

Lighthouse: Bright and Salty
Matthew 5:13-16
September 16, 2017
Dan Hoffman

Hi, I'm Dan. And welcome back to Lighthouse.

Last week we started a series together looking at Jesus' Sermon on the Mount. Go ahead and grab the Bible from the pew or open the one on your device. We will be in Matthew chapter 5. If you are looking in the pew Bible that's page 683. This is where Jesus teaches us what it means to actually be His disciple.

And last week we looked a bit at what a disciple is – because this isn't a word we use that much today. A disciple followed a rabbi which is like a teacher. But we said the goal that rabbis had for their disciples a lot more like the goal I have when I eat oatmeal with my kids than it is like many teachers have for their students today. Can anyone remember the goal rabbis had for their disciples?

[Discuss]

So generally, teachers try to get their students to memorize information in order to spit it out on tests, the rabbis tried to inspire their disciples to live like they were living.

And this is Jesus' goal in the Sermon on the Mount. Memorizing the Bible is great, but Jesus' first goal is not simply that we know or even remember what He said, but that we live like He lived.

And so Jesus' Sermon on the Mount starts with Him giving 9 Beatitudes so we will know what it means to live like Him. So for example Jesus says "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." And these beatitudes describe people Jesus says win at life. And that's great, except when you actually look at them you realize they are the opposite of what the world expects winners to look like.

So the world thinks people who are rich and beautiful and smart and popular are the winners, but Jesus says nope – that's deceptive. The real winners are the poor in spirit, and the meek and the peace makers and even those who are persecuted because of righteousness. These are the lucky bums who win the kingdom! And Jesus says, "I would know, because I made this place!"

Now these 9 Beatitudes can be divided into three sections in which Jesus tells us three major things about His disciples – these are people who win the kingdom.

Can anyone remember one of the three sections the beatitudes are divided into?
[Discussion]

1.) The first four are Need beatitudes. They describe people who recognize how much they need God. They don't think they are better than everyone else, they know they are broken sinners who need a Saviour.

2.) The next three are Service beatitudes. These describe people who are willing to give the mercy they have received from God away to the people around them. So they recognize they haven't gotten what they deserve from God – and that's a good thing. And they treat people the way God has treated them.

3.) The final two beatitudes are Hurt Beatitudes. They describe people who are willing to suffer for their faith in Jesus.

And beatitude people look like Jesus. And this is what God wants for you – He wants you to look like Jesus.

Now there are a couple different possibilities as to why God would want us to live like Jesus. The first is that He just loves to see us suffer and fail. I mean, after being meek and poor instead of powerful, and being willing to suffer persecution isn't exactly something people get excited about.

And so a lot of people think God is a big ogre who gets a kick out of watching His creation squirm. He sets the standard impossibly high – just look like Jesus, that's all – and then when we don't meet it, He lashes out and punishes us.

But that isn't the God that Jesus tells us about in the Sermon on the Mount. Rather, Jesus paints us a picture of a loving designer who wants us to win.

So did anyone go home and download that Pound It app I demonstrated last week? Nobody?

People say there is an app for everything, but last week when I used a cell phone to pound a nail into a board the nail won. Now besides venting a little frustration there was a point to that. So turn to the person sitting beside you and ask them what was the point behind that phone thing?

[Discussion]

So what was the point behind that phone thing?

[Discussion]

So Jesus made us, and knows what kinds of apps we can run, and what will destroy us. And He wants what is best for us. And so in the Sermon on the Mount Jesus tells us how we need to live if we are going to win at life.

Now today we are looking at the next few verses in the Sermon on the Mount, so if you have Matthew chapter 5 open we are going to start in verse 13.

One more thing, as we get going here today I want to encourage you to take notes. There really is an app for this. Download Onenote or notepad and just make a reference to anything that stands out to you as we are going along.

I tell you this not because I'm a brilliant teacher, but because Jesus was a brilliant rabbi. And He wants us to learn how to win at life. So if you want to win it's worth paying attention. Take some notes.

Now who can stand up and read Matthew 5:13-16 for me?

[Read]

Now one thing we are going to see throughout the Sermon on the Mount is that the Jesus-Following life holds two things together that appear to be contradictory. So Jesus-Followers are both no different from anyone else, and totally different from everyone else. Everyone say "No different and totally different."

And without understanding how these two realities can be simultaneously true it is impossible to understand what Jesus is saying in this text.

Here's what I mean. We know that Christians are no different from anyone else because we are a bunch of sinners saved not because we deserve it, but by getting what we don't deserve. That's the "need" beatitudes. So real Christians aren't "holier than thou", we are just the same as thou. That's why Paul says

It is by grace you have been saved, through faith - and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God (Ephesians 2:8)

So we are the same as everyone else.

Now God changes us when He saves us. He doesn't leave us where we are. And that is a good thing. But we can't forget where we started. And so when we share our faith we don't do it by saying "hey pagans, become awesome like me, and then you can be a Jesus follower." Everyone starts following Jesus because they need Him, not because they deserve Him.

A bit ago a non-Christian friend of mine asked me if I had a problem with gay people. He knows I'm a Christian. He knows I believe the Bible, and he knows this is a hot button topic these days. So he asked me this, really trying to pick a fight. He expected me to take some kind of righteous high road and get judgmental.

But my response was: Look, the Bible tells us that we are all sinners. So I've got no judgment for someone who is gay any more than I've got of myself. The Bible says:

For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God... [and] the wages of sin is death. (Romans 3:23; 6:23)

So “yes” the Bible says homosexual action is sin, but it also says gossiping, telling lies, cheating on tests and for that matter any heterosexual sexual actions outside of marriage is sin. And I've happened to struggle with pornography for much of my Christian walk. So I'm not gay, but I'm just as bad a sinner as anyone else.

The point is it **doesn't** matter what your vice is – **we've all got a vice** – and we are all the same before God. We are sinners. In fact – the Bible says our righteousness – that's the good things we do – is as filthy rags before God. So God isn't even impressed when we help an old lady across the street or give money to charity. As far as earning God's approval goes everything we do might as well be sin.

...

So Jesus-followers are exactly the same as everyone else. We are sinners who need of God's forgiveness and don't deserve it.

But Christians are also totally different from everyone else. And this is because God is totally different from everything else. Theologians call this total difference “holiness” and it means that God is unlike everything else in the universe. So everything else is created – He alone is uncreated. Everything else is temporal – He alone is eternal. Everything else has a finite amount of energy – He alone is infinite, and on and on the list goes on – God is like nothing else.

And then the Bible tells us that this God who is unlike anything else lives within those who receive His grace and submit their lives to Him. 1st Corinthians tells Jesus-followers:

Don't you realize that all of you together are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God lives in you? (1 Corinthians 3:16 NLT)

Now anything can happen when the God of the universe starts living inside a person, but the big thing that happens is that He starts changing us to look like Him. And looking like God makes us totally different from everyone else.

That might mean you **don't** get excited about the same things you used to get excited about. When it's lunch at school, or you're at the water cooler at work, and people start joking about how drunk they got on the weekend or how they “got lucky”, you start to find you can't join in because you don't find that kind of conversation funny anymore – Jesus is doing something in your heart.

Or when the guy in front of you doesn't see that the light has turned green and just sits there – I love that. Or he doesn't shoulder check and cuts you off; instead of flipping the bird you start to have a different response. You aren't like you used to be.

Now Jesus doesn't change our actions – we still have free will. But as He gets into our lives He changes our desires so that we start wanting to change our actions. And the result is Christians are totally different from everyone else. Nobody else wants to look like Jesus, but Christians want to look like Jesus.

So look over to that great looking person beside you and ask them: How are Jesus-Followers both exactly the same, and totally different from everyone else? 2 minutes.

[Discussion]

Ok, let's see how Jesus unpacks this. Look with me at Matthew 5:13 and 14.

[Read Matthew 5:13 and 14]

Jesus uses two word-pictures here to describe His disciples: Jesus-Followers are the salt of the earth and the light of the world.

The first is a food picture. Jesus uses food to image the world and salt to image His disciples. Now I love food pictures, so being the culinary genius that I am I brought a fridge, and in the fridge is a sandwich that I made. Now I love sandwiches. There is just something brilliant about thinly sliced meat piled high and covered in cheese and vegetables between some freshly sliced bread. I could eat sandwiches every day.

I need a volunteer who thinks they can identify the content of a sandwich using only their olfactory glands – **that's your sense of smell**. I need a bit of a foodie.

[take rotten sandwich in plastic bag from fridge and open it with participants nose very close]

Alright, I need to tell you a little about this sandwich. It's been sitting in this fridge all week, but the fridge hasn't been plugged in. Sorry about that. (I can see it is going to become harder and harder for me to get volunteers as this goes on).

Okay, very briefly, in the first century salt had a couple different uses. Certainly it made food taste better just like it does today, but the primary purpose for salt in the first century was as a meat preservative. Meat goes bad in hot places, so people would rub salt into their meat to preserve its shelf life.

We don't do this too much because we have these real cool things called

refrigerators. So if Jesus was here today He might say “You are the refrigerator of the world.” Jesus’ point was that His disciples are the preserving element in the world – we keep the world from rotting. Or we are supposed to – we will come back to that.

The second thing Jesus says is “You are the light of the world.” Now lights in the first century did just what they do today, except they had no switches – they used lamps. But they served the same function. Lights enable us to see in the dark. So the world is like a room in your house at night time. And you are what enables people to see what needs to be seen.

So at my house my twin 4-year-olds have a nightlight in their room. But it’s for me, not them. So when I go into their room in the middle of the night to take them pee – you have to do that when you have kids – I can avoid stepping on Lego. And Jesus says “You are the light of the world.”

So turn to the person beside you and ask them – what does Jesus mean by calling Christians the salt and the light of the world?

[Discussion]

So Jesus says the world is a decaying and dark place. But My disciples have a purpose. They preserve what would decay, and they expose what is dangerous in the darkness. This is what My disciples are in the world.

But there is a warning here as well. Verse 13 says:

“But if the refrigerator is unplugged how can it refrigerate anything, it is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled.”

Jesus says it’s possible for Jesus-followers to be useless. Refrigerators can be unplugged, and salt, in the first century, could lose its saltiness. And that was because most of the salt came from the Dead Sea – which is right in the middle of Israel – and there are lots of impurities in it. And so the salt would become less salty with age. And when this happened it wouldn’t work as a meat preserver. And so it was good for nothing except to be thrown out and trampled.

Now keeping with the precedent of last week I was going to trample this refrigerator – it was going to be awesome. But this is Spencer’s fridge. And actually that was Spencer’s phone. And I want Spencer to like me, so we are just going to pretend that I fed it the boots – kapish?

So Jesus says the world is like meat, and you are the refrigerator = but you’d better be plugged in, and you are the light – but you’d better not be hiding under a bowl – because that’s useless, and I designed you to bless this place to the glory of God.

Now last week I told you about the city of Langley considering taking away the municipal tax exemption from churches because they weren't really doing much for the people of Langley.

This week I want to tell you about a group of Jesus-Followers that are doing something for their city. The church is called North Coast Church. It's in California, but when I heard about this group of Jesus followers I thought "this is a church that is seeking to bring the light of Christ into the city they are in."

So they have become a big church. But their big focus is small groups. And so while there are about 5000 people who attend North Coast, between 80-94% of them are involved in a weekly small group. So they have lots of groups.

Two weeks a month these groups do Bible study together, working through the passage of text that was covered the last Sunday. One week a month they do something fun together that they can invite their friends to. And then one week a month they go out, as a group, into the city and find a way to serve.

And each of these groups has chosen a different way that they serve the city of California on a monthly basis. Now what this amounts to is that their church averages 2 service projects a day, 365 days a year.

So some groups make meals for homeless people. Others play games with seniors at care homes. Others pick up garbage. Others help with gardening at non-profits around town. Some offer reading clubs for poor school districts. Some work with helping prostitutes and addicts get off the street. And on and on the list goes.

And by doing this they are seeking to be the refrigerator of the city – they want to preserve the city from decay. And they are seeking to be the light of the city. They show people what the difference is between living in the light and living in the darkness.

And the reason they want to do this is because of what Jesus says in verse 16:

[Read Matthew 5:16]

So at Lighthouse we are going to be starting some small groups modeled on this idea. We don't want to be a broken refrigerator. We don't to hide our light under a bowl. We want our good deeds to draw the city of Prince George to Jesus.

Now if you are involved in another church, and are part of their small groups we don't want you to come to ours. Be present where you are plugged in. But if you aren't involved, and you want to win at life like Jesus wants, then we want you to be part of this. Give yourself to being the salt and light of the city Jesus has put you in. Jared is going to have more information on this in a couple weeks. But if you want in then I've got a sign up sheet over on the prayer table that you can put your name and some contact information down on.

These are probably going to start up in October some time. We will keep you posted.

Alright, I'm going to pray for us pretty quick here which means the start up act is done and now we are heading into the main event – which is worship. And as I'm praying I'm going to invite Jared to come up to serve communion. You can come get ready for that now.

1.) Last week we said that communion is about expressing our need to God. It is saying Jesus, I need your gift of mercy. And so maybe you are thinking about how the witness of your salt and light has been a bit useless. And so you want to say Jesus I need what I don't deserve. You say you trample useless under your feet, but I'm asking for mercy. And I'm asking for you to make a difference in my life. Come and change me. Jesus does that kind of thing. And He can do that work in you as you take communion.

Or maybe you've never been the salt and light of the world because you've never been forgiven by Jesus and filled with His Spirit. If this is you today, and you recognize you are a sinner who needs a Saviour, then as you come to this meal tell Jesus "I need you, I want to look like You. I want You to use me to shine Your light into this city." He will meet you where you are and become your Saviour.

2.) After you've taken communion if you want to pray and pledge your life to Jesus you can do that over to the side. If you want someone to pray with you someone will be there. If you want to just pray by yourself you can do that too.

3.) And if you want to tell Jesus "You are more important than money to me" you can give over there to the side as well. We've got a debit and credit machine, and everything you give over \$10 can be tax deductible if you want it to be.

4.) And while all this is going on we are going to be expressing worth to God in song.

[Pray]