

Have you noticed lately how many products we have today that are designed to imitate the real thing. ...There is plastic decking... that looks like real wood. ... We have vinyl flooring... that appears to be ceramic tile. You can purchase fake fur... or jewelry... phony noses... hairpieces... and other body parts. ...The purpose behind all of these items is fairly obvious... but what about a can of Spray-on **Mud**?

Yes... there is actually a product that is sold... and it is Spray-on Mud. It is designed for use on the outside of your SUV. That way it appears you use your expensive gas-guzzler for more than taking the kids to soccer practice. ... Spray it on and friends might think you've just returned from a wilderness adventure.

I read that sales of the product are going well... particularly in America... and in London (which is where the concept originated.) ... "*If they want an authentic look,*" says inventor Colin Dowse, "*There's not a lot else they can do. There's not a lot of mud in Chelsea.*" Apparently, \$15 a can seems a reasonable price for the appearance of authenticity.

And then... this week... I saw on my morning news program... as well as another program in the evening... that Nordstroms is selling \$500.00 designer jeans – on which they have attached plastic dirt and mud. They suggested that it was for city-folk who want to appear as though they work with their hands.

Just like normal American society today... there are many expressions of imitation Christianity... that we can try to pass off as the real thing. You can read on Facebook... "I'll be sending good thoughts your way..." It is as if

good wishes are being mistaken for prayer. ... And then... success is automatically interpreted as spiritual blessing... or as spiritual achievement. Inspirational bumper stickers and symbols can be seen as evangelism. Excellent music can cover for authentic worship of the heart. ... Humorous or emotional stories can pass for inspired preaching. ... Christian clichés can be handed out as biblical wisdom. ... An attractive personality can be mistaken for a Spirit-filled life.

But last week... we began a section of our study through the Gospel of Matthew... which is known as the Sermon on the Mount. And last week... we discovered that Jesus is declaring what Kingdom Life is like for every true believer. This is the authentic spiritual life of the believer... and everything else is “imitation Christianity.”

(LISTEN)... You know what I am about to tell you is true! ... The number one cause of atheism... is Christians. ... Those who proclaim God with their mouths... and deny Him with their lifestyles... is what an unbelieving world finds simply unbelievable. ... We might think that we are pretty good imitators of authentic spiritual living... but it is driving people away from the Lord.

I believe that in most cases of unbelief... is not an intellectual persuasion of God's non-existence. It is Christians who live as though God doesn't really exist. They replace authentic spirituality with imitation Christianity... or they pretend that their faith does not need to change or affect their day to day life.

As I was preparing for today's message... a writer of one of the commentaries I was reading... seemed to just stop... and take this little side-road:

Until my conversion in 1975 I professed to be an atheist in part because I looked at the roughly 85 percent of my fellow U.S. citizens who claimed to be Christians and could not see that their faith genuinely affected their lives. I reasoned that if even Christians did not believe in Jesus' teachings, why should I? My excuse for unbelief—and the excuse of many other secularists I knew—continued until God's Spirit confronted me with the reality that the truth of Christ does not rise or fall on the claims of his professed followers, but on Jesus himself. The faith of nominal Christians may appeal to non-Christians who can use it to justify their own unbelief, but such "Christians" will be *thrown out and trampled*. ...

(which is seen in a verse of today's passage - Matthew 5:13).

The sermon on the Mount is of tremendous value to us... because we get a picture directly from Christ... that will show us if we are the real deal... or simply imitations. ... The portion of the sermon on the mount that we come to this morning... deals with the matter that the faith of a Kingdom person does genuinely affect their life. Faith is NOT one's own personal matter!

In sharp contrast to the many Christians around the world who live under the constant threat of torture and death... western Christians often remain silent in public life. ... Simple fear of ridicule and derision has silenced them. ... They do not witness in the workplace. They do not intend to reveal the fact that they are Christian. ... Even within the sacred walls of their churches... they very often attend in mute salutation to their meager faith. Silenced by a mammoth media... that breeds a contemptuous and begrudging view... of those of the "born again" persuasion... some

Christians go through life... believing that silence is a friend and anonymity is appropriate camouflage. ... No one will ever discover that they are Christian. And to them... that is OK... because they mistakenly believe that their faith is a private matter.

However... in the light of today's opening verses of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount... the call of Christ is clear. ... This message from Christ is not open to debate. ... He has laid down the distinguishing characteristics of the people who belong to his kingdom. Keeping our faith hidden and private is foreign to any person who is part of the Kingdom of God.

Matthew 5:13-16

Here... in this sequel to the beatitudes (which we studied last week)... the Lord gave two illustrations... to show how what we are... will have an impact on... what others do. ... We... who are "the salt of the earth" and "the light of the world" ... are living in a world of decay and darkness... and we are to have an impact on both conditions.

Our function as salt is to resist decay. Salt is aseptic. It cannot change corruption into incorruption, but it does prevent corruption from spreading. It is used to hold decay and putrefaction at bay. Before the days of refrigeration, it was the most commonly used preservative.

God designed our oceans to be salty for a reason. It is a miraculous filter that purifies both air and water... over all the earth. As rivers drain into the ocean... the salt corrodes and breaks down pollutants. Then purer water particles evaporate to the sky and drop back to the earth as much cleaner water. The salt from the spray of an ever churning ocean gets picked up by

the wind and once airborne... air polluting particulates glom onto the salt particles and fall back to the earth. High winds take salt from the sea high into the air for miles inland. So the earth's air and water supply are constantly cleansed and refreshed because of the salt in the oceans. We could not live on this planet... without our salty seas.

Salt has many functions of which we note three important functions. **First**, salt sanctifies. Without the saltiness, the oceans would be great areas of corruption that would plague the earth with disease. When the godly show up in a room, people often want to clean up their language and behave better. Holiness influences and promotes purity of conduct. **Second**, salt saves. Salt is a great preservation of good. Until refrigeration advances occurred in our times, salt was the chief ingredient for preserving foods. The godly can preserve a nation and save society from great judgment—we have already noted what they could have done for Sodom. **Third**, salt seasons. Salt can greatly improve the flavor of food. The presence of the godly will encourage, inspire, and help. Christians should not be deadbeats, moody, always complaining, and unpleasant. Christians are to be salt, not vinegar.

Timothy Keller makes the following observation about salt:

The job of salt was to make something taste good. I don't know about you, but I can't stand corn on the cob without salt on it. When I have eaten a piece of corn on the cob that I really like, I put it down, and what do I say? "That was great salt." No, I say, "That was great corn on the cob." Why? Because the job of the salt is not to make you think how great the salt is, but how great the thing is with which it's involved.

What if you are salt in your small group Bible study? If you're salt, people won't go away saying, "That person really knows the Bible and had all the answers. Showed me up!" No. What happens is when you go away from a small group in which you have been the salt, people don't say how great you were. They say, "What a great group." "What fascinating truth."

This is pretty simple. Salt makes you feel better about life. Christians make you feel better. But religious people always make you feel condemned. They make you feel worse.

Jesus added a warning:

Matthew 5:13b

"... 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.

This statement (of course) does not refer to losing one's salvation... but to losing one's testimony and influence. ... This pictures the disabling work of sin in regards to Christian service and testimony. ... As an example... when a minister commits adultery... he is done. ... He will never again regain his seasoning. The stigma will never be completely removed in this life. The failure will plague him the rest of his life. The same holds true for any believer who has been a witness for Christ. ... If ever there was a day when the earth needed Christians to keep their testimony and influence... it is this day of the X-rated home movie... internet pornography... and the marching sodomite.

Matthew 5:14

While salt deals with the moral... light deals with the spiritual. ... Salt relates to our character... but light relates to our conduct. ... Salt deals with what a person is... light deals with what a person does.

Jesus said, "I am the light of the world" (John 9:5). ... But here... He says... "*You are the light of the world...*" ... Taken together... then... the two statements mean - that we are to be like Him.

We are to remind people of the existence and authority of God by living in the will of God and by being like Jesus. Just as "a city that is set on a hill cannot be hid"... our testimony for God... must be consistent... continuous... and conspicuous.

This should put to rest any notion that Christian faith is merely a private matter between a person and God. Christian faith is not a personal (or private) matter!

Matthew 5:15

Christ gives two patterns to emphasize that the believer is to shine conspicuously. **First**, the city on the hill. A city on a hill is more conspicuous than a city anywhere else. Christians should shine so conspicuously that no one would doubt that they are Christians. **Second**, the lamp in the house.

The small wicker oil lamps of this period gave little light in the average 1st Century home... which had few windows. Lamps (or candles) would be most effective by being set on a lampstand. ... Something large placed over them would presumably extinguish the light altogether. ... A lamp that has been lit (or a candle, if you prefer)... is to be put on a lampstand..... where it can shed light to the entire room. The light must be very conspicuous... or it is of little use.

Here's the point: Your Christian profession must show in obvious ways... unless you are only an imitation.

Matthew 5:16

If our spirituality is authentic... we will glow like lights... showing others what Christ is like. ... If we are imitations... our consistent lifestyle will be to hide our light by (1) being quiet when we should speak, (2) going along with the crowd, (3) denying the light, (4) letting sin dim our light, (5) not explaining our light to others, or (6) ignoring the needs of others. Be a beacon of truth—don't shut your light off from the rest of the world.

An author of an article in *Christianity Today Magazine* (June 2014) wrote:

When I was young, growing up in the United Kingdom, my family and I could always count on our next-door neighbor, Mrs. Oglive, to be around. We left a spare key with her in case we got locked out. We forgot our keys quite often, and she was always there—morning, afternoon, and night—to let us in.

Mrs. Oglive never went out. She suffered from agoraphobia, the fear of open spaces. Having lived next door to her for 40 years now, I still haven't seen her venture past her doorway. She wasn't always this way. She has pictures on her mantelpiece of less anxious days, from her honeymoon with Mr. Oglive and from a day at the beach with her children. But after her husband died, Mrs. Oglive began to isolate herself. As a child, I saw opportunity in this: Her garden resembled a jungle, and I earned some pocket money by pretending to be Indiana Jones armed with a machete slicing through the undergrowth, clearing the path to her front door.

As an adult, I can only imagine the heavy cloud of fear and frustration that surrounds her. Now frail and in the twilight of life, Mrs. Oglive's curtains are almost always drawn. But now and then, I still get locked

out, and as she hands me the spare key, I am glad to see she is still alive.

I see parallels between Mrs. Oglive and the contemporary church. Many Christians observe the world from behind closed curtains, bemoaning culture instead of engaging it. Many local churches are isolated from the wider community and world ... suffering from fear of an open public square with divergent viewpoints and lifestyles.

Jesus' disciples are to be influential for the Kingdom even in the midst of an oppressive world. Salt and light can be understood to imply two aspects of witness in the world. Disciples... like salt... must mingle with the world in order to give it good flavor... or to purify or preserve it. ... But disciples... like lamps... must remain distinct from the world in order to illumine it. ... Salt is of no value if it loses its zing... and its zing is not meant to be kept in a salt shaker.

Matthew 5:17-20

These verses serve as the interpretive key to the rest of the Sermon on the Mount. ... Therefore... understanding this particular section of the sermon is critical for understanding the sermon as a whole. ... Jesus says in verse 17, "*Don't assume that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill.*" "The Law and the Prophets" is Jesus' way of referring to the entire Old Testament... and He says that He didn't come to abolish the Old Testament... but to fulfill it.

Jesus came to fulfill the ***intention*** of the Old Testament... that is... to bring it to its ***intended completion***. ... And the fulfillment Jesus has in mind here (in relation to the Old Testament)... is not simply external conformity to its commands... but rather a ***heart alive*** to God. ... This is what the law was calling for all along

Deuteronomy 30:6 (ESV)

And the LORD your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your offspring, so that you will love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, that you may live.

To emphasize His belief in the Scriptures (which corrected their implied misconception of His view of the Scriptures), Christ spoke three important truths related to Scripture.

- ***The reliability of the Scriptures.*** " ... until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law until all is accomplished. (Matthew 5:18). No book has been so attacked as the Bible. Yet no book has done so well as the Bible.

- ***The retribution from the Scriptures.*** "Therefore whoever relaxes one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven (Matthew 5:19). Judgment will come upon those who break the laws of the Word and who teach others to do the same.

- ***The reward from of the Scriptures.*** "*but whoever does them and teaches them will be called great in the Kingdom of heaven*" (Matthew 5:19). Both doing and teaching the Word will result in the "*great*" praise in heaven." What God calls "*great*" is seldom what man calls great. Many famous athletes, movie stars and politicians called great on earth will not be called great in heaven—it is only those who do and teach the Word who shall be called "*great*" in heaven.

Matthew 5:20

This is simply another way Jesus speaks about salvation. **Jesus demands a righteousness exceeding that of the scribes and the Pharisees.** That reality ought to shock us... and it should alert us that unless our righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and the Pharisees... we will not enter the kingdom of heaven but will remain forever in the kingdom of darkness. ... In other words... this righteousness is the difference between heaven and hell.

In light of these truths... we're left wondering what kind of righteousness the Pharisees had... given that our righteousness must exceed theirs. Although we could look at other passages for help with this question... Matthew 23:25-28 really captures the kind of righteousness that the Pharisees possessed. In Matthew 23:25 Jesus says,

Matthew 23:25 (ESV)

“Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you clean the outside of the cup and the plate, but inside they are full of greed and self-indulgence.

Notice the contrast that Jesus draws between what is on the inside and what is on the outside. The Pharisees were clean on the outside, but they were full of greed and self-indulgence in their hearts. The same reality is presented in the verse that followed...

Matthew 23:26 (ESV)

You blind Pharisee! First clean the inside of the cup and the plate, that the outside also may be clean.

Then in verses 27-28 Jesus gives perhaps the clearest and most picturesque illustration of the Pharisees' righteousness:

Matthew 23:27-28 (ESV)

“Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs, which outwardly appear beautiful, but within are full of dead people’s bones and all uncleanness. So you also outwardly appear righteous to others, but within you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness.

The righteousness of the scribes and the Pharisees was purely an external righteousness. But Jesus says that it's not enough to be righteous on the outside if you are not also righteous on the inside. What Jesus is demanding is **not more righteous deeds by human effort, but more righteous hearts by divine grace**. He is not saying that you must have a *quantitatively* greater righteousness, something like a righteousness that is numerically greater than the scribes or the Pharisees. To use an academic analogy, it's not that the Pharisees have scored in the low 90's on the holiness test, and entrance into the kingdom of heaven requires a score of 94, 95, or 96. This misses the point altogether. Rather, Jesus is talking about a *qualitatively* different righteousness—a righteousness of a different kind altogether. This is not an outer righteousness to show everyone how good we look, but an inner righteousness that shows how gracious and powerful God is.

Jesus was saying that authentic spirituality needed a different kind of righteousness altogether (out of love for God)... not just a more intense version of the Pharisees' obedience (which was mere legal compliance). Genuine righteousness must (1) come from what God does in us, not what we can do by ourselves, (2) be God-centered, not self-centered, (3) be based on reverence for God, not approval from people, and (4) go beyond keeping the law to living by the principles behind the law. We should be just

as concerned about our attitudes that people don't see as about our actions that are seen by all.

Is your faith genuine... or is it imitation...? ... There is a lot that is riding on your being truthful with your answer.

Rob Smitty donated one of his kidneys to a stranger. It was a noble and generous sacrifice. While browsing the Internet, Smitty developed an interest in people needing organs. He said his motivation involved doing something that would make his children proud.

But his 10-year-old daughter wasn't impressed by his sacrifice. Amber said her father never comes to see her and never calls, not even on her birthday. "I don't think he's much of a hero," she said.

Tennessee records show Smitty had not made child support payments to Amber's mother in nine months.

Just as Amber is not impressed with her father's sacrifice... God is not impressed with our sacrifices that only imitate the true spirituality that Christ spells out for us in the Sermon on the Mount.