

Following The Way Of The Kingdom: Studies in the Sermon on the Mount

**First Methodist Church of Tulsa
Fall 2025**

***Session 3: Responsibilities of Kingdom Life (Matthew 5:13-16)
September 17, 2025***

Matthew 5:13

In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.

1. What challenges you most about the call to repentance? What about the turn from what the world calls blessed to what God calls blessed?

2. What role does faith play in the regular course of your day? What are the struggles you face to see Christ live your life apart from your daily disciplines?

3. What do you think would make you more aware of God's presence and power in the moment to moment of living?

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Now that we've established what the blessed life of the kingdom of the heavens looks like, the next section we're going to tackle is what our role as blessed people is supposed to look like in the context of this world. We all have lives that include waking up, eating, going to work (and I know retired people are often as busy as those with 9-5 jobs; so are stay at home moms, etc.), coming home, dealing with whatever you deal with in the evenings, and going to bed. Where does the kingdom of the heavens fit into that?

The big picture here is that if we've experienced a repentance that shifts our worldview from the kingdom of this earth (Satan's domain) to the kingdom of the heavens over which Jesus is Lord and we've bought into God's version of what a blessed life looks like, there is a decided difference in not only how we look at the world, but also how we live our lives. We live our lives according to the values and laws of another kingdom. In other words, our highest value isn't to follow the laws of the United States or what western civilization values (though our laws and western civilization emerged with a distinctly Christian ethos), but the kingdom of God. That may be too wordy to make sense of so let me encapsulate it here: a change in life and worldview ought to result in a change of commitment and action. We'll talk a lot more about the action in the coming weeks, but I want for us to talk about that commitment tonight. What is my responsibility to the kingdom of the heavens? What are my primary commitments. Jesus gives us two ways of looking at it that we're going to look at tonight.

The first thing Jesus says to the blessed, to us, is that we are the salt of the earth. The first and most obvious question about this is, “what does that mean?” What does it mean that the people who are a part of the kingdom of the heavens are to be the salt of the earth? Well, Craig Keener, who is a New Testament professor at Asbury Theological Seminary writes, “various scholars have emphasized different uses of salt in antiquity, such as a preservative or an agent regularly added to manure; but the use of salt here is as a flavoring agent: “if salt has become tasteless” (the Greek word can also mean “become foolish,” so it may include a play on words).¹ I don’t want to over interpret this so let’s think about it in this way. If we look at salt as having a function, then if it ceases to serve that function, then it is useless, right? If you have a role as a garbage man or woman, but you don’t show up to work and put garbage into the truck, then you cease to be of value to the company that collects garbage, no? The point is, I don’t think Jesus is saying that we have a flavor to add to the world, even though that might be true, but that we Christians have a role, or a responsibility in the world and if we’re not actively fulfilling it, then what’s the point of being a Christian?

Now, if we go down the road of trying to interpret this saying as a statement on the kind of action we’re supposed to take, I think the New International Greek commentary makes more sense. John Nolland says, “Apart from the obvious role of salt in flavouring and preserving, in the ancient world it was seen as a purifying or cleansing agent.”² This is interesting because there is a sense in which the Church, made up of Christians like you and me, are meant to be a purifying and cleansing agent of the world. The problem that arises from this perspective is that we have often tried to do this without being pure or clean ourselves. In chapter 7 of Matthew, Jesus actually makes this point when he says that if we point out a speck in our neighbor’s eye but ignore the log in our own eye, we’re nothing but hypocrites. We’ve got to first take the log out of our own eye (become pure) before we can point out the speck in our neighbor’s eye (purifying the world). We have to be cleansed by repentance and the Holy Spirit. We’ve gotten it wrong by expecting non-Christians to be more holy than we are. That’s why we’ve got to get our own lives aligned with Jesus so that we can be the salt of the earth. Our own personal holiness is what adds salt to the

¹Craig S. Keener, [The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament](#), Accordance electronic ed. (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1993), 57.

²John Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, [New International Greek Testament Commentary](#). Accordance electronic ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 212.

world and it's the daily walking with Jesus experience of the Holy Spirit that does that.

The next thing Jesus says is that we are the light of the world. Isaiah 42:6 says,

“I am the LORD; I have called you in righteousness;

I will take you by the hand and keep you;

I will give you as a covenant for the people,

a light for the nations,

and Isaiah 49:6:

“It is too light a thing that you should be my servant

to raise up the tribes of Jacob

and to bring back the preserved of Israel;

I will make you as a light for the nations,

that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth.”

The point of this is that the people of God, Israel, the very people to whom Jesus is preaching, are to be a light to the world that is enshrouded in darkness. The year before Heather and I got married, when I still lived in the dorms while I was in seminary, I was preparing for a Greek test one January. Unbeknownst to me, that evening, a squirrel got into a nearby transformer, and shut electricity down on campus. The way our dorm was set up meant that there was no exterior light. Once I left my room and got into the common area it was complete and utter darkness. I had to feel my way along the wall until I got to the door to the stairwell, where there was an emergency light, and I was able to make my way down to the 1st floor where I could commiserate with other students. The point of the story is this: I was walking in complete and utter darkness, not able to find my way to safety and the company of my fellow students until I found light. We are a world awash in darkness and we can't find our way to safety or salvation without light. Jesus says twice in John's gospel that he is the light of the world. He is the true light who has come into the world as John 1:9 says. The church is his body which necessarily means that we are to be a light to the world, showing them the way to salvation in Jesus Christ.

Let's look at what Jesus says about this. First, he says that a city set on a hill cannot be hidden. If you're looking for defensive camouflage for a city, putting it on top of a hill is not the best course of action even though being on top of a hill is defensively advantageous. In the middle of the day, you can see it. At night, when there are lamps burning, you can see it from a long way off. So if you're not interested in being a light to the world, don't set yourself up there as a beacon to others. In a similar vein, you don't light a candle or a lamp and

then put something over it. The point of the lamp is to give light so that you and others may see by it. To put something over it defeats the purpose.

Jesus connects those two statements with the summary, “in the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.” Now, we’ve got a little work to do here because during the course of the Reformation and the five hundred years since it started, we’ve really emphasized that good works are not the means by which we enter the kingdom—it’s by grace through faith. We’re frequently reminded that when it comes to salvation, our good deeds are like filthy rags. The protestant church has emphasized that to a fault, I think, and we’ve convinced generations of Christians that their works do not matter. But that’s not actually how the kingdom works, does it? Remember in week one we talked about the point being that we not try to do the things Jesus tells us to do, but to seek to become the kind of people who do the things he tells us to do. That may seem like splitting hairs, but there’s an important distinction. We’ve got to be transformed first, but even that requires an act of the will, repentance, which is an action or a good deed. Then we walk with Jesus as his apprentices doing the good works of the kingdom as a way to experience the means of grace. Ten years ago, when Pastor Andrew was writing his book *The Means of Grace*, I remember talking to him about Wesley’s language around this and I said that it seemed to me that the means of grace (prayer, fasting, searching the Scriptures, doing works of mercy among the poor and imprisoned) were not about earning God’s grace, but through them experiencing the grace of God. Remember Willard says that grace is not opposed to effort, but to earning. In cooperation with God’s grace through the Holy Spirit, we do things, good works, which aid us in our transformation. Listen to what James 2:14–17 says, “What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can that faith save him? ¹⁵ If a brother or sister is poorly clothed and lacking in daily food, ¹⁶ and one of you says to them, “Go in peace, be warmed and filled,” without giving them the things needed for the body, what good is that? ¹⁷ So also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.” In other words, is it really faith if it doesn’t fundamentally change the way we live?

If faith fundamentally changes the way we live, then we become salt—a cleansing agent through people who have been cleansed—and we become light, a beacon to those walking in darkness through the deeds that we do as a response to the gospel of Jesus Christ. And all of that brings honor to the Father by people going, “wow, look at what these people are doing as a result of their commitment to God’s kingdom and their responsibility as kingdom

people. What a good and holy God he must be!” That’s what bringing glory to God looks like.