

Command #2: Make a Difference in the World

Matthew 5:13-16 // Jerry Barber & Greg Singerle

¹³ *"You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled underfoot.*

¹⁴ *"You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden. ¹⁵ Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. ¹⁶ In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.*

Condensed Version

Read Matthew 5:13-16 and discuss these questions with your disciple(s):

1. What does the "salt" metaphor in verse 13 stress?
2. What does the "light" metaphor in verses 14-16 stress?
3. Read Luke 5:17-26 and Luke 19:1-10 as two examples of how Jesus perfectly fulfilled the command for us to make a difference in the world. What do you admire about Jesus?
4. What is one specific way that you need God's help to be different from the world (in its wrong values, etc.)?
5. What is one specific way that you need God's help to be more in contract with the people of the world so your good deeds can influence them for God?

Study (answers follow below)

1. Context: Matthew 5:13-16 immediately follows the Beatitudes (5:1-12), in which Jesus talked about the character of those in the kingdom. How does Matthew 5:13-16 prevent us from misunderstanding the teaching of verses 1-12?
2. What does the "salt" metaphor in verse 13 stress?
3. What does the "light" metaphor in verses 14-16 stress?
4. Read the following verses and make a note of those the Scripture represents as light:
Psalm 18:12, 104:2, 1 Timothy 6:16; and 1 John 1:5 = _____
Matthew 4:16, John 1:6-9; 8:12 = _____
Ephesians 5:8; 1 Thessalonians 5:5 = _____

5. What is the reason a city on a mountain cannot be hidden?
6. What are the good works spoken of in verse 16?
7. Compare two passages in Revelation to see the difference between those that glorify God and those that do not glorify God: Revelation 14:6-7 and 16:9.

Answers:

1. If you take verses 1-12 improperly, you could wrongly conclude that those who follow Jesus are SO DIFFERENT from the world that true followers withdraw to their own like-minded group and have contact nor influence on the world around them.
2. Background: in the ancient world, salt was used for many things: as a preservative, to fertilize, add flavor, or add purity. It is difficult, and probably not wise, to try to single out any one of these uses as Jesus' intention, but to take the metaphor in a broad sense. Grant Osborne gives a good summary: "... it means simply to make an impact on the world" (*Matthew*, Zondervan Exegetical Commentary, 175). By adding the statements about salt losing its saltiness (and therefore effectiveness), Jesus is stressing that Christians must be different from the world in their character.
3. A "lamp" probably refers to a small oil-burning portable lamp that would be used in a small, one-room house in first-century Palestine, and the measuring bowl was a normal bowl that was used to measure grain. Just as you do not hide a lamp but put it on a lampstand to give light to people in the house, it is unthinkable for Christians to "hide their lights" internally. This metaphor stresses that Christians must be in contact with the world, must take the light of Christ, including loving deeds, out to the people of the world who are in darkness, rather than remaining isolated in our Christian circles only.
4. God, Jesus, God's people
5. A city set on a mountain is visible due to its location, especially at night when its lights are shining (and perhaps even in the day, when the sun glistens on it).
6. I like Grant Osborne's definition of good works in this context: "a lifestyle of goodness that is always helping others and demonstrating the love and concern of God for them"--and he notes that the content of the works is elaborated on in the rest of the Sermon on the Mount (*Matthew*, 176-77). You also see this in verses like 2 Cor. 4:6; Phil 2:15; Titus 2:8; and 1 Peter 2:12, 15.
7. In Revelation, the notion of glorifying God is tied in with repentance and conversion.

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Worship

Let your light shine before others: Luke 5:17-26 and Luke 19:1-10

1. As you read about these events where Jesus let His light shine before others who saw His good works, what do you admire about Jesus? (Some examples might be: Jesus is able to see my faith; Jesus defends His right to forgive my sins in the face of the enemy; Jesus cares for all of my needs – spiritual, emotional, physical; Jesus spent time with people that others rejected like Zacchaeus).
2. In letting His light shine, what were some of the specific things that Jesus did? (Some examples might be: Jesus taught the truth about God; Jesus paid attention to those around him so that He knew their hearts; Jesus clearly told others that faith is the means by which sins are forgiven; Jesus boldly and unashamedly used His authority; Instead of condemning sinners, Jesus went directly to them so they could be changed by God.)

Keep reading the Scripture over and over and let God build a picture of this event in your mind as you search for what Jesus did and what you admire about Him. Ask yourself what is Jesus doing? What is the crowd doing? What are the men bringing the paralytic doing? What are the Scribes and Pharisees doing? Immerse yourself into the story from every perspective, always keeping your eyes on Jesus.

3. What was the result of Jesus letting His light shine and doing His good works before others?
4. Using Jesus as the example, what things do you need to do in order to let your light shine before others so that they see your good works and glorify your Father in Heaven?
5. What things hinder you from letting your light shine?

Obey

1. Being different from the world: Meditate on Romans 12:1-2. Ask God to reveal to you any areas in which you have allowed the world to shape you rather than being transformed by God. Write them down here and then ask a fellow believer to pray for and with you and help support you in your desire to obey (and pray with them about their areas too!)

2. Being in contact with the world: For the next month, keep a journal of the times and ways you were with believers and the times and ways you were with unbelievers. As you analyze it afterwards, (1) thank God for the opportunities to be salt and light to a needy world; and (2) if you discover that you are not around unbelievers enough to be “light” as God designed you to be, make a plan to change your lifestyle to change this.

Being with Believers	Being with Unbelievers

3. Write a prayer to God in which you respond to what He is saying to you through His Word about this subject.

Train

Remember, God’s desire is for you to pass on what He is teaching you. This is discipleship. It is not necessary for you to have “arrived” spiritually before you start sharing with others. It does require a sincere heart and desire to follow Christ.

1. Ask them to work through this discipleship guide and discuss with them their answers to the questions above.
2. Pray for and with them about ways God can use them to make a difference in their world.
3. Model for them in the context of a real-life relationship what it looks like to be salt and light, to be a disciple of Jesus in everyday life. They need to see it in you in addition to hearing it from you.
4. Take them with you as you do interact with those who need God and do good deeds (e.g. if you are going to serve at the homeless shelter, invite your disciple(s) to come along too). Ask good questions of them during or after the experience (like Jesus often asked his disciples questions as he took them along with him in ministry).

Recommended reading:

Lifestyle Evangelism: Learning to Open Your Life to Those Around You, by Joe Aldrich.

Out of the Saltshaker & Into the World: Evangelism as a Way of Life, by Rebecca Manley Pippert.

Saturate: Being Disciples of Jesus in the Everyday Stuff of Life, by Jeff Vanderstelt.