

Introduction

I'd like to begin by telling you a story about the Lord Protector of England during the 1650's, Oliver Cromwell. During his reign, the British government began to run low on silver coins. So, he sent his men to cathedrals all over the country for any silver they might find there. They then returned to him and declared, **"The only silver we could find is the statues of the saints standing in the corners."** To which Cromwell reportedly replied: **"Good! We'll melt down the saints and put them into circulation."**

That is, by way of analogy, an instructive story. It reveals what God Himself wants. It's the saints in circulation and that's what I'm going to preach about today. Matthew 5:14-16 is part of the Sermon on the Mount and one of the most familiar texts in Scripture. Let's examine it and determine what it tells us about the saints in circulation.

The World

I begin with the term **"the world"** in verse 14. That term refers to the social context in which you and I live our lives. It's what we call our sphere of influence and is comprised of all the people that we know and meet every day. **"The world"** encompasses the waitress serving our table, the plumber fixing our kitchen sink, the people working with us, our next door neighbors, our teammates, our in-laws, our class mates, and on it goes.

Now, this **"world"** in which you and I live is essentially non-Christian. The majority of people who comprise it are apart from Jesus. Many if not most of them are removed one or more generations from any Christian influence. They know very little or even nothing about Jesus and don't take Him into account at all. They live, in other words, as if He doesn't even exist.

Examples abound. I've told you before about my wife Jill ordering a Palm Sunday cake for her kinderchurch class at the Giant Eagle Store.

The young woman waiting on her inquired when she did, **“What is Palm Sunday?”** Jill discovered as they conversed that she had never heard about Jesus riding triumphantly into Jerusalem. Or consider a woman I met several years ago who didn’t know that the Bible is divided into Old and New Testaments or that it contains chapters and verses. My point is this. Most of the people in **“the world,”** in our spheres of influence, are non-Christians who know little or nothing about Jesus.

The Light of the World

But they need to know about Him and verses 14-16 teach us how they can. There’s a word that occurs four times in this text, **“light.”** The word **“light”** in Scripture connotes several things, one of which is **“revelation of truth.”** That’s what it connotes here, the revelation of the truth about Jesus.

With that definition in mind, note one of the most celebrated metaphors in Scripture in verse 14, **“You are the light of the world.”** The word **“You”** there designates disciples and friends of Jesus – those who arrange their affairs around engaging Him and His kingdom at hand. Well, Jesus says about them that they are the light of the world. According to verse 14, they are like a city, the lights of which are so many and bright that they can’t be hidden. Think of the lights of Las Vegas for instance. Or according to verse 15, they are like a lamp, which give light to everyone in the room. Think of your own living room lights. Those mini-parables illustrate what disciples and friends of Jesus do. They reveal the truth about Him to the non-Christians in their lives.

This celebrated metaphor, **“You are the light of the world,”** discloses what is, I believe, God’s primary strategy for reaching non-Christians for Jesus. It isn’t revival services, door to door evangelism, sports evangelism, or even seeker sensitive churches. It’s the saints in circulation instead. It’s disciples and friends of Jesus revealing the truth about Him to the non-Christians in their lives. That God’s strategy and call, that we are saints in circulation, and here’s how we answer it – by

doing three things.

Live Kingdom Lives before Non-Christians

First, we live kingdom lives before non-Christians. Verses 14-16 are part of the Sermon on the Mount recorded in chapters 5-7. In this Sermon, Jesus pictures what is called a kingdom life. Some people arrange their affairs around engaging Him and His kingdom at hand. He in turn, through the Holy Spirit, transforms them into persons whose mental, emotional, volitional, and bodily processes produce the kind of life He pictures in chapters 5-7, a kingdom life.

But what does a kingdom life have to do with revealing the truth to non-Christians? Verse 16 tells us. Study the Sermon on the Mount and you'll grasp just how radical and appealing a kingdom life is. It's so radical and appealing in fact that it's as noticeable to non-Christians people as the lights of Las Vegas are – and causes them to glorify God.

Ethicist James Wallis explains the dynamics of verse 16 this way. In 1 Peter 3:15, Peter wrote about **“everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you.”** Wallis identifies what was behind Peter's statement. First century Christians were living lives that were dramatically counter to their culture. Peter knew that non-Christians would notice that, be curious, and ask them questions about it. So, he exhorted them in 3:15 to be ready to effectively answer those questions. First century Christians often witnessed, in other words, by just answering questions their lives prompted non-Christians to ask.

One of our problems today, Wallis claims, is that non-Christians are no longer asking Christians those questions. Why? It's because Christians aren't living counter culture lives. The lives of Christians and non-Christians look pretty much the same. Non-Christians don't see anything different enough in the live of Christians to even ask about.

But routinely engaging Jesus and His kingdom at hand changes that. It creates a kingdom life that is different than the life of non-Christians. The difference is so dramatic in fact that it prompts the curiosity of non-

Christians. It captivates them and compels them to ask critical questions. We then answer those questions and are a natural witness for Jesus in the process.

A PTA group was having a meeting about an upcoming event. During it, one woman spoke up and bluntly said to another, a Christian who was in charge of publicity, **“You aren’t promoting this aggressively enough. It’s going to be your fault if it fails.”** It was a tense moment for everyone until the Christian kindly replied: **“Thank you for pointing that out to me. Do you have any suggestions?”** After the meeting, a non-Christian came up to the Christian and asked, **“Didn’t what she said make you mad?”** She answered that it didn’t and explained why, **“Jesus teaches that we should love those who reprove us. We should be glad when people point out what we’re doing wrong. And I’ve found that what He teaches is always best.”**

That little anecdote demonstrates one thing we do to be saints in circulation. We live kingdom lives before non-Christians.

Talk about Jesus to Non-Christians

We do a second thing to be saints in circulation. Talk about Jesus to non-Christians. Notice I didn’t say talk about our local church or our beliefs or our religion. I said talk about Jesus.

When I say about Jesus, I mean about who He is, not about what He did. Don’t get me wrong. We will eventually tell non-Christians about what He did: His virgin birth, perfect life, substitutionary death, and historical resurrection. But that’s only after we tell them about who He is. There are always exceptions of course but that’s the guideline we should generally follow. We should talk about who Jesus is and there’s a reason for that. It’s because nothing is as inviting to people, Christians and non-Christians alike, as that.

I once conversed with a college student I had just met, who was a chemistry major. Chemistry (especially subatomic particles) absolutely fascinates me. So, I asked him a number of questions, which he tried to

answer. That's what he did for me. What I did for him was talk about Jesus, who He is. It was an easy thing to do because it arose naturally from the conversation we had. As we were talking, I said, **"There's a verse in the Bible that might interest you as a chemistry major, Colossians 1:17. It tells us something about Jesus. He's the Master of Matter."** I then explained to him that Jesus designed, created, sustains, and controls all the atoms, elements, and molecules that make up the universe in which we live. He was interested in that and we talked for some time about it.

There's no doubt about it. The person of Jesus is inviting. We're lights to non-Christians, therefore, when we talk about Him - when we communicate who He is and what He's like to them.

We can only talk, however, about what we know. The great Rosalind Rinker gave her Inter-Varsity students an assignment. It was to stand up and talk as long as they could about Jesus - not about His death, resurrection, or anything else He did on earth, but just about He Himself, who He is and what He's like. Not one of her students was able to talk for even a minute about that. Let me ask you. How long could you talk if that assignment were given to you?

Jesus is the glue of the universe, the master of matter, the Prince of Life, the lord of all things, the smartest person who ever lived, the one essential friend, the first and last, the lord of history, the Son of Man, the Son of God, the resurrection and the life, the great "I am," and on it goes. Learn all of those things and more and you'll be able to naturally share who Jesus is with non-Christians.

Ravish Non-Christians with the Blessings of God's Kingdom

There's a third thing we do to be saints in circulation. Ravish non-Christians with the blessings of God's kingdom. The central message of Jesus was that **"the kingdom of heaven (God) is at hand."** He said that we can access that kingdom through Him and experience its blessings now. So, we ravish non-Christians with a vision of those blessings. We

make them **“hunger and thirst”** for them. We achieve that by doing three things.

First, we learn by experience and the study of Scripture what the blessings of God’s kingdom are. One of people’s most crushing burdens, for instance, is the opinions of others. Imagine the freedom of being unmoved by the approval or disapproval of others. I know by experience and Matthew 6:1-18 that that is one of the blessings of God’s kingdom.

Second, we discern the needs of the non-Christians in our lives. Asking the Holy Spirit’s help and using our own powers of perception, we identify what their deepest aspirations and concerns are.

And finally, third, we creatively and clearly relate the blessings of God’s kingdom to the needs of non-Christians. We show them how those blessings **“speak to their condition,”** to quote George Fox – how they scratch where they itch. We show them how they address the deepest aspirations and concerns of their lives.

I once met a young man who had a condition of dwarfism and a debilitating inferiority complex as a result. He expressed shame about his appearance as we talked and I was able to address it. I explained what Jesus teaches in Matthew 6:27-30: **“Physical appearance is a non-factor in the kingdom of God. He’s able to clothe you with an inner beauty that shines so brightly that your outer appearance is hardly visible at all.”** I then elaborated on that. He may have thought that what I said that day was just nice talk and didn’t decide to follow Jesus. But he’s at least closer to deciding that than he was before.

Conclusion

What I’ve share with you today makes our calling clear. First, live kingdom lives before non-Christians. Second, talk about Jesus to non-Christians. And third, ravish non-Christians with the blessings of God’s kingdom. That’s our calling and it’s imperative that we answer it. We’re saints in circulation if we do.