

Christian Influence: The Salt of the Earth

With the recent death of Supreme Court justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg the political battle lines have been hurriedly drawn. On one side of this tug of war we have President Trump and many Republicans determined to fill her vacant spot on the bench prior to the November 3rd presidential election. On the other side there are many in the Democratic Party determined that this will not happen. Other pressing issues include: Who will be our next President? How will America continue to respond to a lengthy pandemic and what assistance will Washington give? It may seem that everything important begins in Washington D.C. But is this actually correct? Good government can be a great benefit to its citizens with fair laws, impartial justice, order, etc., however, the biblical role of any government (e.g., Romans 13:1-7; 1 Peter 2:13-17), can only, ever, be a minor role in the big picture of what's truly important for our lives. Politics and the political structure is not the instrument intended by God to bring about genuine and lasting change in this world.

Today I begin a new series of articles from Matthew 5:13-16. Although I've referenced these verses in previous articles, this will be the first time that I've written extensively on them. This passage follows the previous teaching from Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount known as the Beatitudes. In that section of scriptures (Mt. 5:3-12) Jesus points us to important attitudes and actions of those who are in the Kingdom of God. Christians are those who are to be in the world but not of the world. Let's begin our look at verse 13 under the heading:

—Christians as the Salt of the Earth

Jesus begins this verse with a statement of fact. "You are the salt of the earth..." Notice that Jesus is not saying, "Since you are my disciples, try to be salt." Or, "As you mature as disciples, you will one day be salt." The emphasis is not to be something that we're not, but to be what we already are! According to the placement of the pronoun "You" in the Greek sentence structure, this could literally be translated: "You and you alone are the salt of the earth." Keep in mind that Jesus is not identifying all people without exception as "salt," but rather he's speaking specifically of Christians. His disciples alone are salt.

What does Jesus mean by the phrase, "salt of the earth"? As we think about salt, what we want to see is that this is a metaphor which describes positive Christian influence wherever God places us. "Earth" just speaks of this broken world where we live, inclusive of the people who need to hear for the first time—or sometimes need to be reminded—of the glorious gospel of Jesus Christ. Let's look now at:

—The Purpose of Salt

Historians teach us that, at the time of Jesus in the first century, the Romans held that, except for the sun, nothing was more valuable than salt. Roman soldiers were often paid in salt which is where we get the expression that someone is, "not worth his salt." In scripture in a number of places we read of a "covenant of salt" which speaks of permanence as well as preservation (Lev. 2:13; Numb. 18:19; 2 Chronicles 13:5) In Ezekiel 16:4 we're reminded of the

ancient Near Eastern custom of rubbing a newborn baby with salt as a way of protecting it from disease, therefore preserving its life. In addition to preservation, salt is used to season our food, i.e., a flavor enhancer. So then, Christians are to be a preservative against moral decay, rot and spoil as well as being those who seek to enhance the flavor of the society around us.

Notice how important it is for Jesus to say that, “You and you alone are the salt of the earth.” Although we can be thankful for the role and responsibilities that the government has—including making and enforcing just laws and restraining evil (Romans 13:1-7)—Christians are to take seriously our responsibility to be a grace motivated positive influence in the lives of those around us. Although it will never rise to the level of perfection in this life, as people come to faith in Jesus Christ, their lives are changed and changing. By grace, their godly influence acts like ripples in a pond. As salt, Christians want to be a permeating influence, bringing the gospel to bear in the lives of those around us with our words and actions. As we do, true and lasting change can begin to happen on a local, regional (Acts 19:18-20) and even a national scale. This is why Christian influence is so important.

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