

# Contagious

*You are the salt of the earth.... You are the light of the world. Matthew 5:13-14*

The Beatitudes are an intriguing introduction to the greatest sermon ever written. After Jesus caught His audience's attention, He moves on to the thesis of His sermon: the purpose of following Jesus is to change the world.

This had always been the plan of God for the Jewish nation. God had chosen them to be a special people who shined His truth to the world (Genesis 12:3). They were to prepare the way for the arrival of the Savior who had been promised in Genesis 3:15. Now, Jesus made clear that He was the fulfillment of God's plan in *Matthew 5:17*, "Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill."

There had always been those who believed in the promise and placed their faith in God. They were saved as we are, by repenting of their sin and accepting God as the only possible means of salvation. As *Hebrews 11:13* reminds us, "These all died in faith, not having seen the promises, but having seen them afar off were assured of them..." Now here before them stood the actual fulfillment of the ancient prophecy. And with its fulfillment a new age was beginning. No longer would the light shine out to the world from a single nation, it would now permeate the world through the institution of the church.

The application of the Sermon on the Mount is simple: how I live out my faith has implications for the world at large. It brings each of us to these questions: How much do I love God? Have I accepted my poverty of spirit and repented in mourning over my sin? Have I humbled myself before God recognizing my own inability to overcome the chasm my sin nature has placed between us? Have I hungered for the truth of God's Word and recognized the power it has to renew me daily as I fight against my natural tendency to sin?

How much do I love my neighbor? Am I willing to extend mercy to those around me? Am I focused on growing more like Christ in order to be a consistent witness? Am I willing to make peace through forgiveness? Do I accept the rejection of society with grace and generosity in an effort to be more like Christ? How I live out the answer to these questions reveals to the world the sincerity of my belief and the depths of my faith in God's love for me.

Each of us has a level of influence in our world. Family, friends, co-workers, social circles all offer us a chance to individually shine our love for God to others. But as Jesus points out in these verses, while we must do the individual work alone, it is when Christians come together that we become a powerful light that cannot be hidden.

A church is only as strong as the individual Christians within it. And they are each only as strong as their individual desire to live for Christ. What we see here is a call to a spiritual revolution that begins quietly in our hearts and pours out collectively into the society around us. A single flame has only so much power against the darkness around it. But a city of flames shines out proudly into the dark banishing everything that hides in the shadows. We are to change our world, and we need each other to accomplish that task.



# Let It Shine!

*The light cannot be hidden.*

## Our Influence on the World

*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. Matthew 5:13*

### Permeating Society

Christianity, like the presence of salt in a stew was to spread throughout society and the world. Notice in **Galatians 3:26-28**, what various parts of society were impacted by the Gospel? *There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female...*

What parts of the world were to be impacted according to **Acts 1:8**? *in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth."*

How can we be more effective at reaching unreached people in our society or world?

### Imparting Good Flavor

Our purpose as Christians is to make the world a better place to live. How does Jesus describe our mission to the world in **Matthew 10:16**? How are we to handle ourselves? *"Behold, I send you out as sheep in the midst of wolves. Therefore be wise as serpents and harmless as doves.*

It is interesting to think of the cultural values of other religions and the way that they affect the cultures that adopt them. Hinduism's and Buddhism's stress on karma and reincarnation results in an indifference to societal injustice and the needs of others. Islam's rejection of grace leads to a society that is heavily geared toward retribution and legalism. Animism's worship of man-made gods leads to a culture of fear and superstition. Atheism's and agnosticism's embrace of humanism results in relativism as each person becomes their own god and follows their own rules. What is the basis for a Christian culture in **Matthew 5:43-47**? *We are to love our enemies and each other.*

How does this emphasis defeat other religions' attempts to stamp it out? *Christianity doesn't condone violence against other religions (despite the Crusades) and preaches reacting to animus in love. This gives Christians a good reputation and forces other religions to rely on lies about Christianity. When people see Christians martyred despite being good people, it makes the Christians the victims rather than the enemy. When people inevitably realize that the lies told about Christians are unfounded, it causes the religion fighting against them to lose credibility. For Christians themselves, persecution causes them to become stronger in their faith due to their need for God's help. They become more dependent upon Him and more likely to live in the power of the Holy Spirit making them more likely to witness and be good representatives of Christianity.*



Israel had been ruled by other nations ever since the fall of Jerusalem to Babylon almost 600 years before. During this time period, Greek culture became the predominant culture. The Hebrew Bible was even translated into Greek in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century BC since so many Jews were more fluent in Greek than Hebrew. There was an increasing fear in Israel that many Jews were losing their cultural identity. This led many in Israel to embrace an attitude of hostility towards foreigners. Jewish sects such as the Zealots openly fought against the Romans while other sects such as the Essenes isolated themselves to in protection from the changing culture. Hating the enemy was seen as a good thing despite the law prohibiting it. What does Jesus remind them about their claim to be the children of God in **Matthew 5:45-48**? *They needed to be like their Father and love their enemies.*

Obviously, violence against others reduces our ability to influence our culture. But what about isolation? Can we be a good influence in our world if we isolate ourselves from our surrounding culture? What example do we see set in the early church? (See **1 Thessalonians 1:8**) *The Thessalonian church was greatly persecuted and yet, they had become famous in their region due to their witness. We cannot hope to change our world if we refuse to interact with it.*

## Preserving Society

In **Romans 12:9-21**, Paul has a long list of Christian values. He wraps it all up with what concluding statement in verse 21? *Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.*

How does a large presence of Christians in a society reflect this truth? *Their influence moderates the evil of the surrounding culture. Historically, Christians were the first to start hospitals, orphanages, and schools. They protected the weak (abandoned babies and orphans) and sheltered the homeless.*

## Problematic Salt

*...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. Matthew 5:13*

It is obvious to all from the context that Jesus is equating a loss of flavor with the loss of influence. However, since today's pure sodium chloride in our table salt does not lose its flavor, this complicates our understanding of this analogy. It helps to understand that in ancient times the methods of salt collection and storage were not as sophisticated as today and did not result in as refined or pure of a product.

For instance, the salt hills and pits around the Dead Sea were an important source for table salt. But unlike sea water which has an 85% composition of sodium chloride,<sup>1</sup> the waters of the Dead Sea have a much lower concentration (around 8%). Instead, they contain a high amount of magnesium chloride (53%), along with a mixture of potassium, calcium, and bromine.<sup>2</sup> This raises the possibility that at times some of what was sold as table salt in Israel might have had little sodium chloride in it if any at all. This gives us the possibility of two kinds of Christians.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://oceanservice.noaa.gov/facts/whysalty.html> retrieved 4/15/26

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.jpl.nasa.gov/images/pia01916-the-dead-sea/> retrieved 4/15/26



## Impure Salt

Salt that was mixed with impurities is reminiscent of what in **Revelation 3:15-16**? *So then, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will vomit you out of My mouth."*

What does Jesus command the Laodiceans to do in **Revelation 3:19**? *Therefore be zealous and repent.*

## Fake Salt

We see a description of false teachers within the church teaching heresy in **2 Peter 2:1-2**. What does Peter say is the consequence to Christianity of their deception? *And many will follow their destructive ways, because of whom the way of truth will be blasphemed.*

How does **2 Peter 2:18** describe the way they lead people astray? *For when they speak great swelling words of emptiness, they allure through the lusts of the flesh, through lewdness... They use sinful methods to influence people. Their teachings are empty and have no value, they simply sway through emotion and sin.*

What two animals are used to describe these two types of Christians in **2 Peter 2:22** and **Matthew 7:6**?

1. Those who reject God: *dogs*
2. Those who wallow in sin: *pigs*

Why does **Proverbs 9:7-8** say we should handle these kinds of Christians with care? *Both a mocker and a wicked man will reject your intervention and may harm you.*

Is this passage telling us we should not witness to the unsaved? Why or why not? (See **Ezekiel 3:18-19**). *If God has directed us to witness to someone, then we are obligated to do so. If we do not, their blood is upon our hands. However, if we do so and they reject us, then we have fulfilled our duty to them and are no longer held responsible.*

When Jesus sent out His disciples to preach in Israel, what were they told to do in the places that refused to let them preach? What did this signify? (**Matthew 10:14-15**) *Shake off the dust from their feet. That they had refused the message of the Messiah. They would face judgement for their refusal. It was based upon the passage of Ezekiel — they had done their duty to those people, it was not their fault they had been rejected.*

This brings us to **Colossians 4:5-6**. What two things are we to consider carefully in how we interact with impure and fake Christians?

*Our time* – we need to use it wisely where we can get the most results.

*Our words* – we need to be gracious and winsome, not harsh and judgmental.

When Paul acted with this wisdom in **Acts 18:5-8**, what happened? *Many Corinthians believed and Crispus the ruler of the synagogue believed.*



# Our Witness to the World

*“You are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden. 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. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven. Matthew 5:14-16*

What did Jesus promise in **John 8:12**? *“I am the light of the world. He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness, but have the light of life.”*

There is an important conceptual difference between being the salt of the world and the light of the world. Salt is something necessary we add to things. We have control over how much of it or how widespread its usage is. This is why salt is *influence* because we can control how much of it we exercise upon those around us and our society as a whole. This is why, as we saw, the influence of Christianity can be harmed by sinful Christians and by fake Christianity.

Light, however, is different. The essence of light (the rays) cannot be changed. Notice that while salt can be impure and even fake, light is always light. This means that God’s light shining through us as Christians is always true to God Himself. If we are walking in the power of the Holy Spirit, our witness is the light of God shining into the lives and hearts of others.

Another conceptual difference with light is how difficult it is to hide. In our age of electric lights, we talk of “light pollution” which prevents us from seeing the stars and Milk Way in the night sky. We have to be very specific about trying to stop the effects of light. So Jesus is pointing out that as Christians, we automatically shine out into the world and the only way we can actually stop it is by trying to *hide* our light.

How would attempting to hide our light as Christians look in our lives? What kinds of ways might people attempt to do this? *People try to divide their lives into public and private spheres. They do not give prominence to their faith, nor do they live their lives based upon a Christian worldview.*

Given the difficulty of hiding light, what kinds of problems would Christians like this experience? *Frustration. Living a life defeated by sin and without the power of the Holy Spirit because rather than embrace their Christian identity, they are trying to stuff it down.*

Ultimately, who is going to experience the most harm when Christians attempt to hide their light? (v. 15). *Their families – those who are closest to them.*

Light before the time of electricity came from fire. Candles, oil lamps, and wood braziers were used. Candles burn at approximately 12 lumens while a 17-watt modern LED bulb produces between 1500 – 1900 lumens. But what if you want to really light up a big place? Professional soccer stadiums are required to have lights that equal 22.5 million lumens. What does this tell us about the point Jesus is making about a city of lights in **Matthew 5:14**? *Single lights are not nearly as effective as a collection of lights together. Our witness as Christians is more profound when it is part of a church family.*



In what ways does a community of believers help us be a better testimony to the world according to Hebrews 10:23-25?

1. Gives us the strength *to hold fast* to what we believe.
2. *Encourages us* to love each other and show our love through good works.

Our purpose as Christians is seen in the final statement of *Matthew 5:16*. We are to shine brightly in our world so that those around us will not see us but instead will see and glorify God because of us. God wants to do great things in our lives. He wants to change our community, our culture, our world. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus challenges us to live in such a way that this can happen. But it is worth reminding ourselves that He also challenged us to live a life that is *blessed*. What attracts the world to us? Our joy which overflows despite every problem, every disadvantage, every challenge we face. The attractiveness of the gospel is its powerful message of joy to a broken, unhappy world.

