



THE COMPASS

RED HILL LUTHERAN CHURCH

The Compass:

Encounter-Exam Sermon Series: "Matthew's Messiah." The Gospel of Matthew.

(Epiphany, 2026)

"Salt and Light." *Matthew 5.13-20.*

□ Day #1—Monday, February 9th. Read: Matthew 5.13. —Encounter: God's Word and your life—What do you Hear and/or See?

Last week, we focused on the beginning of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount, and His introducing the sermon with nine beatitudes that detail the upside-down nature of the blessings that come from the Kingdom of God. These promised blessings are God's gracious gifts to those who repent of their sins and trust Christ for righteousness. Only after Jesus has assured His disciples of God's *goodness to them*, does He *call on them*, in the rest of His sermon, to *be good* and *do good*. When we recognize our own spiritual poverty, when the Lord leads us to hunger and thirst for God's righteousness, when He makes us pure in heart so that we seek to worship only the true God, then we are blessed, now and forever! In verse 13, Jesus begins to describe the *purpose* of discipleship, using metaphors that would be understandable in His day. First, *salt*. Below, we list what actual salt does and what spiritual interpretations and applications there could be for the disciple of Jesus. In the ancient world, salt functioned as a...

- Seasoning. (Believers are to enhance life and meaning in life)
- Preservative. (Believers affirm and work for what is true and right)
- Purifier. (Believers confront and seek to change that which brings decay and death in this world).

Jesus said His disciples (you) are the "salt" of the *earth*. The Greek word defined as "earth" is γῆς (*gēs*), meaning literally "land" or "soil." The disciples of Jesus are to be in their everyday lives, what literal salt was (is) to everyday "earth." Conversely, what happens when the church (a Christian) ceases to be what we are called to be? We are, according to Jesus, *foolish!*

Jesus' phrase, "lost its taste" is one word in Greek: μωραίνομαι (*mōrainomai*): "Foolish" "Absurd" ("Moronic") (i.e. "Tasteless"). Jesus adds that "tasteless" salt should be thrown out because of its uselessness. Commenting on the many uses of salt in Jesus' day, D.A. Carson explains...

Above all, salt was used as a preservative. Rubbed into meat, a little salt would slow decay. Strictly speaking salt cannot lose its saltiness; sodium chloride is a stable compound. But most salt in the ancient world derived from salt marshes or the like, rather than by evaporation of salt water, and therefore contained many impurities. The actual salt, being more soluble than the impurities, could be leached out, leaving a residue so dilute it was of little worth. In modern Israel savorless salt is still said to be scattered on the soil of flat roofs. This helps harden the soil and prevent leaks; and since the roofs serve as play grounds and places for public gathering, the salt is still being trodden under foot.¹

Consider/Reflect: Luther: "What [Jesus] calls 'good works' here is the exercise, expression, and confession of the teaching about Christ and faith...Shining is the real job of believing or teaching, by which we also help others to believe" (*Luther's Works: American Edition*: 21:65).

□ Day #2—Tuesday, February 10th. Read: Matthew 5.14-16. —Examine: The Text and its

Jesus now turns to *light*. "Light" in Scripture, illustrated God's truth and direction in the world, even Jesus Himself! As Jesus will reveal in the *Sermon on the Mount*, the truths and values of the Kingdom of God, when believed and practiced, brings *life* and *light* to the world. "Since Jesus is the Light of the world (John 8:12; 9:5), so also his followers should reflect that light. Like lights from a city illuminating the dark countryside or a lamp inside a house providing light for all within it, Christians must let their good works shine before the rest of the world so that others may praise God."² The purpose of shining the light of the Kingdom is to do good and, importantly, *bringing glory* to our Heavenly Father!

¹ *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, F. E. Gaebelein Ed (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1984).

² C. Blomberg. *Matthew* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1992).

...the two images of salt and light...each is essential but has its necessary effect on its environment only if it is both distinctive from it and yet fully involved in it. So disciples must function in society as an alternative and challenging community. It is by their visible goodness that they will bring glory to the God who has made them so....Either of the main functions of *salt*, as flavor or as preservative, fits the image. The rabbis used salt as a symbol for wisdom (*loses its saltiness* is literally, “becomes foolish”). [The “light of the world” image is of a brightly lit city on a hill-top, representing the corporate effect of the combined “lights” of individual disciples.³

We are God’s instruments created for a purpose; to both proclaim the joy and meaning of living according to the Kingdom of God in our world and to point to the source of this joy and meaning: Jesus! In the rest of the sermon, through Matthew 7, Jesus will describe how we can be the “salt and light” in this world.



Consider/Reflect: Look at the picture above of Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount. What do you see/notice? Can you picture yourself sitting at Jesus’ feet? You do!

□ **Day #3—Wednesday, February 11th. Read: Matthew 5.17-18. –Explore: The background to this text(s).**

Jesus makes clear that He is not ignoring or contradicting God’s law, rather, Jesus is both preserving the *intention* of God’s law, as well as fulfilling the *purpose* of the divine law. As Craig Blomberg describes, Jesus’ fulfilling of the law brings the “law to its intended goal. This is what the Pharisees and scribes have missed, who therefore need a greater conformity to God’s standards (v. 20). Both the Law and the Prophets together (v. 17) and the Law by itself (v. 18) were standard Jewish ways of referring to the entire Hebrew Scriptures (our Old Testament).”⁴

Jesus’ mission was not to abolish...[the]...“Law or the Prophets”... the Scriptures.... [But, rather]...Jesus fulfills the Law and the Prophets in that they point to him, and he is their fulfillment...the passage before us insists that just as Jesus fulfilled OT prophecies by his person and actions, so he fulfilled OT law by his teaching. In no case does this “abolish” the OT as canon, any more than the obsolescence of the Levitical sacrificial system abolishes tabernacle ritual as canon. Instead, the OT’s real and abiding authority must be understood through the person and teaching of him to whom it points and who so richly fulfills it.⁵

In v.18, Jesus affirms the divine nature of the law and the law’s absolute authority and truth. Jesus’ often repeated assurance, “For truly I tell you...” is literally in Greek, ἀμὴν (*amen*): “Amen, I tell you.” This was a way of beginning a teaching or saying that implied *distinctive authority*. Nothing, Jesus assures, will be omitted from the law. As Craig Evans notes:

The smallest letter or stroke (lit. “one yota or one serif”) refers to the Hebrew letter *yod*, which as a consonant makes either a *y* sound or a *j* sound (often it is *j* in English, but *y* in Hebrew, German, and other European languages), and the

3 D.A. Carson, R.T. France, J.A. Motyer, and G.J. Wenham, Eds.. *New Bible Commentary* (Downers Grove, Illinois: Inter-Varsity Press, 1994).

4 Blomberg, *Matthew*.

5 F. E. Gaebelein, Ed. *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary: Matthew, Mark, Luke* (Zondervan Publishing House, 1984).

small strokes that distinguish similar letters from one another (such as distinguishing *b* from *t* or *d* from *r*). The logic is that if the smallest letter and the tiniest mark will not pass away, then one may be sure that the major teaching of the Law will not either.⁶

Consider/Reflect: “Jesus fulfilled the law and proved to be the perfect God-man, who is therefore able to become the means of our justification or right standing with God. Therefore, we are not under the law as a means of gaining salvation. At the same time, Jesus is the interpreter of the law, showing what is binding principle and what is temporary symbolic ritual. Jesus demonstrates that the entire Old Testament hangs on love for God and neighbor.”⁷

□ **Day #4--Thursday, February 12th. Read: Matthew 5.19.— Explore: The background to this text(s).**

Jesus deepens His assurances of the truth and necessity of the divine Law by issuing a challenge to those who would teach that God’s law was no longer applicable in the lives of God’s people. According to J. Nolland, Jesus moves “from a statement of Jesus’ role vis-à-vis the Law to a statement of how things stand with regard to the permanence of the Law (in the purposes of God) and to a statement focused on the willful behavior of individuals and its consequences.”⁸ What exactly is Jesus referring to as “these” commandments? According to C.E. Arnold:

The rabbis recognized a distinction between “light” and “weighty” Old Testament commandments and advocated obedience to both. Light commandments are those such as the requirement to tithe on produce (cf. Lev. 27:30; Deut. 14:22), while weighty commandments are those such as profaning the name of God or the Sabbath or matters of social justice (Ex. 20:2–8; Mic. 6:8). Rabbi Simlai stated that “613 commandments were revealed to Moses at Sinai, 365 being prohibitions equal in number to the solar days of the year, and 248 being commands corresponding in number to the parts of the human body.”⁹

Craig Keener adds...

Later rabbis decided that the greatest commandment was honoring one’s father and mother, and the least, respecting a mother bird; they reasoned that both merited the same reward, eternal life (based on “life” in Ex 20:12; Deut 22:7). A modern reader might ask, What happens to the person who breaks one and keeps another? But such a question misses the point of this hyperbolic language which other Jewish teachers also typically used to say, “God will hold accountable anyone who disregards even the smallest commandment.”¹⁰

Consider/Reflect: “Jesus’ kingdom teaching focused first on values and then on the behaviors through which values are expressed....In this sermon Jesus began (Matt. 5:17–20) by explaining that His teaching is not contrary to Old Testament Law. It is intended to “fulfill it.” That is, Jesus would explain the Law’s true meaning.”¹¹

□ **Day #5— Friday, February 13th. Read: Matthew 5.20.—Explore: The background to this text(s).**

Our text ends with a rather startling statement from Jesus! The righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees in the time of Jesus was well known. The Pharisees were a sect within Judaism that was scrupulous in their understanding and obedience to the law, as well as the Rabbinic traditions of their “elders.” (For example, see *Mark* 7.3, 5). The Sadducees, conversely, were the more aristocratic sect, and generally adhered only to the five books (Law) of Moses, or, the *Torah*. As far as the general *populace*, the

...Pharisees were also popular with the people and respected for their piety. They tithed meticulously, were careful about ritual purity, and at least during the dry season, they often fasted twice a week. The term for “teachers of the law” [Sadducees]...can refer even to executors of legal documents in villages, but in the Gospels it normally refers to those who were literate and formally trained in the Law of Moses, often teaching others the law. Jesus’ words are again designed to shock his hearers, since Pharisees and teachers of the law would be among the people most respected for piety. But Jesus demands a deeper form of righteousness...¹²

What is Jesus demanding here? The term, “righteousness,” comes from the Greek word, δικαιοσύνη (*dikaíosynē*), which variously means “to be put right with” (i.e. a proper relationship) from which follows “right actions” or “right practices.” What Jesus has just illustrated, and what He will teach in the rest of the *Sermon on the Mount*, is that disciples are only able to live and

6 C. A. Evans and C. A. Bubeck, Eds, *The Bible Knowledge Background Commentary* (Colorado Springs, Colorado: David C Cook, 2004).

7 C.A. Beetham and N.L. Erickson, Eds. *The NIV Application Commentary on the Bible* (Zondervan Academic, 2024).

8 J. Nolland. *The Gospel of Matthew: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press, 2005).

9 C.E. Arnold. *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary: Matthew, Mark, Luke* (Zondervan, 2002).

10 C.S. Keener. *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament* (InterVarsity Press, 1993).

11 L.O. Richards. *The Teacher's Commentary* Wheaton, Illinois: Victor Books, 1987).

12 C.S. Keener and J.H. Walton, Eds. *NIV Cultural Backgrounds Study Bible: Bringing to Life the Ancient World of Scripture* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 2016).

relate according the truths and values of the Kingdom of Heaven (God), through a *right-relationship (righteousness) with God*! In other words, God's grace and mercy are the source and power of our obedience. "True righteousness is the result of a right relationship with Jesus. Good works are a fruit of faith in Him (Eph 2:8–10), something that most scribes and Pharisees did not possess."¹³

This verse dispels any suspicion of legalism which v. 19 might have raised. The *scribes* (professional students and teachers of the law) and *Pharisees* (members of a largely lay movement devoted to scrupulous observance both of the Old Testament law and of the still developing legal traditions), whose obedience to 'the least of these commandments' could not be faulted, do not thereby qualify for *the kingdom of heaven* (whereas the disciple who relaxes the commandments does belong to it, though as the 'least'). What is required is a greater *righteousness*... a relationship of love and obedience to God which is more than a literal observance of regulations. It is such a 'righteousness' which fulfils the law and the prophets (v. 17)...¹⁴

Consider/Reflect: "The scribes and Pharisees read and study the Law and the Prophets. They accept the fact that "Scripture cannot be broken" (Jn 10:35), but they do not believe that Jesus is the fulfillment of the Scriptures (cf Jn 5:39). They seek to achieve righteousness by keeping the Law, for which they have a high regard. But Jesus goes on to point out just how defective their righteousness really is (vv 21–48). 'Christ takes the Law into His hands and explains it spiritually' (*Formula of Concord Solid Declaration V 10*). When judged by the true intent of God's Law, our righteousness is likewise defective. Only in Christ do we have true righteousness. [Pray]: Jesus, when I read and study the Scriptures, help me to see my sin and to see You, my Savior. Amen."¹⁵

□ **Day #6-Saturday, February 14th. Read: Psalm 112.—Embrace: God and His guiding you through His Word.**

Today we use the *Daily Order of Prayers* from *Luther's Small Catechism*. Read and mediate on Psalm 112 and...:

"[M]ake the sign of the Holy Cross and say: In the name of the Father and of the Son + and of the Holy Spirit. Amen. Then, kneeling or standing, repeat the Creed and the Lord's Prayer:

I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth. And in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord; who was conceived by the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary; suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead, and buried; He descended into hell; the third day He rose again from the dead; He ascended into heaven, and sitteth on the right hand of God the Father Almighty; from thence He shall come to judge the quick and the dead. I believe in the Holy Ghost; one holy Christian Church, the communion of saints; the forgiveness of sins; the resurrection of the body; and the life everlasting. Amen.

Our Father, which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy Name. Thy Kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, As it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses, As we forgive them that trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, But deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory, forever and ever. Amen.

(Depending on the time of day, pray the prayers below):

(Morning) I thank you, my heavenly Father, through Jesus Christ, Your dear Son, that You have kept me this night from all harm and danger; and I pray that You would keep me this day also from sin and every evil, that all my doings and life may please You. For into Your hands I commend myself, my body and soul, and all things. Let Your holy angel be with me, that the evil foe may have no power over me. Amen.

(Afternoon/Evening) I thank you, my heavenly Father, through Jesus Christ, Your dear Son, that You have graciously kept me this day; and I pray that You would forgive me all my sins where I have done wrong, and graciously keep me this night. For into Your hands, I commend myself, my body and soul, and all things. Let Your holy angel be with me, that the evil foe may have no power over me. Amen.¹⁶

Consider/Reflect: "Paul quotes v 9 in 2 Corinthians 9:9, the great stewardship chapter. The fear of the Lord leads us in the wisdom of generosity and contentment. [Pray]: O Lord, give us a firm heart to trust in You, subduing our selfish nature in repentance and reviving us in Your righteousness. Amen."¹⁷

13 *The Lutheran Study Bible* (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2009). .

14 R.T. France. *Matthew: An Introduction and Commentary* (InterVarsity Press, 1995).

15 *The Lutheran Study Bible*.

16 Martin Luther. "Luther's Small Catechism." Taken from, *The Lutheran Study Bible*. (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2009).

17 *The Lutheran Study Bible*.