

Beautiful Attitudes, The Christian's Character
"The Christian's Influence: Salt & Light"
Matthew 5:13-16

Introduction- In the Beatitudes Jesus has described the essential character of all those living in the Kingdom of God!

Now using two metaphors "salt" & "light," he indicates the kind of influence they will have for good in the world.

But some may be tempted to ask "What possible influence could the people described in the Beatitudes exert in this hard, tough world?....."

Yet Jesus did not share this skepticism! He knew the world would persecute them. (vs. 10-12)

But looking at that handful of faithful followers (he said "ye are....(you-emphatic).

1 Cor. 1 "God has chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise!" They were "ordinarily ordinary".

So using the metaphors of "salt" and "light" Jesus does two things with each of them:

1. He makes an affirmation "ye are".... (vs. 13, 14)
2. He points out the condition on which the affirmation depends.

Now let's look at the first affirmation:

I. "Ye are the salt of the earth." vs. 13

In the ancient world salt was highly valued. The Greeks believed it contained something almost divine. The Romans sometimes paid soldiers with salt. The ancient world valued salt for several reasons. But the big question is, which of those reasons did Jesus have in mind when He said, "You are the salt of the earth."

1. Salt was valued as a seasoning agent.

Job. 6:6 "Can flavorless food be eaten without salt?" So perhaps Jesus was saying that as His disciples, we are to bring a flavor or a zest to living! Life without Christ is insipid and dull! But Jesus can make the bland savory; the unpalatable becomes delight! Life without Jesus always grows stale. - John 4

2. Salt also creates thirst.

Even today Arabs take salt to force them to drink liquids and avoid dehydration caused by the desert. Perhaps Jesus is saying that our lives should be lived in such a way that it makes others thirst for God? It's unfortunate that the unbelieving world would after looking at the church has not always wanted to know God!

Some time ago, a public relations firm in New York conducted a study of what outsiders thought about the church. The unchurched respondents had three major negative reactions. First, the church always asked for money; next, it was always sad; finally, it always talked about death.

But perhaps salt's greatest use and the idea that Jesus had in mind was its use as a *preservative*. When Jesus said, "Ye are the salt of the earth" he was most likely thinking of salt's preservative function.

The fishermen who heard Jesus speak would have thought of the way they used salt to preserve fish!

Illustration: Catch in Lake Galilee and sold in Jerusalem!

So as Christians we are to have a preserving influence on the decaying world around us!

Now both the Bible and our own History tell us that man apart from God eventually decays and destroys himself.

Illustration: Genesis 3, the fall, the time of Noah, and Sodom & Gomorrah. Romans 1, its "sin" has brought decay and death.

Now it is true that God himself has set other restraining influences in society.

1. The State - with its authority to frame and enforce laws.
2. The Family - including marriage and parental influence.
3. The Church

Yet without redeemed, regenerate, and righteous people, these God ordained institutions can never affect the moral decay of sinful society.

Illustration:

The French culture of the early 1700s was in the process of decay. The king had a motto: “After me the deluge.” He was absolutely right; that was a prophetic voice. The deluge came and France was ripped apart by the French Revolution.

Just twenty miles across the channel, the English culture had the same rot. Historians have described at length the moral corruption of English culture. And yet England did not go through a revolution. What spared it? Its mighty navy? Its suave diplomats? Its politicians? Its police force? No. The country was spared, as historian and president Woodrow Wilson insisted, because in 1703 a man called John Wesley was born in England.

In Wesley’s early years his heart was strangely warmed, and he became a citizen of the kingdom of God. He reached out and won others to Christ, and the historians believe that it was in large part the righteous Methodist movement, spread like salt throughout the land, that delivered England from a revolution.

The safety of a nation does not reside in its military genius, its armies, or even its atomic weapons; it comes from the character of its people. Throughout history, civilizations have fallen like decaying trees. The outward push may have come from an enemy, but the country fell because of inward rot.

We are significant if we are beatitude people, meek and pure peacemakers, though sometimes persecuted. We are like salt in a decaying society.

“We are to be a moral disinfectant in a world where moral standards are low, constantly changing or non-existent.”

But the effectiveness of salt, however is conditional.

The Two Conditions:

1. Salt must come into contact with the culture.

We are not to withdraw from the world and live in monasteries! Jesus sent his disciples forth as sheep among the wolves, (in the world, but not of it.)

- Don’t hide in your churches.
- The church is not to be a “salt warehouse”.
- We need to influence the culture by living out the Christian counter-culture found in the Sermon on the Mount. A greater righteousness, a wider love, a nobler ambition.

- Illustration - Schools, T.V., movies, art, music, government, sports, ect.....
“In the work place.”
- Rather, Jesus is our example! “Moral insulation, not physical isolation.”

2. Salt must not be contaminated by the culture.

- If salt is to be effective, it must retain its distinctiveness. vs. 13b (not lose its savor.)

How does salt lose its saltiness?

By contamination or mixture. The church or the believer becomes like the world! So we can't help the world. Lust of the flesh, eyes, pride...Rom. 12.

Dr. Lloyd Jones, "The influence of Christians in and on society depends on their being distinct, not identical." (note: the church following the world.)

Illustration - Contrast Abraham & Lot!

Ask yourself, have you lost your saltiness? If so, your good for nothing!

Ask, how to keep salty?

But not only is the world decaying, its also dark! So Jesus say's in vs. 14, "ye are the light of the world." Wow! Note again these humble followers of Jesus "are the light of the world." You say, "but I thought Jesus is the light of the world?" He is! Illus. - the moon and the sun! Also the Christian is essentially different from the world. The world is decaying, we are salt. The world is dark, we are light. We must not lose that distinction.

How are we to shine?

"By our good works," vs. 16 (We are not saved by good works, Eph. 2:8-9).
Good works cover everything the Christian says and does.

Illustration seen in the Sermon on the Mount:

1. A greater righteousness.
2. A wider love.
3. A nobler ambition.

1. Christians should shine naturally.

The purpose of light is to shine!

2. Christians should shine sacrificially!

Where ever you see light you know that something is being burned up, energy is being expended.

3. Christians should shine openly. (vs. 14-15)

If you are the light of the world, don't hide your light under a bushel.

4. Christians should shine where they are. (vs. 16)

What's your candlestick?

It may be an obscure place, a humble home, an office, sick bed, school, etc.

Eph. 5:18 "Be filled with the Spirit!"

Light exposes and reveals, so like Jesus you may be rejected! Yet we must shine!

John R.W. Stott in his book "The Christian Counter-Culture":

"Salt and light have one thing in common: they give and expend themselves and thus are the opposite of any and every kind of self-centered religiosity. Nevertheless, the kind of service each renders is different. In fact, their effects are complementary. The function of salt is largely negative: it prevents decay. The function of light is positive: it illuminates the darkness. So Jesus calls his disciples to exert a double influence on the secular community, a negative influence by arresting its decay and a positive influence by bringing light into its darkness. For it is one thing to stop the spread of evil; it is another to promote the spread of truth, beauty and goodness. Putting the two metaphors together, it seems legitimate to discern in them the proper relation between evangelism and social action in the total mission of Christ in the world - a relation which perplexes many believers today. We are called to be both salt and light to the secular community."

Stott- "Christians can influence and change non-christian society!"

Six weapons for social change:

1. Prayer
2. Evangelism
3. Example
4. Argument
5. Action
6. Suffering

In Conclusion

Three Results of Living the Beatitudes:

1. This is the way we ourselves will be blessed. The beatitudes identify those whom God declares to be blessed, those who please him and who themselves find fulfillment. True blessedness is found in goodness, and nowhere else.
2. This is the way the world will be best be served. Jesus offers his followers the immense privileges of being the world's salt and light if only they will live by the beatitudes.
3. This is the way God will be glorified. Here towards the beginning of his ministry Jesus tells his disciples that if they let their light shine so that their good works are seen, their Father in heaven will be glorified. At the end of his ministry, in the upper room, he will express the same truth in similar words: 'By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit, and so prove to be my disciples..'

So this, then, is the great desirability of the good and Christlike life, and so of the Christian counter-culture. It brings blessing to ourselves, salvation to others and ultimately glory to God.