Father in heaven”. Here Jesus says—Let you light so shine before men—that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in Heaven! What is the difference? Motive! Citizens of the Kingdom let their light shine—to glorify the Father who is Heaven! In chapter 6:1—people do charitable deeds to be seen by men; for what purpose—so that other people will think you are generous!

The good works are “beautiful deeds” (John 10:11). This suggests two things; something that is attractive and something that is genuine. Jesus said “I am the good shepherd” (he gives his life for the sheep). But Jesus is also the great shepherd. He rises from the dead.

What are these good works? They are those things that allow people to see—Jesus in you! What does that attraction and authenticity do? Lead people to admire us? No to glorify your Father in heaven.

How far should our Christian influence reach? Our heart. Our lives. Our surroundings. Our home. Our work. Our school. Our city. There is nothing so potent as a life lived in Christ and for Christ; nothing so potent as purity and peace and the kind of persecution that leaves us—admired! Evil is exposed. Christ is elevated.

How powerful is a life lived for Christ? The very definition of influence is that power that is exerted over the minds of others or the acts of others without apparent effort or the results of the qualities, the position or reputation of the person or thing that exerts this power.

We let our light shine, not to bring attention to ourselves, but to God. It was said of Robert Murray McCheyne, a godly Scottish minister from the last century, that his life was such that people were known to fall to their knees and accept Christ as Savior just looking at him! I don't know if that's true! But I know that certain people, like Billy Graham remind people—not of Billy Graham—but of Billy Graham's message! Many years ago—my friend Franklin Graham was on Jay Leno's show. Jay said something strange; Jay said that he was very nervous having Franklin on the show. Why? He knew Billy Graham was watching! Millions of people tune in to the show—but just the thought that Billy Graham was watching caused Jay to rethink—what he might say on that show!

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Do people know when you are around? Do they care?

You will be an influence. Either for good or evil. Your life will make a difference. Either for sorrow or joy. Just what kind of difference depends on you!

Conclusion

Jesus is the true light that came down from heaven. The apostle John put it this way; "The true light, which enlighteneth every man that cometh into the world" (John 1:9 KJV).

Augustine wrote; "Do not believe you are a light to yourself. The Light is that which illumines every person coming into this world."

Several years ago the Christian Life and Faith magazine presented some unusual facts about two families. In 1677 an immoral man married a very licentious woman. Nineteen hundred descendants came from the generations begun by that union. Of these, 771 were criminals, 250 were arrested for various offenses, 60 were thieves, and 39 were convicted for murder. Forty of the women were known to have venereal diseases. These people spent a combined total of 1300 years behind bars and cost the State of New York nearly 3 million dollars.

The other family was the Edwards family. The third generation included Jonathan Edwards who was the great New England revival preacher who became the President of Princeton University. Of the 1344 descendants many were college presidents and professors. 186 became ministers of the gospel, and many others were active in their churches. 86 became state senators, 3 were Congressmen, 30 judges, and one Vice-President of the United States. No reference was made of anyone spending time in jail or a poorhouse.

Not all children of good parents become useful citizens; and not all children of bad parents become unproductive citizens. Yet the possibility of a child getting the right start in life is enhanced if he or she comes from a home where love prevails, where the Bible is taught, where prayer is offered. Father—Mother—when you live for Christ you provide strong incentive for your children to choose the Christian way of life. Parental example and influence is powerful—for good or evil. Part of immortality may lie—not in the things you leave behind—but in the people who's lives you have touched!

The old Puritan writer Thomas Watson prayed; "O Lord, forgive what I have been, sanctify what I am, and order what I shall be."