

# The Source of Our Influence

*The Beatitudes*

By Don Green

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**Bible Verse:** Matthew 5:13  
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**Truth Community Church**  
4183 Mt. Carmel Tobasco Road  
Cincinnati, OH 45255

**Website:** [truthcommunitychurch.org](http://truthcommunitychurch.org)  
**Online Sermons:** [www.sermonaudio.com/tcomm](http://www.sermonaudio.com/tcomm)

Well, tonight we come back to the book of Matthew 5 and I invite you to turn there with me. I think that this will be a very helpful and clarifying time in God's word today and next week, and I'm glad that we're coming to these texts when we are kind of outside the political cycle, at least a presidential political cycle, so that we can rightly consider the nature of Christian influence and where the power of the church actually lies because there are many who would beckon us to a lot of political involvement and think that the church should be involved in politics. If individuals want to be involved in politics, that's one thing, but it's not the job of the church and that's not where our influence and power lies and this will become very clear as we consider our consecutive text in Matthew 5.

What I want to do is reread the Beatitudes before we go into verse 13, just to set the context for you, because the Beatitudes are foundational to everything else that we read in the Sermon on the Mount, and they're very foundational to the text that follows. So let's start in verse 3. where Jesus, actually, let's go back up to chapter 5, verse 1, just to see that as Jesus is speaking here, he's speaking to his disciples, to those who are following him, to those who are learning from him and not from the world. Chapter 5, verse 1, Jesus

1 Seeing the crowds, he went up on the mountain, and when he sat down, his disciples came to him. 2 And he opened his mouth and taught them [that is, his disciples], saying: 3 "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. 4 Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted. 5 Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth. 6 Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied. 7 Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy. 8 Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God. 9 Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God. 10 Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. 11 Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. 12 Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

Now let's pause there for just a moment. We've already taught through the Beatitudes in a global as well as an individual way. I just want to remind you of the humble spiritual character of the nature of the disciples of Christ. We are not power brokers in the world. Jesus says and pronounces blessing on those, those that are the privileged recipients of divine favor, are those who are marked by a particular kind of character, the character that flows from being born again, and these people, and these people alone, are the ones who belong to the kingdom of heaven. These people and these people alone are the ones who will be comforted, who will be satisfied, who will receive mercy, who will see God, to whom the kingdom of heaven belongs. It's a spiritual quality of humility, of brokenness over sin, not self-assertion, but those who are meek, who experience spiritual composure as a result of trusting in God. These and these people alone are the ones who belong to the kingdom of heaven. We've covered all of that and we don't really need to spend a whole lot more time on it, but notice at the end that it is impossible for the true disciples of Christ to be power brokers in the world. Perhaps an individual Christian might rise to a position of political power, but that's not the purpose of the church. That's not what the church is designed to do, and we know that it's impossible for the true church to wield real political power in the world because the real church is rejected by the world. Look there at verse 10, "Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake. Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you." Our entire inheritance is one of rejection and persecution by the world. That's so fundamental to understand, beloved, and to realize that that sets the context for what follows in verses 13 through 16 as we move into a new section in the Sermon on the Mount. Jesus, just having described who were the real disciples, just having described the spiritual character that is the fruit of the new birth, just having described the attitude that is cultivated by true repentance, and having gone through that in meticulous detail, the Lord did, now, and having said that people like this will not be liked by the world, the world will hate them and persecute them and reject them, and yet nevertheless they are still blessed by God, notice what he now says in verse 13, because the Beatitudes are linked directly to verse 13. You cannot properly understand verse 13 without recognizing that it is built on what went before. That's a basic principle of biblical interpretation. Context helps you understand what's being said.

Now in verse 13 through 16, I'll read this, what Jesus is about to explain is how his disciples influence the world, all right? He's about to describe the influence that true disciples have on the world around them and so he says in verse 13,

13 You are the salt of the earth,

Now stop right there. Who's the "you" that he's talking about? Who's the "you"? That is essential to know who the "you" is. What is the antecedent of the plural pronoun "you"? It's plural in the original language. In Kentucky they'd say, y'all, you all are the salt of the earth. You plural. You all are the salt of the earth is the idea. The "you" of which he speaks is the "you" from verses 3 through 12, these humble, persecuted, spiritually thirsty people who identify with Christ and follow him. Those are the people that he's now

talking about in verses 13 through 16. We'll look at verse 13 tonight, the rest of the passage next week, Lord willing.

So now let's look at it with all of that very important introduction. Jesus says,

13 You are the salt of the earth, but if salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything except to be thrown out and trampled under people's feet. 14 You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. 15 Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. 16 In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.

Now perhaps I should do one other thing by way of context. Go all the way to the end of the book of Matthew 28 and let me just remind you of this and of what the purpose of the church is, what is the commission that Jesus gave to the church, and in Matthew 28:16, we're setting a lot of context here that's going to really help us understand the text in front of us in a clear way. Let's begin in verse 16, "the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them." This was the twelve apostles minus Judas Iscariot who had betrayed him. Now the remaining eleven are going to Galilee waiting for instruction from Jesus on what they are to do and what they are to do next now that he has been raised from the dead. Verse 16, "Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. And when they saw him they worshiped him, but some doubted. And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me." Now in verse 19, he's going to tell them what they are to do as he is about to depart. He says, "You go therefore and make disciples of all the nations." There's that word disciples again. Make more people like yourself who learn from me and who follow me. Now, we're not to read that in isolation from everything else that preceded in the gospel of Matthew, and central to that initial main discourse of Jesus' teaching in the Sermon on the Mount, he addresses the disciples. He says you are to be like this, you are to be poor in spirit, mourning over sin, hungering and thirsting after righteousness, pure in heart, being peacemakers, willing to suffer persecution for righteousness' sake. Now when Jesus tells the disciples, and by extension the church for all ages, that they are to go out and make disciples, what is the church to produce? What is the church to teach and to lead people into being a true disciple of Christ? Is it to be political power brokers in the world? Or is it to be the kind of people that he said that they and they alone were the ones who really belong to the kingdom of God? This is obvious. This is very, very clear, even though it's greatly contradicted by very powerful and influential forces in the church today. Jesus says, "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you, and behold, I am with you always to the end of the age."

Now, all of this to say that when you come to verses 13 and 16 in chapter 5, and you realize what the long-term trajectory of the church is to be, what the church is to do, what it's to teach, what it's to produce, it all funnels back to the Beatitudes, developing people

of humble spiritual character who desire nothing other than to be like Christ and to follow him. That is what the church is to do. Now we can talk about trying to build influence, you know, at a county level, we can talk about trying to build influence at a country level, but that's not the job of the church. You know, people want to organize politically, I couldn't care less if people want to organize politically. Just don't try to impose that political infrastructure on the church and say that's the mission of the church because it is not. That is not the mission of the church. The mission of the church is to make disciples that look like the people in Matthew 5, and the world's not interested in that. By definition, the world does not want that. The world persecutes people like that. And so the mission of the church as defined by Christ who is the head and the Lord of the church, who bought the church with his own precious blood and therefore owns it and has the prerogative exclusively to say what the church should be, Christ said, "This is what I want you to do." We've got to be clear on this because there are all kinds of voices coming at us saying that the mission of the church is something else, something different. You know, we need to have influence in the world. We need to change the culture. That's not the point of salvation. The point of salvation is not to save society. The point of evangelism is not to save society, it's to save souls individually. Christ goes to souls and ministers to them individually.

If it's a matter of aligning the purposes of Christ with those in positions of influence and leveraging worldly influence for the sake of morality in culture, Jesus went about it all wrong. Look over at the gospel of John 3. I have notes here in the pulpit; my notes, they used to really guide what I say, now they're just kind of like suggestions to me but they help me remember what I've been thinking through. Look at this in John 3 and see what Jesus does with a man of influence and what he says to a man of influence. "Now there was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews." This man was kind of the equivalent of Ben Shapiro in the day, you might say. He was a teacher, but he was unregenerate. He was not born again, and yet he was influential, he was a moral man, blah, blah, blah. And what did Jesus do with him? What did he say to him? Did he see in Nicodemus a partner for joint enterprises going forward to try to influence politics in the Roman Empire and strengthen the Jewish hand against the oppression of their Roman overlords? Not at all. Not at all.

"This man came to Jesus by night," flattered him even. "This man came to Jesus by night and said to him, 'Rabbi,'" here comes the flattery, buttering him up in the language that was known when I was younger. You'd butter somebody up to smooth them up, make them more receptive to what you have to say. "This man came to Jesus by night and said to him," remember, he's a ruler of the Jews. This guy had influence. Ruler of the Jews came to Jesus, said to him, "Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher come from God, for no one can do these signs that you do unless God is with him." And Jesus was having none of it. He answered him and he said, "'Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God.' Nicodemus said to him, 'How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born?'" And Jesus doubles down on it with this ruler and teacher of the Jews. He says, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God." Nicodemus, we don't have anything to do with each other right now. "That

which is born of the flesh," verse 6, "is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not marvel that I said to you, 'You must be born again.' The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear its sound, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit.' Nicodemus said to him, 'How can these things be?'" Jesus, I don't understand a word of what you're saying as you talk about being born again in the kingdom of God. I don't understand this at all. Nicodemus recognized that they had no joint partnership in spiritual matters. He said, "How can these things be?" verse 9, Jesus answered in verse 10, "Are you the teacher," notice the article, "the teacher of Israel." You are preeminent in teaching the people of Israel and yet you do not understand these things? "Truly, truly, I say to you, we speak of what we know, and bear witness to what we have seen, but you do not receive our testimony. If I have told you earthly things and you do not believe, how can you believe if I tell you heavenly things?" And on it goes.

Notice really carefully, and this is right at the beginning there in John 3, you're reading right at the very beginning of the coming out of Jesus in public ministry, which preceded even what we read in Matthew 5, Jesus speaking to this influential man and saying, "You've got to be born again if you're going to have any part with me." He didn't try to ingratiate himself to Nicodemus. He said, "Nicodemus, you're outside the kingdom of God. You need to be born again." Well, listen, that's not a message of political influence, is it? Is it? It's not. And it illustrates the whole issue and the whole purpose of the church. We cannot ingratiate ourselves to the world with our message because we're telling the world that it's under condemnation, that the world is part of the problem, that the world needs to be born again, and they don't want to hear that. They persecute that. They reject that. They lie about us when we are clear about those things. And the church, as the church, cannot be co-belligerents with people that are dead in sin and are slaves of Satan when we're slaves of Christ. We have to understand this most fundamental point.

Now, you look at that through carnal eyes, you look at that as the world sees things and measures things, you look at that and you'd say, "Well, then the church will have no influence over these people." And that's precisely where we get it wrong. Jesus says, "Oh no, you have influence. You just need to understand the source of your influence, the nature of your influence." And that's the point of Matthew 5:13 to 16. The point of Matthew 5, you can turn back there. You can turn back there. Jesus, building on what he had said about how true disciples would be persecuted, he says this, the message of this text is what follows, that though his disciples are rejected and persecuted, the true disciples are a means of influence on the world. They are actually a blessing to the world even though the world rejects them. It is utterly counterintuitive. Just as the cross itself is the power of God, and that is counterintuitive to the human carnal mind, the cross is the power of God, it's the power of our preaching, that's counterintuitive to our carnal mind., so in like manner, the fact that the people that the world rejects and persecutes and hates and lies about would have influence on them, that's also totally counterintuitive. But it's exactly what Jesus said. The wisdom of God is not the wisdom of the world. We shouldn't try to measure the power and influence of the church in worldly terms because God doesn't measure by worldly terms when it comes to the influence of his disciples and of his kingdom.

Now the truth behind the passage that we're reading here, it kind of boils down to this: the kingdom of God and the kingdom of the world are distinct entities. There is the earth, you see in verse 13, Jesus says, "You are the salt of the earth," there's the earth and there's the salt of the earth. So just making very simple, basic observations, there's the earth and there's the salt of the earth. And so Jesus is building on what he has already said. This new section about the salt of the earth and the light of the world is vitally related to what proceeds and it has absolutely no meaning if you divorce the Beatitudes from it. Now look, the political power brokers that want to use the evangelical church, want to use Christians for their own purposes, they have no interest in the Beatitudes whatsoever. That's of no concern to them. They don't want that. They want our votes. They want our influence. They want our contributions. Yes, yes, yes, they want all of that. But understand that they just want to use us for their own worldly ends. They're not interested in the kingdom of God and so we have to be jealously protective of the purposes of Christ and the purposes of the church because that's what he's called us to do when he said go and make disciples. We have to let all of these things set in.

Let's think about it from another direction, beloved. When Jesus came into the world, Rome, the Roman Empire, dominated the secular world. He came into a world that was filled with idolatry. All the major cities had temples to different idols and as the Roman history of their emperors would progress through the apostolic age, more and more they claimed prerogatives of deity. They demanded worship of deities and cities would build temples to the emperor and worship the emperor as Lord. That's the world that Jesus came into. In a Jewish sense, in the religious sense, the Pharisees dominated the spiritual world of the Jews with their external religion, with their hypocrisy. We'll talk about this more some other time. But the Pharisees were so influential and were viewed as the guardians and the keepers of the law, but Jesus utterly rebuked them, said, "You have nothing to do with my kingdom," and in Matthew 23 pronounced a series of eight different woes and judgments against them. So you've got Rome on the one hand dominating the secular political life, you've got the Pharisees and their false perversion of the true revealed religion of God dominating the spiritual life, and now Jesus comes and starts to make these disciples. Understand that Jesus was not welcome in the world that he created. He created the world, he came into the world in his incarnation, but that secular world wanted nothing to do with him. The Pharisees wanted nothing to do with him. That's why they killed him on both sides.

Now John 1:10 and 11 says, speaking of Christ, that, "He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world did not know him. He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him." Where's the influence in this? How does that fit with the model that's being sold to us by others and has been for decades in different variations, going back to the moral majority and all of that stuff. Where's the model based on the life of Christ in his incarnation that would tell us to have those kinds of expectations of influence, of worldly power and influence? It's nowhere to be found, beloved. The strength of the church is not in human institutions. Jesus Christ is the exclusive source of salvation and the world does not want to hear that message. Christ during his earthly life refused to be made king. The Jews wanted to make him king and

he would have nothing of it because that's not why he came. The apostles in the book of Acts, they were not politicians. They were not influential with the ruling authorities. The ruling authorities beat them and imprisoned them, ultimately executed all of them except the Apostle John, and they banished him to a remote island that was just a rocky refuge for prisoners. The New Testament is not a political manifesto. The New Testament does not address, for example, the direct overthrow of the institution of slavery, just to give one well-known example. Scripture says our citizenship is not on earth, but it is in heaven. We are to set our minds on the things above, not on the things below. Here, Hebrews says, we have no lasting city. I mean, this is just woven through Scripture in terms of where we establish our expectations and what it is that we are to devote ourselves to.

Now, you want to talk about having influence with the powers that be? Well, go back, read some things in church history. Go back to when Constantine supposedly became a Christian and he outlawed crucifixion and made Christianity the official religion of the empire. That would be the perfect, that would be the perfect thing to look at and say there, you know, by the measure of some, that we should have political influence. Nowhere was the political influence in the course of history more strategic throughout the world than it was when Constantine made Christianity the official religion of the empire. What happened? What happened? Did it Christianize the empire? Really? No, it didn't. All it did was it brought in a mass of unconverted people into the church, and it corrupted the church rather than the church suddenly having all kinds of worldly power and influence, and you just trace the decline of the purity of the church, the doctrine of the church, the corresponding eventual rise of the Roman Catholic Church and all of that corruption. This is not the way to go, beloved. It's not what Scripture teaches, it's not what history teaches. And so politics and politicians are not the source of our influence. Never have been, never will be, never should be. We shouldn't even think like that.

Now, if that's the case, and then how is it then, Jesus came into this world that rejected him, how did his influence come to be so widespread in the spiritual realm? Well, he gathered lowly disciples around him, disciples that had no rank in the Roman Empire, no prominence with the Jews. A few fishermen mixed in with a tax collector and some others. One, Simon the Zealot, who apparently had some political inclinations but changed. You know, you just had this motley crew that no one would gather together and say here's how we're going to take over the world. What Jesus did, as you read the gospels, is that he taught ordinary people who sat outside the halls of power and we see by that that worldly authority is not the means that God intends to use. Our influence is not in politics but in Christian character, in being filled with the Spirit, of seeking first the kingdom of God and his righteousness. That's the source of our influence.

And so as we look at verse 13 today, I just want to break it into two different points tonight. First of all, to consider the reality of Christian influence and what it is that Jesus is saying when he says you are the salt of the earth. You are the salt of the earth, point number one for tonight, the reality of Christian influence. And so the Beatitudes are the context of this passage. You must understand that very basic principle, Jesus just talking about a humble, persecuted character. And what Jesus goes on to say in verse 13 is that as

his disciples, as Christians, manifest that kind of character, it impacts the world. It impacts the world. It has an influence far beyond what anyone would suspect.

Look at verse 13 again with me. He says, "You are the salt of the earth." Now right away, "you," as I said is plural, it's distinct, and it's emphatic. It's emphatic by the use of the pronoun. It's emphatic by the placement of the pronoun and the order of the sentence. He says, "You are the salt of the earth. You and no others are the salt of the earth. You whom I've just been describing in the Beatitudes, you are the salt of the earth." He distinguishes his disciples, he sets them apart, and as the Creator of the world and the Lord of the church, Jesus tells us authoritatively through his lips which can never lie, he says, "You, my disciples, are the salt of the earth."

Now, earth refers to humanity at large, not to the soil beneath our feet, obviously. He says, "My disciples have an impact on humanity." And he says, "You, my disciples, have an impact on humanity." Now, those of you that are of humble spirit just kind of quietly trying to go about living your life, living a godly life in the privacy of your home, no aspirations for...Jesus says you're the ones who are the salt of the earth. Well, what does that mean? Again, the earth referring to men generally who do not belong to Christ. How are you the salt of the earth? It's a privilege to be able to expound this. Remember that in the first century they didn't have modern refrigeration techniques so they couldn't preserve perishable food by keeping it cool, putting it in a refrigerator or something like that, and so what they did was they used simple ordinary salt as a preservative. They would rub it into meat and that would prevent the decay of the meat, and the effect of that, rubbing the salt into the meat, would last for a long period of time so that without refrigeration, you could keep edible meat available for a good long period of time simply by applying salt to it. Jesus, when he says you are the salt of the earth, he is describing the impact that Christians have on those around them and what do they do? The disciples of Christ who manifest the character found in the Beatitudes – watch this, listen carefully – they retard spiritual decay in the world around them. The world would far more quickly descend into the chaos of deceit and destruction and sin and ungodliness, that would occur much more rapidly except for the presence in the world of the disciples of Christ. The Bible says that the whole world lies in the power of the evil one, 1 John 5:20, and yet the world would be far more corrupt than it already is without the restraining influence of the saints. The mere presence of godly people restrains, retards, holds back the spiritual decadence that would otherwise occur around us.

How does that work when we don't have politics, we don't have the lever of power on moral legislation, for example? How then does this work? Let me give you two simple illustrations. You'll like both of these illustrations, these brief stories, one contemporary, one from church history. Years ago, a friend of mine told me that his wife was with a group of unbelieving women, and these women were complaining about their husbands. They were airing out all of their husbands' dirty laundry. He's got a bad attitude, he's got a temper, you know, he's bad at this, I don't like this, and just complaining and speaking badly about their husbands. It was a very ungodly and unedifying conversation. My friend's wife didn't join in the complaints, didn't add to the list of bad things being said. In that environment, she just humbly spoke well about her husband, said, "Well, actually, I



love my husband. My husband is a good man. My husband has these good qualities." And she spoke humbly about her husband like that. Now understand, she was not trying to make a point. She wasn't trying to rebuke these women for the things that she was saying. She didn't even say anything like that. You know, she didn't say, you shouldn't talk that way. She just naturally spoke well as a Christian woman about the Christian man that she loved. Just sweet, simple, innocent, straightforward godliness. An amazing thing happened, as my friend told the story to me. Those other women around her, they stopped their criticisms. They conformed to the standard that she set. The whole direction of the conversation changed in response to the simple godliness of this Christian woman speaking well about her husband. The moral force, the moral influence of her example went against the collective ungodliness of that gathering and stopped it in its tracks because their consciences were convicted by the godliness around them.

Now, second story. The impact sometimes is delayed for a long period of time. I don't want to create a picture that that's the immediate reaction of everybody around. If that was always the immediate reaction, we'd never have persecution, would we? People wouldn't react and fire up against it if it was always immediate like that. I'm just still illustrating the point of how it restrained and held back ungodliness. Sometimes the impact is delayed and this is one of the most amazing stories that I've read for, you know, for several months at least. There was a Puritan preacher named John Flavel. He lived from 1628 to 1691, so 63 years old, about my age when he died. There was a teenager that heard this magnificent well-known to this day well-known preacher who heard him preach as a teenager. His name was Luke Short. Now Luke Short was not a Christian when he heard John Flavel preach. He did not become a Christian under the influence of his ministry while he was there and while he was alive. Luke Short just went on his way and lived the life of a farmer for a very long period of time, never becoming a Christian. Luke lived to be 100 years old so this is like 85 years after he heard John Flavel preach. One day as a 100-year-old man, he was sitting in his field reflecting upon his long life, and during that time of meditation, he recalled that sermon that he heard from John Flavel 85 years earlier, and as the Lord brought the memory of that sermon and the impact of that sermon to his mind, what church history has left for us to know about this is this, the horror of dying under the curse of God that he had learned and was impressed upon him in that sermon, it was brought back to his mind during that time of meditation when he was 100 years old and the sermon that he had heard all those decades earlier was used by God to convert him to Christ at that advanced age. You can read about that in Flavel's book called "The Mystery of Providence" on page 11, the Banner of Truth edition of it. Flavel's impact, Flavel acting as the salt of the earth long after he had departed this earth, being used by God to restrain ungodliness, to convert a man to Christ long after Flavel had gone to his eternal reward. I think that's amazing. I think that's amazing. It gives me encouragement as I preach. Who knows what the Lord will do? This is one instance of a man's work, the fruit of a man's labor, following after him into heaven, following him into heaven rather than preceding him.

The common point here is just to realize that whether it's a godly woman speaking well of her husband in the midst of ungodliness, whether it's God using a sermon long after everyone else had forgotten it, there's influence being had, influence in private godliness,

influence in public ministry in a way that is not visible to the human eye. The effect of salt on meat is invisible to the human eye. It's not directly observed, it just happens. What Jesus is saying is in like manner, it may look like my disciples are small, uninfluential, little in power, as Jesus describes the church at Philadelphia in Revelation 3. He looks at that church, he says, "You're of little power," but I'm paraphrasing, he said, "but I love you, I'll bless you, I'll set a door of opportunity before you, even though you're little in power." You cannot reconcile that with the model that says that Christians are to have their hands on the levers of public influence. You can't reconcile it. It's not the way that it works. Jesus says the influence is hidden. It's not visible, but it's still very real.

Now notice something else here. This is very important. Jesus here is speaking to his disciples. He's describing things to them. He's encouraging them. Here in verse 13, this is not a command. Jesus does not command us to be the salt of the earth, saying you have to go out and you have to be the salt of the earth. That's not it. He's not commanding something into existence that does not presently happen. He states, this is the reality of it. You are the salt of the earth. By very nature, this is what you are and what you do. The natural unseen effect of salt is to preserve and beloved, this is of such great encouragement for, you know, a smaller church like ours, for an individual Christian, just kind of struggling through life with family problems maybe, trying so hard and wanting to be godly and crying out to God in prayer, and it just seems like nothing ever quite goes your way. Jesus comes to Christians like you and me and says you're the salt of the earth. Disciples like you have an effect on the whole world in a way that you would never suspect. You see, beloved, what Jesus is saying here is that the godly character of the Beatitudes, it affects others, whether you see it or not. Now, that's not to say that people are attracted to the gospel, necessarily. It's not even to say that they're attracted to you for that matter, you're persecuted for the sake of righteousness. But the thing of it is, is that even though they hate it, and men love sin and they want to keep it, there is an effect of godliness that it has on the world as individual Christians are burrowed into their different circles of influence. The effect of a godly life affects the conscience of unbelievers and it restrains sin in them. Not perfectly, not totally, but instead of going at it at a hundred miles an hour, they're slowed down to 20 or 30, just to use an illustration.

I remember, I've often thought about this as an unsaved man in my undergraduate days. This happened to me. I went to a baseball game with a girl who was a legitimate Christian, as far as I know. She thought I was a Christian because I had told her that I was. I thought I was, but I wasn't. And during the ball game, my team was not doing well and to my shame, I remember I cursed and, you know, I had a very foul mouth as I was watching this game because of the a poor play of my baseball heroes. And this young woman looked at me with the simplest, I'm remembering this 40 years later, this is a perfect illustration of everything that this passage is teaching us, 40 years later, I remember this vividly sitting in the left field seats of the old Bush Stadium in St. Louis, Missouri. She looked at me and she said, "You don't have to talk like that." She could just as well have plunged a dagger into my heart, so convicting was that in my mind. Here I was, and I didn't become a Christian until long after we had gone different ways, long after this event, but it just so convicted me. She was right. I was pretending to be a Christian, and I had such a foul, profane mouth, and it was wrong for me to be that way. I

was using the name of the Lord in vain. She didn't give me a long Scripture exposition. She didn't even make a big point of it. She said one sentence, "You don't have to talk that way." And it crushed me and I changed the way I was talking in front of her, and now I remember it spontaneously 40 years later. She was the salt of the earth. There was that influence that quiet, gentle godliness has that has nothing to do with political influence and everything to do with moral influence, spiritual influence, as the Spirit of God works through a godly character and convicts others of the sin around them in a most natural way. That is the reality of Christian influence.

Now, let's go to a second point here this evening: the rejection of Christian imposters. The rejection of Christian imposters, and what Jesus does as he continues on after having said you are the salt of the earth, he goes on to say, "but if salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything except to be thrown out and trampled under people's feet." What Jesus is doing here in the second part of the verse, the longer second part of the verse, is he's distinguishing the true disciples who are the salt of the earth from imposters who only look like salt, who only look like they have influence. Now strictly speaking, I'm told, I'm not a chemist, I'm not a mechanic, there's a lot of things I'm not, but I'm told that salt cannot actually lose its saltiness. That's just part of its characteristics, part of its nature, salt is salty. But in the first century, there was salt in the ancient world that contained impurities. It looked like salt. It looked like the real thing. But there would be this diluted residue that wasn't really salt at all. It had no value. It couldn't retard the decay of meat. It couldn't be used for preservative value and they just threw that out into the street. People would walk on it, trample it. It was useless, had no value at all. And so that kind of salt, so called, salt in air quotes, was just thrown out. Useless. Had nothing, had no value at all. And so if salt did not preserve, then it was thrown into the street to be walked upon, trampled upon.

Now how does that relate to the impact of Jesus, of what Jesus is saying about the impact of his true disciples? He says you're the salt of the earth, and then he goes on a much longer explanation about salt that's lost its taste, not good for anything, needs to be thrown out and walked upon. What does that have to do with anything? Well, many commentators who are in such a hurry to help Jesus out in his teaching, they quickly say Jesus is not saying that a true disciple can lose his salvation. You're the salt of the earth, but if you lose your saltiness, you're not going to lose your salvation. You know, they're eager to say that, and according to them, Jesus says that true Christians who are contaminated by sin are no longer effective but it has nothing to do with losing your salvation. Well, let me just state for the record clearly, I agree that true Christians cannot lose their salvation. True Christians will persevere in the faith, Philippians 1:6, but that has nothing to do with what Jesus is saying here at all. I do not think Jesus is warning against contaminated Christians and contaminated disciples at this point in the Sermon on the Mount. Could you say, I mean think about what the implications of that view, imposing that view on this verse would be. Jesus said that whoever it is that he's talking about, he says they're not good for anything except to be thrown out and trampled under people's feet. Does that sound like a true Christian to you? Is a true believer born again by the Spirit of God, indwelt by the Holy Spirit, bound for an eternity in heaven around the throne, praising God, can someone like that no longer be good for anything? That's

not what Jesus is saying here. That can't possibly be what he's saying here. That would be like saying, remembering the context, these people of the Beatitudes, theirs and theirs alone is the kingdom of heaven, but you know, if they get contaminated by sin, they're not good for anything. That's incoherent and it's amazing, it's amazing how many biblical commentators, when you read them closely and think through the implications of what they're saying, they're just utterly incoherent. Drives me crazy to read that stuff, read it, read it, and just realize I've just wasted my time.

No. Salt is salty and true Christians have influence. It's the nature of things. It's just the order of reality that God has established. Salt is salty and his people have an unseen spiritual influence on the world around them. A Christian that has absolutely, a Christian, air quotes, who has absolutely no moral influence is not a Christian at all. What Jesus is saying is not that true Christians get contaminated by sin and then they're useless. No, if a true Christian gets contaminated by sin, they're not useless, what God does is he disciplines them either providentially or rebukes them through the word so that they will turn from their sin and come back to the spiritual growth that he's called them to have. No, those that have no sanctifying impact on the world around them that just easily fit into the fabric of the world without any difficulty, they're imposters. They're not Christians. They look like salt, but they're not salt.

The Apostle Paul describes this in Titus 1:16. You don't need to turn there, I'm just going to read it quickly. Titus 1:16 as Scripture interprets Scripture. He speaks about the defiled and unbelieving. Nothing to them is pure, but their minds and their consciences are defiled. He says, "They profess to know God, but they deny him by their works. They are detestable, disobedient, unfit for any good work." That's who Jesus is describing, describing the false professor of Christ that was in the left field seats in St. Louis 40 years ago. That man, who is now thankfully long since dead, that man was detestable, disobedient. He was unfit for any good work. And all who falsely profess Christ are like that. They have no influence. They look like the world, they fit into the world, they have no impact on the world because they are of the world. 1 John 2:19, "They went out from us, but they were not really of us. If they had been of us, they would have remained with us, but they went out in order that it might be shown that they not all are of us." And that's what Jesus is describing here in verse 13. He says, the true Christians have an impact. Those that don't have an impact aren't born again. They don't have the character of the Beatitudes. He's separating the true from the false, not making distinctions among true Christians here.

So all of this being said is that Christians like you, beloved, simple, quiet, humble, faithful, unassuming, Christians like you impact the world around you far beyond the earthly stature that you seem to have. Christians and churches should not easily fit into the world and yet, the world is a better place because we're in it. God uses his people as an instrument of grace to restrain sin in others but beloved, understand where the influence is. The influence comes from being a genuine disciple of Christ, being truly born again. The influence comes from having a heart and a desire for the character of the Beatitudes even if you fall short of it, longing after righteousness, hungering and thirsting for righteousness. That's what God uses. And so, beloved, don't trade the real thing and

the real power, even though it's not observable by human eyes, for a false substitute that's peddled by those who love political power and want to use you for their own ends that have nothing to do with Christ. Our circles of influence are better as a result of our godliness, not because of our politics, and if you know the true source of your influence, you won't trade it for those carnal substitutes, you'll simply seek the Son of God and as you seek him, as you meditate on Christ, it could be no other way, beloved, as you meditate on Christ and the Spirit uses those godly meditations to conform you a little bit more to his image, to give you a little bit more of the aroma of heaven to your life, you become an aroma of life to those who are in Christ, you become an aroma of death, as Corinthians says, to those who are not in Christ but, beloved, the reality of it is, the influence is, the power is in this godly character that comes from being born again. And what an amazing thing that God would use such frail, faltering creatures like you and me, like that, to advance his kingdom. You and I, we wax hot and cold. We stumble. We struggle. We ask for forgiveness. We pray. We're weak. And in our weakness, the God of the universe, the Christ of the cross, perfects his strength. That's what Christ says to us as his disciples. "You're the ones I use," Christ says. What a blessing.

Let's pray to him.

*Our gracious Father, help us to be the true salt of the earth. Work deeply in our hearts. Father, fill us with your Spirit, the Spirit whose ministry is to convict of sin, righteousness, and judgment, the Spirit whose ministry is to glorify Christ, not to take over the world. Father, help us to walk in the Spirit, walk by the Spirit, manifest the fruit of the Spirit, be filled with the Spirit, all so that we would live to your glory and that you would use us as you see fit in this dark, dying, decaying, and decadent world. Thank you for saving us. Thank you for those in our past, maybe a pastor, maybe a parent, a friend, co-worker, that spoke truth to us, that shared Christ with us, that opened a Bible to us, and you used their simple faithfulness just as you used a shoe salesman to effect D. L. Moody, you used a humble, unknown, forgotten pastor in a small room of 15 and you converted through that man's ministry no one less than Charles Spurgeon. Father, we can't measure it, we can't predict it, we don't control it, it all belongs to you. We just ask you that you would make us these people of influence that flows from true salvation, true godliness, and that you would advance your kingdom in that way to your glory and we'll cast our crowns at the feet of Jesus and give you all of the glory in the end. Help us to that end, Father, that our lives would not be squandered, our lives would not be wasted in false frivolous worldly pursuits, but that we would be effective instruments of God, producing sons of God in enemy territory, as Jim Elliott said. Help us to that end individually and corporately as a church, Father. Though we may be small, though we may be weak, bless us and give us doors of opportunity like you promised to the church of Philadelphia, a church of little power, perhaps, but one before whom you set an open door that no man can shut. Grant us that kind of influence, Father, those kinds of desires for the advance of your kingdom and the advance of the gospel of Jesus Christ. We pray in his blessed, holy name. Amen.*

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