



Pleasant Ridge Baptist Church

The Sermon on the Mount - Part 1 • the gospel and work • matthew 5:13-16; 2 corinthians 2:15-17 •

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Main Point

The gospel affects all of life, including your work.

Introduction

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

Do you think the gospel has application to your everyday life? If so, which specific areas?

Where do you work? Do you feel comfortable sharing your faith at work? Why or why not?

What makes up an average day for you? Most of the best hours of our days are spent at work. You may be a young worker in the first ninety days of your job, a CEO considering your final three legacy years before retirement, or somewhere in between. No matter where you land on the continuum, if you're a follower of Jesus, the question we all must answer is, "What more can I do to integrate the gospel into my work?" Over the next six weeks, we'll answer that question in "The Gospel Goes to Work." We'll discover that the gospel has both individual and corporate applications.

Understanding

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

| Watch the session one video of the gospel goes to work.

Stephen mentioned three metaphors Scripture uses to describe the impact of Christians.

What are those three metaphors? What is distinct about each of these? Which best describes the way you view your life at work?

| Have two volunteers read Matthew 5:13-16.

What did Jesus mean when He said believers are the salt of the earth?

In Matthew 5:13, Jesus called His followers “the salt of the earth.” Salt’s primary function in Jesus’ day was to help preserve food—especially meat—an act that was particularly important in the Middle East due to hot temperatures and arid climate. As believers, we are to act as preservatives in the culture around us by maintaining high moral and spiritual standards that counteract the sin and decay of the world. In other words, the world should be a better place because believers are in it. Salt also adds flavor to food, which is the way we use it today. Salt is distinctly different from the things with which it’s mixed; likewise, Jesus’ disciples are to be different from the world.

How does light as a teaching tool in Jesus’ day compare with its function today?

In what situations do people tend to hide their light “under a basket” at work?

In Matthew 5:14-16, Jesus compared believers to light. Jesus developed His comparison by mentioning two situations in the first century where light at night was especially welcome. First, imagine traveling on a cloudy night, longing to reach a city situated on a hill. Such a city cannot be hidden. Although the city’s lights might be few, at some point you would come around a bend or over a ridge and see the city. Second, suppose you were at home at night and had only one olive oil lamp. You would put it on a lampstand so it would benefit all who are in the house. You would not put such a light under a basket. Light exists mainly so other things can be seen. Thus, the good works of believers shine before men so others receive a blessing.

| Ask a volunteer to read 2 Corinthians 2:15-17.

How can spreading the aroma of the knowledge of Jesus be both an “aroma of life” to some and an “aroma of death” (2 Cor. 2:16) to others? How does this specifically apply to you in your workplace?

In 2 Corinthians 2:15-17, Paul called believers the fragrance, or aroma, of Christ. As the fragrance of Christ, our lives should mirror that of Jesus’, marked by faithful obedience no matter the personal cost. Like a sweet perfume, as believers we are to be distinguishable when we enter a room. People should notice us for our presence—not because of our personality, but because the fragrance of Christ is so strong on us that we are hard to miss. Some will react positively to this aroma, while others will respond negatively. People’s response is not our responsibility: we are only to be the aroma of Christ.

How have you seen the gospel do its salt work, its light work, and its perfume work in a job setting?

Read Colossians 3:23-24. If you work for a secular company, is your work “spiritual”? Why or why not?

It’s common in our day to think of spiritual work and secular work as being different. This way of thinking sees secular work as performed by laypeople and necessary for income. But after people have reached a more advanced level of spirituality, they must step aside from their secular work as plumbers, teachers, truck

drivers, or salespersons and enter vocational ministry, which performs the real spiritual work. The problem with this way of thinking is that the Bible doesn't agree with it. According to Colossians 3:23-24, all work is spiritual. Paul's point is that whom you work for is far more significant than what you do or where you work. The question, "Is your work spiritual or secular?," is important. But Paul seems to tell us that the more important question is, "Whom do you work for?"

Consider the statement, "Wherever you are, whatever you're doing, the gospel matters."

What would it look like to bring the reach, power, and intent of the gospel to all dimensions of your life—including your work?

A gospel-centered life is a way of thinking. Gospel-minded work starts with your mindset, your motivation, and your allegiance. We must begin to think of any vocation—from pastor to plumber, from missionary to brickmason, from chaplain to car salesperson—as spiritual work if it's ultimately done for Jesus.

Steve talked about how contentment, selfishness, and the desire to work your way up on the corporate ladder are all things that can prohibit your witness in the workplace. Is this true of you at work?

Would your coworkers say you have interest and energy in their world, or would they write you off as more self-serving? Why?

In the video, it was shared that sometimes it's easier to not share our faith at work because we're all a little afraid of being perceived as hypocrites. If we are vulnerable about our faith, then we invite the opportunity for criticism. If we claim to be Christ followers, then we in turn will be held accountable for our actions.

How does our call to be salt, light, and a sweet perfume overwhelm any fears you might have to be vulnerable with others at work? How does the call of Matthew 28:18-20 supercede any hesitations you may have?

According to the video, how does your authenticity at work play a role in your being an effective witness for Christ? In what ways is sincerity a "sweet perfume" to others?

Application

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

How do you think it would affect your work life if you realized that work isn't a mundane, necessary part of your life but an opportunity to build the kingdom of God?

How would you describe the "fragrance" you put off as you go about your daily life? What changes would you need to make, specifically at work, in order to give off a sweet aroma to God?

Pray

Close the group session with prayer. Ask God for grace to see opportunities to display the good news in your workplace and in every other aspect of your life.

Commentary

| matthew 5:13-16

Jesus explained in two word pictures the impact that a truly righteous person will have on his or her world. The entire sermon, including the Beatitudes before and the many teachings after, shows us how to live as “salt and light” in the world as representatives of another kingdom. These word pictures also serve Matthew’s purpose—to encourage believers to change their world (Matt. 28:18-20).

There are many lists of the uses of salt (v. 13), most of them inspired by Jesus’ statement here. However, among the many possible connotations, Jesus probably had two most centrally in His mind. First, salt preserves from corruption. In the centuries before modern refrigeration, salt was the method of choice for preventing bacteria from poisoning food. Just as salt prevents or kills bacteria in food, the kingdom servant prevents or confronts corruption in the world. Notice that it is the earth that needs the salt, not the kingdom of heaven. If the kingdom servant did not have a function to perform on earth according to God’s plan, he might as well go straight to heaven upon conversion.

The second function of salt is to add flavor or interest (Col. 4:5-6). Jesus highlighted this purpose when He spoke of the danger of salt losing its saltiness. Part of the church’s task on earth is to live according to its new nature—alive, purposeful, hopeful, joyful. Christians should be living in such a way that others will pause and consider what is different about them (1 Pet. 3:15). Believers are different and should appear so, because the Father is different (holy; 1 Pet. 1:15-16). The kingdom servant who does not live according to his nature as salt is useless to the king’s advancement of the kingdom on earth.

The picture of light (vv. 14-16) is similar to salt, in that both describe the influence the believer is to have in the world. However, it reveals a different facet of the believer’s influence. The function of light is to make reality or truth visible, thereby giving direction and guidance by what is seen. Jesus again used the emphatic “you,” and again clearly stated that this is already what a believer is, not something he might become. It is the nature of a kingdom servant to be light in the world. Any believer who fails to function as light is going against his nature as God’s new creation. The believer has no light inherent in himself. The believer’s light is a reflected light. Believers are to make certain that nothing comes between them and their source of light (2 Cor. 3:18; Phil. 2:13-16).

Both a city on a hill (v. 14) and the lamp on its stand (v. 15) fulfill their function by being elevated, so their light can be seen by many people over a broad area. Jesus Himself explained the application of this principle

in 5:16. The light represents our good works, which must be done with such integrity that all who see have no choice but to credit our Father in heaven. The Christian's life and influence is to be visible and obvious, not secret or hidden. We must not camouflage our devotion to Christ, but humbly do all we can to allow its truest colors to be seen where we live. The term translated give glory to means "to make manifest or visible." When we shine our light before others by living righteously, we are making visible the character of the Father. It is the Christian's commission to live in such a way as to make God visible in a world that is blind to Him.

| 2 corinthians 2:15-17

2:14a. Paul had been disappointed in Troas and Macedonia, but through it all God had been good to him. He began this acknowledgment of divine goodness with thanksgiving: But thanks be to God.

2:14b–16a. Paul delighted in God's care for him. He expressed this joy with the metaphor of a victory parade. Paul was convinced that God always leads believers in triumphal procession in Christ. Paul drew upon the triumphal parades that were known throughout the Roman world. Prisoners of war were marched through the streets as fragrant perfumes filled the air. At the end of each parade, many prisoners were executed. For this reason, the smells of the parade were sweet to the victors, but they were the smell of death to the defeated.

Paul saw several similarities between these victory parades and his own ministry. (1) He and those with him were members of the victorious army led by Christ, as were the rest of the apostles. (2) Their gospel preaching spread everywhere ... the knowledge or acknowledgment of God as the victor. Similarly, Roman victory parades spread knowledge about victories and caused people to acknowledge the victors. (3) Paul said that he and the apostles were like the perfumes of the victory parades. They became to (the honor of) God like the aroma of Christ, or more specifically, like the aroma accompanying Christ's victory. Both the victors of this spiritual gospel war (those who are being saved) and the defeated (those who are perishing) smelled their aroma. (4) This aroma of Christ, however, affected each group differently. To Christ's enemies, Paul and those with him were the smell of death, but to those following Christ they were the fragrance of life.

This metaphor contrasted Christian and non-Christian reactions to evangelists. To Christians, Paul and his company presented reminders of the wonders of salvation. For non-Christians, they raised the terror of divine judgment. No one could ignore them because their fragrance was spreading throughout the world.

2:16b. As Paul contemplated his analogy between Roman victory parades and his gospel ministry, he was overwhelmed. He exclaimed, Who is equal to such a task? The answer he implied was that no one was worthy of playing such an important role in human history and in the kingdom of God. It was astounding that God appointed humans to this role.

2:17. Paul wanted the Corinthians to know that he did not view his ministry as an ordinary job. He did not peddle the word of God for profit. He distinguished himself and those who worked with him from so many others who had reduced their ministries to mere occupations. Unlike the gospel peddlers, Paul and his

company spoke before God with sincerity. Paul still lingered on the accusation of insincerity and duplicity he had addressed in the preceding section. He could not have been insincere because he looked upon his ministry so highly. Instead, he served as one sent from God, considering his task a sacred privilege. The fact that he did not accept payment for his preaching further demonstrated his sincerity.