

Make a Difference

Matthew 5:13-48

September 5, 2010

Intro

Jesus began his ministry around the Sea of Galilee area. He settled in the town of Capernaum which is just on the north end of the sea. As he began his ministry among the people, God immediately gave testimony to who He was through miracles of healing every kind of disease and every kind of sickness among the people.

The news about Him went out into all the districts of Israel and great multitudes followed him. And when He saw the multitudes, He went up on the mountain and began to teach people.

The people were amazed at his teaching. Not only did he speak with authority, but they had never heard anything like this from any of their religious teachers. They had been taught that the way to enter the kingdom of God was by what they ate or by how they washed their hands or by what they did or didn't do on the Sabbath.

But Jesus spoke of the condition of their heart and that the favor of God and the fullness of joy would be theirs because of who they were in their hearts, not because of their outward religious form.

But after Jesus spoke of the inward change that God would bring in them and the favor of God and the fullness of joy that would come from it, He then pointed them toward the world and called them to make a difference in it.

God sent his Son into the world with the good news that He would forgive their sin and reconcile them to Himself by sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh; and as an offering for sin He made a way for people to have right relationship to God.

But God not only sent His Son into the world, He then sent us into the world also to make a difference because the world needs salt and the world needs light.

I. You are Salt and You are Light

- There was an era, not too long ago, that Mark Twain called the “gilded age.” It was after the time of reconstruction after the Civil War of the late 19th century. It was a time famous for the industrial revolution. The economy was rapidly expanding and there were real jobs with real wages, and wealth was expanding.
- It was also a time of great technological advancement such that some decided to create something that represented the progress of man. And so they built the largest passenger liner in history; of which someone famously said, “Not even God can sink this ship.”
- But we now know that the advancement of technology does not equate to the advancement of man; it only empowers man's true nature.

Illus - when I was in Russia in the 90s, a Russian asked if I thought that money would fix Russia's problems. “Money only empowers the condition of the heart,” I said, “what Russia needs is a revival.”

- We live in a dark time and it's only getting darker. Look at the modern generation. They were raised by the 60s generation that was so

busy rebelling from their upbringing that they neglected to raise up their own children.

- God sent his Son into the world to make a difference, and Jesus is sending us into the world to make a difference as well.

A. You are the salt of the earth

- In verse 13, Jesus said, “You are the salt of the earth.” It's a fact. You are the influence that God is sending into the earth to make a difference.
- Salt was extremely valuable and important in that culture and this would have had great meaning to that multitude.
- Roman soldiers were sometimes paid part of their wages in salt. In fact, our modern word, “salary” comes from the meaning, “to give salt.”
- It was so valuable because without it meat could not be preserved and would soon spoil and decay in the hot Middle Eastern sun. They would also add salt to their wounds to keep them from getting infected.
- Newborn babies were rubbed with salt for cleansing and purifying.
- But salt is also needed for flavor. When Israel brought a meal offering, it must be salted, it must be good tasting and pleasant.

Leviticus 2:13, “Every grain offering of yours, moreover, you shall season with salt, so that the salt of the covenant of your God shall not be lacking from your grain offering; with all your offerings you shall offer salt.”

Illus – in the restaurant business, we often debated about whether foods should be salted – the answer; yes!

Colossians 4:6, Let your speech always be with grace, as though seasoned with salt, so that you will know how you should respond to each person.

- Salt also stimulates thirst.

Illus – There’s a reason movie theaters put lots of salt on their popcorn, because they know you'll be thirsty and come back and buy a super-sized drink.

- If you're around a godly person, it makes you want to be more godly. God wants your joy, your faith, your peace in the face of adversity to be such that people see what you have and want it also.

Illus - one of the greatest compliments a Christian can ever receive is when someone says, “I want what you have.”

- But don’t lose your saltiness. How? By letting them influence you.

B. You are the light of the world

- In verse 14, Jesus said, “You are the light of the world.” Here again, Jesus is sending them and therefore us into the world to make a difference.
- Why? Because the world is dark and getting darker.
- What's interesting is that Jesus said that He was the Light of the world. How can both be true?

- It's comparable to the light which was seen on Moses after he had been in the presence of the Lord on Mount Sinai.

2 Corinthians 3:7-8, 11-12 The glory of God's presence...

- In other words, Jesus is the light of the world, and because of His presence in our lives, God's glory is seen in us as well.
- Jesus then said, "Let your light shine before men that they may see your good works... and glorify your Father who is in heaven."
- Has God made a difference in your life? Then don't hide it; tell people about the difference that God has made in your life and it will make a difference in their life as well.
- The purpose of light is to show the way out of the darkness.

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

- Darkness is the same as blindness and truth is what opens people's eyes – God's word is a lamp that shines into the darkness.

Psalm 43:3, O send out Your light and Your truth, let them lead me; let them bring me to your holy hill and to Your dwelling places.

John 8:31-32, "If you abide in My word, then you are truly disciples of Mine; and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free."

- God is sending us to make a difference in the world; to appeal to their spiritual thirst, their spiritual hunger, their desire to see; not to condemn the world, but to speak the words of life.

John 3:14-21 God sent his Son to save the world.

- But we should be influencing them and not have them influence us.

Illus – My first day as a waiter at a high class restaurant...

<h2>II. God's Light Shines from the Heart</h2>

- The rest of the Sermon on the Mount gives us insight into the transformation that God brings about in the heart.
- When He makes us the salt of the earth and the light of the world; then that is seen by what happens in our heart.
- In verse 20, Jesus spoke of a righteousness that surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees.
- But that is a righteousness that He gives to us and He then begins the work of transforming us; that is our heart, mind, and character within us.

A. May your words edify and bring life

- Jesus began this section by talking about what happens in our relationships to others. They had heard, "You shall not commit murder," but Jesus said that they should not even allow anger to take over their heart.

- Aren't these similar words to what Paul wrote to the church in Ephesus?

Ephesians 4:29, Let no unwholesome word proceed from your mouth, but only such a word as is good for edification according to the need of the moment, so that it will give grace to those who hear.

B. What we think about matters to God

- In verse 27-28, Jesus addressed the question of what happens in a person's mind and whether that is important to God.
- No doubt, many people have said to themselves, "Why does what happens in my mind matter?" The answer is that it matters to God.
- No doubt, this is because He knows that it is the heart that determines how a person will live.

Luke 6:43-45 The treasure of the heart determines the life.

- The apostle Paul gave helpful words for the one who desires a godly heart.

Philippians 4:8, Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute, if there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise, dwell on these things.

C. Don't take your own revenge

- The verse, "An eye for an eye" had been wrongly applied to mean that anyone could take revenge.

- But Jesus spoke of the heart that does not exchange insult for insult.

1 Peter 3:8-9, Be humble in spirit; not returning evil for evil or insult for insult, but giving a blessing instead; for you are called for the very purpose that you might inherit a blessing.

Romans 12:19, Never take your own revenge, beloved, but leave room for the wrath of God, for it is written, "Vengeance is mine, I will repay," says the Lord.

- In verse 44 and following, Jesus explained, "Love your enemies, and pray for those who persecute you in order that you may be *sons of your Father* who is in heaven;"
- Then, when Jesus said that God causes the sun to rise on the evil and the good, he was saying that God is the God of grace; that is, the goodness of God to those who don't deserve it.
- Jesus is describing an authentic relationship to God through Jesus Christ so that the heart is changed. And when the heart is changed, the life is transformed and then that person becomes the salt of the earth and the light of the world that God would send to make a difference.