

“Be Who God Made You to Be”

Matthew 5:13-16

Let's review the context of the Sermon on the Mount. Jesus has begun His ministry, preaching and teaching 'Repent for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand', healing sicknesses and casting out demons as He travels throughout Galilee. Large crowds are starting to follow Him. These are the people who have been told by the supposed 'spiritual' leaders of Israel; you're not good enough for God. Your diseases, weaknesses and poverty show God's face is not shining on you. You're not blessed of God and you'll never do anything of significance. The religious leaders taught that you were blessed by God if you were healthy, rich, if you were in power, if you showed no signs of weakness, if you fought back against the Romans, if you were pure on the outside.

But Jesus comes along – just like Isaiah said in Is. 61 to “*preach good news to the poor, to proclaim freedom for the captives of oppression and release from the darkness of sin.*” He tells them that God says you're blessed if you recognize your spiritual poverty, grieve over yours and others' sins and leave revenge with the Lord. Blessed are you because you hunger and thirst for God and what's right in his eyes, resulting in a desire to be merciful, pure in heart and to restore peace even though you will be persecuted for living for Jesus.

Now Jesus summarizes all this in vv.13-16 with His salt and light metaphors. When you live out the beatitudes – a summary of the kingdom of God principles, then we are making a huge impact in our world. How? When you and I seek to live by Kingdom standards instead of the world's . . .

We Delay Spiritual Decay **(5:13)**

As if to stress to His disciples that they are and will make an impact for Christ in the world where they live, He repeats the word “You” in the Greek. “*You, you are*”. As if He is anticipating our doubts. “You” Jesus says. ‘*Who me?*’ we question. ‘Yeah, You – you are the salt of the earth!’ What did Jesus mean by this metaphor?

The primary function for salt in Jesus' day was as a preserver of food. They didn't have fridges and freezers or Tupperware back then. Instead they used salt. They would rub salt into meat and it would dramatically slow down the decaying process.

Ever since Adam and Eve sinned, the world has been decaying. Sin abounds. In our time we see morals decaying. But it would decay even faster if the believers in Jesus Christ were not here. Our presence and our message slows down the decaying process. How do we delay moral decay?

By preserving truth (2 Tim. 4:1-4)

2 Timothy is Paul's last letter. The majority of the letter is Paul's charge to Timothy, “don't compromise the Word of God!”

In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who will judge the living and the dead, and in view of His appearing and kingdom, I give you this charge: Preach the Word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage – with great patience and careful instruction. For the time will come when men will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead to suit their own

desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear. They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths.

We are the preservers of God's standards. When our world promotes choosing your own gender instead of accepting who God made you to be; abortion as a women's right to her body, ignoring the rights of the child or euthanasia as an act of mercy, who speaks against these things, who slows the process down in our culture's desire to see these things accepted as part of society? Believers in Jesus Christ standing up for the principles of God.

The Word of God will last for eternity. We have that confidence that all God's promises in His Word will eventually come true and all those who rejected His Word will realize one day they will be judged according to the Word. We have the wonderful message of God, that some times prevents or at least delays the spiritual and moral decay of our society. Don't apologize for it. Don't be ashamed of it. Graciously stand up for the truth because it's for everyone's physical and spiritual well-being. Its what people need to hear, even though they don't want to hear it.

Salt is a very stable compound. It can do its job as long as impurities are not mixed with it. So, we also delay spiritual decay . . .

By modelling purity (Eph. 5:1-7)

¹Follow God's example, therefore, as dearly loved children ²and walk in the way of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God. ³But among you there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality, or of any kind of impurity, or of greed, because these are improper for God's holy people. ⁴Nor should there be obscenity, foolish talk or coarse joking, which are out of place, but rather thanksgiving. ⁵For of this you can be sure: No immoral, impure or greedy person—such a person is an idolater—has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God. ⁶Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of such things God's wrath comes on those who are disobedient. ⁷Therefore do not be partners with them.

Hasn't our presence at work, in class, in the dressing room or even at a family gathering stopped a dirty joke, a rude comment or curbed foul language? 'Among us there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality.' When you and I practise godly sexuality, we model the healthy principles of God. The world knows that when we model impure sexuality, that it creates all kinds of physical, social and moral dilemmas.

But if we give in or lower our standards of morality we lose our impact. "But if you lose your saltiness [Jesus said], how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled by men."

Once salt has been mixed with something else, it quickly loses its effect. Like salt, we add flavour with our presence. We bring out the best in our world when we model pure lifestyles and share the truth of God's Word.

Jesus uses another metaphor: again stressing "You – yes, you are the light of the world!" when we live by God's standards. When we're living the beatitudes out . . .

We Radiate God's Way to Live **(5:14-16a)**

Jesus is trying to stress to us that this is what we are, not what we will be. We are lights, if we know Christ. Light has a function: to dispel darkness, to show the path to something. This is what He means when He says you can't hide a city on a hill. In those days there were no street lights so travel at night was particularly dark. But when travelling at night in the country, one could see the light from a town in the distance.

You don't light a candle at night and then put it under a bowl, Jesus says. Most Jewish houses consisted of one room. One oil lamp placed in the centre of the room could light the whole house.

When we lose power at night we get an idea of pitch darkness. But when we light one candle, it makes a huge impact on our surroundings. And likewise, so do we, Jesus says, when we live for Him we radiate God's way to live. Show your good deeds. 'Show My light in you by obeying Me.' People will see it, Jesus says. People will see how God wants us to live through our good deeds, through our everyday, ordinary living. They will see God radiate through us . . .

In our actions (Eph. 5:8-20)

Ch. 5:1 began – *“Be imitators of God and live a life of love.”*
If we know God through faith in Jesus Christ, we change the way we live.

5:8 “For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light (for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness, righteousness and truth) and find out what pleases the Lord.

Then he goes on to say, as light we expose the deeds of darkness. At times our behaviour makes unbelievers uncomfortable. It may even convict them and eventually bring them to ask why we do what we do/or don't do what they do, and then we have the opportunity to share how Jesus has changed us.

We are to be careful how we live (v.15), even how we use our time for God's purposes, even what controls us. Because what controls us most results in what we speak about (v.19). If we're allowing God's Spirit to control us then our conversations will be more God focused than self focused. Paul moves on to talk about how we are to let our light shine by our actions to a huge section on how we radiate God's way to live . . .

In our relationships (Eph. 5:21-6:9)

Look at the subheadings. Paul instructs believers how knowing Christ changes how we relate to our spouse (5:22-33), our children & parents (6:1-3) and our employers & employees (6:5-9). But this whole section hinges on 5:21. God will radiate through our relationships at home, work and school when we practise mutual submission with one another. Be willing to serve, to listen, to pray for and to give preference to. We all have the tendency to think mostly of ourselves or our perspectives or our schedules. But when we put others ahead of ourselves, we radiate Christ to the world.

Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others more important than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others. Your attitude should be the same as that of Jesus Christ who . . . Paul then describes how He humbled himself to serve us.

We radiate God's way to live in our actions and relationships and . . .

In our attitudes (Phil. 2:14-16)

"Do everything without complaining or arguing, so that you may become blameless and pure, children of God without fault in a crooked and depraved generation, in which you shine like stars in the universe as you hold out the Word of life."

Negative attitudes do not shine for God, they only show how grumpy we are. Negative, complaining attitudes do not attract people to you, but an uncomplaining attitude attracts others like stars in the sky. Some people wonder why they have few friends. They often complain that people don't invite them over or are never there when they need them. Sadly, its often because of their attitudes. Forgiving, serving and humble attitudes radiate God's way to live and attract those who to the gospel.

We ARE salt. We ARE light, Jesus says. We make a bigger impact then we think. When we show the work of God in our lives by delaying spiritual decay and radiating God's way to live then we're doing what we were made to do and the result is . . .

We Will Glorify God **(5:16b)**

Let your light shine before men so that they may see your good deeds and glorify [that's the word in Greek] Your Father who is in heaven."

Our lifestyle speaks volumes. When we live by Kingdom standards we bring glory to God.

The "they" here that we shine our lights on, predominantly speaks of the unbelievers. Peter seems to paraphrase Jesus words in 1 Pet. 2:12 when he said, *"Live such good lives among the pagans that though they accuse of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day He visits us."*

God can be glorified by unbelievers in that our living for Christ and graciously submitting to persecution humbles them possibly resulting in their salvation. But perhaps there is a way that unbelievers indirectly bring glory to God, without accepting the gospel. Unbelievers indirectly glorify God when they see our good deeds and cannot deny that the reason we do these things is because of our love for God. When Jesus returns and all those who rejected Him stand before Him to explain why they never accepted them, Jesus may very well bring to their minds the many occasions where you and I were a witness to Christ by our lifestyle, which they cannot deny, but they refused to accept.

If you are here this morning and have never asked Jesus Christ to forgive you of your sins, I urge you to do that today. God loves you so much that He sent Jesus to die for you. You must admit your own sinfulness and ask his forgive-ness. When you do that He forgives you and gives you His Spirit to live in you. The presence of His Spirit is there to help you live for Him.

For us who know Christ, remember we ARE the salt of the earth AND the light of the world. Be encouraged. What we do for Christ does matter. It matters to God, who then uses what we do and impacts people one at a time. We may be outnumbered. We may feel like we're overpowered by the unsaved. We may be ridiculed and harassed for not living like the world does, but according to the beatitudes, then that's how we make an impact.

If we have not been the salt and light we should be, then ask for forgiveness and commit your way to His standards that we've let slip. Ask God to help you by his strength and power to be salt and

to be light so that we can change a life here and there, and must importantly, glorify our father in heaven.

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