

Real Influence

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[0 : 00] Well, it's definitely a bit sparse with our long weekend and the mass exodus from Vancouver that took place on Friday. But I also want to welcome all those here who are new with us, who are visiting over the long weekend.

It's great to have you with us. We've just started a new sermon series last week on the Sermon on the Mount. And it is a series that talks to us, where Jesus teaches us what it means to be his followers.

What it means to actually live out the gospel that God has transformed us with. And so last week we began the sermon with eight characteristics of a disciple, these well-known beatitudes.

And it's a very unusual list we talked about last week from the world's standards. In fact, quite often it's quite opposite from what the world does and what the world thinks.

It is a unique list. And there is something, I think, that gets under the radar of the world when that is lived out. And an indication of this was several years ago, one of our national newspapers ran an editorial.

[1 : 13] And in it they said that religious institutions, and they were particularly thinking of Christian churches, ought to have an end to their tax-exempt status.

And the reasoning in this column was that churches really serve no useful purpose in society, other than that they confirm the opinions and beliefs of the people who gather together.

And so the question was, why should society, in a sense, subsidize this activity? Well, that's probably the closest I've ever had to actually writing a response.

I actually didn't get down to doing it. I think I wrote it in my head, but never sent it off to the newspaper. What I would have said is, I would have pointed them to this verse and said, Christians are salt and light.

And they wouldn't have known what I was talking about. And they would have not printed my letter. But I would have had to be more specific. I would have had to say things like, people who go to church are pure in heart.

[2 : 20] People who follow Jesus are. And they are devoted to the God of truth in their dealing with others. And so they make model citizens. They are people who hunger and thirst for what is right and good.

And this blesses society. They are thankful people who always look for ways to give of themselves rather than how much they can get out of society.

And they care for each other and for those who are outside the church in very real ways. And often these are people who are marginalized in society or who wouldn't receive the care.

The church provides comfort for those who mourn all kinds of losses. They help in dealing with many addictions. They are caring for those who go through medical problems.

As well as they are company to the lonely. They also, Christians, teach one another how to serve each other and how to lead. They care for the poor and helpless in society.

[3 : 23] Not only in the church and around the church, but also overseas as well. And they support those going through crises of many kinds.

And the list could go on and on and on about the ways that Christians bless one another and bless the world in ways that you can actually understand whether you are a Christian or not.

There is a profoundly good effect on the society around the church. But the problem is it is often hard to measure. And it does not usually make front page headlines.

You know, I think the one exception to that probably is Billy Graham crusades at times. I was reading up on, I actually saw a little documentary on Billy Graham.

And they talked about the Sydney crusade in Australia. Where literally millions of people ended up going in Melbourne and Sydney and then New Zealand in the span of a few years.

[4 : 21] And during that time, crime actually went down. People started reading their Bibles. And these are all documented as well. And that there was a change in the way that society functioned.

It was a time of crime going up and up and up over the 50s and 60s. And during the years of the Crusades, they actually leveled off and went down a bit in the whole country.

So that's when a whole series of events happened and Christians worked together to bless the world. But more often than not, it is something that's unseen.

Because we can't actually see what would have been if Christians weren't in place. And of course, in that letter that I would have written, I couldn't have written what was underneath the tip of the iceberg.

I couldn't have said that through Christians, people outside the church are actually blessed with the Gospel. They are transformed by it. They are changed forever into a new creation.

[5 : 21] And that through prayer, the world is changed. That the world around us is blessed and influenced through our prayers. That's why every week we pray for the world and the country and the city around us.

So what all this means is that Christians have a profound influence in the world that's not often recognized. And Jesus, in these six short verses that we read, teaches that this is actually the purpose that he has for his followers.

That they would affect the world for his sake. And very simply, that's what this little section that we have read is about. It's very powerful.

That we would be engaged with the world as Christians. And that we would influence it in his name. And so that's why a disciple is different from the world.

It is because they belong to Jesus. And so that they will be involved in the world to influence it in his name. And that's why today the church is not meant to be a refuge from the world.

[6 : 28] It's not sort of an oasis that we escape from the world to. Although that's partly what does happen. It's not a bad thing when it does.

But primarily what our church is about is that it is a staging ground. It is the place where we gather together in order to carry the good news of Jesus outside the church.

And so we gather together to be strengthened in God's word. To serve Jesus in the world. So we hear the gospel in sermons. And as we meet together for Bible study.

We pray for each other. We support each other in our walk with Jesus. And we learn to relate to each other as he would have us relate. So that we might influence the world.

So that we can go out from here. And that's been God's purposes for his people throughout the Bible. You remember we've been actually talking about this in Galatians.

[7 : 29] We talked about Abraham. And the covenant that God made with him. That when the people of God were first formed. God said to Abraham, I'm going to bless you.

And you will be a blessing. And then through you the nations of the world will be blessed. And if you notice today Jesus is doing something very critical here.

He is telling his disciples that they are the new people of God. That they are the new Israel in a sense. And that's why what we've just heard is blessing upon blessing upon blessing.

Jesus is saying, I will bless you. And you will be a blessing. So that you will bless the nations of the earth. He's saying, if you are a follower of Jesus.

Then this mandate. The mandate that Jesus has. Will be yours. And I think that there's two things that work against that great mandate.

[8 : 30] Of actually being those who will bless the world. And those two things are fear and forgetfulness. You know in the Bible.

There are literally hundreds of verses that say. Fear not. Do not fear. Be not afraid. And in verse 11 right away Jesus addresses the fears of disciples.

Who are called to bless the world. And he says this. He says, Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you. And utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account.

Rejoice and be glad. For your reward is great in heaven. For so men persecuted the prophets who were before you. You see Jesus is saying that.

You will experience rejection. But in the middle of that rejection. God will bless and reward you. And not only that. But Jesus says that we are in company.

[9 : 30] With others that have gone before. We are in company with Jesus as well. We often see rejection of our serving Jesus as failure. But according to Jesus. That is the occasion.

For God's reward. It is the occasion for God to deeply bless us. In the midst of rejection. And we see this happening in the world around us all the time.

In slightly different ways than the early church. But nevertheless it's there. In March. Just a couple months ago. Less than that. There was a Christian gathering in San Francisco.

There was 25,000 Christian teens who gathered in a stadium there. And they were rallying against what they called pop culture's terrorism against virtue.

And the point of the gathering where there were lots of music and speakers. Was that God's instruction book. The Bible. Would guide young people away from the corrupting influence of popular culture.

[10 : 32] Well that doesn't sound too dangerous. And then to strengthen youth groups to study and live out God's word seriously. And to reach out to the needy in the cities.

Well what happened is that the San Francisco Board of Supervisors got wind of this. And they accused the rally of attempting to negatively influence the politics.

Of America's most tolerant and progressive city. And so they passed a resolution. Warning about the negative effect that such Christians could have on the community.

So this is a resolution by the Board of Supervisors. And one assemblyman said that the rally's intolerance of sexual promiscuity. Pornography, the drug culture and homosexual deviance is obnoxious and disgusting.

And should therefore not be tolerated. They should get out of San Francisco he said. Well the irony was not lost on the San Francisco Chronicle.

[11 : 36] And they editorialized the next day that the Supervisors reaction. Was so boorishly over the top that only one word could describe it. Intolerant.

Intolerant. And that's right isn't it. I mean this is where the world which prides itself. In being open and tolerant. Will in fact reject.

Will in fact persecute those who stand. For what God stands for. Personal rejection will come from influencing the world. For Christ's sake.

But Jesus is saying here don't let it stop you. Instead be glad in that time. Because it is the place of God's blessing. And reward. And reward. So having addressed fear.

The fear of influence in the world. Jesus goes on to address the forgetfulness of his disciples. And we have this condition of forgetfulness. That's why the Bible is full of remembering as well.

[12 : 36] And he reminds them in verse 13 to the end of this passage. That they are salt and light if they are his followers. And notice that Jesus doesn't say you must be this.

Salt and light. He's saying that you are. He says you don't work hard to be work and salt. He says that they are by virtue of the fact that they belong to Jesus. By virtue of the fact that they are in the kingdom of heaven.

They are salt and light. And the reason Jesus chooses those images. Is because salt and light are distinct from their environment. And they change it.

They come in from the outside. And they penetrate and utterly change the environment that they come into. So Jesus is saying if you follow. You cannot help but have that kind of effect on your world.

Well what is the effect? Salt was very valuable in the ancient world. And the reason of course is because they didn't have refrigerators. And so salt kept food from going rotten.

[13 : 44] Especially meat. And not only that. But of course as now it was used to enhance food. The flavor of food. And so Jesus is saying something very basic about human society.

He is assuming in that image. That society is decaying. That it rots without the influence of the gospel. Without the influence of Christians.

And you can see this in Vancouver every day. You know if you are involved in topics that range from raising children. To making business decisions.

From teaching students. To making moral sexual choices. If you are involved in public policy. Or the arts. You will rarely see the perspective of God.

Or even the idea of objective truth. Being talked about. It's not often heard. And Jesus is saying that we are being salty. As we stand up for God's truth.

[14 : 43] And his ways. That there is a good effect. That comes for society. When we are actually actively. Seeking to influence the world. And so there is a preservative effect of salt.

But at the same time. There is a spiritual blandness. In Vancouver around us. And so Jesus image is very appropriate here. The worship.

Our spirituality in Vancouver. Often takes the form of materialism. Or the seeking after pleasure. Of all kinds. We live in a beautiful part of the world. It is very common for the religion.

To be one of seeking to gather pleasure out of that. And that is the point of religion. But it is a shallow and tasteless religion. With no life in it.

No life comes to you from it. And the world around us. Needs the richness. And the depth. Of a personal relationship with Jesus. They need that.

[15 : 45] In a sense we have a banquet. In the word of God. That many of around us have never tasted. And have settled. For this bland. Sort of insipid form.

Of religion. And so in our openness. With our personal relationship. With God. We are offering life. And the treasures of heaven.

To the world. There is this sense of seasoning. The world. Because of Jesus. And then after saying that we are salt. Jesus goes on to say that we are the light.

Of the world. Now this is a marvelous privilege. Because of course. Jesus says. I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me. Will never walk in darkness.

But will have the light. Of life. And again. Jesus is teaching. Not something just about us. But also the world as well. He is saying that the world.

[16 : 43] Is in a state of spiritual darkness. And of course. The world denies it. In fact. It sees itself as enlightened. And having moved beyond the darkness. Of the old forms of religion.

The old forms of looking at an ancient. Script. Of the Bible. And. The Bible teaches. That the darkness cannot be changed. Except for by the light.

Of Jesus. So that when we live out. Our commitment to Jesus. His light. Does shine. Into. Our world around us. And.

There is a marvelous. Verse. That Paul says. In Philippians 2. He is talking to. The church. And he tells them. To live as children of God. To live out.

This relationship to God. Without blemish. In the midst of a crooked. And twisted generation. Among whom you shine. As lights in the world. Holding fast.

[17 : 39] To the word. Of life. Isn't that a marvelous image? It's something that. Doesn't. We don't naturally see. With our natural eyes. That we are shining as lights.

In a crooked. And twisted generation. But that is the truth. Of the gospel. This is the. This is the true situation. We find ourselves. In the world. And it is true.

Jesus is saying. That the world notices. A life. That is devoted to Christ. People will wonder. Why you speak differently. Why do you behave. The way you do. Why do you make. The decisions.

You make. It is because. You are living as lights. In this generation. It's very. It's extremely rare. To hear somebody. Speak about Jesus.

In a way that. Involves sincerity. And respect. One that says. This is a relationship. That means everything. To me. When you hear that. Light is brought into the world.

[18 : 36] A number of years ago. I was a volunteer firefighter. In a small town. Up on the Sunshine Coast. And. I used to. Get a lot of flack. Because I was a minister.

Living. Or. Living in Pender Harbor. And. In the fire department. Working each week. And. It was always in good fun. And so forth. I was. Fortunate.

In one way. Of being ordained. In that. Right away. They knew where I stood. And so. I didn't have a choice. But to be a light. In a sense. Well. One night. The language.

Got particularly salty. In the bad way. It was. It was rather blue. And somebody spoke up. And said. You know. Does this language. That you're hearing. Around you.

Bother you. You know. Week by week. We. We. We talk like this. And there was this pause. And of course. All of a sudden. I'm in the spotlight. You have all these firefighters around.

[19 : 30] What's he going to say? And so. I thought. Well. Okay. I might as well just go for it. And so. I said. No. It doesn't really bother me. I've heard it all before. The only thing.

That really offends me. Is when you use. The name of Jesus Christ. As a profanity. And then. I went on to say. That he. It's because. He is the one. That I worship. It's the reason.

I'm doing what I'm doing. And I talked a little bit. About. Who Jesus was. For me. Well. I tell you. That. That pours cold water. On the festivities. At that point. And so. You know. It's kind of. Awkward. For a few minutes. But it's very interesting. That after that. I heard a whole lot less. Of that particular. Use. Of a profanity. And. It was very interesting. That. There were. There were more and more people. Who would just come. And talk to me. From time to time. About what was going on. In their lives. More meaningful conversations.

[20 : 26] Interestingly. And I think it's because. That we do shine light. When we take Jesus seriously. In our lives. That there is a good effect. When we speak about him. As he is.

We are actually bringing. Enlightenment. We are bringing. To light. The things that are. That are truly important. Important. In this life. And not only that. But we are telling. People. The way out. Of darkness. We are actually saying. It is to know. A person called. Jesus Christ. He is the way to God. That you. Can leave the darkness. That is in this world. And I think. There's a very strong. Strong applications. And I'm going to close. With this. That Jesus is giving to us. In fact.

It's unmistakable. So. He warns his disciples. And here's our application. In verse 13. And 15. Do not be salt. That loses its taste.

[21 : 19] And then in verse 15. Do not be lights. That are hidden. Under a bushel. Now both of these things. Make no sense. To a Christian. Jesus is saying.

A disciple. Actually can't do this. Salt can't. By nature. Lose its saltiness. You know. Anybody who is a chemist. Here would know that. And. No matter how you pretend to do it.

It's useless. In fact. Jesus says. It's just worth being. Trampled on. That kind of idea. And then he says. A lamp that burns. Is impossible to hide. It will go out.

If you cover it. This is. This is an impossibility. As well. How can a light. That is a. That is lit. Be covered. It will go out. It's as ridiculous.

As trying to hide. A city on a hill. You know. That would be. A massive canvas. That would try to hide. A city on a hill. What Jesus is teaching here. Is that.

[22 : 14] When the disciples. Try. Not to be salt and light. They are attempting. An impossible thing. It is ridiculous. To hide your devotion. To Christ.

From the world. He has transformed you. You are one of. His people. His children. But that's exactly. What the. Our society around us.

In Vancouver. Pressures us. To do. Keep your faith. To yourself. Don't let it. Influence your decisions. And business practices. And certainly. Don't talk about it.

But Jesus says. No. That's an impossibility. I have made you. To be. Salt. And light. You are the fulfillment.

Of the Old Testament. Prophecy. For the people of God. Which said. I will make you. A light. For the Gentiles. That you may bring. My salvation. To the ends of the earth.

[23 : 09] That's the promise. That's being fulfilled. In you and I. Every day. Because we have been made. God's children. And brought into his kingdom. We are salt.

And light. Whether we like it or not. And so Jesus calls us here. To face our fears. And our reluctance. That hits all disciples. And he says.

Let your light. So shine before others. That they may see. Your good works. And give glory. To your father. Who is in heaven. Jesus is saying. Intentionally live for him.

In the things that you do. Your acts of love. And service. In the decisions you make. In the things that you say. In the world. Intentionally live for him. Do those things.

Because. The great outcome. Is that actually people. Are attracted to that. Even as we experience. Rejection. Jesus is promising here. That there will be praise.

[24 : 05] For our father. Who is in heaven. And I think this is. A wonderful encouragement. For us as a church community. At St. John's. Because Jesus is saying. That as you are different.

For Jesus Christ. People will be attracted. To our heavenly father. Yes there is rejection. But there will also be. A people coming to praise God.

God. Because you live. In a distinct way. As Jesus would have us. To live. But on the other hand. If we are indistinguishable. From the world. We become useless to God.

And ought to be. You know. As useless as something. That is thrown out. And trampled on. Light and salt. Are distinct. From their environment. And they change. That environment.

By their presence. This is what God. Calls us to. His disciples. So may God grant. That we are in fact. Salt and light. For the world. May we be bold.

[25 : 03] And intentional. About influencing the world. For Christ's sake. Amen. Thank you.