

You Are Influencers  
July 11, 2021

We are close to the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of 9/11. Twenty years. That means that the lives of all of our teenagers have always been affected by that event.

The first iPhone was introduced in 2007, the iPad in 2010. None of our children and most of our teens cannot remember a time these devices did not exist.

While I have seen many changes to telephones and televisions in my lifetime, both were invented before I was born. As far back as I can remember, my family always had both.

We tend to take for granted those things that have always been true in our lifetime, even if they have not always been true in history. One such thing concerns the Bible. I hope you know the following fact. **The first Bibles did not have chapters or verses.**

**In the year 1205 AD Stephen Langton** created the chapters we use to find passages in the Bible. Other efforts at divisions of various kinds had been tried before him. But the chapters set up by Langton became the standard.

Even then, there were no verse numbers. It wasn't until several hundred years later that verse numbers were created. **Isaac Nathan ben Kalonymus, in 1440 created them for the Jewish Scriptures and Robert Estienne added verse numbers to the NT in 1551.** Originally these were printed in the margins. The first English translation to use both the chapter and verses that we use today was **the Geneva Bible, published in 1560.**

Another feature that that appears in many Bibles today are section headings. My Bible, a New International Version, has one at the beginning of chapter 5 called "The Beatitudes." Such headings can be helpful in hard-to-understand passages if a person is new to that part of the Bible. The headings can help you figure out what is being presented. This is especially true in many Old Testament passages in the prophets.

However, there is a problem with depending on these headings. They can be misleading. For example, the next section heading in the NIV appears before verse 13 as if a new subject is introduced there. That is unfortunate. I don't believe that verse 13 begins a new subject. Instead, it continues the subject Jesus was speaking of in the previous verses.

To get there, let's back up. Let's begin at verse 1 and refresh our memory of what he said.

**Matthew 5:1-9 (NIV) Now when he saw the crowds, he went up on a mountainside and sat down. His disciples came to him, and he began to teach them, saying: "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted. Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled. Blessed are the merciful, for they**

**will be shown mercy. Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God. Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God.**

The phrases of character traits Jesus mentions like “poor in spirit” and “mourning” and “pure in heart” were taken from the Old Testament. Jesus’ listeners were familiar with them. Many of them were encouraged by Jesus saying these things because they identified them with the long awaited arrival of the Messiah and a restored kingdom of Israel. So, as Jesus continued through the Beatitudes, his disciples were very attentive. I can picture smiles on their faces.

Then, Jesus makes a slight change in direction in verse 10.

**Matthew 5:10 (NIV) Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.**

### **Observations on the Beatitudes**

**1) We do not deserve the promised blessings, nor will we have earned them by living the Christian life.**

**2) All of them require us humbling ourselves before God and others.**

**3) Persecution follows us because of what Jesus will do with us in the world.**

**4) In the first seven beatitudes, the blessings are all based on what the disciple does.** Five of them concern a person’s heart toward God. Two of them concern acts towards other people. All of them are pointing out from the disciple, either to God or another person.

**5) The eighth beatitude concerns something that happens to the disciple.** Again a blessing is promised but also persecution is expected. And lest Jesus’ disciples think he was just talking in general terms, he became more specific in the next verses.

**Matthew 5:11-12 (NIV) Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.**

So persecution of Jesus’ disciples, us included, is to be expected. Jesus likens us to the prophets in the Old Testament. Like them, Jesus will work through us to reveal truth of God and to call people to repent of sin and be reconciled to God. This is the tie-in of verses 13-16.

**Matthew 5:13 (NIV) 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.**

Salt was used in various ways back in that day. It was a very valuable and limited commodity. Salt was used as part of the pay given to Roman soldiers. **Our English word salary comes from the Latin *salarium* , the root of which is *sal*, meaning salt.**

Salt was used in various ways back then and people have tried to form an application for us based on all of them. Salt was used to preserve meat and fish. But we aren't preserving anything in the world. Salt was used in medicines to heal. But Christians aren't healing anything.

No, Jesus spoke of the quality of salt he was emphasizing. He mentions taste. Salt tastes salty. A little bit of salt enhances the flavor of food. Too much and it is inedible. Too little and it has no effect. Salt is always a minor ingredient in cooking and baking recipes. A 9x13 inch sheet cake normally has only between a quarter to one half teaspoon of salt in the whole cake.

Jesus said that his disciples are the salt of the earth. **Jesus uses us to bless the world, to have a positive effect on the world.** When we submit ourselves to Jesus as Lord and are living in response to the Holy Spirit's leading, Jesus will use us to make a difference in the world.

Jesus warns that if his disciples lose their saltiness, he will not be able to use them as he wants. If we are not submitting to him, not responding to the Spirit's leading, we will be useless to him. Disciples can lose their impact on the world.

Jesus continued with another metaphor.

**Matthew 5:14-16 (NIV) 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.**

(Isaiah 42:6; 49:6; 60:3)

C.H. Spurgeon said, ***"The Bible is not the light of the world, it is the light of the church. The world does not read the Bible, the world reads Christians."***

Jesus calls us the light of the world. Light often stands for truth in the Bible. And it does here. We are followers of the one, true, living God. We are followers of the Lord of the universe. We are followers of the only way to God and eternal life, Jesus. We are to shine the truth of God to the world with our words and deeds. Here Jesus gives the second command of this sermon.

**Matthew 5:16 (NIV) ... let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.**

However, not all will praise our Father in heaven. Many will turn on us. They don't want us reminding them of what is right. They don't want us setting a good example. They don't want us shining a light on bad behavior. They don't want to hear that there is only one way to God

and eternal life. They will attack us for doing so. Most often this attack will be verbal. Jesus uses two words that describe this. **“They will insult you... and falsely say all kinds of evil against you.”** Physical persecution is rarer than verbal. But both are growing in our day and age.

In verse 12 is the first of Jesus’ commands in this sermon. His command is to Rejoice and be glad when we are persecuted as followers of Jesus. Rejoice at being persecuted for being salt and light for Jesus in a lost world. That is not our natural response to people speaking against us. It is not something we seek after. We all want to be liked. We all want others to approve of us. Facing their displeasure does not naturally gladden us. Such a response is a product of the Holy Spirit in us.

Jesus puts his followers in the same class as the prophets of the Old Testament. He says we should expect to be treated like the prophets. The prophets, for the most part, were not believed to be speaking for God. They were not popular with most people in their days. Jesus said we should expect the same results that the prophets saw.

Faithful Spirit-led followers of Jesus will be influencers. One of the new vocations of our day is the influencer. An influencer is someone on the internet who has a large following of people. The influencer uses social media to influence others to adopt trends in fashion, beauty, technology, video games, politics, music, sports, and entertainment.

That sounds like what Jesus said his disciples are. Jesus invented the influencer. He revealed that his disciples are influencers for God.

While salt cannot lose its saltiness, we can lose our ability to influence others for Jesus. We can do so two ways. One, if we fail to speak up at the right times, we will not be salt. Two, we can lose our ability to make a difference through poor character, hypocrisy, or sin. We can lose the respect of those we might influence. It is hard to get back that respect.

Who are you letting your light shine to this week? Are you praying for them by name? Are you willing to be used by Jesus? These are the marks of faithful disciples.