

## The Power of Influence

Some years ago, the Queensland Government scrapped plans to build a new Brisbane - Gold Coast Highway to alleviate congestion on the existing motorway. Hundreds of thousands of dollars and many man hours were spent in research to determine the feasibility of the project.

Why did the government abort their plan to build this much needed highway? Was it too difficult to build? Did the cost exceed their budget? No. A small group of determined, single minded people, banded together and fought tenaciously against the government until the proposed plan were scrapped.

Isn't it amazing that the sheer might and power of the Queensland Government was stopped... not by the mightier Commonwealth Government, but by the influence of a small group of eco-minded people. Friends, determined influence is powerful!

**Elihu Burrit** wrote, *"No human being can come into this world without increasing or diminishing the sum total of human happiness, not only of the present but of every subsequent age of humanity. There is no sequestered spot in the universe to which he can retreat from his relations with others, where he can withdraw the influence of his existence upon the moral destiny of the world. Everywhere his presence or absence will be felt. Everywhere he will have companions who will be better or worse because of him."*

**Andrew Murray**, a great man of God, lived a holy life before his children and had the following influence over them: 11 grew to adult life--5 of the 6 sons became ministers of the gospel, and 4 of the 5 daughters became wives of ministers... 9 out of 11! Of his grand children... 10 grandsons became ministers of the gospel, and 13 grandsons became missionaries. **So many lives influenced in one family, by just one man!**

After teaching The Beatitudes to His disciples (Matt. 5:1-12), Jesus spoke about the *influence* His followers would have on the world for God, and for good. This influence is a mandate... a command for all believers.

When Jesus taught blessed are... the **poor in spirit**, those who **mourn**, the **meek**, those who **hunger and thirst for righteousness**, the **merciful**, the **pure in heart**, the **peacemakers**, and those who are **persecuted** because of righteousness. He went on to say that these 'Beatitudes' are not to be lived out in isolation or only among fellow Christians, but are to be lived out everywhere we go, with everyone we meet.

**In living out The Beatitudes, believers will be a *right* influence in life.**

**Jesus says**, *"You are the salt of the earth. But what good is salt if it has lost its flavour? Can you make it salty again? It will be thrown out and trampled underfoot as worthless. "You are the light of the world—like a city on a hilltop that cannot be hidden. No one lights a lamp and then puts it under a basket. Instead, a lamp is placed on a stand, where it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your good deeds shine out for all to see, so that everyone will praise your heavenly Father" (5:13-16).*

In this passage of Scripture, Jesus says that the person who decides to live according to The Beatitudes is going to influence the world as SALT and LIGHT. This message mainly focuses on verse 13... our influence in the world as salt.

From God's perspective the world is corrupted and decayed... it's dark and darkening.

In **Second Timothy**, Paul warns us that “... *evil people and impostors will flourish. They will deceive others and will themselves be deceived*” (3:13).

Friends, the world in which we live cannot do anything but get worse. It has no inherent goodness to build on, and it has no inherent spiritual and moral life in which it can grow. Year after year the ‘system of evil’ accumulates a deeper darkness. Man is infected with the deadly virus of sin, which has no cure apart from God.

- **G. Campbell Morgan** said, “*Jesus, looking out over the multitudes of His day, saw the corruption, the disintegration of life at every point, its break up, its spoilation; and, because of His love of the multitudes, He knew the thing that they needed most was ‘SALT’ in order that the corruption should be arrested ...*”

As Christians, we are called ‘be’ influencers of the world whilst being separated from it's standards and ways. Sadly, however, the church today is more influenced by the world than the world is influenced by the church.

Why did Jesus use salt to illustrate our influence in life? In the ancient world, salt was highly valued. The Greeks called salt ‘divine’ and The Romans said there is nothing more useful than sea and salt. Roman soldiers were often paid in salt, and it was from that practice that the expression ‘not worth his salt’ originated.

In numerous ways Jesus' hearers would have understood the expression ‘salt of the earth’ to represent a valuable commodity. Believers were to have an important influence over the world.

Many suggestions have been made as to the particular *characteristics* of salt that Jesus intended to associate with the figure of speech, *salt of the earth*; Characteristics such as: PURITY, FLAVOR, STING, and PRESERVATION.

## 1. PURITY

Some interpreters point out that as salt is white, it represents PURITY.

The 6th Beatitude, “Blessed are the pure in heart,” should motivate Christians to live pure lives before the world. We are not to live as the world lives. Black is not okay, and ‘compromise grey’ is also not okay.

Our lives must be different to the pattern of the world. The Book of Romans says: “*Do not be conformed to the pattern of this world*” (12:2), and James tells us to remain “*unstained by the world*” (1:27).

Our glistening white, moral and spiritual purity is to contrast with the moral discolour of the world. We are to *shine* and *glisten* in thought, speech and actions.

## 2. FLAVOR

Secondly, salt is characteristic of FLAVOR.

This suggests that the lives of Christians should add divine flavor and excitement to the world. Just as many foods are tasteless without salt, the world is drab and tasteless without the *presence* of true Christians. Christians have no business being boring! Our function is to add flavor and excitement to the world - not take it away!

After Christianity became a recognised religion of the Roman Empire, the **Emperor Julian** lamented, *"Have you looked at these Christians closely? Hollow eyed, pale-cheeked, flat breasted ... they brood their lives away unspurred by ambition. The sun shines for them, but they don't see it. The earth offers them its fullness, but they desire it not. All their desire is to renounce and suffer that they may come to die."*

**Oliver Wendell Holmes** once said that he might have entered the ministry if certain clergymen he knew had not looked and acted so much like undertakers.

That's so true of many Christians today who choose to live *crucified* lives (discouraged, depressed, and dead) instead living *resurrected* lives (Spirit-filled, hopeful, and victorious)!

The Christ of my Bible has commanded us to live as ambassadors of *good news*, not ambassadors of *doom and gloom*. Our lives should continually reflect the joy of Christ... the joy of our salvation... which outshines anything else in all of life.

### 3. STING

Thirdly, salt can STING.

Because salt stings when placed on a wound, this may suggest that Christians are to sting the world with honest truth... pricking its corrupt conscience with God's Word to bring about healing.

We must guard ourselves, however, from sliding into the trap of living a life of popularity that compromises God's word through diluting the antiseptic power of the very truth that can heal the painful woes of the world (beginning in our own families).

An *undiluted* gospel that does not confront sin *head-on* is not the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ.

In John 14:6 Jesus says about Himself, *"I am the truth!"* And in John 8:32 He says, *"the truth shall make you free."* Living truthful lives may at times sting others but that same sting can heal others!

When we compromise the truth of God in our lives (to protect our worldly relationships, career prospects, material gain) we render the power of God ineffective in helping others whom we claim to love.

A lifestyle of *compromised truth* cannot provide the full-strength antiseptic power that is needed to help those who are suffering from the affects of undiagnosed/untreated sin in their lives.

Yes, I know from experience how hard it is to live a lifestyle of uncompromising truth... It's not easy... It's downright tough!

### 4. PRESERVATION

Fourthly, salt has the characteristic of PRESERVATION.

Perhaps preservation is the primary influence that Christians are to have in the world. In the ancient world, salt was the commonest of all preservatives. It was used to keep things from going bad, and to hold putrefication at bay. Meat, if left to itself will go bad, but if salted, can be preserved.

For Christians to have a *preservative influence* over the world we need to live in every day contact with the world (the work place, home and community) openly and unashamedly living the truth of God. We cannot be a *preservative* whilst isolated from the world.

**Helen Ewing** became a Christian at an early age in Scotland. She devoted her life entirely to the Lordship of Christ. When she died at the age of 22, it is said that all Scotland wept. The Godly influence of her life was such that everywhere she went the atmosphere was changed. If someone was telling a dirty story, they would stop if they saw her coming. If people were complaining, they would become ashamed of it in her presence. An acquaintance reported that while she was at Glasgow University she left the fragrance of Christ wherever she went. In everything she said and did, she was divine salt.

Helen's Ewing's presence in life was PRESERVATIVE in influence!

## Summary

Jesus says in verse 13, "*You are the salt of the earth.*"

In this verse, and in verse 14, the pronoun 'you' is stressed. The idea is you, and only you, are the *salt of the earth*. That means the world's corruption will not be retarded unless God's people (you and I) influence life through being divine salt.

'You' both verses is plural (every believer in the Church). One ray of light will accomplish little, but when joined with other rays, a great light is created.

The word 'are' in verses 13, and 14, stresses *being* rather than *doing*. Spiritual salt is what Christians are all the time, not what they do at various times (e.g. on Sundays).

We are God's salt and Jesus is the source of our tastefulness. Only believers, living in accordance with The Beatitudes, can be a right influence in retarding the world's corruption By living in such a way that...

1. Reflects Godly **PURITY**,
2. Adds Godly **FLAVOR**,
3. **STINGS** corruption, and
4. Provides Godly **PRESERVATIVE** to those who are perishing.

Friends, each of us is an influence on others in life... this we can't change. But we can decide what type influence we exercise over others.

We can talk salt, or we can *be* salt.

The decision is yours to make.

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