

BACK TO THE FUTURE - 6
Becoming Contagious
Matthew 5:13-16

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. 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 lamp stand, 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.

Everyone on this earth has a purpose for being here. Often we don't see or appreciate that purpose, but it exists, none-the-less. However, a follower of Jesus Christ has been given some important details which help outline his purpose. To sum up the words of Jesus from our text, we are to be salt and light. Those words refer to the influence we will have on others. It is not a matter of whether we have influence on others or not, that is a given, but rather it concerns how we use that influence we do have.

If you are a parent, you are one of the major influences in the life of your child. Their opinions and attitudes towards the things of God will greatly depend on your example and teaching. They will be influenced by others and may some day decide to reject your standards, but there will still be greatly influenced by them. Your friends and neighbors, or anyone who observes your life, will be affected by how you live either positively or negatively.

For none of us lives to himself, and no one dies to himself.
Romans 14:7

It is not by accident that you live where you live, work where you work, or hang out where you hang out. The idea of following Jesus Christ is not just a Sunday morning thing. If Jesus Christ is real to us, it will affect our lifestyle 24/7/365 (366). By our influence we will either point people to Jesus

Christ by encouraging them to become His followers, or we will discourage them by our inconsistency. Being salt and light is the most important thing any of us could ever do.

The world needs salt because it is corrupt and it needs light because it is dark. The idea that the world is getting better and evil is diminishing is simply not the biblical world view. The truth is the world is corrupted and decayed, and that it is dark and darkening.

But evil men and impostors will grow worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived. 2 Timothy 3:13

There is a sense in which moral values have been positively influenced by Christians. The treatment of women and children has been tremendously changed since the gospel has spread through the world. The care of orphans and the sick has developed because of Christianity. It was primarily the work of Christians that brought an end to the slave trade. But these advances still do not change the heart of man.

There are many today who would have us to believe that man is evolving upward, because he has increased in scientific, medical, historical, educational, psychological and technological knowledge to an astounding degree. But he has not changed his own basic nature and he has not improved society. Man's knowledge has greatly improved, but his morals have progressively degenerated. His confidence has increased, but his peace of mind has diminished. His accomplishments have increased, but his sense of purpose and meaning have all but disappeared. Instead of improving the moral and spiritual quality of his life, man's discoveries and accomplishments have simply provided ways for him to express and promote his depravity faster and more destructively. Modern man has simply invented more ways to corrupt and destroy himself.

Man is affected by the deadly virus of sin, which has no cure apart from God. Yet, for the most part, man does not want a cure. Man's knowledge is increasing by quantum leaps, but this increased knowledge does not retard his corruption but

rather intensifies and defends it.

Always learning and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth. 2 Timothy 3:7

The world's problem today is a heart problem. It will not be solved by social programs, education, etc.

The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; Who can know it? Jeremiah 17:9

1. GOD'S PLAN

It is to the corrupt and darkened world that the followers of Jesus Christ have been called to be salt and light. Although we are imperfect and still struggle with sin, yet we have been forgiven and given the power to win over sin. It is this army of sinners who have been saved by God's grace which has the marching orders to influence this world for Jesus.

The pronoun *you* in both verses 13 and 14 is emphatic which means it implies, "You are the *only* salt of the earth" and "You are the *only* light of the world." Only the followers of Jesus Christ can be salt and light. The word *you* is also plural. (It is translated as *Ye* in the KJV which retains old English pronouns that distinguish between the singular and plural) One grain of salt has a limited influence, but when it is combined with others - as in the setting of a local church - its influence is increased greatly.

Some years ago a magazine carried a series of pictures that graphically depicted a tragic story. The first picture was of a vast wheat field in western Kansas. The second showed a distressed mother sitting in a farmhouse in the center of the field of wheat. The accompanying story explained that her four-year-old son had wandered away from the house and into the field when she was not looking. The mother and father looked and looked all day but the little fellow was too short to see or be seen over the wheat. The third picture showed dozens of friends and neighbors who had heard of the boy's

plight and who had joined hands the next morning to make a long human chain as they walked through the field searching. The final picture was of the heartbroken father holding his lifeless son who had been found too late and died of exposure. The caption underneath read, "O God, if only we had joined hands sooner."

The world is full of lost souls who cannot see their way above the distractions and barriers of the world and cannot find their way to the Father's house until Christians join together as salt and light and sweep through the world in search of them. That is what we are asking you to do in our *One Campaign*. I want to challenge every believer here to ask God to lay at least one other person who needs the Lord upon their heart. We then ask you to give us the name of that *One* so that we may pray together for them. Then do your best to invite them out to a service.

The word *are* stresses being rather than doing. Salt and light represent what Christians are. The question is whether we are tasteful salt and effective light.

Christ is the source of our savor and our light.

That was the true Light which gives light to every man coming into the world. John 1:9

We therefore shine by the reflected light of the true Light.

For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light. Ephesians 5:8

He has delivered us from the power of darkness and conveyed us into the kingdom of the Son of His love. Colossians 1:13

We are God's salt to retard corruption and His light to reveal truth. By the indirect influence of the way we live we retard corruption, and by the direct influence of what we say we manifest light. Every follower of Jesus Christ has the responsibility of being salt and light, there are not exceptions.

2. BEING SALT

Being salt is so available today we probably don't appreciate its value nearly as much as ancient civilizations. During a period of ancient Greek history, salt was called *theon* which means divine. The Romans held that, except for the sun, nothing was more valuable than salt. Roman soldiers were paid in salt, and it was from that practice that the expression "not worth his salt" originated.

Salt was often used in the ancient Near East to bind a covenant, somewhat in the way an agreement or contract is notarized in our day. God prescribed that all sacrificial offerings in Israel were to be offered with salt "so that the salt of the covenant of your God shall not be lacking." (Lev. 2;13)

When this passage is studied, some of the characteristics of salt are usually mentioned.

- **Salt adds flavor.**

This implies that Christians are to affect the world around them in a positive sense. There is a sense that we can be a blessing to men in general because of God's blessings upon us. However, the world doesn't always appreciate the flavor of Christians.

- **Salt stings a wound.**

If we live Christian lives, it will "sting" the world, prick its conscience and make it uncomfortable. There is truth in this analogy because if we become so concerned with trying to please people our witness against sin will be obscured. We can be so concerned with not offending others that we fail to confront them with their desperate need to be saved from their sin.

- **Salt creates thirst.**

Because it increases the body's craving for water, salt tablets often are given to those who do hard work in excessive heat. God intends for His people so to live and testify before the world that others will be made more aware of their spiritual dehydration and danger. For example, someone may see our peace in a trying circumstance, or our confidence in what we

believer, and thereby be persuaded to investigate our faith.

- **Salt preserves.**

Throughout history, one of the main methods for preserving meat was to "salt it down." That is definitely the greatest analogy of the believer's influence in the world. In spite of our often failures and short-comings, Christians are a preserving influence in the world.

3. BEING LIGHT

Jesus has called us to be light. Salt is hidden, light is obvious. Salt works secretly; light works openly. Salt works from within; light works from without. Salt is more the indirect influence of the gospel; light is more its direct communication. Salt works primarily through our living; light works primarily through what we teach and preach.

For with You is the fountain of life; in Your light we see light. Psalm 36:9

...God is light and in Him is no darkness at all. If we say that we have fellowship with Him, and walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin. 1 John 1:5-7

Light is not simply given to have but to live by.

Your word is a lamp to my feet, and a light to my path. Psalm 119:105

God's light is to walk by and to live by. We are therefore to proclaim God's light in a world engulfed in darkness. Christ is the true light; we are to reflect His light. He is the Sun; we are His moons.

For it is the God who commanded light to shine out of darkness, who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. 2 Corinthians 4:6

By its nature and definition, light must be visible in

order to illuminate. The followers of Christ must be more than the indirect influence of salt. We are to be a light that the world can see.

**That you may become blameless and harmless, children of God without fault in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world
Philippians 2:15**

While we are salt and light, it is possible that our saltiness and light can become ineffective. Much salt in Palestine, such as that found on the shores of the Dead Sea, is contaminated with gypsum and other minerals that make it taste flat and even repulsive. A batch of contaminated salt had no value and was thrown out, not into the field where it would ruin the soil but in the path or road where it would be gradually ground back into the dirt and disappear.

Technically salt never becomes unsalted, but contamination can cause it to lose its value as salt. Its saltiness can no longer function. Jesus is not saying that believers can lose their salvation, for Christians cannot lose their salvation just as salt cannot lose its inherent saltiness.

My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me; and I give eternal life to them, and they shall never perish; and no one shall snatch them out of My hand. John 10:27

However, we can lose our value and effectiveness when sin contaminates our lives. That is why we need to continually come to God for cleansing in our daily walk.

Light too can become useless. Like salt, it cannot lose its essential nature. A hidden light is still light, but it is useless light.

Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven.

We do this by allowing others to see what God has done within us, not what we do through our own strength. It is God's light; our choice is whether to hide it or let it shine. Everything we do is to cause others to give praise to the God

who is the source of all that is good.