

A CONTAGIOUS FORCE FOR GOOD

MATTHEW 5:13-16

Our Scripture passage today is directly related to vv. 3-12, the Beatitudes. The Beatitudes are who we are because of our relationship with God.

Now Jesus turns to how our relationship to God affects our relationship with the world. In other words, first God blessed us and now, through us and by us, He blesses the world.

Jesus is very emphatic about this: You are the salt of the earth. You are the light of the world. The “you” in both places is plural. All believers are the salt of the earth and the light of the world.

So, if we really are salt and light, we must ask, “What about my faith? Does it make a difference in how I live, I you act, what I say, what I think, and where I go? Am I more influenced by my friends or, am I the influencer?”

We keep hearing that spirituality in America is high—but the influence of Christianity may be at an all time low.

The African male lion is the unchallenged king of the beasts, right? He’s a powerful and influential creature that wanders the jungle striking fear into the hearts of all within its range. True?

In fact the male lion sleeps an average of 21 hours a day. He leaves most of the difficult work to the female lions. Oh, he sometimes shows flashes of strength and dominance. But mostly he lives off his reputation.

Can you see a parallel between the male lion and the Christian church in America today? Could it be we are living more off our reputation than what we are actually doing?

We call ourselves a Christian nation. Four out of 5 American adults describe themselves as Christian. Yet less than 1 out of every 10 born again Christians has a biblical worldview that makes a difference in his or her decisions and behavior.

Most adults in the U.S. do not believe that salvation is only through Jesus Christ. Most do not

accept the Bible as the authoritative word of God; or that the God of the Bible is the only true God. (The Barna Report, Nov/Dec. 1997).

The question facing Christians in America today is what kind of country are we going to be? Will we be America the spiritual, or America the morally bankrupt?

Could it be that the main problem with American Christians is not that they aren't where they should be but that they are not what they should be?

Which way are we leaning as a country? That depends upon whether we, and Christians across our land, become the salt and light of our nation.

Dick Halverson said, "The measure of a great church is not how many people are there on Sunday morning, but what is happening in the church when the buildings are empty." (Confident Living, Feb. 1989, p. 20.)

Are we going to be worthless disciples or effective, contagious forces for good? Jesus says...

You are the salt of the earth.

Matthew 5:13 (NIV) 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.

This is an extremely powerful analogy. People did not always take salt for granted. For centuries it was rare and expensive. In ancient times more wars were fought over salt than over gold. Rome built a highway, the Via Salarium, just to transport salt.

Roman armies were paid in salt, which was called "salarium," a Latin word from which we get the English word "salary." Superstitions arose about salt. Native American Indians used it to keep evil spirits away. Spilled salt meant bad luck.

All bodily fluids of animals and humans are salty solutions? If salt disappears, life on earth will disappear. Let's name some characteristics of salt, and what it means as being the salt of the earth.

1. Salt flavors

The best-known use of salt is flavoring. Christians are to add divine joy, zest and happiness to the world. A young man shared with his S.S. class how a Christian drew him to Jesus Christ.

He said that before he became a Christian the church members he knew during school and at

his job were not very different from anyone else, except that they attended church and he didn't.

They told lies; they laughed at the same crude jokes that he laughed at. They used the same four-letter words. He said that when he would think about God or Jesus, those people came to mind and he would tell himself there was really nothing to Christianity.

But then Arnold would come to mind. Arnold was a Christian who never went along just to be accepted by everyone else. He always tried to do the right thing. His life lifted up the good news about Jesus in a way that the young man could not escape. He was drawn to Jesus because Arnold added divine flavoring.

2. Salt was a symbol of friendship

In some ancient societies salt was a symbol of friendship. In Arab culture, when two people shared salt, even if they were your enemy, you were required to treat him as a friend. Jesus told us to love our enemy, to pray for our enemy.

3. Salt was valuable

We don't think much about salt today. It's just there in the saltshaker. But throughout history salt has been valuable. The Romans believed that, except for the sun, nothing was more valuable than salt.

Jesus' hearers would have understood salt of the earth to represent an extremely valuable commodity. They knew He was saying that His followers were to have an extremely important function in the world.

4. Salt stings

I'm sure all of us have felt the sting of salt in an open wound. Christians are to sting the world's conscience—make it uncomfortable in the presence of God's Holy Gospel.

Sometimes we become so concerned with pleasing and trying to attract that our witness against sin is obscured and lost. We must remember we cannot stand with our Lord if we do not stand on and with His Word, the Bible.

5. Salt creates thirst

It increases the body's craving for water. Bill and I went to a Church Security meeting at Calvary. After eating several pretzels for snacks, I needed water because the salt made me thirsty.

Believers are to so live before the world that others will be made more aware of their spiritual dehydration and danger.

We are to live such lives that people will become thirsty for Jesus. They should be able to look at us, and think, “What is this person? I have never seen anybody quite like this before!”

We can be the kind of person that creates a thirst for Jesus. And when we become such, believe me, revival will start, and the people who are looking for a difference, will come in and will want to know about it.

6. Salt preserves

But the primary emphasizes of Jesus is that of preservation. John Stott said, “If meat goes bad, don’t blame the meat. That’s what happens when bacteria breed unchecked. Ask, ‘Where’s the salt?’ “If society becomes corrupt, don’t blame society. That’s what happens when fallen society is left to itself and human evil is unchecked. Ask, ‘Where’s the church?’

“It’s hypocritical of us to shrug our hands in despair and blame society for going bad. Jesus told us to be the world’s salt and light. If darkness and rottenness abound, we must accept the blame--and accept with new determination the role that Jesus has given us.”

Christians are a preserving influence in the world. Christians hold back moral and spiritual erosion. I know our world is disappointingly evil—but it could be even worse.

All that Jesus had in mind with the illustration of salt was that believers check the moral corruption of the world so that it doesn’t quickly perish in its own moral rottenness.

Jesus challenges us to be the salt of the earth in a time of wickedness. What the world needs is more Christian salt to preserve and nurture the life God gives in Jesus Christ.

What would the world be like if there were no churches, and no Sunday Schools? We Christians can have a powerful influence on the direction our world goes. We are the salt that prevents the entire earth from degenerating even faster than it is.

You are the light of the world.

Matthew 5:14 - 16 (NIV) 14“You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. 15Neither 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. 16In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.

Have you ever wondered why Jesus used two illustrations—salt and light? Because salt is for corruption—we are preservers in the world against moral decay. And light is to attract the lost to Jesus. Jesus is the real light of the world and we are His rays, attracting those walking in darkness to Him.

1. Light is meant to be seen

Jesus said He was the light of the world (Jn. 8:12). We are His representatives. People are to see Jesus through us. When our attitude is of the Beatitudes, we light up the world.

A minister filling in for a teacher of a young boys' class asked, "What do you think Jesus was like?" The pastor expected to hear: He was a good man; He was a poet; He was a carpenter; He was like God. But no! One little fellow raised his hand and replied, "I think Jesus was like my Sunday School teacher."

Has anyone ever compared you to Jesus? And wouldn't it be wonderful that we would so live our lives that non-Christians want to know our secret, and the source of our light!

There are people in the world around us who never read the Bible. But they are reading us. Are they able to see God in our lives? Are they able to say of us to others, "That man--or that woman--reminds me of Christ"?

Do we let our light so shine that men may see, not us, but our Father in heaven? This is the real test. Light shines in the darkness—it is meant to be seen.

2. Light is a guide

Light also guides us to our destination. [Flying with Mark. Him sick and passed out. Flying at 15,000 feet. Total darkness. Lights of the town and runway. Glorious.]

Christians should be shining lights in a world of darkness. Light is obvious, not hidden. Light is every outward and visible action of our Christian walk. Our lives and our words must reveal to others how to travel through this world and how to make a safe landing.

Application:

Is it realistic that people in the world should be able to look at our lives and tell we have been born again? Yes, I think this is exactly what Jesus is telling us. Being a Christian does make a difference. We are not simply "different." We are the salt and light of the world. Examine your actions this week. Were you salt, were you light for Jesus?

Remember, salt is worthless when it remains in the salt shaker; light must be seen to do any good. When someone says to you, "Please pass the salt," remember the words of Jesus, "You are the salt of the earth...You are the light of the world."

Whenever you turn on a light switch let it remind you that you are the light of the world. We do not want to be a church that will move with the world. We want to be a church that will move the world.