

The Impact of Kingdom People

Matt. 5:13-16

"You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled by men. "You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.

Someone once said, *"The greatest insult Christians can receive is to be unnoticed"*...to be so blended in with the unbelieving that our lives have neither influence nor impact. (Click "like" if you agree.) Viewed negatively, this is the point made by the Similitude's in **vs.13-16**. In these familiar verses Jesus compared His disciples or kingdom people to **salt** and light. Both of these basic elements have high impact. Have you ever ingested a mouthful of something that got double or triple salted? Have you ever mistaken salt for sugar? It's a wake-up moment, isn't it? Have you ever been blinded by oncoming hi beams when driving? Has someone turned on the bedroom light in the middle of the night? Have you ever had a camera's flash go off inches from your face? Regardless of whatever else is true about these basic elements, salt and light have high impact. They refuse to blend in and be unnoticed. The taste of salt is unmistakable and the illumination of light is dramatic. Both elements refuse to be ignored.

In the Sermon on the Mount that begins in **chap. 5**, Jesus was speaking to His disciples as the crowd listened. In the 8 Beatitudes of **vs. 1-12**, Jesus defined the righteousness that marks kingdom people. He began by saying they are **poor in spirit**. They recognize the emptiness of self-righteousness and futility of self-salvation. Convinced of their sinfulness and need, they cry out for God's mercy and grace. They take life seriously and **mourn** because of the sin that offends God and brings misery to His creation. In humility and **meekness**, they submit to the God who alone can save them and make them righteous. Then having tasted the goodness of the Lord, **they hunger and thirst for righteousness** the way a thirsty traveler searches for food and drink. Ever conscious of the gifts of mercy and forgiveness they received when God saved them, they're **merciful** to others. They maintain a generous attitude toward people whether they deserve it or not. They seek opportunities to make life better for those in misery. Then Jesus said, they are **pure in heart**. In other words, their love for God isn't mixed, diluted or contaminated by love for lesser things...especially sinful things. They love God supremely and it shows.

Last time we found that kingdom people are **peacemakers**. Since true peace is only experienced by those who are at peace with God, they speak the truth and share their faith. They seek to point others to Christ who is our peace. But in the process of living and speaking the truth, they arouse hostility and ask for trouble. In a variety of ways they are sure to be persecuted for the sake of Christ. But they don't retreat or go silent. Using the word He used 9 x's to describe kingdom people, Jesus said, **"Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me."**

Now in the Similitude's that follow, Jesus explained the impact of those who live out the attitudes and behavior described in these Beatitudes. Our lives will be noticed. We will stand out. Like **salt** and **light**, kingdom people will have impact in this world

Let's think about the meaning of the first similitude. To do that, we need to think of **salt** the way the ancients did. In **v.13** Jesus said, **"You are the salt of the earth."** In our world, salt is inexpensive, ordinary and common.

We sprinkle salt on our food...we even throw it on sidewalks and driveways to melt ice. (and you say, *"thank you very much, I didn't need that reminder!"*) But in the ancient world, salt was highly valued. In fact, the Romans said, *"Nil utilius sole et sale."* Translated that means, *"There's nothing more useful than sun and salt."* (How proud my latin teacher would be just now!) The Romans said, *"salt is the purest of all things."* Salt was valued in many ancient cultures as a seasoning / a preservative / and as a disinfectant. In the time of the Bible, salt was even a unit of exchange. Soldiers and workers were often paid in salt. When someone says, *"he's not worth his salt,"* they mean he isn't worth the wages he was paid. Dr. William Barclay says *"salt was the most primitive of all offerings to the gods."* Until the end of the sacrificial system, every sacrifice was offered with salt. **(Lev. 2:13 / Ezek. 43:24)** So salt was valuable to those who first heard these Similitudes.

Though centuries have passed, we still acknowledge the positive qualities of salt. I'm sure you've heard someone say, *"those people are the salt of the earth."* This idiom is used of good people ...people who are an asset to society. In earlier times it was said of farmers whose hard work resulted in crops that fed the army.

So Jesus looked directly at His disciples said, **"You are the salt of the earth."** Despite the rejection you may endure for my sake, even though your contribution to my kingdom may seem insignificant ...your life and service has great value on planet earth. Just as **salt** is constitutionally different from whatever food it flavors...believers are different from the unbelieving we come in contact with. Our lives must have the impact of a pleasant **seasoning** in a bland world that has lost its taste for goodness. In fact, **Col. 4:6** says, **Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone.** We see in this verse that salty conversation is **full of grace**. It's humble, thankful and complimentary. It isn't proud, rude, complaining, or critical.

Then too, like salt, the way we conduct ourselves should have **preserving** impact. Our society is rapidly sinking in godlessness and immorality. Almost nothing shocks us anymore. Evil is good and good is evil. The late Dr. Vance Havener once said, *"If God doesn't judge the sin of America soon, He'll have to apologize to Sodom and Gomorrah!"* We may not be able to arrest the advance of evil, but like a speed bump, we should at least slow it down. Like Lot's presence in Sodom, the Church must act as a preservative in a world headed for destruction.

But our lives should also serve as a **disinfectant**. Our influence should encourage others to do right and turn from doing wrong. It's interesting to see how my Taco Bell friends tend to clean up their conversation when the "preacher" joins them for lunch. But I want to be more than just a "stop sign" to these Taco Bell shareholders. I want to be a "One Way" sign that points them to Jesus.

Pastor Keith Krell tells of a young salesman who was dejected because he lost a big sale. As he talked with his sales manager he said, *"I guess it just proves you can lead a horse to water but you can't make him drink."* The manager replied, *"Son, take my advice: Your job is not to make him drink. Your job is to make him thirsty."* That's the impact our lives should have among those who are lost without God and without hope in this world. There should be an air of mystery about us that causes the unsaved to wonder what makes us different. Then with Christ set apart as Lord in our hearts, We must **always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. (1 Pet. 3:15)**

So Jesus said, **"You are the salt of the earth."** His words were meant for His disciples as individuals. The plural pronoun **you** means *"you, but not just you...you, and you and you too."* Wherever we find ourselves in the world, we are to remember we are **salt**. Our lives must have impact. We were saved and made new people in Christ for this purpose. We must not allow ourselves to blend in and be innocuous.

We must **speak the truth in love** and resist the temptation to take paths of least resistance. In **Rom. 12:2** Paul wrote, **Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is--His good, pleasing and perfect will.** Only as we resist conformity and pursue God's transforming grace can we have lives of maximum impact.

Notice the concern expressed in the rest of **v.13**. **But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled by men.** Most of Israel's salt came from the area around the Dead Sea. Salt was mined from the massive salt cliffs of Jebel Usdum which stretch seven miles along its western shore. But this salt isn't pure. When taken from the cliffs, it's contaminated with other minerals. This causes a weakness in flavor and an unpleasant taste. This may be what is meant by **salt** that **loses its saltiness**. The scientifically minded have been puzzled by this phrase. Sodium chloride is a stable compound. For that reason, salt can't lose its saltiness without ceasing to be salt. To say, *"it's salt but it isn't salty"* is like saying, *"it's water but it isn't wet."* The solution seems to be that salt collected around the Dead Sea contained a mixture of other minerals. Over time, the pure salt was washed out. What remained was a useless residue that only looked like salt. This useless salt was used to harden the soil of footpaths. As people walked these paths the salt was literally **trampled by men**.

The spiritual meaning here seems obvious. Jesus didn't command us to become salty. Instead, the NT challenges us to remain pure. We're to let nothing rob us of our distinctiveness. We must not love the world or allow our lives to become contaminated by sinful things. In a world filled with sin and deceit, it's entirely possible for a disciple to become contaminated and ineffective. And if we fail to remain in fellowship with Christ who made us the salt of the earth, nothing can make us salty again. This doesn't mean tasteless disciples lose their salvation. The NT teaches salvation is secure forever for those who are born again by faith in Christ. It means useless disciples are cast aside in the service of Christ. They're useless with regard to the work for which Christ called them. When Christ returns, they will forfeit the reward that could have been theirs. But let's move on to the second similitude.

vs.14-16 - "You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.

In this second divine comparison, kingdom people are said to be **light**. Once again, we know that light has impact...especially in a dark environment. The light of a cell phone is seen by everybody in a darkened theater. I can't tell you how many times we've had to confiscate Super Trip flashlights in the hours after 11 PM after *"the light's out curfew"* was declared. I'm sure the campers get away with more than I care to know about...but not a lit flashlight after 11! The light condemns them! Gotcha!

Notice how the disciples are here viewed collectively. We're like a city. Individually, we are light. But Jesus came to build His church...to unite us in a fellowship with one common life and purpose. So He said, **A city on a hill cannot be hidden**. That's what every church that follows Christ is like in this dark world. Aside from lives saved for eternity, history tells the story of positive impact the church has made in this world. Public education / and institutions like hospitals / universities / orphanages / the Red Cross / Salvation Army / rescue missions / jail ministries / the YMCA and the YWCA, all find their origin in the people of God. Social reform has always followed periods of revival. Most people don't realize this. Perhaps the greatest unsung story of our times is the story of the church's involvement after hurricanes Katrina and Sandy. Where the government fumbled and proved how inefficient it can be, God's people were the boots on the ground.

They served sacrificially by sharing their energy and wealth with people who lost everything! Their efforts are seldom reported and rarely rewarded. But God sees and knows. **Heb. 6:10** makes this promise... **God is not unjust; he will not forget your work and the love you have shown him as you have helped his people and continue to help them.**

Now don't miss this point...Jesus didn't command us to be **salt** and **light**. Twice he said, this is what **you are**. If you live the righteous lifestyle defined in the Beatitudes...**you are salt** and **you are light**. And just as **a city on a hill cannot be hidden**, the testimony of believers united by faith in Christ is impossible to overlook or ignore. Like salt and light, righteousness can't be hidden. So the emphasis in these verses is not to become something, but to be what we are.

I love the story of the undertaker who hid under a sheet in the morgue. When his assistant entered the room and the perfect moment arrived, he sat up with the sheet still covering him. It worked. In sheer horror, the assistant shrieked and said, *"Mister, you're supposed to be dead. Now I'm pleading with you sir, please be what you are!"*

That's what Jesus meant in these Similitudes. Don't let the salt He created you to be contaminated and washed out. Get out of the shaker and get involved in places where the impact of Christ in you is needed. The mission field is outside the doors of the church. A man once arrived late to a Quaker meeting. He asked an usher. *"When did the service begin?"* The usher wisely responded, *"The service begins when the meeting ends."* Don't be a secret service believer. We applaud our friends who were baptized today. Each one submitted to baptism as an act of obedience to Jesus. They could have remained "privately saved"...a "closet believer." But in obedience to Christ they went public with their faith and their willingness to identify with Him. For every believer, this first step of obedience sets the pattern for the way Jesus calls us to live. Salt isn't useful until it comes in contact with something that needs to be salted. So our lives must have contact with the lost around us.

And **light** is what we are. Jesus went on to repeat this challenge in a different way in **vs.15 - Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house.** The **bowl** spoken of here was a clay measuring bowl. Jesus implied that sane people don't do this...they don't light a lamp and then put it under a bowl where its light is obscured and useless. They elevate the lamp...they put the lighted lamp on a stand. From that place **it gives light to everyone in the house.** **v.16** provides the application. **In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.** Just as salt is useless when bottled up in a shaker, so light is useless until its lifted up and allowed to shine in a dark place.

Now understand...the light of Kingdom people is not like sunlight because the sun produces light. Our light is more like the light of the moon. The moon's light is derived from the sun. In the same way, believers reflect the glory of the Lord. In the OT the face of Moses was radiant having been in the presence of God. So we come into the Lord's presence in private and corporate worship and we go out with the reflection of His glory and righteousness radiating from within us. When it comes to good deeds, we're not to be show-offs or ostentatious. Our ambition isn't to be glorified for being such wonderful people. Our goal must be to live and to speak in ways that please God and glorifies Him.

But don't miss the emphasis here. To be useful in Christ's kingdom, salt must remain pure. And to be useful, light must be out there and seen. Let these Similitudes speak to your heart. In what way does God want to display His righteousness in and through you? Are you bottled up in the shaker or is your life poured out as a pleasant seasoning / a helpful preservative / and a Christ-honoring disinfectant? Are you turning the grace God has given you into good deeds, or is your light under a bowl? What benefit do you offer a world that is rapidly becoming bland and sinking in darkness?