

CORE Seminar
Spring 2024
Sermon on the Mount
Course 3: Matthew 5:13-32

INTRODUCTION

Hey guys! Welcome back to our CORE Seminar – the Sermon on the Mount. Last week, we were in **Matthew 5:2-12** – better known as the Beatitudes. We went through those really quickly – but they were useful for us to define what it is to be a Christian AND to understand what the Christian life should look like to the world around us. The Beatitudes come to a climax with a clear hint that a conflict exists between the kingdom of God and the kingdoms of this world. Unfortunately, it seems that many Christians today overlook the significance of the Beatitudes in their lives – this is often evidenced by their public debates on social media – we mentioned that Christian Twitter/X is the worst.

Today, we’re going to be in **Matthew 5:13-30**. During our time, we’re going to transition out of the Beatitudes and into the “key” that will help us understand all of Jesus’ Sermon. But, before we open our Bibles and before we hit the next section of the Sermon – please read the quote below by John Stott, an Anglican minister.

QUOTE

“If the beatitudes describe the essential character of the disciples of Jesus, the salt and light metaphors indicate their influence for good in the world. Yet the very notion that Christians can exert a healthy influence in the world should bring us up with a start. What possible influence could the people described in the beatitudes exert in this hard, tough world? What lasting good can the poor and the meek do, the mourners and the merciful, and those who try to make peace not war? Would they not simply be overwhelmed by the floodtide of evil? What can they accomplish whose only passion is an appetite for righteousness, and whose only weapon is purity of heart? Are not such people too feeble to achieve anything, especially if they are a small minority in the world? It is evident that Jesus did not share this skepticism. Rather the reverse.”

- John Stott, *The Bible Speaks Today*

PRAYER

Naturally, the question needs to be asked,

- Can Christians exert a healthy influence in the world?
- Are Christians too feeble to achieve anything, especially if they are a small minority in the world?

At the time of the Sermon, the disciples weren't asking these kinds of questions. BUT, they seemed to be asking themselves these questions after the crucifixion, death and burial of Jesus. Jesus knew this – because He knew the hearts of men. His ministry to His disciples prepared them to take His gospel to the ends of the earth [**Matthew 28:18-20 & Acts 1:8**] and to face the difficulties this world throws at them. **John 16:33** all but promises that they would face difficulties in this world.

As you read through the main portion of the Sermon over the next two months, please keep this in mind. Just as Jesus was training His disciples, His Word is to train us be those called by Christ to exert a healthy influence in the world!

Have someone in your group read Matthew 5:13-16

A Christian's character – as described in the beatitudes – lead up to the Christian's influence we just read about in **Matthew 5:13-16**. Our influence on the world depends on our character.

QUESTION: So, what are the uses for salt and what are the uses for light?

Uses for Salt

- 1. Flavor enhancer**
- 2. Preservative**
- 3. Purifier**

Uses for Light

- 1. Illumination**
- 2. Health & growth**
- 3. Biblical symbol for truth**

Christian "saltiness" is the Christian character – as shown in the beatitudes. It is committed Christian discipleship revealed in our actions and our words. For effectiveness the Christian must retain his Christlikeness, as salt must retain its saltiness. "If Christians become assimilated to non-Christians and contaminated by the impurities of our culture, they lose

their influence. The influence of Christians in and on culture depends on their being distinct, not identical.”¹

As with our “saltiness,” if salt can lose its characteristic – then the light in us can become darkness [John 6:23]. But, we are to allow the light of Christ that exists in us to shine brightly to the world around us – “A city set on a hill cannot be hidden.” As Jesus’ disciples – both the ones we read about in the Gospels AND us – we are not to conceal the truth of Scripture OR the truth of what we are [transformed, regenerate disciples of Jesus Christ!]. Jesus is saying that we should be transparent enough to influence the world around us and for our transformation to be evident to everyone around us. Then people will see us and our good works, and then will glorify God for the work He has done in us.

I love how Paul puts this understanding [salt & light] in his own way in 2 Corinthians 5:17-21

Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold the new has come. All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to Himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. For our sake He made Him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God.

QUESTIONS: How does the message of this section flow naturally from the section we just read [particularly 5:10-12]?

Jesus uses the metaphors of salt and light to define the influence the citizens of His kingdom are to have on the world. Though in modern times, we think of salt primarily as a seasoning, in ancient times (before refrigeration was possible) it was valued primarily as a preservative. Considering this, what do you think it means for Christians to be the salt of the earth? What does the Christian community preserve?

In the natural world, light reveals what is hidden in darkness. It also causes things to grow. How should the citizens of Jesus’ kingdom have a similar effect on the world around them?

APPLY: Specifically, in what relationship or circumstance do you need to be salt? What causes you to hesitate rather than exercising influence as Jesus commanded?

- In what relationship or circumstance do you need to be light? What causes you to hesitate rather than exercising influence as Jesus commanded?

¹ John Stott, *The Message of the Sermon on the Mount*. Page 60.

Have someone in your group read Matthew 5:17-20

This short section really serves as the “key” to understand the entire Sermon. For this reason, it is critical that we spend some time on these 3 verses.

In **verse 17**, Jesus teaches that He did not, “**come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them.**” What He is referring to is the ENTIRE Old Testament. When He states that He didn’t come to “**abolish**” the Law or the Prophets, Jesus is saying that He didn’t come to throw the Old Testament away – why would He do that – it all points to Jesus the Messiah.

The word “**fulfill**” is used to communicate that Jesus came to fulfill the prophecy and teaching of the Old Testament. When He came, He brought all of the Old Testament to completion. And the fulfillment Jesus has in mind here in relation to the Old Testament is not simply external conformity to its commands, but rather a transformed heart that’s alive to God. This is what **Deuteronomy 30:6** has been calling for all along:

⁶ And the Lord your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your offspring, so that you will love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, that you may live.

In **verse 18**, Jesus goes all grammatical AND it’s really cool!

- Iota – is the smallest Greek letter and is pronounced like the small Star Wars character Yoda... so yota.
- The dot – is a reference to the Hebrew language. The Hebrew alphabet is made up of consonants. And the consonants formed together make the words. The “dot’s” refer to the vowels that are placed “around” the Hebrew consonants to form the vocabulary and tenses of the words.

So, when Jesus basically tells them that no matter what language – Jew or Gentile – that you read the law, it will be accomplished. And Jesus is the One who will fulfill and accomplish all that is in the Scriptures.

Last, He says that since He is fulfilling and accomplishing the Scriptures – then His hearers should spend some time KNOWING the Scriptures. He basically stated that they needed to be like the Pharisees and scribes – who studied the Scriptures constantly. Ironically, they did not recognize Jesus as the fulfillment of the Scriptures – but they still studied them.

So, to summarize, this section is so critical to understand all that Jesus teaches in the Sermon on the Mount because Jesus is the fulfillment of the ENTIRE Old Testament AND He accomplished everything that was said about Him in the Old Testament.

- As disciples of Jesus, we should spend time not only **reading** the Scriptures [which He fulfilled and accomplished] but we should **STUDY** the Scriptures [just like the Pharisees] so that we can know Him through His Word!

QUESTIONS: *Jesus begins addressing how His ministry relates to the law of the Old Testament. Why is this discussion important, considering Jesus' audience—both His disciples and those in the crowd who are listening?*

Look up the words “abolish” and “fulfill” in a dictionary/thesaurus and write definitions for them that best fit the way they are used in 5:17.

- *Abolish:*
- *Fulfill:*

Based on your understanding of His life and ministry, how does Jesus fulfill and accomplish the law?

Jesus' provocative statement in 5:20 introduces the next section of the text. What is the nature of the righteousness seen in the scribes and Pharisees? [Look at Jesus' words in Matthew 23:27-28 to help with your answer]

APPLY: In what ways are you tempted to “relax” the commands of God, particularly those that seem less important? Give two examples below. How does this behavior have a negative “teaching effect” on your fellow believers? On unbelievers who know you?

Have someone in your group read Matthew 5:21-30

²¹ “You have heard that it was said ... ²² But I say to you

²⁷ “You have heard that it was said, ... ²⁸ But I say to you

Six different times [we're covering the first 2 tonight and the others next week] in **Matthew 5:21-48** Jesus says, **“You have heard that it was said... but I say to you...”** The reason He speaks this way is because the Pharisees [great students of the Word terrible practitioners] had created all kinds of ingenious ways of working around the intentions of the Law and God's Word.

For example, they found ways to harbor bitterness and anger toward their neighbor – while remaining innocent in their own eyes with regard to murder. Jesus doesn't let them off the hook.

Another way they “worked around the system,” was they may have lusted after their neighbor's wife, BUT so long as they didn't commit adultery – then they felt themselves to be holy. Again, Jesus doesn't let them off the hook.

Now, it's easy for us to pile onto the Pharisees, but if we look at our lives – we may say:

- Well at least I've not murdered anyone!
- OR, at least I've not had an affair on my spouse!

Well, Jesus didn't let them off the hook and He doesn't let us off the hook either.

- If we have had anger in our heart towards our neighbor, Jesus says that we have murdered them.
- Or, if we have had lust in our heart then Jesus says that you have committed adultery!

In each case, Jesus teaches that we should have a heart of **repentance, reconciliation and remorse**.

- **Repentance**: Repent of your sin and turn away from it – don't return to it any longer.
- **Reconciliation**: As soon as we are conscious of a broken relationship, we must take the initiative to fix it – to apologize for the trouble we have caused to make amends. Scripture teaches that the sun should never “go down on our anger.” [Ephesians 4:26]
- **Remorse**: Last, Jesus teaches that if we continue to have a problem with lust, that we should “pluck out the eye... or cut off the limb and throw it away.”

QUESTION: *With regard to what the people had been taught, Jesus quotes or paraphrases passages from the Old Testament with the leading statement, “You have heard that it was said...” What does this statement imply about the faithfulness of the teaching they had received?*

- *Does Jesus' statement, “But I say to you...” imply that He is contradicting what they had been taught? Explain your answer.*

CONCLUSION & PRAYER