

The Wisdom of Jesus

Be Contagious
Matthew 5:13-16

February 8, 2009

Dr. Steve Horn

We continue our study of the Sermon on the Mount this morning. The specific reason for our study is to understand what it means to live wisely. Jesus said that the person who follows these words is a wise man. So, we have been saying that “Here in the Sermon on the Mount is the wisdom of Jesus.” To this point in our study we have examined that part of the sermon that is generally called the “Beatitudes.” The Beatitudes serve something as an introduction to the sermon. Today, we move in to more of what could be considered the body of the sermon—the main point of the sermon. 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 loses its flavor, how shall it be seasoned? It is then good for nothing but to be thrown out and trampled underfoot by men.

¹⁴ “You are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden. ¹⁵ Nor do they light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a lampstand, and it gives light to all *who are* in the house. ¹⁶ Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven.

Introduction: We have discovered 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.

The title of my message this morning is “Be Contagious.” 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?

Factors that will Impact our Effectiveness as Salt/Light:

- **The Importance of our 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.

- **The Integrity of our Commitment**

You are the salt of the earth; but if the salt loses its flavor, how shall it be seasoned? It is then good for nothing but to be thrown out and trampled underfoot by men. You are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden." (5:13-14)

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 integrity of our commitment. 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.

- **The Intensity of our Contact**

Nor do they light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a lampstand, and it gives light to all *who are* in the house. (5:15)

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!"

- ***The Intention of our Conduct***

Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven. (5:16)

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.

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