



SALT AND LIGHT

Here is a list of names. What do they have in common?

- Elon Musk.
- Barack Obama.
- Cristiano Ronaldo.
- Narendra Modi.
- Rhianna.

They were the top 5 most followed people on X last year. And as such, they are 'influencers' (not influenzas, though one at least could probably be regarded as potentially dangerous). No, they're all influencers.

Now whether you have an X account, a YouTube channel, or just friends on social media, we all have the potential to be influencers. Wherever there's interaction between us and the world, there's the potential for it. At home. At work or school. In the supermarket or the restaurant or the hospital. Online.

Everywhere.

And this idea is nothing new. 2000 years ago, Jesus talked about the need for His followers to be 'influencers.'

And He used 2 symbols, 2 pictures, to get that across.

Matthew 5:13-16

What are the symbols Jesus uses? Salt and light.

But why?

- **Salt.** Salt is essential for life and is used as both a seasoning and an antiseptic (they even rubbed it into the skin of newborns!). It can also be used as a preservative: before the advent of refrigerators, they would cover meat in it to slow the spread of bacteria and keep it from rotting. Hence in Jesus' day salt was a hugely valuable commodity: in fact, Roman soldiers were paid in it (they called it *salarium* or 'salt money' in Latin, the origin of our English word, salary).
- **Light.** Light, like salt, is necessary for life itself to exist. And like salt, it's a conspicuous thing, providing guidance and warmth to those around it. Not only that, but sunlight is good for our day-to-day health: it's a natural disinfectant, UV rays can be used to destroy the RNA of viruses, and it can even affect us on a psychological level (hence SAD or seasonally affected disorder). The word 'light' is used around 250 times in the Bible, often in association with God Himself.

What then is Jesus saying? That we're here to be influencers, for Him.

So how do we do that? In 3 ways:

1) We've got to be present. Jesus opens with "You are the salt of the Earth; you are the light of the World." I.e. you've been put into this world to be present in it.

Both salt and light have penetrating properties – they invade whatever environment they're introduced to. But that can only happen if they're allowed to come into contact with it. Unless salt is applied to meat or to a wound, it'll make no difference; unless light is shone into a darkened room or a street at night, it'll make no difference. In a similar way, Jesus has sent us into this world to infiltrate it – just like He did (Acts 1:8).

Of course, there may be times in our lives when we have to create distance. But generally speaking, if we're going to impact this world, we have to be willing to engage.

2) We've got to be different. Jesus closes with "Let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father ..." I.e. be evident; be different.

What does Jesus mean by that? Well, He doesn't mean acting all holier-than-thou or speaking in King James English or dressing like one of the Amish (no offence to the Amish). Jesus didn't: He spoke as a man of His time and place, and yet He was as holy and different as you can get.

What He means is we have to stand out – in our attitudes towards others; in how we spend our money; in what we watch and listen to; in how far we'll go before marriage; in the words we use – and won't ("seasoned with salt", as Colossians 4:6 puts it). And that can be tough – because our natural inclination is to want to fit in. With family; friends.

Even so, if this world is going to be different, it's going to need *us* to be different, first. As someone once famously put it: "You've got to be the change you want to see."

3) We've got to be consistent. In the midst of this Jesus says something which has caused a fair amount of head-scratching: "If salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything ..."

Even in the ancient world, they knew that a grain of pure sodium chloride cannot lose its saltiness (hence its use in covenants). But if a salt store became mixed with similar minerals, it might *seem* to – at which point it would be unfit for culinary use and would be used to grit pavements instead. So, Jesus is saying that we have the potential to 'bring out the best' in this world and keep it from going bad – as long as we stay pure and uncorrupted by it.

The alternative is like lighting a lamp then covering it – we rob ourselves of our God-given potential. Our witness.

Feeling Small

So, we are to be salt and light. And in using such terms Jesus is reminding His Jewish audience of the reason God chose them in the first place – to be the salt of the earth and a light to the nations (which might make vs13 a warning of exile, too).

But He's also saying, "If you follow Me, this will be fulfilled in you. You will become the city on a hill that Jerusalem was always meant to be."

The point is that, as Christians, we are more influential than we realise. But my guess is you probably don't *feel* very influential: you may even feel pretty tiny and insignificant. Thing is: so is a grain of salt; so is the flame of a lamp. And Jesus is saying that, no matter how tiny you may feel, you have the potential to influence this world for Him – if you allow Jesus to be an influence, in you. The greatest influence of all. More than your temperament. More than your upbringing. More than your culture. Because Jesus is the original, the ultimate, salt of the earth and light of the world (John 8:12).

So perhaps the point is, "I'm the greatest influence there is. And if you're following Me, you'll be an influence, too."

What then does this look like, for you? I'd like you to discuss these 3 questions with the people around you:

- What or where are your spheres of influence?
- What's the most challenging part of this for you?
- What can you do or say to be a gospel influencer?