

Can We Change the Culture?
Matthew 5:13-16

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Our sermon today comes from the Sermon on the Mount—the greatest sermon ever preached. At the end of this sermon, Jesus said that the person who follows these words is a wise man. The words of our text today are the familiar analogy of our call as Jesus’ disciples—to be salt and light.

Text: ¹³ “You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt should lose its taste, how can it be made salty? It’s no longer good for anything but to be thrown out and trampled on by men.

¹⁴ “You are the light of the world. A city situated on a hill cannot be hidden. ¹⁵ No one lights a lamp and puts it under a basket, but rather on a lampstand, and it gives light for all who are in the house. ¹⁶ In the same way, let your light shine before men, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven.

Introduction: Let’s begin with some good news about those converting to Christ. First of all, let me preface the numbers I am about to give you by saying how hard it is to count these kinds of things, but a widely recognized source says:

- 82,000 people are converting to Christ every day. Some believe these numbers are too low. One reports that there might be more than this becoming Christian in China alone.
- South Korea is 1/3 to ½ Christian.
- Brazil is moving toward being 50% Christian by 2025.
- In the last 10 years, 1 million Cubans have become Christians.
- More Muslims have come to Christ in the last 15 years than in the previous 15 centuries.
- We might be living in a global Great Awakening.

But, we don’t know it. Now, for the bad news.

- Of these 82,000 people coming to faith in Christ daily, only 6,000 of those conversions are happening in North America and Europe combined.
- The number of atheists and agnostics has quadrupled in the last 20 years in America.
- In America, one-third of millennials have no religious preference at all. (Jim Denison, Sermon Delivered at FBC, Bryan, TX, on March 27, 2017)

We feel as though some days, we have lost the so-called cultural war?

So, how can we change the culture around us? To find our answer, we go to the sermon of a different culture, but it is the greatest sermon ever preached.

When we get to verse 13, Jesus has shared so far in the Sermon on the Mount the kind of life that God wants us to have. Now, Jesus shifts the focus to being the kind of person He wants us to be. He identifies our primary purpose to be salt and light. Many seek the understanding in this passage by ascertaining the individual characteristics of salt and light. The problem with this kind of interpretation is that we tend to focus on today’s perspective about salt and light instead of the usages of salt in the

first century world. We will apply this passage by examining the **similarities** of salt and light rather than the individual usages of salt and light.

As Christians, we should be living our lives in such a way that others want to have what we have. Some years ago, Pastor Bill Hybels wrote a book entitled, *Becoming a Contagious Christian*. In that book, he put forth the idea about contagious Christianity with the use of this formula: High Potency + Close Proximity + Clear Communication = Maximum Impact. That is, if we are going to impact our world, we must have these qualities. That's exactly what Jesus was getting at when He calls his disciples to be salt and light. So, how do we have maximum effectiveness as salt and light? Or, how can we change the culture around us?

Factors that will Impact our Effectiveness as Salt/Light:

- ***Divine Calling***

Again, remember that the interpretative key that is most helpful in analyzing this analogy of salt and light is to see the common denominators in salt and light. Certainly, one of those common denominators is importance. The importance of salt and light help us to see the importance of our calling. We need to be reminded of our importance in God's kingdom. Now, that is not an arrogant statement, but rather a positive statement. Believers are important in others coming to know Christ. Consider 1 Peter 2:9:

But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light.
(1 Peter 2:9)

In the ancient world nothing was more important than salt and light. Roman soldiers were paid with salt. Thus the saying, "Not worth your salt." Pliny, the elder, wrote, "Nothing is more useful than salt and sunshine." Nothing was more important than salt in Rome, except perhaps the sun. Jesus was emphasizing the importance of both salt and light. He chose these two metaphors for a reason. Both initiated feelings of great importance. Thus, Jesus was saying, in my kingdom, nothing is more important than my followers. For by you, the kingdom will be inaugurated. If we are going to be effective, we must first of all recognize our importance.

- ***Distinct Character***

The second factor that is going to determine our effectiveness is the integrity of our commitment. If salt isn't salty, it isn't any good. Salt loses its flavor not scientifically, but by being brought into contact with other non-salty properties. The more of other stuff you have, the less you taste the salt. The same kind of principle holds true with light. If light is dim, it isn't any good. A flashlight in the daylight is no good.

Once we have established the Christian's importance in God's kingdom, then we must understand that we only achieve that importance when there is distinctiveness of our character. I don't have to tell you of the research that indicates that there is little difference in the ethical behavior of believers and non-believers. The darkest days of my life as a pastor are those days when I hear reports of one our members involved in some kind of sin. When we lie, steal, cheat, and whatever else, we not only sin against God, but we violate the integrity of our commitment, and damage our individual witness as well as that of the whole church.

- ***Direct Contact***

Again, if we focus on the similarities of the two metaphors, both salt and light have to be in close and intense contact with the opposition in order to make a difference. We must engage our culture. Your effectiveness is going to be directly related to your willingness to engage the culture that is far different from you. We can have wonderful worship, Bible teaching that that strengthens our walk, fellowship that encourages Christians, but the goal is to be salt and be light to those outside the church.

I heard about a man that walked into the little Mom and Pop grocery store and said, "Do you sell salt?" The man said, "Do we sell salt! Just look!" The man showed the customer an entire wall of shelves stocked with nothing but salt-Morton salt, iodized salt, kosher salt, sea salt, rock salt, garlic salt, seasoning salt, Epsom salts-every kind of salt imaginable. The customer was amazed. "You think that's something. Come over here." He led the customer to a back room filled with shelves and bins and cartons and barrels and boxes of salt. The customer said, "This is unreal!" The man said, "You hadn't seen anything yet." He led the customer down some steps into a huge basement, five times as large as the previous room. It was filled wall-to-wall, floor-to-ceiling with every imaginable form, size, and shape of salt you could imagine. The man looked at him and said, "You really do sell salt!" The store owner said, "No, we don't, that's just the problem! We never sell salt. But that salt salesman that comes by every week, boy does he sell salt!"

Do you see the analogy?

- ***Deflected Credit***

Who gets the credit? You or God? Perhaps one of the real reasons that the church is sometimes not more effective is that people see our intentions as promoting ourselves rather than pointing others to God.

What matters is not what people think of us, it will be "What do they think of Jesus?"

The conclusion of this message is that we have to recognize all four factors. Then, and only then, will we have maximum effectiveness.

Can we change the culture around us? Yes, but not in a way that we usually think about? We want it to change without us changing. We want it to change overnight. Instead, we change the culture one person at a time.