

Portrait of a True Believer

Matthew 5:13-16

INTRODUCTION

1. Real or fake? True or false? Authentic or counterfeit? Genuine or knockoff?
2. If you've ever traveled in NY – lots of vendors selling namebrand merchandise
3. Gucci, Chanel, Prada – there are lots of counterfeits out there – caution
4. Shouldn't be surprised that there are counterfeit Christians as well
5. **2 Tim.3:1-5** "*difficult times will come...holding to a **form** of godliness*"
6. Think about it for a minute.
 - a. What does a "real" Christian look like?
 - b. How does genuine discipleship manifest itself?
 - c. How can you recognize the real thing?
7. Four verses in the Bible help us to distinguish between the fake and the real thing when it comes to Christianity
8. The text provides us with a **PORTRAIT OF A TRUE BELIEVER**
 - a. we can use these 4 verses as a "**plumb line**" of sorts – assess ourselves
 - b. help us determine if we're truly following through on our commitment

READ Matthew 5:13-16

- **You are the salt of the earth...**
- **You are the light of the world**

I. SOME INITIAL OBSERVATIONS

- A. These word pictures Jesus uses – **are stated as requirements**
- B. Jesus says to those who have committed to be his followers, "***you are the salt of the earth you are the light of the world.***"
- C. No "ifs, ands, or buts about it."
- D. Our authenticity measured by the degree to which we meet these standards.
- E. Jesus doesn't say you are **like** salt or that we **will be** light some time in the future. No, he says you **are** these things.
- F. This is our calling. It's our purpose. It's who we are - why we live in this world.
- G. The word "you" in Greek is **emphatic**. It literally means, "you, my followers, and none others, are the salt and the light!"
- H. **But let's dig deeper. What exactly is Jesus getting at here?**
 - I. What is he saying about authentic followers with the phrases, "salt of the earth" and "light of the world?"

Genuine Disciples...

II. ARE PRECIOUS

- A. To comprehend we must look back in history
- B. **Salt** and **light** today are taken for granted – not precious at all.
- C. We have salt in all forms in abundance (salt packets, shakers, sea salt, blocks)
- D. For us salt is everywhere. The **cheapest thing** you can buy in store.
- E. And **light** is no real big deal for us either.
 1. Lights on our **key rings** and our **children's shoes** and **cell phones**.
 2. Without thinking we flip on switches as we enter a room
- F. But, for the people sitting on that mountainside listening to our Lord that day, things were very different.
- G. **Back then, salt and light not so common - both were very precious.**
- H. Salt - so highly esteemed the Greeks thought it was divine.
- I. Roman soldiers were often paid in salt.
 1. This is where the phrase, "not worth his salt" comes from.

2. Salt is also the root for our word “salary.”

J. **Similarly, light was treasured because it wasn't easy to obtain**

K. Great trouble/expense to have even the feeble illumination of an oil lamp

L. People carried little **clay lamps, oil, wicks** along with **flint**

1. No light switches to turn on—no street lights to line the roads.

2. After sunset people truly stumbled in the dark. **Light was precious.**

M. Mark Adams: *When Jesus used these two metaphors – salt and light, those people would have understood him to say that, in his opinion, genuinely devoted disciples were rare and precious! They are worth their weight in gold or salt. And if you encounter someone who is really serious about following Jesus, passionate about becoming more and more like him, committed to doing his will, remember that individual for he is priceless!*

N. **Isa 43:3-4** *I am the LORD your God, The Holy One of Israel, your Savior... you are precious in My sight.*

O. **But why are true followers so valuable?**

III. MAKE THE LIVES OF OTHERS BETTER

A. Salt adds **flavor** to food and light **eliminates depressing shadows**

B. Similarly Christ-followers enrich the lives of those around them.

C. They add “spice” and “light” to a dark, spiritually bland world.

D. Like salt, they add flavor to life, and their lives brighten up the lives of people who know them in the same way a light makes a room more cheery the moment you flip its switch.

E. Hershell Ford - Devoted disciples bless those around them because they are selfless, happy, optimistic, joyful, fun-to-be-with people. A genuine disciple is someone that other people like being around.

F. This is one area in which many of us fail as disciples.

1. We're more **joyLESS** than **joyFULL**

2. It's so easy for Christians to slip into **negativity** in this fallen world of ours

3. We spend our time **focusing on all the bad things in life.**

4. We **complain** and **gripe** and become people who are devoid of joy, and this turns other people off. It repels lost people.

G. Joe Aldrich: **“we must be good news before we can share the Good News.”**

H. Another writer tells the story of a woman who was asked if she would become a Christian. She replied, *“No, I have enough to be sad about already.”* This misconception is our fault. You see, many people observe “fake” disciples, Christians who take their eyes off of our all-loving, all-powerful heavenly Father and become sad and insipid rather than salty disciples who embrace a dark demeanor instead of allowing the light of God to reflect on their faces. Authentic disciples are not this way. They are people whose happiness and optimism is fueled by their trust in God. They live as if they actually believe his promises. They walk close to our Lord! And because they do, they experience abundant life, a meaningful life that overflows with living! Real disciples know how to laugh and rejoice! They embrace this outlook on life because they know God loves them! They know their sins are forgiven! They know that no matter what “bad” comes their way heaven is near! And this kind of attitude is precious in this dark and dreary world of ours.

Let me ask you, do you go around with a long face griping about life? When you converse do you find yourself always slipping into “complaining mode”, grumbling and complaining about your health, grumbling and complaining about high prices about traffic about the church and so on and so on. Is your focus on the inevitable problems of life? Have you allowed the struggles of living in a fallen world to cause your “salt” to lose it's savor? Have you focused so much on your own problems that you are hiding the light of God under a bushel full of negative attitudes? Are you the guy other people tend to steer clear of because life is hard enough without having to deal with your negativism? Or are you the kind of individual who people gravitate to, the kind of person that makes life better, the kind of person who embraces a joy that is contagious?

I. **Phil 2:14, 18 “do everything without complaining...be glad and rejoice!”**

J. Jesus tells us one reason genuine disciples are precious is because they make the lives of the people who know them better.

IV. KEEP THE WORLD FROM GETTING WORSE

- A. Let's face it, "The world is like ROTTING MEAT and the world is a DARK place
- B. Enter Salt and Light
- C. In the same way that salt extends the life of meat and in the same way that light illuminates and guides, we are to be **involved** in slowing the decline of our culture, helping people to see why right is always better than wrong.
- D. **Prov. 14:34** "Righteousness exalteth a nation...."
 - 1. Not nebulous righteousness - not righteousness independent of people
 - 2. But a righteousness that comes from those who emulate Christ
- E. Ray Pritchard says, "We who follow Christ are to be a moral disinfectant stopping the spread of evil. We are to be the conscience of the community, speaking out for what is true and right."
- F. True disciples go against the flow, they slow down the moral and spiritual spoilage in the world.
- G. It is our job to help keep this fallen world from getting worse.
- H. Peanuts cartoon showed Peppermint Patty talking to Charlie Brown in which she said, "Guess what Chuck? The first day of school, and I got sent to the principal's office. It was your fault, Chuck." Charlie Brown responds, "My fault? How could it be my fault? Why do you say everything is my fault?" To which she declares, "You're my friend, aren't you, Chuck? You should have been a better influence on me." While Peppermint Patty was trying to pass the buck, she was also speaking some truth. We should be a good influence on those around us. It's our calling. It's our job.

In August of 2000, Matt Friedman, a reporter for the *Jackson Mississippi Clarion-Ledger*, shared the following encounter with a man who understood this principle of **authentic discipleship**. Friedman writes:

"Several months ago I was on a TV show to discuss with other panel members recent problems plaguing the Jackson, Mississippi, community. The city council was in disarray because the council president and another councilman were headed to jail. The council president had been caught making shady deals with a strip club in a re-zoning ordinance. The panel moderator, a newswoman named Katrina Rankin, looked at me and asked, 'Matt, whose fault is all of this?'

Suddenly, I became agitated. I was prepared to tell her in dramatic fashion that we are a nation of laws and that the council president trampled on those laws. If we were looking for a place to lay the blame, there was only one place to put it—smack dab in his lap as he sat in his well-deserved jail cell. That is what I was going to say.

But I never got the words out. One of the panelists sitting next to me was a gentleman named John Perkins—author, Bible teacher, and community developer. Before I could respond, Perkins answered, 'it's my fault.' all heads turned his way and he elaborated. 'I have lived in this community for decades as a Bible teacher. I should have been able to create an environment where what our council president did would have been unthinkable because of my efforts. You want someone to blame. I'll take the blame. All of it.'"

- I. Perkins knew he had a job to **speak up**, to be a **positive influence** and so he honestly felt he had failed here -- failed to be a positive influence.
- J. This makes me think....
- K. **Salt and light people – that's what disciples are - MAKE A DIFFERENCE**
 - 1. Want to be good at personal evangelism? Be a Salt and Light person
 - 2. Want to bring others to Christ? Be a Salt and Light person
- L. Those people on the mountainside that day knew that for salt to be a preservative it had to be rubbed into the meat – can't leave it in the barrel
- M. They also knew that light was only good when used in the darkness.
- N. Jesus expects his followers to be **involved** in the real world.
- O. Authentic disciples don't **isolate** or **insulate** themselves from society.
- P. A Christian doesn't hide his light - he lets it shine.
 - 1. He or she gets out there and interacts with lost people!
 - 2. He applies his faith to life.
 - 3. Remember, Jesus did not say, "you are the light of the **church**." He said, "**you are the light of the world.**"

V. POINTS OTHERS TO GOD

- A. Genuine disciples point away from themselves and to Christ.
- B. There is a story of the little boy who was visiting a cathedral with his mother. As he looked around at the beauty of the stained glass windows curiosity finally got the best of him and he asked, “*Who are all those people?*” To which his mother responded, “*They are Christians.*” And then sensing this teaching moment, she asked, “*Do you know what Christians are?*” She let him think for a moment and then said, “***They are people the light shines through.***”
- C. That’s what real disciples are like—they let Jesus shine through them.
- D. They follow Jesus so closely that they literally let Him use them in such a way that they “disappear” and people see Jesus instead.
- E. If you ever see someone who does good to be seen of men, what you are really seeing is a counterfeit disciple.
- F. **Matt 23:2,5** – Pharisees did works to be seen of men
- G. Authentic disciples always lift Jesus up.
- H. When Jesus said, “***let your light shine.***”
 - 1. He didn’t tell us to hold it up and say “*Look at me. I’m a Christian. I am a good and wonderful person.*”
 - 2. **A light does not call attention to itself.**
 - 3. Rather it points the way through the darkness.
- I. Salt is a great illustration of this principle of discipleship
 - 1. One of its functions is to make something taste good.
 - 2. When I eat a piece of corn on the cob I don’t say “That was great salt!”
 - 3. No I say, “That was great corn on the cob.”
 - 4. Those who put salt on their watermelon....great salt? No! Great watermelon
- J. **The job of the salt is to REVEAL the flavor of the meal**
- K. **The job of a true believer is to REVEAL the flavor of the Savior!**
- L. **1 Pet. 2:12** *Keep your behavior excellent among the Gentiles, so they may because of your good deeds glorify God.*

CONCLUSION

- 1. Four little verses about **salt** and **light**
- 2. But what a powerful message from Jesus, our Savior and the very Son of God
- 3. The authentic Christian, the true follower is a person of **SALT** and **LIGHT**
- 4. Become the Salt – become the Light – By coming to Jesus today and obeying Him. He is the source of LIGHT.
- 5. Already a Christian? **BE THE SALT BE THE LIGHT THIS WEEK** and you will draw people to Christ!

Matt Hennecke
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