

Influencing the Lost

Matt. 5:13-16

Pastor Jarrett Stephens

As you can see, we are continuing in our *FACETIME* series, talking about how we can strengthen and continue to develop and grow the most important relationships in life. And so far in our series, we have talked about the relationship we have with:

- Our mom – covered this on Mother’s Day...
- Our mate – talked about the importance of marriage...
- Our children – how they are “arrows in the hand of a warrior”. We are to shape, sharpen and shoot them into the world...

Last week, we took a one week break and my friend, Pastor Russ Barksdale came and spoke. This week we are jumping back into the series and today we are going to talk about the relationships we have with those who are “lost”... “lost” is a term the Bible uses to describe those who don’t know Jesus in a personal way.

I’m calling the message: **Influencing the Lost**

Illus. Fill the Frame – Earlier this year, I passed out some 4x6 frames...they look just like this (hold up frame), and I challenged our staff to fill the frame with someone they lead to Jesus.

You know, we put frames of people in prominent places in our home and offices, and I wanted a blank frame in everyone’s office to remind them to “fill the frame”. Well, we have had some incredible stories come for this.

Most recently is Luzma Bedoya – check out this quick story. (**SHOW VIDEO**)

How cool is that? I wish ALL of you could have been in my office the day that Luzma came over to share with us about her mom trusting in Christ and following him in believer’s baptism...we were all crying and rejoicing! It was awesome.

And I want to ask you as we get this going today:

If I was to pass out 4x6 frames to everyone here, and ask you to “fill the frame”, do you have someone that immediately comes to your mind that you are sharing Jesus with or want desperately to come to know him?

- It could be like Luzma’s was, and be a family member...
- Or maybe it is a co-worker that you have grown to love and desperately desire them to come to know Christ and experience the hope and joy and peace you have...
- Or maybe it’s a friend at school or a neighbor...

- Or someone at the gym...

I don't know, I just want to ask at the outset here, is there anyone you know...have a relationship with...that you are currently praying for and asking God to use you to bring them to Christ?

THIS is our responsibility as believers in Jesus. It's to introduce people to the one we claim has forgiven us of our sin and restored us to a right relationship with God.

illus. Lanier Library with N.T. Wright – this was one of his main propositions is that God chooses to partner with us to bring about his will and help accomplish his divine purposes.

1 Cor. 3:9 – “**For we are God's fellow workers** (co-laborers)...”

2 Cor. 5:20a – “**Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ** (we represent him wherever we go!), **God making his appeal through us...**”

Now, if statistics are correct...and this is coming from Lifeway Research 80% of people who attend church one or more times a month believe they have a personal responsibility to share their faith – that's good because we do!

I point you to the Great Commission...to Acts 1:8 – we are to be Jesus's witnesses here and around the world.

The problem is, that same research showed that 61% of the people interviewed had not shared Jesus with anyone in the previous six months.

According to the website *Bible.org*, 95% of all Christians have never won a soul to Christ and 80% admitted that they do not share Jesus in a consistent way!

Now, my purpose here today is NOT to beat you up or put you on a guilt trip! Most Christians when you ask them what are the two areas they could improve on spiritually, the mass majority will answer the same way – they'll say I need to pray more and I need to witness more.

My goal today is NOT to guilt you – MOST of us know we need to be stronger in this area and there are a variety of reasons we don't share Jesus:

- For some it's fear – fear of rejection or maybe the awkwardness that can sometimes be present when you talk about spiritual matters...
- For some it's a lack of opportunity – the fact is the longer you are Christian, the less non-Christians you know or spend much time around...
- For some, it's a lack of feeling equipped – you feel like you don't know what to say or exactly how to say it...

There are a TON of reasons we don't share our faith, any my goal today is to simply raise awareness, keep the goal and objective of winning people to Jesus in front of us and I hope in doing so, you will be encouraged today to be the salt and light Jesus has made us to be.

Our text today is: **Matt. 5:13-16** – “**You are the salt of the earth, but if salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything except to be thrown out and trampled under people's feet.** ¹⁴ “**You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden.** ¹⁵ **Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house.** ¹⁶ **In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.”**

To set a little context for you, this is a portion of what is called the Sermon on the Mount from Matthew chapters 5-7. It is the first and longest public discourse we have in scripture of Jesus teaching.

He has come on the scene and is just beginning his earthly ministry. He has recently called his first disciples and listen to how Matthew describes the ministry of Jesus.

Now, this is key to understanding how and why it's important to influence the lost!

Matt. 4:17 – “**From that time Jesus began to preach, saying, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.”**

Matt. 4:23 – “**And he went throughout all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom and healing every disease and every affliction among the people.”**

In Christ, the kingdom of God had come to earth...and this was a new kind of kingdom!

This kingdom is different from the earthly kingdoms and powers that come and go. This is a spiritual, eternal kingdom that has now come to a physical, literal earth. It has a reigning King and calls its citizens to live:

- By a different set of values...
- It has a different ethic...
- It operates with a different set of rules...

This IS the Sermon on them Mount. One theologian called it *The King's Manifesto*.

You read it, and you see what life is like when you are living for the kingdom or maybe a better way to say it is you read it and see what life is like when the kingdom is living in you!

And this is where we MUST begin! Before we can talk about influencing the lost, we have to answer this question first – are we sure we have been found?

Or to put it in Kingdom terms, since this is the context of this passage of scripture. The question could be posed as this: Are you sure you are a citizen of the Kingdom?

We can't talk about calling on people to follow Jesus and winning people to his Kingdom if we are not kingdom citizens ourselves...and I'm going to show you WHY this is so important here in just a moment.

So, let's answer the question...and it's a question that only you and the Lord can answer: Are you a citizen of the Kingdom of God?

Illus. Pastor Ivan Orellana – Speaking of citizenship, just this past March, our Spanish Pastor at our Jersey Village Campus received his citizenship...pretty cool! **(SHOW PIC)**

Well, how does one become a citizen of the Kingdom of God? Is it like becoming a citizen of the United States or some other country? Do you take some test? Memorize some facts? Pledge some kind of commitment?

Well, Mark adds in his gospel a little commentary concerning Jesus's announcement that the Kingdom of God is at hand. Listen to:

Mark 1:14-15 – “Now after John was arrested, Jesus came into Galilee, proclaiming the gospel of God, ¹⁵ and saying, “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel.”

So, here is how it happens. Here is how you become a citizen of the Kingdom of God. You have to repent and believe the gospel! I share it like this with people from time to time.

Illus. WHITEBOARD THREE CIRCLES

Now, when this happens, a miracle takes place...the Bible calls it being “born again” and instantly...instantaneously you are made a citizen of the Kingdom of God.

Paul puts it like this in **Col. 1:13** – “He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son...”

Beautiful, right? He changes us...transforms us...and transitions us into his Kingdom - WHEN we place our faith and trust in Christ, and it's at the point that we begin operating out of this new Kingdom ethic because we have a new Kingdom heart!

I like to say it like this: Because our identity changes, our behavior changes! Or to say it another way: Because our position changes...because who we are changes, our practice...what we do changes!

Let's go back to our text, and we'll see this as clear as day!

Matt. 5:13-16 – “**You are (identity/being) the salt of the earth, but if salt has lost its taste (behavior/influence/practice), how shall its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything except to be thrown out and trampled under people's feet.** ¹⁴“**You are (identity/being) the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden.** ¹⁵**Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house.** ¹⁶**In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works (behavior/influence/practice) and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.”**

Who God has made us...what God has done in us...changes everything. We as believers in Jesus and citizens of his kingdom, ARE salt and light.

And salt and light by definition influence...salt and light ACTS...salt and light changes things!

Now, a lot of ink has been spilled in commentaries about salt and it's uses and the analogy that Jesus is making here. We know that salt in the early centuries was extremely valuable. Sometimes people and soldiers in particular were paid in salt. We get the word “salary” from the Latin word “salarium” – “sal” – meaning “salt”.

Surely, you've heard the phrase or used the phrase, “that person is not worth his salt” – what are we saying? He's not worth his pay.

Salt in the times of the Bible was mainly used as a preservative. There was no refrigeration and so people would take salt and rub it into meat or fish and it would preserve it...keep it from rotting or wasting away.

The parallel of course is that as followers of Jesus, as Kingdom citizens, we ARE salt – and as salt we preserve society from the decay of sin. This is what sin does...it brings brokenness and decay.

As followers of Jesus and citizens of his Kingdom, we should not be contributing to the decay of this world – that kind of salt according to the scripture, has lost its taste.

In the words of Jesus, if we are NOT preserving from decay, we're no longer good for anything but to be thrown out and be trampled under people's feet because we are not serving the purpose for which we have been created.

It's a sure sign something has gone wrong if salt isn't preserving and doing what God created it to do!

Illus. Got home from camp – what if our dog, Rocket came up to me and instead of barking started oinking like a pig or mooing like a cow? I'd say, that's crazy...we gotta get that thing to the vet!

It's NOT doing what it was created to do! It's identity/being and its practice/behavior is not lining up – that's a sure sign something is wrong!

It's the same with salt...and it's the same with light. The Bible says (v. 14) "You are the light of the world." Again, this is your identity...this is "being". It's who you are! And who you are should affect what you do!

Light by its very nature is meant to be displayed! Light exposes!
Jesus says, "You don't light a lamp and then put it under a basket...you don't hide it under a bushel?! NO! You let your light shine! Why?"

Matt. 5:16 – "In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works (behavior/influence/practice – your deeds some translations say) and give glory to your Father who is in heaven."

Who you are as a citizen of the Kingdom should affect how you live...i.e. what you do!

- Salt, by its very nature preserves! You don't have to tell it to! Salt preserves decay.
- Light, by its very nature shines! You don't have to tell it to or look for it...you just see it! It's light...and light shines and exposes darkness.

Now, before we bring this home from an applicational standpoint as it relates to influencing the lost and sharing Jesus with people, I want to highlight two important points concerning these verses.

First, is the word "you" in (v. 13 & 14). It is written in its emphatic form. That means you, and you alone. It's as if Jesus was looking at every person in the crowd that day and saying, "As a Kingdom citizen, you – YOU! YOU! YOU, are the salt of the earth and the light of the world.

Second, the word "you" is not just in its emphatic form, but it's in the plural form as well. Meaning NOT just you, and you alone. But you, and you alone...and you, and you alone, and you, and you alone – TOGETHER YOU!

See, we are in this together! We as citizens of the Kingdom are each salt and light, and when we live out WHO we are, the difference we make can be stunning...it can be amazing!!!

To me, this just takes the pressure off! Because I know if I'll live out who I am in Christ, and if you will live out who you are in Christ, together we will influence the lost for Christ!

Let me paint a picture like this! See, no one is going to go to lunch today and take the salt-shaker and put one, little tiny grain of salt on your food and think that's going to do the trick! BUT...if you will shake it and get a lot out of that shaker, you can change the entire way your food tastes!

One little light can make a BIG difference (**LIGHTS OFF/SPOTLIGHT ON**), but if we turn a bunch of lights on – BRIGHT as day (**ALL LIGHTS ON**)!

Talking about influencing the lost...I liken it to this...if we are all living out who we are "in Christ" – watch what can happen:

Illus. Everyone together (paint a picture!)

- Neighbor that has never gotten it – you faithfully pray for them, talk with them, you find ways to serve him or her...they see your Easter sing in the yard each year and watch you pull out to go to church on Sundays...
- Neighbor goes to work and guess what? – he works in the cubicle next to this Kingdom citizen over here. And you help them out on a project, you listen to them, don't agree with some of his standpoints/viewpoints, but you don't judge him or look down on him, you simply love him...
- Neighbor/Co-worker goes to the gym to workout, and runs into you, another Kingdom citizen over here. You give him a spot...you create conversation and simply in the way you interact with him, he knows that you are different. You invite him to church, you bring up spiritual topics with him...
- And then this neighbor has children and happens to be on the same team as your child over here. You have his boy or girl over to play with your children. You invite him over for dinner, begin to ask questions, be involved in his life....

And typically, what happens is a big boulder called a trial or trouble will fall into the person's lap. Whether or not it does or not, doesn't really matter because one day something will cause this person to start doing the math.

His neighbor who loves and serves him, he always sees headed to church. He catches his co-worker reading his bible during his lunch break...that guy he works out at the gym with who has a pleasant demeanor has invited him to church on numerous occasions...this family that has invested in his children and had them over for dinner that are so fun to be around and normal...they are all believers!

And all of the sudden, this man figures out that the God of the universe is pursuing him and calling him to himself through ordinary Christians being the salt and light they were created to be!

And please notice in this illustration, it was not about trying to be salt and light. The believers in this story WERE salt and light and simply lived out who they were in their daily life – people saw their good works...how they lived...their everyday activity and together they influenced someone who was lost for Jesus!

I want you to pray for those in your sphere of influence that don't know Jesus in a personal way...begin praying for them by name every day.

Ask the Lord to see that person's face into your heart. Ask the Lord to open doors for you to share with them and to bring other Kingdom citizens around them to help influence them for the cause of Christ.

I want you to think about ways that you can serve people and love people to Jesus. Let your good deeds...your good works be seen...and listen we will challenge you to do this.

Illus. FALL – Sunday Nights – (BLESS: 5 Everyday Ways to Love Your Neighbor and Change the World) – we’re going to pour out the salt...turn on the lights (flying over a city at night) – spiritually, that’s how I want it to look in our neighborhoods!

We’re going to clear the church calendar from as much church-programming as we can on Sunday nights and give you ways to BLESS your neighbors while people are at home! THIS is the mission!

B – Begin with Prayer

L – Listen with Care

E – Eat Together

S – Serve with Love

S – Share your Story

We are going to challenge you to do this! To live out who you are! And the secret to “DOING” all this...check this out - it’s NOT in our plans! It’s NOT activity we drum up!

If you want to influence the lost and stay motivated to making a difference for Christ – it’s found in going deeper and understanding in a greater way our “Identity”...our “BEING”.

Let me show you what this looks like/work it out here on the whiteboard, and we’ll continue this into next week when we talk about “facetimeing” or growing in our relationship with the Lord!

Illus. WHITEBOARD – “Being vs. Doing”

If we will wrap our minds and hearts around who we are “in Christ”, our practice and behavior...our influencing the lost will take care of itself.

Can you imagine filling 2500-3000 frames with people we have led to Jesus and brought into his Kingdom simply because we decided to be the salt and light God called us to be.

May it be so. Let’s pray.

Please Note: This document is not meant to be a published, cited, annotated research paper. It is simply a transcript of a spoken message, provided as a resource. Many commentaries, articles, and other sermon helps were likely studied and contributed to the forming of this message.

