

Wednesday Night BIBLE STUDY

Wednesday, April 17, 2013 – First Baptist Church Buda
Midweek Prayer Meeting & Bible Study

YOU CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE

“Influencing Your World for Christ”

Matthew 5:1-12, 2 Timothy 3:1-9, Matthew 5:13-16

READ: Matthew 5:1-12 – The Beatitudes

How can a genuine believer in Jesus Christ today... a true Christian, truly have an impact on this tough, hard world we live in? What possible influence could the people described in Scripture as “poor in spirit,” “meek,” “humble,” “thirsty,” “mourners,” “merciful,” “persecuted” (see the Beatitudes) exert in a society overrun with competitive, aggressive, stubborn, often hostile individual? _____

Wouldn't they become trampled underfoot and overwhelmed by the flood tide of this world and the world's ways? Aren't such people too feeble to achieve anything, especially since they are such a small remnant?

As you will discover in Scripture, Jesus did not share the skepticism of some who may have felt like His meek and humble follower could not possible impact this tough cruel world. Rather, He emphasized the reverse. He declared that His true followers... genuine Christian were sources of indispensable ingredients that preserve and illumine a planet looking for hope, peace, and truly meaningful life... we truly can make a difference!

I. A BIBLICAL DOSE OF REALITY OF OUR TIMES (2 Timothy 3:1-9)

If you were to choose some words to describe the day in which we live what words would you choose? _____

We need not look far or hard for an accurate analysis of the world in which we live. All we have to do is turn in the Bible to 2 Timothy 3.

“¹But know this, that in the last days perilous times will come: ²For men will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents,

unthankful, unholy, ³ unloving, unforgiving, slanderers, without self-control, brutal, despisers of good, ⁴ traitors, headstrong, haughty, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, ⁵ having a form of godliness but denying its power. And from such people turn away! ⁶ For of this sort are those who creep into households and make captives of gullible women loaded down with sins, led away by various lusts, ⁷ always learning and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth. ⁸ Now as Jannes and Jambres resisted Moses, so do these also resist the truth: men of corrupt minds, disapproved concerning the faith; ⁹ but they will progress no further, for their folly will be manifest to all, as theirs also was.” -2 Timothy 3:1-9 (NJKV)

The phrase “last days” refers to this age, the time since the first coming of the Lord Jesus. The phrase “terrible times” (or “perilous times” in the NKJV) is interesting. The same Greek word used here and translated as “terrible” is used to describe the savage nature of 2 demon possessed men in Matthew 8:28. And the words “times” had to do with epochs, rather than clock or calendar time. Such savage, dangerous eras or epochs will increase in frequency and severity as the return of Christ approaches. The church age in which we are in is fraught with these dangerous movements accumulating strength as the end nears. In other words we should not be surprised by the things we see happening in our day. Others may scratch their head and wonder why bomb explode at marathon races, but Paul told us we would live in “perilous times.” Then Paul launches into this list of attributes characterizing the a description of those in this world during these terrible last day times.

Here we find that Paul’s assessment fits our times almost like he was looking through a time machine window and reading our day. We could perhaps more easily summarize Paul’s description in three words... these are three words that very much give us a dose of reality to the times... the tough times we live in today.

3 Words that Characterize Paul’s Description of Our Day:

- 1. Difficult (v. 1)** – We are told that “there will be terrible times in the last days” (“terrible” in NIV, “perilous” in the KJV & NKJV, “difficult” in LB & NLT). Some scholars have translated this word as “terrible” or “perilous.” The Green root word from which this term comes means “grievous, harsh, fierce, savage.” It’s used only one other time in the New Testament – in Matthew 8:28. There we read of two demon-possessed men whose consequent behavior was “exceedingly violent.” That’s an excellent description of our world – violent, harsh, perilous, difficult.
- 2. Depraved (v. 8)** – Here Paul cites two men from Moses’ day as prime examples of man’s ungodly state apart from salvation. Paul describes them as having a “depraved mind” – that is – as possessing a corrupted or ruined understanding of the truth. (How do we get a “ruined” understanding of truth?) A world such as ours which is filled with people like those is indeed a difficult place in which to live.
- 3. Deceived (v. 13)** – The world around us is also teeming with imposters and deceivers – people who pretend to offer help but who actually oppose the truth and promote evil. Unfortunately, they flourish in every profession, providing false hope for true needs.

II. A GREAT REMINDER OF OUR INFLUENCE FOR OUR DAY (Matthew 5:13-16)

Technically, the only one who can preserve this world is Jesus Christ. But as His servants, we have been commissioned by Him to carry on this work in His absence. In one of His best-known and best-loved sermons, the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus addressed our task through His use of two metaphors – salt and light. Let’s take time to reread these very familiar verses. (Read: Matthew 5:13-16)

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.” – Matthew 5:13-16 (NKJV)

2 Ways We Can Influence our World and Make A Difference:

1. **As salt - “The Salt of the Earth” (v. 13)** – It’s interesting to note that Jesus described the qualities of a servant throughout the Beatitudes (vv. 3-12), He used the words, they, their, and those. But when He spoke of the servant’s influence upon society, He personalized His words by using the term you. In this way, He made the metaphor stronger and more direct. He said, “*you are the salt of the earth...*” The word translated as “salt” in verse 13 is the Greek word “halos” which refers to plain old, ordinary salt. However, in the New Testament day “salt” was anything but plain, old or ordinary. It was very important to everyday life. In ancient Greece “salt” was called “theon” which meant divine. The Romans held that, except for the Sun, nothing was more valuable than “salt.” Often Roman soldiers were paid their daily wages in “salt” and it was from this practice that the saying “not worth his salt” originated. How can we be salt? To find out let’s consider a couple of distinct uses of salt.

4 Ways Salt Can Make A Difference:

(1) **Salt add flavor** – Salt is used for taste... it enhances the flavor of numerous foods. But when salt loses its taste, “*it is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and be trampled by men.*” In Jesus’ day tasteless salt was useless so it was taken and added/mixed with other ingredients in order to fill potholes in the dirt roads. By analogy Jesus is warning his followers that if they lose their preserving influence in society, they in a sense are no more use or effect so they become overlooked... walked-by by the world. In other words they lose their ability to make a difference and impact our world.

Question: *So the question is how can a Christian maintain their flavor? How will you?* _____

(2) **Salt speeds healing** – Salt stings when poured in an open wound or sore, but it does speed healing Salt was often used for medical purposes in New Testament times, especially given their lack of medical help. And salt does possess many healing and antiseptic qualities. It is a good natural medicinal additive that can aid and speed

healing.. It kills germs and fights infection. So, Christians must be a healing force in the world, killing the germ of sin and fighting the infection of sin and speeding healing by introducing Jesus Christ, the “Great Physician” to others. By the way, your life, lived like a Christian may stings some... and rub some the wrong way. That is the healing influence of Christ in you, the salt in life.

Question: *In what way does the life a Christian sometimes cause a “sting” to the life of an unbeliever? What is meant by this? How should we respond to this? How do we sometimes respond?* _____

- (3) **Salt creates thirst** - Salt creates thirst! Christian, your life ought to create a hunger and thirst for God in the lives of others. You ought to attract people to Christ, not distract them from Him. Ask yourself, “Am I drawing people to Christ, creating a thirst for God and the things of God that I have in my life... or is my life a turn off, pushing others away?”

Question: *How can you and I as Christians create a thirst for Christ and the things of God in the lives of others?* _____

- (4) **Salt serves as a preservative** – Salt, can be used as a preservative, as a matter of fact, years ago, before refrigeration, salt was used to keep meat from spoiling and rotting. It was used to preserve meat to keep it in edible condition. So if we are the preserving agents of the world, then it too must be perishing... rotting and spoiling away. But Christ emphasized that our influence keep that corruption from coming to completion.

Question: *How? How do we do that... keep others from perishing and rotting away before this old world perishes?* _____

Before we move on, let’s briefly observe three positive facts about salt that may add a little more truth and application to Jesus’ call to us to be salt:

3 Salt Positive:

- (1) **Salt is shaken and sprinkled... not poured** – Salt has to be spread out... to much in one place will ruin the food. The same is true for Christians; they need to break out of their hold huddles and spread themselves throughout the playing field. We are not to be “Christian-clicks” or “Christian social clubs.”
- (2) **Salt adds flavor... but it is obscure** – Salt doesn’t draw attention to itself... but to the food it is seasoning. Likewise, Christians should add zest and flavor to life and point to Christ. It is not about us and our objectives, but about Christ and His! We would be obscure in the equation. As John said “He must increase and I must decrease!” We don’t save anyone, Jesus does!

(3) **Salt is unlike other seasoning... it cannot be duplicated** – Others can try to manufacture artificial substitutes for salt (Mrs. Dash, etc.) but salt really cannot be substituted. It's not the real thing and it never will be... and there will be a noticeable difference. Also, salt must be applied before it is useful or will do no good. Similarly, non-Christians cannot be salt of the earth – only Christians can. However, Christians cannot preserve and season society if they don't reach out beyond themselves. We try many substitutes in this world thinking it will solve the problems of our day. They never work... and they never will. Only Jesus!

2. **As light - "The Light of the World" (vv. 14-16)** – Elsewhere Jesus said of Himself, *"I am the Light of the world; he who follows Me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life."* (John 8:12) In Matthew 5, however, Jesus said that Christians are the light of the world. In other words, when we become His followers (believers), His light shines through us to a world in darkness. Light's basic function is to dispel darkness. But, as Jesus points out, light cannot perform its job if it is hidden. Therefore, He exhorts us to let our light stand out, plain for all to see, not just for a select or comfortable few. But what are lights of our lives for... what difference can light make? He answers that for us in **verse 16**, *"In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven."* As we think of light, let's take note of three characteristics that stand out about light.

3 Characteristics of Light That Can Make A Difference:

- (1) **Light is silent** – Have you ever noticed that light makes no noise and it just shines. And yet, in doing so, it offers profound appeal to those who see it from the darkness. It is essentially a silent, but very bright witness. Interesting! What could that possible mean?
- (2) **Light gives direction** – It exposes what he dark hides and has veiled and it illumines the pathway through many obstructions. (See Ephesians 5:8ff)
- (3) **Light attracts** – Ever notice a porch light or street light at night and all the bugs swarming around it. Light attracts. Those in the dark cannot fail to see the light when it pierces through and they are drawn to it somehow. As we live our lives in obedience to Christ through His Word, others readily see the radical difference and hope in us and will be drawn to it in different ways. Some may react violently to it, others may embrace it, but both are a reaction to the Light in us.

III. A PERSONAL RESPONSE FOR OUR IMPACT ON OUR WORLD

God calls us to be different from everyone else in the world. But this kind of revolutionary lifestyle requires a daily commitment that lasts a lifetime. To keep salt good and the light burning brightly, we need to plan an active response which begins with three realizations... daily reminder of who and whose we are:

3 Daily Reminders for the Christian Who Wants to Make a Difference:

1. **I am different** – We who know Christ are unique. In no way should we conform to the ungodly system of this world.
2. **I am responsible** – We are each responsible for our own salt, that it keeps its preserving power, and our own light, that it continues to shine brightly for Christ.

- 3. I am influential** – Christians who are salt and light are influential to those around them. The only question is, will we as Christians influence non-Christians in a way that is pleasing or displeasing to our Lord? The choice and responsibility belongs to us.