

SESSION 4

True Righteousness

MATTHEW 5:13-20,43-48

JESUS DEFINES WHAT IT MEANS TO LIVE IN HIS KINGDOM.



A new phenomenon over the last fifteen years has been the advent of social media influencers. In fact, the term “influencer” was not added to the *Merriam-Webster Dictionary* until 2019. These “influencers” on the internet produce interest in a variety of products and ideologies. This approach to marketing has a value of well over \$20 billion dollars. Some of these influencers have become folk heroes to many internet users.

WHO ARE SOME SOCIAL MEDIA INFLUENCERS YOU ARE AWARE OF?
ARE YOU ABLE TO IDENTIFY WAYS THAT YOU HAVE BEEN IMPACTED
BY THESE INFLUENCERS?

UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

Matthew 5–7 make up what is normally called the Sermon on the Mount. In many ways, this set of teachings was for the disciples only. Jesus was teaching them what it meant to follow Him. In fact, Matthew 5:1-2 states specifically that Jesus left the crowds and ascended a hill or mountain. Once seated, His disciples gathered around Him and He began teaching them concerning how one is to live as a follower of Jesus.

Chapter 5 begins with what is familiarly known as the Beatitudes (vv. 3-12). These eight statements speak of how fortunate the followers of Jesus are when they find themselves in a variety of situations because of their faith in Jesus. These are eight attitudes that Jesus described as worthy of congratulations. There is a promise attached to each of the Beatitudes.

Jesus was saying to His disciples, “If you are going to follow Me, this is what your life will look like.” He spoke of what makes His followers distinct from the rest of the world. This would include the reality of facing persecution as a follower

of Christ. Also included was being difference-makers by being salt and light in the world (vv. 13-16).

Chapter 5 closes with Jesus’s teachings regarding His followers’ relationship to the Old Testament law (vv. 17-48). The law of Moses in the Old Testament and the New Testament teaching regarding our freedom from the law are not at odds. Jesus is the key to interpreting both. He came to fulfill Old Testament law. God’s standards of holy living did not change with the coming of Jesus. However, the stipulations of the law found their deeper meaning in Christ. In fact, Jesus called for a higher standard of living from those who follow Him (v. 20).



13 “You are the **salt of the earth**. **A** But if the salt should lose its taste, how can it be made salty? It’s no longer good for anything but to be thrown out and **trampled** **B** under people’s feet.

14 You are the **light of the world**. **C** A city situated on a hill cannot be hidden. **15** No one lights a lamp and puts it under a basket, but rather on a lampstand, and it gives light for all who are in the house. **16** In the same way, **let your light shine** **D** before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven. **17** Don’t think that I came to abolish **the Law or the Prophets**. **E** I did not come to abolish but to fulfill.

18 For truly I tell you, until **heaven and earth pass away**, **F** not the smallest letter or one stroke of a letter will pass away from the law until all things are accomplished. **19** Therefore, whoever **breaks** **G** one of the least of these commands and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven. But whoever does and teaches these commands will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. **20** For I tell you, unless your righteousness surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never get into the kingdom of heaven. [. . .] **43** You have heard that it was said, Love your neighbor and hate your enemy. **44** But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, **45** so that you may be children of your Father in heaven. For he causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. **46** For if you love those who love you, what reward will you have? Don’t even the tax collectors do the same? **47** And if you greet only your brothers and sisters, what are you doing out of the ordinary? Don’t even the Gentiles do the same? **48** **Be perfect**, **H** therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.”

A. In Jesus’s day, salt was used for seasoning and preservation. Likewise, believers hinder corruption in society.

B. Salt mixed with impurities was worthless. Likewise, a compromised faith is spiritually impotent and can’t make an impact on culture.

C. A metaphor for the disciples’ visible, transformative presence in a dark world. Believers are called to reflect the one true “Light of the world” (John 8:12).

D. Believers shine through their “good works.” We do not receive salvation by works, but we do reveal our salvation through works.

E. The “Law” refers to the Torah, the first five books of our Bibles. The “Prophets” include the historical books, along with the Major and Minor Prophets.

F. Jesus affirmed the eternity of God’s Word. Even when all creation passes from the scene, the authority and power of God’s Word will remain (Ps. 119:152; Matt. 24:35; 1 Pet. 1:25).

G. The Greek word can mean “loosen” or “release.” Jesus was warning His listeners against discounting or disregarding God’s words.

H. Not sinless, but complete and mature. This is a call to ongoing growth toward Christlikeness.

EXPLORE THE TEXT

1. Influence Your Culture

(Matt. 5:13-16)

Kingdom people make a positive impact on the world for God's glory.

- **What makes salt and light good illustrations for faith?**
- **What happens when believers serve as salt and light in the world?**

2. Obey Your Father

(Matt. 5:17-20)

Kingdom people find genuine satisfaction and purpose by keeping God's commands.

- **When have you been accused of something that wasn't true?**
- **How can followers of Jesus impact society?**

3. Love Your Enemies

(Matt. 5:43-48)

Kingdom people reflect their heavenly Father by loving their enemies.

- **What was so revolutionary about Jesus's teaching in these verses? What makes it difficult for us today?**
- **What are some obstacles to loving our enemies?**

Apply the Text

- **Discuss with your Bible study group ways you can work together to extend Christ's love to people not being reached by your church. This could include the homeless, refugees, impoverished, and internationals living in your community. How could your group influence the lives of these people?**

KEY DOCTRINE:

Evangelism and Missions

It is the duty of every child of God to seek constantly to win the lost to Christ by verbal witness undergirded by a Christian lifestyle, and by other methods in harmony with the gospel of Christ. (See John 20:21; 1 Thessalonians 1:8.)

BIBLE SKILL:

Use multiple Scripture passages to understand a major doctrine.

Read Matthew 5:20,44-45 and highlight the terms "righteous" and "righteousness." Scribes and Pharisees thought righteousness was achieved rather than received. To understand righteousness, read how the following verses answer these questions: What is the source of righteousness? (1 Cor. 1:30; 2 Cor. 5:21; Gal. 2:21) How do people become righteous? (Rom. 3:22; 4:3-5) How can believers demonstrate righteousness? (Rom. 6:13-20).

TALK IT OUT

Focus on Matthew 5:20, noting the requirement for entering the kingdom of heaven.

The Pharisees were considered the most righteous people imaginable. They tried to separate themselves from all forms of sin and dedicated themselves to doing what God commanded. Jesus told His followers that their righteousness must surpass that of the Pharisees if they hoped to enter the kingdom of heaven.

Does your righteousness surpass that of the Pharisees? Explain.

Jesus's statement about needing to surpass the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees would have shocked His listeners. What they didn't understand was that no one is able to attain God's requirement of perfect righteousness. The only way we can get into the kingdom of heaven is to depend on Jesus's perfect righteousness, permanently given to the believer at the moment of conversion (2 Cor. 5:21). We need the righteousness that comes from God as a gift through faith in Jesus.

Discuss what this verse tells us about a works-based approach to salvation.

Place Matthew 5:20 on your phones or on cards and agree to memorize it together.

Prayer Requests / Notes

DAILY EXPLORATION



Day 1: Matthew 5:13

Consider how believers function as salt in society.

When Jesus declared that His followers are “the salt of the earth,” He was using a familiar commodity. Salt was a valuable substance, often traded as a part of transactions for goods and services. To say that Jesus’s followers were the salt of the earth pointed to their value in the world.

In Jesus’s day, the primary use of salt was for preservation. Lacking refrigeration, salting meat was essential to preserving it. Salt prevented its spoilage. Jesus understood that the culture was corrupt with moral decay. The presence of His followers would add preservatives to the world to stop corruption.

There was the possibility, though, that a follower of Jesus might fail in the task of being salt in the world. Jesus introduced a conditional statement: “if the salt should lose its taste.” Chemically, it is impossible for salt to lose its salty taste, but it can be “defiled.” This is a more literal translation of the statement. As salt becomes diluted and polluted, the result is that it becomes worthless as a preservative. It becomes good for nothing but to be thrown out and trampled under people’s feet. We cannot allow society to pollute and dilute our influence as followers of Jesus. To do so is to become worthless in changing the culture.

In what ways are you functioning like salt in the world?



Day 2: Matthew 5:14-16

Compare Matthew 5:16 to John 8:12.

Jesus told His followers: “You are the light of the world.” In John 8:12, Jesus said “I am the light of the world.” Followers of Jesus reflect His light. Light brings illumination. Christ followers are to shine truth into the world’s darkness. Our purpose is to shine—not to be hidden.

Jesus reinforced this word picture by pointing out that many towns were built on the summit or side of a hill where they could be seen from a distance. They were visible by day, and the light from every home would make the cities visible at night. These cities shining on the hill could not be hidden. Those who follow Jesus are clearly visible. People see our actions and hear our words.

A light is not meant to be hidden under a basket. Through this analogy, Jesus taught that His followers must not isolate from society. Instead, we are to be influencing society by reflecting Jesus into the world’s darkness.

Light that is hidden loses its ability to illumine. Jesus directed His followers to let their light shine before others. When disciples allow the light of Jesus to shine through, their good (attractive) works bring glory to God. To give glory to God involves honoring God with praise and acknowledging how great He is. As followers of Christ shine their light, making Him more visible to others, God is glorified.

What “dims” your light? How could your light shine brighter?



Day 3: Matthew 5:17-20

Reflect on how Jesus fulfilled the law.

Verse 17 is a watershed teaching. Here was the divide between the self-righteousness practiced by the scribes and Pharisees and the righteousness proclaimed by Jesus. Much of the “law” of the Pharisees was man-made traditions for which Jesus had little use. Because of His disdain for these traditions, He was accused of wanting to abolish the law. Jesus, however, told His disciples that He hadn’t come to “set aside” the law. Instead, He came for the purpose of bringing the law to its intended goal.

The law was God’s absolute basis for truth and morality. Jesus didn’t teach anything contrary to those absolutes. They are applicable for all time. He came to fulfill the law—that is, to complete the purpose of the law. That purpose was to show people their sinfulness and need for a Savior.

“Until heaven and earth pass away,” God’s Word will remain authoritative. Jesus emphasized this by pointing to the smallest parts of the alphabet. Not even the smallest detail would be erased from God’s law until all things are accomplished.

Jesus said that entrance into the kingdom of heaven would require greater righteousness than that of scribes and Pharisees. Their righteousness was a self-achieved righteousness. Jesus pointed out that whatever could be accomplished through self-effort would never be sufficient. His followers needed a different righteousness that comes as a gift from God through faith.

Why must your righteousness surpass the righteousness of the Pharisees? How can it?



Day 4: Matthew 5:43-45

Underline “love your enemies.”

In Matthew 5:21-48, Jesus pointed to six Old Testament commandments. The command to “love your neighbor” is from Leviticus 19:18. The second part of Jesus’s statement, “hate your enemy,” was added by the scribes and Pharisees. Hating your enemy is easy. No wonder the Pharisees and scribes thought they were righteous. They could keep their traditions and convince themselves they were fulfilling the demands of God’s law.

Jesus called His followers to a higher standard: “love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.” The culture and traditions of the day taught the opposite. In the Greek text, the pronoun *I* in the phrase “I tell you” is emphatic to contrast God’s law against the man-made teachings of the day.

The word *love* (*agape*) is love that puts the needs of another ahead of personal needs. It is the highest form of love that God demonstrated when He gave His Son for us.

Jesus was aware that this new, radical lifestyle He was teaching to His followers would illicit persecution. Thus, He called for prayer for “those who persecute you.” In doing so, the disciple would be putting the entire situation in God’s hands.

Following Jesus as disciples means following God’s example of loving others. It is by our love that we show the world we are followers of Christ (John 13:35).

What are some obstacles you face in loving your enemies?



Day 5: Matthew 5:46-48

Highlight verse 48.

The scribes and Pharisees thought they were righteous before God because they loved their neighbors. But they defined “neighbors” as those whom they liked and got along with. Thus, they were no different than the people whom they loathed—tax collectors. This group of people were hated because they worked with Rome to inflict misery on the Jewish people. Jesus’s followers were to treat those perceived as enemies or persecutors in a different way—by unselfishly looking out for their needs.

To greet only those to whom you are close wasn’t anything to be applauded. Even those who are not followers of God do that. Jesus said to His disciples that their ways needed to be different than the world’s ways.

The new standard Jesus called His followers to follow was nothing less than being perfect the way God is perfect. This does not mean we must be sinless. Instead, the word is better understood as “complete” or “mature.” This was a challenge to grow in godly character. Again, Jesus was speaking about the personal righteousness of those who follow Him. Be better than the self-righteous Pharisees; be like God.

What does being “perfect” as God is perfect look like in your life?

APPLY THE TEXT

Think about your circle of family, friends, neighbors, and acquaintances. In what ways could you serve this week as a positive influence in their situation? Choose one person and work specifically to meet a particular need in their life.

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