

Lesson 3: Righteousness- Matthew 5:13-20

In my encounter with non-Christians, I am often asked, “What advantage is there to being a Christian: What makes you Christians so important in this world? Why do you Christians have to be so different?” Our Lord answers these questions by telling all Christians that they are “the salt of the earth: and “the light of the world.” If this really be true, then there is no more important calling and position than that of a Christian!

In the Beatitudes we saw what a Christian is, but now we come to see what a Christian does. Or, putting it in another way, after realizing what we are, we must consider what we must be for Christ. Beatitudes deals with our character; salt and light with our influence in the world. What influence could those people mentioned in the Beatitudes have upon this hardened and divided world? What can the poor in spirit, the meek, mourners, merciful and peacemakers have on the world? Will they not be overwhelmed with the flood of evil? Where your weapons are only righteousness and a pure heart, what difference can we really make? Can such a feeble, minority really achieve anything?

You are the salt of the earth:” - - Jesus did not say that Christians should be the salt of the earth but that they are the salt of the earth. In order to understand what he means by this declaration it is important to explore how the various uses of salt can apply to our purpose as citizens of the Kingdom. Salt does its work by being brought into close contact with the thing which it is to work upon. It does its work silently, inconspicuously, gradually but you can always tell that it has been there because it changes everything it touches.

Seasoning: Salt is used for seasoning so as to bring out the taste in food.

- ❖ Christians bring flavor and meaning to life. In our pleasure-crazed culture, people are finding life dull and boring. No worldly pleasure can satisfy. Christians reveal to the world that life without Christ is tasteless and unsatisfying. Christians have the real meaning to life in Christ.

Cleaning Agent: Salt in Old Testament times was used or a cleansing agent. Apparently newborn infants were washed in brine.

- ❖ Christians have a cleansing effect on all the world as they bring the world the Water of Life, who is Jesus Christ, the Lord.

Healing Agent: Salt was used to heal wounds and, when applied, brought a biting sting.

- ❖ When Christians proclaim the message of judgment and the grace to the world, the most vulnerable areas of our lives are touched by the message of Christ that heals the wounds of sin.

Preservative: One of the main functions vent decay and putrefaction.

- ❖ The Bible clearly states that the world we live in is decaying because of sin, and the presence of Christians serves as a moral disinfectant in the world where moral standards are low, constantly changing, or non-existent.

Neutralizer: Salt was employed in Biblical times as a neutralizer in the soil. Farmers cast salt on the ground to stimulate growth.

- ❖ Christians are neutralizers against sin and Satan, and, through the proclaiming of Christ, there is spiritual fruit evidenced in lives that have been truly transformed.

... but if the salt loses its flavor, how shall it be seasoned? It is then good for nothing but to be thrown out and trampled underfoot by men.

- ❖ In Palestine there was an impure grade of salt, which was mixed with other minerals if it was exposed to the elements, especially water, the salt would be washed right out of it. It would look like salt, but the saltiness would be left out. If the cares of the world or any other sin come into the Christians life, then one's testimony for Christ is removed. The Christian becomes useless for God. I can think of nothing worse than to be useless and worthless for God.

"You are the light of the world." - - A Christian is a light because he is related to Jesus Christ who is the Light of the world (**John 8:12**). Christians reflect the light of Christ to all the world. The purpose of light to expose and dispel darkness.

- ❖ The Bible proclaims that the world is in a state of gross darkness, and an honest evaluation of the world would prove this to be true. The tragedy is that as our scientific and technological knowledge has increased our recognition of the moral and spiritual issues of eternal consequence continues to diminish.

John 3:19 reveals that the problem is sin and that men love darkness rather than light. Every problem in this world can be traced back to sin, selfishness and self-seeking. Because Christians are lights, they know and understand that the answer to the world's problems is to be reconciled back to a right relationship with God.

"A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden." -- If we fulfill our responsibility of shining as a light of hope and healing in dark world, it is impossible for the church to remain invisible.

Nor do they light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house. Jesus is saying that no one would intentionally take a lighted lamp and place it under a cover. This is a misuse of its intended purpose; therefore, if Christians fail to be a source of light to sin-darkened world they are misusing the purpose that the Lord has placed within them.

“Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.” – If indeed we have received the light of Jesus Christ as an act of our faith, we are commissioned to manifest our faith by doing good works, without seeking self-promotion or fame but as an opportunity to bring glory to God.

Application: To shine brighter you must spend time with the Lord. Here are some possible ways you can do this:

Prioritize morning devotions. The following are suggestions to consider:

- Pick a verse from your devotional time to meditate on throughout the day. It could be a verse about God’s character or an instruction about how to live.
- Practice a lifestyle of prayer. Throughout the day, make some time for quiet moments to pray to God expressing confession, thanksgiving, and praise.
- Set aside regular times for extended times of prayer when you will put aside all distractions and draw close to the Lord.
- Maintain a journal that documents answered prayer, unexpected blessings, dreams and spiritual inspiration rather than problems, complaints and disappointments

As illogical as it is, sometimes believers do not publicly profess their faith in front of others. Sometimes they are afraid of persecution. Sometimes they are afraid of being ridiculed. Sometimes they simply want to fit in with the others around them. Sometimes they are embarrassed because maybe they know they are not acting like believers. If you are sometimes in one of those groups, I want to tell you something today. It is sin. It is sinful to hide your faith. You don’t have to be afraid. You should follow the apostle Paul in **Romans 1:16** who said, *“I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ for it is the power of God.”*

I want each of you to think about a question. Do all of the people who are close to you, such as friends, relatives, co-workers, know that you are a believer? If not, why not? And if they do know you are a Christian because of your words, do they see the light of Christ in you? If you invited them to come with you to church would your life witness in front of them make them want to come with you or make them hesitate?

“Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill. Christ’s teachings were so radical, so revolutionary, so different from the typical Rabbis of his day that the people thought he had departed from the Old Testament Scriptures; however, Jesus fulfilled the Laws of the Prophets in three ways. He gave a proper interpretation of the Old Testament and its application to everyday living which freed it from all man-made traditions of legalism. Furthermore, he could not be condemned because he kept all the laws and commands perfectly. More importantly, he fulfilled all the Old Testament prophecies that were about him. If Jesus had destroyed the Old Testament, then he would have done away with the only source that really proved he was the Messiah.

18 For assuredly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, one ^[b]jot or one ^[c]tittle will by no means pass from the law till all is fulfilled. The jot was the smallest letter in the Hebrew alphabet, and the tittle is a part of one letter. This statement confirms that Jesus believed in the Old Testament as the absolute Word of God that is able to transcend who question its accuracy and relevance. Consider the following poem regarding the uncompromised Word.

*Century follows century - there it stands.
Empires rise and fall and are forgotten -- there it stands.
Atheists rail against it -- there it stands.
Kings are crowned and uncrowned -- there it stands.
Despised and torn to pieces -- there it stands.
Storms of hate swirl about it -- there it stands.
Profane, prayer less punsters caricature it -- there it stands.
The flames are kindles about it -- there it stands.
Higher Critics deny its claims to inspiration -- there it stands.
Infidels predict its abandonment -- there it stands.
Modernism tries to explain it away -- there it stands.
The arrows of hate are discharged against it -- there it stands.*

Whoever therefore breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches men so, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever does and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven.

If we truly believe that the Bible is inspired of God, then we have the awesome responsibility to pray for revelation and understanding of the Old Testament so that we can include it as we teach and preach the gospel of the Kingdom. Those who intentionally fail to do so will have to answer to God but those who correctly interpret the Scripture will be called great in the Kingdom of heaven.

All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work. II Timothy 3:16-17

For I say to you, that unless your righteousness exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven.

Pharisees were the spiritual leaders of their day; however, their religion was based on externals (traditions, man-made rules, etc.) and they thought themselves righteous before God because they kept these external laws; however, their hearts were far from God. They did not understand that salvation was by grace through faith. Faith leads us away from the practice of religion towards a personal relationship with Jesus Christ, which opens the door into the Kingdom of heaven.

Jesus Condemns the False Righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees

Matthew 23 [Passion Translation]

1 Then Jesus addressed both the crowds and his disciples and said,

2 “The religious scholars and the Pharisees sit on Moses’ throne^[a] as the authorized interpreters of the Law.

3 So listen and follow what they teach, but don’t do what they do, for they tell you one thing and do another.

4 They tie on your backs an oppressive burden of religious obligations and insist that you carry it, but will never lift a finger to help ease your load.

5 Everything they do is done for show and to be noticed by others. They want to be seen as holy, so they wear oversized prayer boxes on their arms and foreheads with Scriptures inside, and wear extra-long tassels on their outer garments.

6 They crave the seats of highest honor at banquets and in their meeting places.

7 And how they love to be admired by men with their titles of respect, aspiring to be recognized in public and have others call them ‘Reverend.



11 The greatest among you will be the one who always serves others from the heart.

12 Remember this: If you have a lofty opinion of yourself and seek to be honored, you will be humbled. But if you have a modest opinion of yourself and choose to humble yourself, you will be honored.”



23 “What sorrow awaits you teachers of religious law and you Pharisees. Hypocrites! For you are careful to tithe even the tiniest income from your herb gardens but you ignore the more important aspects of the law—justice, mercy, and faith. You should tithe, yes, but do not neglect the more important things.

24 Blind guides! You strain your water so you won’t accidentally swallow a gnat, but you swallow a camel.

25 “What sorrow awaits you teachers of religious law and you Pharisees. Hypocrites! For you are so careful to clean the outside of the cup and the dish, but inside you are filthy—full of greed and self-indulgence!

26 You blind Pharisee! First wash the inside of the cup and the dish, and then the outside will become clean, too.

²⁷ *“What sorrow awaits you teachers of religious law and you Pharisees. Hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs—beautiful on the outside but filled on the inside with dead people’s bones and all sorts of impurity.*

²⁸ *Outwardly you look like righteous people, but inwardly your hearts are filled with hypocrisy and lawlessness.*

