

SESSION 3



CAUSE AND EFFECT

Introduction

In this world we are called to be 'salt and light' (Matthew 5:13–16). Today we live in a world where there is a clear and obvious falling away from the Lord. As Christians, we are called by the Lord Himself to stand out from the crowd and to make a difference in this darkness.

You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled by men. You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house.

Matthew 5:13-15

We have already looked at Scripture's mandate on what must be our priority – taken from the *Great Commission*, principally found in Matthew 28:18–20, Mark 16:15 and Acts 1:8. We know that Jesus commands us to 'Go and preach the Gospel to all creation'. He also asks us to be the salt and light of the world. So what happens when we fail to obey these commands? What happens when we Christians, who are supposed to be the light of the world, aren't shining as we ought?

Focus

When we proclaim the Gospel, we are joining with creation in declaring God's greatness (Psalm 19:1–4). This is our joy and our privilege as the redeemed! In Matthew 5:11 Jesus extols believers to 'rejoice and be glad', even in the wake of persecution because we have the assurance of a great reward in heaven. Furthermore, Jesus speaks of His intention for believers in John 10:10, 'I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.' Surely then this 'fullness of life', to be experienced right here and now, is inextricably entwined with doing God's will, with us living as fully as we possibly can within His plan for us.

So what when we fail to fully engage in that plan? What when we largely ignore His Great Commission? For us personally it might mean missing out on some of that 'full life' that He promised. But there are far greater, wider reaching consequences.

Firstly if we aren't sharing the message of salvation with others then it is left un-proclaimed. Which begs the question: how are the people of this world going to hear about Jesus unless we tell them? After all it is our job. The Bible tells us:

How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them?

Romans 10:14

Paul hits the nail on the head doesn't he! How can non-Christians call upon God if they do not believe in Him, because they don't know about Him, because no-one has ever told them about Him. How can they know about the One true God of Heaven and the glorious news of the Gospel unless *someone* gives them the message? This is our responsibility. When we look at it this way we must surely recognise our position in the eternal destiny of everyone with whom we engage.

Secondly, when we fail to share the Gospel another consequence is that people begin to turn to false gospels that the world offers. They sincerely put their faith and trust in something that they believe to be the truth. The reason they do this is because they have never heard of the One who says 'I am the way, the truth and the life' (John 14:3).

Why is it then that we do so often fail to proclaim the Gospel? Is it out of embarrassment or fear? The Bible tells us in Proverbs 29:25 that 'Fear of man will prove to be a snare'. The devil will always try to use the fear of man to stop us from proclaiming. More than anything else he wants Christians to be too afraid to share their faith. Are we letting the devil's schemes and plans prevail? Pray against him, his servants, their works and effects. Pray against the fear of man and pray for boldness in our proclamation of the Gospel that can only come from the Lord.

Discussion

1. What is it that stops us from proclaiming the Gospel?
2. What promises in scripture does God give us that He will be with us in all circumstances? (Here are a few examples: Psalm 91; Isaiah 40:8; Matthew 28:20; Hebrews 13:5,6.)
3. How can non-Christians hear the good news unless we tell them?
4. Think about the significance of us being the salt and light of the world? What did Jesus mean by this in Matthew 5:13-15?
5. Does the fear of man stop you from proclaiming? Also what else might stop you sharing your faith?
6. Read the second half of Proverbs 29:25. What can we do to defeat the fear of man?

Bible Parallel

Read Jonah 1:1–3, 3:1–10

God's imperative was to deploy Jonah to preach repentance in the most unexpected place: Nineveh, a sin-ridden, idolatrous, ungodly city and a monument of rebellion against God Almighty. If God had called Jonah to pronounce doom to Nineveh, he might have gone like a shot!

To Jonah, Nineveh wasn't worth the effort. It was a waste of time in his mind. His message would only fall on deaf ears. This mindset was the inner core of Jonah's reluctance. He did not like the fact that God was extending His mercy by giving such a corrupt and evil people an opportunity to repent.

As a man of God Jonah might have known what was expected of him. Either run from God in disobedience and face His rebuke, or run with God under His direction and delight in God's service. Jonah experienced both. Confronted by his wilful disobedience, he was re-commissioned and finally delivered God's message to Nineveh.

The result was a total dramatic repentance from an entire nation . . . 'so the people believed God'. Imagine how many would have missed out on the Gospel! Nineveh experienced one of the greatest revivals in history. What a turnaround! Through this surprising outcome, God reveals to us that:

- No one is beyond God's reach and love
- No one knows what kind of response they will get to the Gospel until they go in obedience to God's direction
- No one knows how God might be preparing a person to receive His word
- No one knows the impact their repentance might have on others in their circle of influence

Often times, the right message is not enough. It needs to be accompanied by the right attitude and the right motive. Total obedience and total submission to God's commission necessitates we rid ourselves of the 'anything but that, Lord' attitude.

Further discussion and personal contemplation

Jonah 3 shows us the magnificent results of doing things God's way, under God's direction. Discuss the dangers of clutching the Gospel as your own private faith. Focus on the people you find most difficult to love or have prejudices against. Does the command to evangelise them send you into a panic? What can you do to overcome this?