

“Disciples Make a Difference”

Matthew 5:13-16

The Sermon on the Mount deals with the need for a new life rather than a legalistic system of morality. In these chapters, Jesus reveals the character that is produced in the lives of His disciples as the result of their lives being transformed by Him.

The Sermon on the Mount shows us what life in Christ's kingdom looks like.

John Stott - *“[This Sermon] is the nearest thing to a manifesto that Jesus ever uttered, for it is his own description of what He wanted his followers to be and do.”*

Why do we study this section of Scripture?

- It shows us the absolute necessity of the new birth
- It points us to Jesus Christ
- It shows us the way to blessing
- It explains for us the way to please our Father in heaven

Whereas in the first twelve verses Jesus has described the character of His followers, in these verses He describes their function as being that of influence.

“Influence” - *the capacity to have an effect on the character, development, or behavior of someone or something*

Larry Dobbs - *“The only inheritance that a man will leave that has eternal value is his influence.”*

John Wesley was one of the greatest Christian influencers who has ever lived. During the eighteenth century, Wesley was a dynamic leader, preacher, and social critic who, during his lifetime, turned the church in England and America upside down. In 1791, John Wesley wrote a letter to member of England's parliament who at the time was in the midst of fighting for the abolition of the British slave trade. Wesley's letter, written and dated on February 26, 1791, read:

“Dear sir, Unless the divine power has raised you up...I see not how you can go through your glorious enterprise, in opposing that villainy which is the scandal of religion, of England, and of human nature. Unless God has raised you up for this very thing, you will be worn out by the opposition of men and devils. But if God be for you, who can be against you? Are all of them

stronger than God? O be not weary in well doing! Go on, in the name of God and in the power of His might, till even American slavery (the vilest that ever saw the sun) shall vanish away before it. That He who has guided you from your youth up, may continue to strengthen you in this and all things, is the prayer of your affectionate servant, John Wesley.”

Four days after writing this letter, John Wesley died. Yet his letter made a profound difference in the life of its recipient, a young man by the name of William Wilberforce.

Wilberforce did not succeed in convincing England's parliament to abolish slavery at that time, but he didn't give up. He kept at it for decades despite much opposition. It is said that when he thought that he could not go on, he would look to John Wesley's letter for encouragement. Finally, in 1807, the slave trade was abolished. In 1833, several months after Wilberforce's death, slavery itself was abolished throughout all the British Empire. Thirty years later, the American president, Abraham Lincoln, issued the Emancipation Proclamation which made the eradication of slavery one of his goals as well.

Never underestimate the power of your influence!

In these verses, Jesus says that His disciples have influence. They make people thirsty. And not only do they make others thirsty, they also radiate light where there is darkness.

According to Jesus, believers are to influence their society and the world around them. How do disciples make a difference?

1. As the RESULT of possessing Christ's character

“You are the salt of the earth...You are the light of the world.”

Notice that Jesus is speaking to His followers in these verses. His followers are those who are in possession of His character, those whose lives have been transformed by His gospel and His grace.

*“**You**” - plural in both verses; refers to His followers in a collective sense; the church collectively makes a tremendous impact*

John 8:12 - “Again Jesus spoke to them, saying, I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.”

Because He is the light of the world, those in whom He dwells are also the light of the world. He is the light that shines through us.

illus. of song by Brandon Heath, "You Put the Light in Me"

Jesus intends for those of us who are in possession of His character to make a difference in the world for His sake.

This means that we must avoid two errors of thought:

- Avoid thinking that the world is basically good; Jesus says that the world is basically rotten!
- Avoid thinking that you should completely disassociate with the world; how else will we reach it for Christ?

John 17:14-18 - "I have given them your word, and the world has hated them because they are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. I do not ask that you take them out of the world, but that you keep them from the evil one. They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth. As you sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world."

Though Christ's followers are not OF the world, we are IN the world for the sake of mission TO the world.

1 Peter 2:9 - "But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light."

We are called to make a difference because of who we are and who lives within us. Believers have been saved for this express purpose.

John MacArthur - *"Here is a mandate for Christians to influence the world. The Beatitudes are not to be lived in isolation or only among fellow believers, but everywhere we go. God's only witnesses are His children, and the world has no other way of knowing of Him except through the testimony of what we are."*

Salt never did anyone any good while it remained on the shelf. Light never did anyone any good while it remained covered. Salt and light both must be dispersed and used in order to have influence in its surroundings.

2. Through the RESPONSIBILITY of witnessing to others

We are in the world to to reflect the world, but because God intends for us to influence the world. Jesus uses two metaphors to illustrate this truth:

The Illustration of Salt

The common belief in the Greco-Roman world was that nothing was more valuable than salt. In fact, Roman soldiers were paid in salt, hence the phrase, "Not worth his salt!"

- Salt is a preservative agent.

John Lennon wrote and recorded a song that was released in 1971, and the song was entitled, "Imagine." The lyrics of the song encourage the listener to imagine a world at peace without the barriers of borders or the divisiveness of religions and nationalities. According to Lennon, the ideal scenario would be no heaven and no hell, and no religion to divide humanity.

In many ways, this is the manifesto of the anti-Christ. I don't want to imagine a world without Jesus Christ!

Jesus said that the world without Him is a rotten place. His followers are the salt of the earth that preserves and flavors it.

The mere presence of believers exerts an immeasurable difference in society. Crime is reduced, ethical corruption is restrained, honesty and freedom is promoted, and morality is upheld. An absence of believers will allow unbelievable depths of depravity.

A well-known fact in the medical world is that the body is designed to give off salt through perspiration. If not for this, the body would retain water and become bloated and unhealthy and could result in death.

- Salt makes people thirsty.

Jesus intends for His church to make the world thirsty for Him. They ought to see something different in us that they desperately desire for themselves.

Oliver Wendell Holmes - *"I might have entered the ministry if certain clergymen I knew had not looked and acted so much like undertakers."*

Robert Louis Stevenson - *"I have been to church today, and am not depressed."*

Bland Christianity never made anybody thirsty for Christ. What do others learn of Jesus strictly through what they see on display in my life?

- Salt stings when it is placed in a wound.

The truth is confrontational to a world that opposes it. This is why Jesus said that His followers would be hated by the world because the world has hated Him and what He represents.

- Salt can be found just about anywhere.

Jesus could have said, "You are the gold of the earth. Or, you are the diamonds of the earth." Instead of saying that His followers are some precious stone hardly found, He says that they are common salt.

This is encouraging because it shows us that He is building His kingdom with common and ordinary people.

5:13 - "You are the salt of the earth, but if the salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything except to be thrown out and trampled under people's feet."

The Illustration of Light

Jesus says to His followers, "You are the salt of the earth. You are the light of the world." He was saying in effect that His disciples would carry out a universal task that would affect all of humanity.

Salt pertains to the disciple's LIFE; light pertains to the disciple's LIPS. We shine light through what we teach others and tell others about Jesus Christ.

His light is His truth.

Psalm 119:105 - "Your word is a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path."

Psalm 119:130 - "The entrance of Your words gives light; it gives understanding to the simple."

Jesus says that a city on a hill stands out and cannot be hidden. This is especially true at night when the lights of that city shine for miles into the surrounding darkness.

Light is to be visible in order for it to be effective.

5:15 - "Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house."

In referring to salt that has lost its taste and light that is under a basket, Jesus is not saying that we can lose our salvation. He is saying that the potential exists for us to be ineffective.

Tasteless Christians are ineffective witnesses, as are those who hide their light under cover.

We must pray for boldness to let our light shine!

3. For the REASON of glorifying our heavenly Father

“In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.”

We should constantly ask ourselves whether or not there is any noticeable difference in our approach to life compared to the rest of society around us. This is true with regard to the way we approach:

- materialism
- pleasure
- happiness
- ethics
- compassion

A picture frame serves no other purpose but to showcase the picture that is placed within it. Disciples are like picture frames. What matters is not the frame; what matters is what the frame points others to.

Our lives are to bring glory to our Father in heaven! To see good works BY us is to see Jesus Christ IN us. This is not for the purpose of bringing praise to ourselves, but is to direct the attention and praise of people to the One who deserves their worship.

How do disciples make a difference? They do so:

- As the result of possessing Christ's character
- Through the responsibility of witnessing to others
- For the reason of glorifying their heavenly Father