

JESUS ON THE FAT HILL: IMPACT OTHERS – MATTHEW 5:13-16

I love being an American. I love the fact that I have the freedoms that I have. While it is not perfect, it is the best country in the world. I don't have to worry about an oppressive government, or religious persecution, or financial restrictions. I have freedom and God has blessed each of us as Americans with this freedom.

We can not take freedom lightly. Freedom came at a price. Many have died to keep the freedoms in America alive. Many have fought politically and militarily for freedom. Many have risked everything so that every person can have freedom.

Freedom means that every person has the right to believe how he or she wants to. Freedom means that people who disagree with me have the right to believe what they believe. Some in America believe there is no God. Some in America believe that there are many gods. Some in America believe that we all are part of a god. They have the freedom to believe these things, even if they are wrong.

So, I want to ask you about freedom. If a person has the right to believe whatever they want, are Christians suppose to try to change them? Are Christians suppose to influence the beliefs around them? Is it appropriate for a teacher to speak up to her students and say, 'I believe the Bible's account of creation'? Should a co-worker say, "As a Christian I believe marriage is a sacred institution between a man and a woman"? Should a boss ever put a Bible on his desk or invite an employee to church? Should a parent force their child to go to church even in their teen years? Or should Christians just keep their beliefs to themselves? All of you should be asking that question. Is your faith in Christ a private matter, for church only, or does it impact your relationships at work, at home, and in our town?

Most non-Christians would say you should keep your faith to yourself. "Don't try to impose your values on others." "Keep religion out of the public arena." In fact, some non-Christians would say that it is un-American to try to impose your values on others.

They forget that America is like a stew pot, not a group of individuals. What makes this country great is the way the different cultures come together and impact each other. Just like in a stew pot, the beef impacts the potatoes and vice-versa, it is American to share your faith, but more importantly it is what Jesus wants.

Christ wants us to impact others. Listen to what Jesus said about the Christian's relationship to the world in the Sermon on the Mount.

READ Matthew 5:13-16

Jesus wants His disciples to affect the world positively by the way in which they live. He told His followers "You are the salt of the earth and the light of the world."

What did He mean by calling them SALT?

First, Followers of Christ Are Highly Valued.

Being told that they were salt must have been puzzling to those who were standing there. Jesus refers to his handful of basically uneducated disciples and referred to them as the salt of the earth. Jesus was talking to a group of nobodies. They were not an organized movement. They were not a large church that influenced city or state governments. They were not a group that the politicians, or the rich, or the popular listened to. They were common people: fisher men, tax collectors, blue collar workers. But once Jesus turned over the saltbox and threw on the light switch for His followers, they became somebodies! They became valuable salt and light.

What great dignity Jesus bestows on his followers. What a great compliment! Salt was a necessity of life in ancient times and thus great value was attached to it. Salt was so important that it was sometimes used for money. In fact, our word "salary" comes from the Latin word for the salt paid to Roman soldiers. We still use the phrase saying that someone is "worth their salt."

We don't think much about salt because we can get as much of it in pure form as we want. It is just that little bottle with holes in the top on the table. But when you are completely dependent on salt to preserve your food, and when it is so valuable that it is used in the place of money, you get a completely different perspective on salt.

Because we live in a part of the world where we have an abundance of food we don't understand the monotony of the diet of those who lived in Jesus' day. In fact, in some third world countries today, people eat rice or corn-meal three times a day every day. Without salt to make it tasty, it would be difficult to continue to swallow the same food, over and over, day after day. In Job 6:6 the Bible says, "Can flavorless food be eaten without salt?" For this one reason alone salt is valuable.

Second, by calling them "Salt", Jesus wants His Followers to be A Preservative.

Salt was important for survival, because it was the only way they had to preserve meat. Obviously, they were not as privileged as we are with refrigeration, so salt became very important in their ability to preserve their food. The salt was rubbed into the meat before it was stored. Salt was used to hinder the process of decay, so too Christians are given the task of stopping the decay of our world.

Christianity has in fact had a profound positive effect on the world. The most dramatic impact of Christianity on the world is that it has attached new value to human life. Prior to Christianity infanticide, and abandonment of children was a common practice. Hospitals as we now know them began through influence of Christianity. The Red Cross was started by an evangelical Christian. Almost every one of the first 123 colleges and universities in the United States has Christian origins, founded by Christians for Christian purposes. The same could be said of orphanages, adoption agencies, humane treatment of the insane, the list goes on and on of dramatic impact of Christianity in our world. (from the book: "What If Jesus Had Never Been Born?")

What did He mean by calling His followers SALT?

Third, Jesus meant for His Followers to make people THIRSTY

Have you ever eaten salty chips or pretzels without a drink? You get thirsty enough to get off the couch!

When Christ called His followers salt, He was telling to make the world thirsty. Thirsty for what? For the Living Water, Jesus Christ Himself. Jesus said in John 7:37-38 - *Jesus stood and said in a loud voice, "If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him."*

People should see that there is something different about a person who follows Jesus. They should see the goodness that is produced in their life. They should see how things work out, or how there is tremendous strength when they don't. They should be able to look at us and say, "I don't know what they have, but I want it!" We should make them thirsty for Christ!

We are to be the salt of the earth!

Jesus also called His followers "the light of the world."

I heard one old-timer say recently that our country is not what it used to be. You can see all around you how things are changing, and sometimes not for the better.

We have to remember that we should not blame the world for its condition.

- Don't blame the house for getting dark; that's what happens when the sun goes down.
- Don't blame the meat for getting putrid; that's what happens when bacteria sets in. (from John Stott)

Sin has infiltrated our world. No wonder it is in bad shape.

You can see the darkness all around us. A recent poll by the research group Public Agenda found that rudeness is getting worse in America. 79% of those surveyed said that lack of respect and courtesy is a serious problem. 88% said that they often or sometimes come across people who are rude or disrespectful. Poor customer service has become so rampant that nearly half of those surveyed said they have walked out of a store in the past year because of it. Interestingly, people didn't know what to do about it:

- 36% said that when confronted with rudeness, the right thing to do is to respond with excessive politeness.
- 29% said it is best to point out bad behavior.
- 42% said the best thing to do is walk away.

Being the light of the world, however, means that we can not walk away. We have to love people until they realize how dark their lives are.

Powerful light was brought to the World Trade Center site after the September 11, 2001 attacks on the towers. Those lights made the area as bright as day so the rescue efforts could continue around the clock. The rescuers had a huge task: find those still alive so they can get aid, and find the dead so the families could give them a proper burial. Without this light, they would never have been able to rescue so many people.

We are on the same mission: we are sent out by Christ to rescue the world from the wreckage that people have made of their lives without Jesus in their lives. We are to help those in the darkness by being His light.

Ephesians 5:8 - For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light.

That is why I want you to memorize Matthew 5:14 (the little card in your bulletin). You are the light of the world!

Have you ever stubbed your toe in the dark? It hurts so bad! There are worse things, however, that happen in the dark. Being the light of the world means that we get to prevent worse pain in other people's life.

We are to be luminaries along the path to God. We should light up the dangerous path of life and make it safe by showing them Christ.

The rescuers at the World Trade Center site would never have thought of covering those lights for a while so they could get some rest. Jesus didn't intend for His followers to turn their lights off either. There isn't suppose to be a time for adulterous relationships, racism, getting your career in order, sowing your wild oats before

marriage, or be someone else when no one is looking. You are the light of the world and it doesn't have an off switch.

As we consider how great our country is on this fourth of July, we have to know that some people are not as blessed to have the freedoms we have. Through out history, kings, tyrants, and leaders have tried to make for themselves great kingdoms on earth. People have used extensive force to create these kingdoms, whether through a Nazi blitzkrieg, a Communist revolution, or an Islamic jihad. It is a real temptation for humans to resort to such means. We want to impose our thoughts on others.

But Jesus has brought the kingdom of God in a very different way. We are called to establish God's Kingdom not by force, but by being salt and light.

Jesus said, "You are." He did not say, "You might be," "You can be," or "You will be." He said, "you are!" There is no other agent that God uses. You are the salt and light. Jesus wants you to realize that you have within yourselves the purpose and the power to make other people better. If you are a Christ follower, than you have been given this purpose and power by Christ Himself. You have the Holy Spirit. His coming into your life means that "You are!"

To be salt and light, we do not have to be spectacular

To be salt and light, we do not have to be sensational

To be salt and light, we do not have to be successful

To be salt and light, we just have to impact our little corner of the world.

Victory in Jesus – Song Folder #4