

## Matthew 5:13-16

All of us influence others and are influenced by others.

The whole aim of advertising is to influence us to buy particular goods or services. When we watch TV, read a magazine or newspaper, see the advertisements which come up on our computer screen or read road-side billboards we are bombarded with messages designed to get us to do something.

As human beings, we too are living advertisements and whether we are conscious of it or not, we influence others, either positively or negatively.

Those who claim to be Christians are called upon by God to influence others in such a way that they too, like us, will repent of their sin and come to know God through trusting in the Jesus as their Saviour and Lord.

Our Gospel reading for to-day contains part of Jesus' famous *Sermon on the Mount* given to His Disciples on the mountain slopes of the Sea of Galilee. Matthew 5:1 reads: *Now when he saw the crowds, he went upon on a mountainside and sat down. His Disciples came to Him and he began to teach them.*

The Lord used two 'word pictures' from every-day life to stress the importance of living life as a Christian, which is expressed in *good deeds* and results in others who are watching, being so struck by the consistency of our wholesome and Godly life that they *praise your Father in heaven.*

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Jesus' first 'word picture': ***You are the salt of the earth*** (verse 13)

Salt is meant to be salty. In Jesus' day, salt was used for flavouring and preserving.

If the salt lost its saltiness, it couldn't be made salty again. It was useless and thrown away.

Jesus was saying something here about the world and about Christians:

The Bible says that the world is *fallen, sinful and bad*, with a tendency towards selfishness, evil and war. It is like meat, which after a time can 'go off'. It can only be made wholesome by preservative or antiseptic.

The Christian, in the world, is to be that much needed preservative or antiseptic! The Christian is to be different from everyone else and to glorify God in his or her difference. To be 'different' doesn't mean to be weird, odd or nutty but to live life in the way God wants us to live, as outlined in Scripture.

Christians are to influence the world by their individual life and character, the sort of life set out in Matthew 5:1-12. This will be so in the home, at work, in the community, friendship circle, clubs, at school, TAFE or Uni. Christians represent Jesus in what they say and how they live.

Local Churches, comprised of individuals, are also to be like a preservative or antiseptic. As Christians gather together they are to reflect God's qualities of sacrificial love, mercy, grace and forgiveness. The world watches local churches and judges God by what they see.

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Remember that salt which loses its saltiness cannot be made salty again. It's good for nothing and thrown away. So it is with those who claim to be Christians who are so much like the world that they're barely recognisable as Jesus' followers. They've lost their influence for God.

Jesus says: be salty! Be effective in life and character and so bring glory to God.

Jesus' second word picture of living life as a Christian: ***You are the light of the world.*** (verses 14-16)

Light has important uses, chiefly to expose darkness, show the cause of darkness and to provide the way out of darkness. A city in which the lights are shining is visible from the air and even from space! The city can't be hidden unless the lights are turned off.

In Jesus' day, with no electricity, the chief source of light was candles. When at night, the house-holder lit the candle, he didn't then hide it under a container, but set it on a stand so that it gave light to the house. Houses were very small so that one or two candles would give light to the whole house. Why was Jesus giving this word picture to His Disciples?

His explanation to both of His word pictures is found in verse 16, where he says: "*in the same way.....*"

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We Christians are to let the light of Christ shine through us into a world darkened by sin, ignorant of God and in rebellion against Him. If we are living as God wants us to live then 'the world' will sit up and take notice as they see 'our good deeds' motivated by our love for God and they will praise our Father in Heaven.

The Lord Jesus said in John 8:12 "*I am the light of the world.*" We, his followers, are only 'the light of the world' as we reflect His light. It is the light of the Gospel of God's grace and mercy which makes us who we are and can impact the lives of others.

It would be tragic for our saltiness to be lost or to 'hide' our light. There are three reasons why we are to be salty and light:

First, as an act of obedience. Second, to bring glory to God. Third, it is part of what it means to be a Christian, part of our new relationship as a child of God.

### By way of conclusion:

As Christians we are living in the midst of people who don't know God and who are living in the darkness. Some of them may be relatives, friends, neighbours and members of our community.

They are watching us! Do our lives match up with what we say we believe?

Jesus says: "*you are the salt of the earth; you are the light of the world.*"

This week, with prayer and dependence on God, let's be salt and light and so bring glory to Him.