

Kingdom Impact: Being Salt and Light (Mt. 5:13-20)

I. INTRODUCTION

- A. Jesus used the metaphors of salt and light to describe the impact on society of God's people who walk out the 8 Beatitudes (Mt. 5:13-16). Jesus sees the world as filled with moral decay and spiritual darkness. He describes believers as salt and light and unbelievers as the earth and world.
- ¹³You are the salt of the earth; but if the salt loses its flavor, how shall it be seasoned? It is then good for nothing...¹⁴You are the light of the world...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. (Mt. 5:13-15)***
1. ***Salt***: Salt is a preservative and it causes food to taste better. God's people are to function spiritually as salt that hinders decay in a sinful society and makes people thirsty for Jesus. Before refrigeration was invented, salt was rubbed into meat to prevent it from decaying.
 2. ***Light***: Light exposes darkness and gives direction. God's people are to reveal the truth about Jesus by our words and deeds to a world filled with darkness.
- B. We should approach this passage as if Jesus were answering questions that His disciples might ask. A lifestyle that embraces the 8 Beatitudes is costly to the flesh, leads to persecution, and requires sacrificial service. Someone may ask, "Where are things going and will it be worth the effort?"
- C. After calling us to walk in the 8 Beatitudes (v. 3-12), Jesus encourages us by giving us the assurance that pursuit of a costly and demanding lifestyle will impact others (v. 13-14). He is saying, "I have a glorious plan to change the world through people in relationship with Me." His people are His primary change agents and world changers. We fully embrace this great privilege.
- D. The main weapons in this spiritual war include the 8 Beatitudes, our words, and good works. We are in the minority and our message is often scorned. What good can meek people who mourn over their sin do? It seems that we are too weak and too few in number to change the earth. Jesus called a few young fishermen to be the salt and the light of the world. Martin Luther said, "*With His Word I can be more defiant and boastful than they with all their power, swords, and guns.*"
- E. Jesus calls His disciples to be salt and light in a world filled with moral decay and spiritual darkness. The world cannot stop itself from rotting or descending into greater darkness. Only salt and light introduced from outside the world can prevent the decay and dispel the darkness.
- F. Jesus gave two conditions for the effectiveness of the Church. The salt must retain its saltiness and the light must not be hidden. The Church and the world have conflicting values and their own distinct message. Our power is found in maintaining our distinction. We are often tempted to blur the lines in order to be more accepted by people who reject Jesus and His message.

- G. The call to be salt and light is a call to make a relevant impact on society. We can only do this as we are true to the message and refuse the temptation to distort it by removing difficult aspects. Jesus' teachings are offensive to the carnal mind and so different from the values of the world.
1. C. S. Lewis wrote of *resistance thinking* that is *against the world yet for the world*. When we weaken Jesus' teaching to make it acceptable and comfortable, we present something other than the true gospel. We must uphold Jesus' teaching on self-denial, sacrifice, and persecution, without minimizing the aspects that are more difficult or repellent to people.
 2. Our message is both *world-affirming* and *world-denying* as we preach on the scandal of the cross with its two applications. First, Jesus died on the cross as the only way to obtain our deliverance. Second, we must respond to His grace by embracing the cross as a lifestyle. Refusing this 2-fold message leaves the Church powerless and in compromise. We must proclaim the dignity and destiny of *what God has called the world to be* while at the same time proclaiming *what the world has become* in all its depravity.
I recommend that you read Os Guinness' book Prophetic Untimeliness.
 3. The idea of blending into the secular scene with music, fashion, movies, etc. to win people *by becoming like them* is a great mistake. Jesus taught that believers who are indistinguishable from non-Christians are useless in bringing real change to the world.
- H. What message do we have for people who feel hopeless in the face of the political, social, and economic forces which seem to control them? Jesus is raising up revolutionaries who are dedicated to changing the world by spreading His revolutionary love, truth, and righteousness.
- I. **Losing our saltiness:** We can lose our saltiness and fail to shine as a lamp by not walking out the 8 Beatitudes, not standing for truth, and not following through on the good works that God has prompted us to do. In the ancient world, without refineries, salt became contaminated with impurities or other minerals. Salt was often in the form of a white powder; it contained sodium chloride (salt) but it could be washed out, leaving just powdery white road dust.
- J. We must be courageous in speaking the truth, which points to who Jesus is and what He wants. The decay-preventing action of salt has a negative element in a society filled with rotteness. We are to speak the uncompromising message of God's holiness and justice in the context of His grace and judgment; then we back it up with good works that demonstrate His love and justice. The Chinese proverb "Better to light a candle than to curse the darkness" makes this point well.
- K. Part of our spiritual identity is to be salt and light. Each believer has a responsibility to use their resources to stop decay and bring light to society in their generation. Our confession must be to live as salt and light. We confess, "I will seek to go deep in my walk with Jesus; I will take a stand for truth, work hard, give much, resist sin, and serve others as salt and light." I will do this, even in my weakness, smallness, and weariness, because I am salt and light.

II. YOU ARE THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD

¹⁴*You are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden. 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. ¹⁶Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father... (Mt. 5:14-16)*

- A. **Light a lamp:** If we ask the Spirit, He will give us ideas for service and truths to speak out on. In this way, He “lights our lamp.” We must follow through on these ideas and stand for these truths. He will often give us very simple assignments to help people in practical ways, or to start a Bible study, or to reach our neighbors. To let our lamp shine means to act on these directives from the Spirit. Many refuse them because they reach only a few people and are routine and mundane.
- B. **Let your light shine before men:** We must speak up and follow through in service. We must not hide the truth deliberately out of fear, or neglect to act because of lust or laziness.
- ²⁵*I was afraid, and went and hid your talent in the ground...* ²⁶*His lord answered, “You wicked and lazy servant...”* ²⁸*Take the talent from him, and give it to him who has ten.”* (Mt. 25:25-28)
- C. **A city that cannot be hidden:** This is one of the most extraordinary statements that Jesus made about His Church. Jesus asserted that a city set on a hill could not be hidden. A city of lights is made up of many individual lights that shine together. It is glorious when many work together, each making a small impact, but collectively making an impact that cannot be hidden. The city is seen when many individuals are faithful to speak up and follow through in service.
- D. **Glorify your Father:** We are to speak and act with humility, tenderness, and faithfulness to truth. Jesus talked about the spirit in which we serve and make the truth known. We are to live, speak, and act in a way that draws attention to God and others, without drawing attention to or promoting ourselves. The disciple is to do all things in meekness (v. 5), without showmanship.

III. THE ASSURANCE OF GOD’S FULL PURPOSE

- A. After seeing that Jesus is committed to changing the world, our next question may be related to how serious He is. To what degree will He change it? How far will He go in using His people?
- B. Jesus did not destroy or minimize any of God’s purposes, promises, or moral commandments from the OT Law and Prophets (Mt. 5:17-18). He came so that the fullness of all that God had promised and commanded would be expressed in the lives of His people. One day the earth will be filled with God’s glory, when the nations walk in righteousness. Jesus will transform the earth and fill it with God’s glory. Read Isaiah and the prophets to see how far Jesus will take this.
- ¹⁷*Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets...but to fulfill it...* ¹⁸*I say to you...one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law till all is fulfilled.* (Mt. 5:18)
- C. The jot referred to the smallest letter in the alphabet (Greek or Hebrew). The tittle referred to an accent mark over a letter that distinguishes it from another letter (Hebrew: beṯ, dalet and reš).

IV. THE INVITATION TO BE GREAT

- A. Jesus invites everyone to be great in His kingdom by walking in the Beatitudes. A disciple may ask, “Lord, what role can I have in Your plan to transform the earth? How much will you use me in this age? How much in the age to come? We cannot repent of the desire for greatness because God designed our spirit with this longing. We are to repent for seeking it in a wrong way.

¹⁹Whoever breaks [consistently] one of the least of these commandments, and teaches men so, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever does [consistently] and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven. (Mt. 5:19)

- B. ***Whoever***: God invites anyone to greatness, without regard for their outward achievements or the size of their ministry. It will be based on the size of their heart in obedience and love to Him. Jesus revealed a new paradigm for greatness. We are to focus on being great in His sight rather than in the sight of men. This greatness will be fully manifest in the age to come, not in this age.

- C. ***Does and teaches***: The issue of our place in His kingdom in the age to come is centered on how much we keep and teach the least of His commandments (especially the Sermon on the Mount). Most people’s teaching ministry is in twos and threes or tens and twenties. We must talk often about the 8 Beatitudes, teaching them in informal conversational ways (and in public settings). We teach them in our homes and home groups, to our neighbors, and in other social gatherings. We share our commitments and insights into the 8 Beatitudes, knowing they are not popular.

- D. ***The least***: Jesus warned that if we minimize the least of His commandments and teach others to do so, we will be least in His kingdom in the age to come. Many, in the name of teaching on God’s grace, promote spiritual laziness, passivity, and a lack of discipline in the grace of God.

- E. Our function in the age to come is linked to our responsiveness in this age. There will be an exchange from “few things” to “many things” (Mt. 25:21) and from “very little” to “government over ten cities” (Lk. 19:17).

²¹Well done, good and faithful servant; you were faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your Lord. (Mt. 25:21)

¹⁷Because you were faithful in a very little, have authority over ten cities. (Lk. 19:17)

- F. We could liken our ministry assignment on earth in this age to a 70-year internship that prepares us for our ministry on earth in the Millennium. Our primary ministry assignment on earth will be in the Millennium and it will last for 1,000 years (Rev. 20:4-6).

- G. In the age to come, we will each receive a different measure of glory in our resurrected body, etc. We will all be loved equally by Jesus, but we will have varying function and authority—some of the saints will be called the least and some will be called the greatest.

⁴¹There is one glory of the sun...and another glory of the stars; for one star differs from another star in glory. ⁴²So also is the resurrection of the dead. (1 Cor. 15:41-42)