

Character and Influence: Jesus' Intro to the Sermon on the Mount – Week Six
Salt & Light – A Different Kind of Influence
Matthew 5:13-16

Introduction: After teaching about the character of a disciple, Jesus begins a short section of the Sermon on the Mount called *The Similitudes* (suggesting we're "similar" to salt and light). If the beatitudes teach about our character in this world, then the similitudes teach about our influence in the world. We need to imagine this scene taking place at night, perhaps after dinner. The fire is out, the sun is down & Jesus gives 2 pictures of influence.

1. 1ST PICTURE (PRIVATE) – You are the salt of the earth. Matthew 5:13

- A. In the ancient world, salt was extremely valuable.
 - 1. It was used as salary and regarded as a staple of life.
 - 2. Salt was used to seal friendships. Did Jesus use it here with disciples?
- B. When Jesus says we're salt, he means *first* that our presence in culture arrests decay.
 - 1. Fish was salted to arrest decay.
 - 2. The old pattern of arresting decay: lob grenades and retreat.
 - 3. The new pattern of arresting decay: do something!
- C. When Jesus says we're salt, he means *second* that we add flavor to life.
 - 1. Flavoring food in the ancient world was a huge problem; spices were invaluable.
 - 2. We add flavor through the things we say...culture of honor. Col. 4:5-6
- D. The command – Don't lose your saltiness.
 - 1. The Salt Sea was nearby. Impure salt was worthless and thrown out.
 - 2. The goal: maintain saltiness by refusing to mix with the values of the world.

2. 2ND PICTURE (PUBLIC) – You are the light of the world. Matt. 5:14-16

- A. It's almost impossible to imagine the intense darkness in the ancient world.
 - 1. We live with constant light, 24/7, but then blackness of the night was complete.
 - 2. Darkness was a symbol of evil and fear.
- B. What light is – It's the supernatural presence of God that shows up in our works.
 - 1. This is clear from vs. 16: "See good works...glorify Father."
 - 2. The goal is that unconditional service be rendered, but still connected with the Father.
- C. What we're commanded to do – Regulate our light.
 - 1. This is also clear from vs. 16: "Shine in such a way."
 - 2. We must learn to show forth light appropriate to the situation.
- D. The challenge – We point the way with culturally appropriate methods.
 - 1. You are going to be light; you can't help it.
 - 2. Do you love people enough to do this wisely? This is a challenge! See 5:11-12

3. PUTTING THE PICTURES TOGETHER – How it works in practice. Matt. 5:3-16

- A. God has built two essential needs into the human soul: meaning and influence.
 - 1. We see meaning in the beatitudes.
 - 2. We see influence in the similitudes.
- B. So where do we start with influence. When you look at the life of Christ...
 - 1. Jesus begins privately with God in the wilderness.
 - 2. He starts small in his hometown of Capernaum, then he has expanded influence.
 - 3. We need to start where we are.

