

Meeting the Challenges of 21st Century Culture How We Can Make a Difference

Intro: Over the past 2 ½ months we've looked at various challenges we face in our culture. Clearly there are formidable challenges to face; and it can be a bit depressing to think about how far our society has gotten away from God and the moral principles of His word.

But should we be overcome with despair? Is it all hopeless? Have we already lost the battle? I don't think so. There is a bright side to our discussion that I hope we will not miss. As the dark clouds of unbelief and immorality gather around us, the bright light of faith and morality appears all the brighter. It may be at this time that we as Christians can have the greatest impact in the lives of those around us. And so I want to end this series on an optimistic note. Let's think today about how we can make a difference in the 21st century culture.

We can make a difference!

Picture in your mind a large collection of basically unaccomplished working people with limited education and little money sitting around Jesus on some mountain plateau east of the Sea of Galilee. And they hear Him say...

"You are the salt of the earth; but if the salt has become tasteless, how will it be made salty again? It is good for nothing anymore, except to be thrown out and trampled under foot by men. You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do men light a lamp, and put it under the peck-measure, but on the lampstand; and it gives light to all who are in the house. Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven." (Matthew 5:13–16)

These words were not spoken in naiveté. Jesus understood that the world was in the power of Satan. In fact His statements are predicated upon the realization that...

The world is hopelessly corrupt.

The world into which Jesus came was a world rampant with idolatry, ingratitude, family breakup, sexual perversion, and greed.

Sounds like our world, does it not?

The world is hopelessly confused.

One man remarked that people's minds are like concrete: firmly set and all mixed up!

G.K. Chesterson once said, "The problem with people who lose faith in God's word is not that they don't believe in anything, it's that they believe in everything!"

But Jesus assured these disciples that they could make a difference! He said to them...

You are the salt of the earth!

Salt had many functions in the ancient world: preservative, antiseptic, spice.

One of Rome's major roads was "Via Salaria" (Salt Road).

Today people get paid a "salary"; but that word comes from "salarium," the payment given to a soldier to buy salt. Thus a person who worked hard was said to be "worth his salt."

"A godly influence can retard moral decay, encourage goodness, grace, and beautify life and create a thirst for righteousness."

Through our lives we can stay and even reverse the processes that lead us to social corruption and even national destruction!

You are the light of the world!

Just as salt answers to corruption so light answers to darkness.

Those who live without the illumination of God's word are like people groping in the dark.

I have come as light into the world, that everyone who believes in Me may not remain in darkness. (John 12:46)

I am the light of the world; he who follows Me shall not walk in the darkness, but shall have the light of life. (John 8:12)

Just as Jesus was and is the light of the world, so we as Christians, when we follow Him, can be that light to our world! Jesus wanted us to see that light properly displayed cannot be missed:

"A city set on a hill cannot be hid."

As a boy living in the little village of Nazareth, Jesus could have looked into the distance and seen the lights of the larger Greco-Roman city of Sepphoris.

Most ancient cities were built on high places for strategic advantage. In the black darkness of the ancient world the dim light of a city could be seen to illuminate the sky from afar. That statement calls attention to the inevitability of godly influence.

How we can make a difference!

We must not lose our sense of mission.

It is easy to believe that we are powerless. We may believe we cannot compete with the riches, the intellect, and influence of the world.

But Jesus says we can!

We must maintain our moral distinctiveness.

As salt we must not "become tasteless"!

Actually salt cannot quit being salty. If it is salt, it is salty!

The point is, salt may be so corrupted by other things that it becomes by that corruption as useless as road dust—good for nothing but to be thrown into the streets and trodden under foot.

We cannot be content to just stay three steps behind the world so that we seem moral! We must stay with the word of God even if the gap between us and the world grows wider and wider. Only if we live without compromise will we be of real use to God!

Therefore, if a man cleanses himself from these things, he will be a vessel for honor, sanctified, useful to the Master, prepared for every good work. (2 Timothy 2:21)

Do we make anyone thirsty for Jesus?

We must speak the truth boldly.

Don't be afraid to hold back any needed truth from those around you. Say it graciously, use wisdom; but please tell people the truth. It is their only hope of heaven; and it is what we do!

“And the Lord’s bond-servant must not be quarrelsome, but be kind to all, able to teach, patient when wronged, with gentleness correcting those who are in opposition, if perhaps God may grant them repentance leading to the knowledge of the truth, and they may come to their senses and escape from the snare of the devil, having been held captive by him to do his will.” (2 Timothy 2:24–26)

Do not put your light “under a peck-measure”! No Palestinian would think of using precious olive oil to light a lamp and then cover it with a clay pot that hid all the light! Instead it would be placed on an elevated lamp stand so that its rays would touch as much the darkness of one’s house as possible.

But what if we deliberately withhold the truth from our neighbors and friends because we are shy or afraid they will recoil in persecution?

We must live the truth with integrity.

We need to demonstrate that serving God has made us better.

Peter applies the principles of the Sermon on the Mount with an appeal to Christians to live in every relationship with excellence.

“Keep your behavior excellent among the Gentiles, so that in the thing in which they slander you as evildoers, they may on account of your good deeds, as they observe them, glorify God in the day of visitation.” (1 Peter 2:12)

Peter believed that one of the most successful ways of disarming the hostility of the world was living with excellence in our relationships.

As they benefitted from the Christian’s godly conduct, they would be led to glorify God. Thus, he urged Christians to...

Submit to the governing authorities and show them their proper honor

Cooperate with those who had authority over them in work, even enduring difficult masters with patience

Submit to their husbands and honor the needs of their wives

“As important as it is for Christians to worship God according to His will, we must remember that most lost men will not be able to glorify God because we eat the Lord’s Supper every Sunday. They may

indeed be moved to exalt God by the quiet love with which we bear one another, by our self-control in the face of great provocation, by our calm assurance in the presence of tragedy, and our firm refusal to be drawn into a world of mindless lust.” (Earnhart)

We must seek to bring glory to the Father!

Disciples can do good things for bad reasons. Jesus would make that clear in Mt. 6. Acts of philanthropy can become advertising for ourselves; but that’s not the goal of a disciple’s good deeds.

What use are our good deeds if they leave people talking about us, but effect no honor for or thanksgiving to God, or promote interest in the gospel of God? Remember Jesus’ words, “...*that they see your good works and glorify your Father which is in heaven.*”

It is not ultimately about us!

Whatever you do, do it to the glory of God (1 Cor. 10:31).

Conclusion: You can do something in this world for good! Edmund Burke once observed, "Society is a pact between the living, the dead, and the great unborn." Here we stand between those vast groups. Our future and our children's future is bound up in the lives of us, the living! The future of our family is in our hands! The future of our country is in our hands! The future of the souls of those we care about is in our hands!

So, let your light shine! Be busy doing the things God has commanded of us: Teaching the truth, helping the needy, restoring the erring, loving our neighbors. And here's what will happen: Others will see; and God will be glorified!

So then, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure. Do all things without grumbling or disputing; that you may prove yourselves to be blameless and innocent, children of God above reproach in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you appear as lights in the world, holding fast the word of life, so that in the day of Christ I may have cause to glory because I did not run in vain nor toil in vain. (Philippians 2:12-16)

May God help us to be that light and salt in this world!