

The Sermon on the Mount – Matthew 5–7

A Christian's Influence – 5:13-16

In the Beatitudes, Jesus defined the character traits of a genuine Christian. In these four short verses, Jesus used the common, indispensable commodities of salt and light as metaphors to specify the influence for good His disciples should be accomplishing in the world they live in.

The people listening to Jesus must have been puzzled at Jesus' expectations of His followers being great influences in the hard, tough (Roman) world, especially since they were supposed to exhibit characteristics like: poor spirit, mourning, hunger for righteousness, purity of heart and peacemaker. Thus, this aspect of Jesus' teaching illustrates one of many Christian paradoxes: genuine believers are required to serve the world, even with the knowledge that the world will persecute them.

BEING THE "SALT OF THE EARTH"

Jesus proclaimed the affirmation: Christians are to be "the salt of the earth" and the condition He placed on this command: they are to maintain their "saltiness".

5:13 Salt is a preservative ^{2 Chronicles 13:5}, a flavoring ^{Job 6:6-7, Colossians 4:6} and a thirst producer ^{Matthew 5:6}.

The family ^{Genesis 2:24-25} and the government ^{Romans 13:1} were instituted by God in society as wholesome influences, but Jesus is making it clear in this exhortation that He expects Christians to be the primary agents to stop, or at least arrest, the moral decay of society. While salt is very stable and cannot actually change, the phrase "if salt loses its saltiness" refers to the presence of many impurities existing with the salt crystals, which results in the salt losing its characteristic usefulness. While it can be refined ("made salty again"), in those days it was easier to mine pure salt and use the impure salt to throw on rooftops and/or paths to keep vegetation from growing.

The Bible also presents salt as an essential part of temple incense ^{Exodus 30:35} and offerings ^{Leviticus 2:13}, an image of death & destruction ^{Genesis 19:16, Deuteronomy 29:23, Judges 9:45} and a healing agent ^{2 Kings 2:19-22}.

A convicting example of John the Baptist being salt in the world was his witness to Herod ^{Matthew 14:1-5}.

BEING THE "LIGHT OF THE WORLD"

Jesus proclaimed the affirmation: Christians are to be "the light of the world" and the condition He placed on this command: they are to let their "light shine before men".

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5:14 Jesus is the true light ^{John 8:12}, and the light Jesus brought into the world ^{John 12:46} drives away worldly darkness ^{John 3:19-21}. While Jesus was in the world, He was the world's light ^{John 9:5}, but His expectation was/is for His followers (Christians) to be His beacons of light while He is gone.

In the first century, buildings were made of a light, stucco-like material. So, when cities were built on a hill ^{Daniel 9:16}, the structures would reflect sunlight, making them visible for long distances. The light of Jesus, shining out from Christians, should be just as obvious to all those around them.

5:15 The imagery of a lighted lamp under a bowl shows the same senselessness of Christians keeping the light of Jesus hidden in their hearts. As the lampstands of God ^{Revelation 1:12-13, 20}, Christians are commanded to let their light shine brightly, as a lamp on a lampstand does in a dark Jewish home.

5:16 Jesus made it clear that the "light" Christians (i.e., people already saved by His Grace ^{Ephesians 2:8-9}) are to brightly shine are their "good deeds" ^{James 2:26} (works ^{Ephesians 2:10} or fruit ^{Matthew 7:15-20}). These Godly deeds are a way of countering the deeds of darkness ^{John 3:19}. As a result, some people will see the glorification of the Heavenly Father, and will join Christians in praising Him.

Light is a spiritual metaphor for heavenly wisdom that produces clear vision for making wise decisions.

Notice the implication that when people are left to themselves, the Earth will decay and the world will remain dark. The only way for there to be a change is for salt and light to be introduced from outside.

Two key lessons of the responsibilities of Christians from Jesus' teaching about Salt and Light:

1. **There is a fundamental difference between the church and the world** (between Christians and non-Christians) that should never be blurred. The message in the Sermon on the Mount is built on the assumption that Christians are different ^{2 Corinthians 5:17}. The greatest tragedy of the church (and the nation of Israel) throughout history is its tendency to conform to the prevailing worldly culture instead of developing a Christian counter-culture.
2. **Christians must accept the responsibility to make a difference in the world.** Jesus demands His disciples to maintain their saltiness (by praying, studying, serving) and apply their knowledge of truth to life situations. They must also let their light shine (living lives of righteousness) at all times. These high standards are possible, only because God has provided the Holy Spirit, who makes the presence and power of God directly available to all genuine believers ^{Luke 1:35, John 16:7-15}.

Bonus Material

Why were there so many harsh judgements by God in the OT times, but none during the church age?

Man showed his incapability to be righteous in his own ability, by failing many times, right from the beginning:

- † The decay started with the fall of Adam and Eve in Eden ^{Genesis 3} and the early first murder ^{Genesis 4}.
- † God killed all mankind, except for Noah, and the animals in a flood because of absolute iniquity ^{Genesis 6-8}.
- † All the people rebelled against God's commands and were scattered at the Tower of Babel ^{Genesis 11:1-9}.
- † During the 430 years the Israelites were in Egypt ^{Exodus 12:40}, the people of Canaan became increasingly wicked ("defiled" ^{Leviticus 18:24-25}) until their sin ^{Deuteronomy 18:9-12} "reached its full measure" ^{Genesis 15:16}.

Prior to Joshua leading the nation of Israel into the Promised Land, Moses (who passed it on to Joshua) was commanded by the Lord to "destroy them totally" and "show them no mercy" ^{Deuteronomy 7:1-2} and later he was told "do not leave anything alive that breathes" ^{Deuteronomy 20:16-17}.

In addition, God's chosen people could not even keep their covenant between God and Abraham:

- † God judged the Northern Kingdom of Israel by using the Assyrians to destroy them in 722 BC ^{2 Kings 17:5-8}.
- † God also sent the Babylonians to destroy the Southern Kingdom of Judah in 586 BC ^{2 Kings 24:18 – 25:11}.

Since the Earthly life of Jesus, there have been many times in history when evil has seemingly been rampant; however, God has not judged any nation by total annihilation during this time. Why is that the case?

What has been the difference between the OT and NT times? Clearly, the difference is the Holy Spirit.

- † John answered them all, "I baptize you with water. But one more powerful than I will come, the thongs of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit..." ^{Luke 3:16}
- † "If you love me, you will obey what I command. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counselor to be with you forever – the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you." ^{John 14:15-17}
- † And now you know what is holding [the antichrist] back, so that he may be revealed at the proper time. For the secret power of lawlessness is already at work; but the one who now holds it back will continue to do so till he is taken out of the way. ^{2 Thessalonians 2:6-7}

These verses emphasize the vital importance of the Holy Spirit, who is a gift from God and "the one who now holds [the power of lawlessness] back". He will also "continue to do so till he is taken out of the way".

Since the spiritual baptism of the church ^{Acts 1:5, 2:1-4} represented the inception of the Holy Spirit's continuous presence on Earth, it seems logical that the Rapture of the church ^{1 Thessalonians 4:13-17} will signify His removal.

So, as bad as it seems at times here on Earth, the wickedness during the church age (when the Holy Spirit is present) is nothing like it was prior to Jesus' First Coming, and it is nothing like it will be between the Rapture and His Second Coming – which is only slightly more time than the seven years of the Tribulation ^{Daniel 9:27}.

Thank God the Christians (the bride/ church ^{Ephesians 5:25-32}) will be with Jesus in the bridal chamber (facing the Judgement Seat of Christ ^{2 Corinthians 5:10}) and not on Earth during the incredibly evil time of the Tribulation.

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