

Cultural Influencers

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Date: 07 April 2019

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[0 : 00] If you have your Bibles with you this morning, and I hope that you do, I wanna ask you to turn to Matthew chapter five. Matthew chapter five. So you can turn your Bible on or open it up, whatever you do to get God's word in front of you.

I want you to turn to Matthew chapter five. And as you're doing that, last year I came across a term that I had to look up because I wanted to make sure I had a good understanding of what this was, okay?

And I wanna ask you this morning, does anybody here know what a social media influencer is? Raise your hand if you know what a social media influencer is. There's only a handful of hands up right now.

So either you are ashamed to let us all know that you know what a social media influencer is, or you're like me, you're just ignorant. You don't know, you've never heard that term before.

That was me last year. And so I looked it up. I wanted to know what a social media influencer is. How could it be so important? That it would be an actual term, an actual thing.

[1 : 00] A social media influencer is a user on social media who has established credibility in a specific industry. All right, so they're already losing me calling social media an industry, okay?

But it says he or she has access to a large audience and can persuade others by virtue of his or her authenticity and reach. Now, if you're like me and you go this afternoon and you start investigating who some of these social media influencers actually are, you're gonna be thinking to yourself, these people are flakes.

These people, I can't believe that anyone would generate income that would support this kind of behavior, this kind of so-called work, this kind of activity.

But I want you to consider some of the top social media influencers in our day and what kind of money they bring down. Number one is Dan TDM.

I don't know, maybe some of you kids out there, teenagers, you might know who Dan TDM is. I had never seen him before. I Googled some pictures of him just so I would have some kind of idea of what he looked like.

[2 : 10] But he brings in \$16.5 million a year and he is a gamer. So he plays video games all day, every day and he videos himself playing video games and puts it online and people go and watch that and the advertisers and the people that give and all this kind of stuff racks up \$16.5 million a year.

A young lady by the name of Kayla, it seems, is making \$150,000 not per year but per sponsored post. So when she puts up a post on social media and it gets sponsored by some business or some brand or this kind of thing, she gets \$150,000 every time she puts that up there.

Selena Gomez, you may know as a celebrity, she makes \$550,000 every time she puts something up on social media. I would be more than happy to start publishing on social media multiple times a day if somebody would agree to give me \$550,000 a time for it.

I don't know about you but that seems like easy money. And you go read these things and it's not really substantive stuff. It's not anything that you can use. It's just gossip. It's just totally useless knowledge.

There's a fellow named Tyler Oakley. He's an LGBTQ activist and he makes \$6 million a year just on being social on social media.

[3 : 40] The last one is a fellow named Ryan. He has a page or an account called Ryan Toys Reviews. And I don't know if any of you parents have ever seen Ryan Toys Reviews but I'm going to make you feel guilty about it because Ryan Toys Reviews makes \$1 million per month doing toy reviews for kids.

The kicker is Ryan is five years old. Why have we wasted our lives? Right?

You know, the rise of the social influencer points us to our culture's desire to improve the self or at least to change the self in some way.

And we have this deep-seated desire to change ourself in every aspect of life from the video games that we play to the health that we promote in our lives all the way down to sexuality in our culture.

This also indicates how desperate people are to be led. You know, we live in a culture where people are saying, I don't want to be led. I don't want anybody telling me how to do my life or where to go or what to think or how to speak or any of those things.

[5 : 01] Yet our culture at its heart is desperate to be led. It wants to be led and it's looking for anyone or anything that will lead it.

Now, centuries before YouTube began catapulting these normal and boring people to stardom and before Hollywood ever captivated the world's attention with a few larger-than-life personalities, Jesus announced that its followers would have an impact on the world.

In fact, he says that they're going to influence every culture on the planet. When you get to the book of Acts, the criticism is that these people are literally turning the world upside down and it all starts when Jesus begins to preach in the Sermon on the Mount.

Matthew chapter 5, listen to what he has to say starting in verse 13. He says, You're the salt of the earth, but if the salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored?

It's no longer good for anything except to be thrown out and trampled under people's feet. You're the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden, nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house.

[6 : 21] In the same way, let your light shine before others so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.

Now, as I was thinking about these verses in the most recent installment of my life, I ran across a statement. Tim Keller, a famous preacher up in New York City, he says that we shouldn't underestimate what Jesus is doing when he stands up to preach before this group of people on that mountain.

You see, we read about it in the Sermon on the Mount. We read about it in Matthew 5, 6, and 7, and it just seems like a string of good advice, a string of platitudes, if you will.

But Keller says, listen, don't miss the importance and the significance of what's going on here.

Jesus is not just coaching people on how to have a better life.

He took those people to the mountain, and he began to teach them because revolutions were started in the mountains. In Jesus' day, when somebody had a bright idea, when they wanted to see something change in their culture, when they wanted to gather a group of people and start a movement in the culture, they would take them out of the town.

[7 : 35] They would gather them up. They would kind of sell their idea to people in the community. And then they would take these people out, if you will, on a retreat into the mountains.

And that's where they would do their teaching and they're indoctrinating. And they would literally start revolutions in the mountains. And so Jesus takes these guys out there, and when he stands up to speak, he's not just trying to tell them how to have peace and harmony at home or how to pay their bills supernaturally or any of that kind of stuff.

He's actually ushering in a brand new kingdom, a brand new kingdom of people who will be completely different than any other kingdom on earth.

It doesn't matter how long this earth lasts. There will never be another kingdom like the one that he's ushering in in these verses. He's ushering in a kingdom of a people who would ultimately influence every culture on the planet.

It doesn't matter where we're from. It doesn't matter where we go. God's kingdom spreads out across all of it. And so, as I mentioned earlier this morning, the Romans had their day, and the Greeks had their day.

[8 : 54] And if the Lord lingers, people will look back and say, the Americans had their day. But Jesus' kingdom will never end. The sun will never set on his kingdom.

And so later in the Sermon on the Mount, he will unpack what those differences look like. He'll show you what your life, how it looks different from everyone else if you're part of his kingdom versus being part of just your community in which you live and this kind of thing.

And I would encourage you to look ahead and read through that again. I'm sure many of you have spent time in the Sermon on the Mount, but I would encourage you to take a look at it again this afternoon, sometime this week, and begin to see how God calls us out to be a people separated for his glory and for our good.

But just look at the headings, if you will, in your Bible this morning. Just in Matthew chapter 5 here, the headings aren't inspired by the Holy Spirit, but they are good summaries.

Jesus is going to go on to talk about anger and lust and divorce and oaths and retaliation and loving your enemies. And that's way more than any of us can handle all at one time today.

[10:07] There's going to be a difference in how his people act and how they live and how they relate to their community. And he'll unpack that. But first he explains the impact that they're supposed to have.

And I believe that if he came here and stood before us today, I think if he had the opportunity to stand here and we had the opportunity to see him and hear him like you're seeing and hearing me right now, I think that he would tell us, he would take us to these verses and he would say, this is who you are.

Church, this is what you're supposed to be doing. This is who you are. You may think that you're a carpenter or a truck driver. You may think that you're a school teacher or a business owner.

You may think that you're a politician or a community servant or a public servant of some sort, but he would say, no, this is who you are. And this is what you should be doing.

And he chooses two metaphors to articulate how we as his followers are supposed to relate to our culture, how we're supposed to influence our culture. The first one he mentions is salt.

[11:16] He says in verse 13, he says, you're the salt of the earth. Now there are a lot of uses in the ancient world for salt and all those uses kind of spill over in today.

We could have a Sunday school lesson on any one of these uses of salt and we could find meaning in our life. Uses like seasoning or healing or destruction or making of covenants and this kind of thing.

And all those things can be applied in some way in our lives. But I believe that Jesus is really talking here about this idea of preservation. Salt is used in preserving things that would spoil otherwise.

And so like salt would be rubbed into the meat of his day so that it wouldn't turn foul, I believe that Jesus would say that Christians are rubbed into the fabric of our culture to be a preserving agent in the lives of those around us and the cultures in which we live.

And this is what it looks like. It looks like Christians being rubbed into the schools, administrators, teachers, and students. They're being rubbed into the fabric of that school system, that education system for the glory of God and for the good of all who participate.

[12:34] And I want you to know, some of you that have been to Sedona, you know that we work in the schools a great deal. We spend a lot of time just loving on the schools. We'll go and do landscaping for them and I don't want you to be under any false notions, okay?

When you go do landscaping in the desert, you're not trimming hedges. You're digging up cactus, all right? It is a major effort of love to go and to serve these people this way.

But we spend a lot of time working in the schools and when we arrived in Sedona in 2014, the first principal that I met was a very skeptical Jewish woman who didn't want to hear anything I had to say about Jesus and really was a little uncertain as to whether she should let us even be nice to her, okay?

Over time, we won her over and the next principal was a friend of mine. And what I want to share with you today is that this past school year, at the beginning of this past school year, we were given a new superintendent.

They hired a new superintendent. The elementary school received a new principal and in the next school year, our high school is going to have another principal and all three of those administrators are going to be numbered among the people of God.

[14:00] They're all going to be believers. Now, they're not going to run a Christian school as we would know a Christian school, but they're going to be the salt that's being rubbed into the fabric of that school system so that it begins to look different and sound different and smell different.

Christians are rubbed into businesses as CEOs and managers and laborers. Like I said, you think you have a job to make money, but God has given you a job to give you a context to act as a preservative of the culture.

And so one of the things I love to tell, and he's not here today, so I get to tell it, my dad was a truck driver for I don't even know how many years. From the time I was in kindergarten until February a year ago, I think is when he retired.

He was a truck driver. For most of my growing up years, he drove on a team. He and a partner would leave on Sunday night at midnight and they'd get home on Friday afternoon. I want you to know that as I was growing up, my dad's never preached a sermon.

He's led a few prayers and worship and this kind of thing, but at least two, if not three, of the riding partners that he had over the course of those years became Christians because he was being rubbed into the fabric of the trucking industry.

[15:21] And so whatever you do, you're being rubbed into the fabric. Christians are rubbed into the communities that we live in as neighbors and public servants, as little league coaches, and the list could go on and on and on, but don't miss the fact that Jesus says here, you are the salt of the earth.

So whatever you do and wherever you go, you are the salt of the earth. Not you're gonna be the salt of the earth or you have the potential to be the salt of the earth, but you are the salt of the earth. This is what you are. And notice here, he's speaking to all the people that are following him that day. This is not something that he pulled the 12 aside to just give them a little private devotion and try to kind of encourage them to be better disciples.

This is not, this is certainly not something that he's just given to the religious leaders of his day. This is something that he is sharing with all the people that are following him on that day.

And so I want you to know that today, I'm not preaching this sermon to Fred Stone. I'm not preaching it to your staff. I'm not preaching it to your Sunday school teachers or your deacons or your small group leaders or your youth chaperones.

[16:38] It's for every single one of you. You are the salt of the earth. And at some point in your life, when you chose to follow Christ, you by definition are the salt of the earth.

Unfortunately, that does not necessarily mean that you will be a good preservative because Jesus tells us here that sometimes the salt loses its saltiness.

Now, what does that mean? Well, it doesn't mean that it stops being salt. It just means that it loses its effectiveness because it has become contaminated.

And what Jesus tells us here is that when the salt became contaminated, people would just toss it out into the street. And it would get packed down as people walked over and treaded on it.

It would just get packed down and become part of the ground. Before long, you can't tell the salt from the dirt. This salt that was so important and used in so many homes is now just part of the ground, part of the dirt that people are walking on day in and day out is no longer useful as salt.

[17:51] So in the summer of 1995, I was 19 years old. That's been a long time ago. But at 19 years old, I was on the camp staff at McCall up the road, up 178.

And I sat at the same table in the dining hall every single meal. My table happened to be on the porch and it was an open air building at that time.

And so every morning I would come in, I'd pick up these little disposable salt shakers that they had put on the table and I'd try to take some salt out on my eggs and my grits, right? What do you think happened?

Nothing. I'm gonna tell you, nobody spoke up, by the way. Nothing came out. Those salt shakers would sit there overnight and the moisture and the air would get in there and it would just clog them up and it would make it to where the salt would not come out.

And so for about a week that summer, as the summer kicked off, for about a week, every morning, I would walk around about half of breakfast time looking for a salt shaker that worked because everybody needs salt on their grits, okay?

[19:00] Nobody has an amen to that. Yeah, I know who you are. So finally one morning, I got up, I go to breakfast, I get my eggs and grits and sausage, I got it all on the plate, I'm ready to go and I hit the salt.

No salt comes out. I set it down and said, forget it. I have not picked up a salt shaker since. And it's not because I'm health conscious, I'm worried about my heart, or because I'm holy, or any of those kinds of things.

It was because the salt had become contaminated, it was useless, and it wasn't worth my effort. Right? And I want you to think about that in terms of how insignificant the contamination seems.

That salt shaker was contaminated by the moisture in the air. It wasn't dropped in a puddle of water. Nobody spilt anything on it. It was simply the moisture that came out of the air that made that salt useless.

Jesus makes you salty. But you have to avoid contamination if you're going to be a preservative for him in this world. And here's where it gets a little personal for us, okay?

[20 : 19] Because it's real popular these days for us to be transparent and honest and open about our struggles and the sin that is in our life and this kind of thing.

And I'm all for transparency, and I think that's a good thing for the most part. I probably feel like that most of the church is hiding far too much that they could be released from if people were willing to share and accept some accountability and ask for some help.

The truth of the matter is that the sin in your life that you struggle with can be an encouragement to others who struggle with that same kind of sin. If they see you walking with Christ, they can have hope for themselves.

It can become a powerful part of your testimony. However, if you continue in your rebellion against Christ, that may or may not endear you to other people, but it will certainly hinder them from coming to Christ.

All right? And I want you to think about this in two ways. If you continue in your rebellion today in the sins of commission in your life, the things that you do that you know displease God and keep you separated from Him, it may or may not make other people think, oh, yeah, he's just a regular old Joe, and he's a lot of fun to be around, and if there's hope for him, there's hope for me, and that kind of thing.

[21 : 49] But it could hinder them from coming to Christ if they don't see a difference in your life. If they see you acting like they do and living like they do and just being here on Sunday morning, it could be a hindrance to them actually embracing the gospel and giving their life and trusting Christ for their salvation.

But it's not just the things that we do that we don't want anybody else to know about. It's the things that we should do that everybody assumes we're doing, but we're not doing. It's sharing our faith. It's proclaiming the gospel when we're given opportunity. We spend our lives building rapport with people and investing in relationships and building relational capital and this kind of thing, and then we never spend it on the gospel.

And if you continue in your rebellion, and when I say rebellion, I mean refusing to share the gospel with your neighbor or your family member or your coworker or the person at the ball field or whoever it may be, then that may endear them to you.

They may not think you're a religious fanatic or anything like that, but it could very well cause them to stumble over the kingdom and miss it altogether.

[23 : 08] As I always want to ask you, are you sharing the gospel with those in your circle of influence? The people there around you that God has put you in their lives and he's rubbing you into the fabric of their existence.

Are you using that for his glory by sharing the gospel with them? The second metaphor that he uses here is light. And he says that you are the light of the world.

And whether we're talking about oil lamps in Jesus' day or the flick of a switch or the push of a button on our phone in our own day, the lights come on and the lights come on and the lights come on for one purpose and that is illumination, revelation.

And again, Jesus says to his people, you are the light of the world. This is not something you need to go to a class for. This is something you are.

By your nature, as a believer in Jesus, you are the light of the world. And this is so significant because in John 8, verse 12, Jesus says, I am the light of the world.

[24 : 13] And can, you know, if Jesus walked in today and he said, I'm the light of the world, we'd be like, hallelujah, praise the Lord. Everybody look to the light. Thank you for showing us the way.

But then he turns around and says, you are the light of the world. And so I wonder what you're shining on today. I wonder what people see because you're the light of the world today.

He goes on to say that a city set on a hill cannot be hidden. Some of you have been to Sedona before and I don't know if you've made the trip to Cottonwood, to Walmart, in the dark or not, but we don't have a Walmart in Sedona because we're too good for that.

People like me, we still drive over to Cottonwood so that we can get to Walmart, okay? But if you go to Cottonwood at night, there's this mountain range behind Cottonwood and over to the right as you're driving toward Cottonwood, you can see these lights on the hill. It's just dark all the way across and then there's this little section of flickering lamps, lights. That little town is Jerome.

[25 : 27] Now, Jerome only has 400 and something residents, okay? It's a tiny little used up copper mining town is what it is. And nobody would know Jerome is there probably except when you go to Cottonwood at night, there's no mistaking that there's people over there on that mountain.

And I would venture to say even at only 400 strong, they'd never get enough people to turn their lights off to hide themselves. Jesus says a city set on a hill cannot be hidden.

And like all the little individual lights that make that town visible to those of us driving to Cottonwood at night, so all of us who belong to Jesus are little lights that are peppered across our culture for the purpose of shining on Jesus for our community.

Specifically, so people will see Jesus. not so they'll see how to manage their retirement better, not so they'll figure out how to have more harmony.

All those things are fine and good and wonderful, but people don't need the gospel for that. People don't need to come here and hear God's word for that.

[26 : 50] But so people will see Jesus and so the question will come, what are we illuminating? What are we shining? What do people see? Because we are shining. Well, you will expose sin and evil in the world around you.

Some of you who go to work and you're not willing to cut the corners or you're not willing to fudge the deals and this kind of thing, your life, your light will reveal faulty and dishonest business practices in your industry.

And some people are not going to like you for it, but the Lord's honored by it. And others will be compelled to listen to what you have to say about Christ because he's made this difference in your life.

For you teenagers and kids that go to school day in and day out, if you're living for Christ and you're shining as the light of the world and what you're going to be revealing is gossip and careless talk.

I want you to know that when I went to Spartanburg to pastor at Philadelphia within the first six months, I got a call on a Sunday night and it was from a lady in our church but she was calling on behalf of her neighbor who was frantic and couldn't talk about anything at the moment and what had happened is this lady's little girl who was in the sixth grade had just hung herself and they wanted somebody to come talk to this family.

[28 : 16] And I can think of a hundred other people I know that would have been better at that than me but God called me to that place and what I found out as I talked to the family and as we listened and unraveled the knots and the cords of all this tragedy, what we found out was this little girl in sixth grade was being shamed and gossiped about and kind of ill-treated at school and this kind of thing.

And I don't see bullies behind every bush but something made this little girl so sad and so down on herself that in the sixth grade she hung herself.

And I wonder when you go to school guys, are you shining light on that stuff to where it's exposed and squelched or do you actually pour fire on those, pour gas on those fires?

Are you actually part of the problem with that? You know, it could be that you being the light of the world shines light on immoral living but whatever it is you will have the answer for escaping that slavish behavior.

People know that they're enslaved. They may not want to admit it but they know that they're enslaved. They're looking for somebody to lead them out of it and it could be that you're here this morning and you realize that these things are true of you.

[29 : 52] You do pour gas on the gossip. You are tied up in immoral living. You are guilty of improper and scandalous and dishonest business practices and it comes to your attention today that you are these things because you've never been redeemed.

You've never been let out of it. You've never been bought out of that sin and that's the message of the gospel this morning is that if you will turn from that sin and if you will turn to Christ and cry out to him for the forgiveness of your sin then he will buy you out.

And he will rescue you and give you hope for eternity. You'll help others grow in their faith. I just want to ask you a question.

You take a mental inventory right now. Do the people in your home, do the people in this church, do the people in your workplace or your school, are they growing in their understanding and faith in Christ because they're being around you?

If not, it might be that you're not really shining light on Jesus at all. You're shining Jesus on how to encourage other people to live better and that might make them feel better for a day or for a season but it won't last them for eternity.

[31 : 11] And then finally you'll see that people begin to follow Jesus because of your testimony, because of the light that you're willing to shine, because being rubbed into the fabric is a salty preservative of this culture.

And I want you to know that there is no greater experience in life than to lead somebody to Jesus. I hope every single one of you have had the opportunity to lead somebody to Christ.

But if you haven't, I want you to know that the day you got married, the day you retired from your job, the day your child was born, all those things pale in comparison.

And those are significant things. I've gone through every one of those except for the retirement. I've been through every one of those things. They're significant things but all those things pale in comparison to seeing a sinner cry out to Christ and receive new life in Jesus and hope for eternity. There is just nothing in the world like it. And this should be the natural result of us living our lives around those who are close to us.

[32 : 26] Jesus says it would have been terribly wasteful to light the lamp and to cover it up with a basket. People didn't do that. People had sense back then. People in my house leave lights on all the time.

They don't have any sense. In Jesus' day they had sense. When they lit the lamp they put it on the stand so that everybody in the house could see. And Jesus says this is the way that we should function in our culture.

Verse 16 says in the same way let your light shine before others so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven. Our very lives should function as a light that leads others to Jesus.

Furthermore when they witness our lives when they see our good works they shouldn't be saying attaboy patting Josh on the back.

That's not what they should be doing. Jesus says they need to see your good works and they need to see your life so that they will be compelled to give glory not to me not to us not to you but to God who is in heaven.

[33 : 38] So as we close this morning Keller has another thought that I like for us to think about as we close. He says Christians are attractive to and attracted to people who are not like them.

And I wonder if you are attractive to and attracted to people who are not like you.

Let's just unpack that for one second here. Are you attracted to people who are not like you? Do you long to be rubbed into the lives of those around you so that they can see Jesus and embrace him as their Lord and Savior?

You know when I first moved to Sedona I realized these people aren't like me. They don't talk like me. They don't think like me. They don't eat like me.

I really just don't even enjoy being around these people. You know they don't want to eat meat and they you know it's just tough some days right.

[34 : 48] But then the Lord just kind of broke my heart over and he said I didn't bring you here because all these people are like you. I brought you here because they're not like you. And I brought you here so that I could rub you and your family into the fabric of this culture so that they might see me and come to me for salvation.

Are you attractive to others because you shine brightly for Jesus? Not just because you're nice and easy going not because you like to have fun or tell funny jokes and this kind of thing but because you're committed to Jesus and reflecting him to those people.

You see my fear is is that the people in Pickens that are not sitting in this building today are not sitting in a building like this today. They're not sitting in a building like this today because they're not attracted to it.

And believe me I'm not saying that you need to bring in the smoke and the lights and all that garbage to get people come in. I'm talking about how you live your life on a daily basis before these people.

Do they look at you and scratch their head and say what in the world is different about that guy? Why is that gal so happy all the time? Are you attractive to others or have you or have you put them off because all you do is demean other people around you that aren't like you?

[36 : 27] Here's the truth. What you have to offer a hungry lost and dying world is infinitely more valuable than anything that all the social media influencers are peddling all put together.

People in our culture are longing to see change in their lives. They're desperate to be led to something that is better than this present. They deeply want to be led and I wonder this morning and this is what I'm asking you to do.

Will you commit to be a cultural influencer for the glory of Jesus Christ by being the salt and light that he has made you and called you to be?

Let's pray. Father God, we're thankful that you did not leave us in our sinful state, Lord, that when we didn't want to be pursued, when we weren't even concerned about being saved, Father, when we didn't even realize we were lost, you were coming after us.

We're thankful that you saved us by the blood of your son, Jesus Christ. And Lord, this morning, hopefully we've been reminded of just how significant that is and just how urgent it is for those around us in our culture.

[37 : 45] Lord, in our school, in our workplace, in our community, our neighborhoods, our ball fields, Lord, there are people that are desperately longing to be led and they're going to be led somewhere.

The question is whether or not we're going to be ready to lead them to the gospel. And so, Father, we ask you this morning to do your work in our hearts that we might realize where we are failing to be attracted to people that aren't like us.

Father, would you help us to tear down those barriers and would you help us to have a longing in our heart to be rubbed into the fabric of their life that they might know Christ and have hope for eternity?

And Lord, if there's anything in our life outside of the gospel of Jesus Christ and his glory that is pushing people away, Father, would you help us have the boldness and the courage to identify it and be honest about it?

Would you help us to have the strength to turn from it that we might be used mightily in these people's lives to draw them to Jesus? Father, only you can do this work in our lives.

[38 : 55] Only you can make us salty and use us as light. And we're asking you to do that. We're going to be faithful to be obedient in Jesus' name. Amen.

I'm going to ask Fred to come up and lead us as we go.