

Lesson 4—The Light of the World

Introduction:

In the Beatitudes, Jesus described the heart and character of those who belong to His kingdom—poor in spirit, pure in heart, peacemakers, and those who endure suffering for righteousness’ sake. But now He shifts from who we are to how we live. Kingdom character becomes kingdom influence.

In Matthew 5:13–20, Jesus issues a bold declaration: You are the salt of the earth. You are the light of the world. These aren’t commands to become something—they are identity statements. If we follow Christ, we are salt and light. The question is whether we will preserve and shine... or whether we will lose our impact.

He then reminds His listeners that He did not come to destroy the Law or the Prophets, but to fulfill them. His life and teaching do not dismiss the Old Testament—they bring it to its fullest meaning. In fact, Jesus calls for a righteousness that surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees—not outward show, but inward obedience and integrity.

This lesson will help us:

- Understand our God-given role as salt and light in a decaying and dark world
- Reflect on how Christ fulfills and deepens the meaning of the Law
- Examine our influence, our example, and the kind of righteousness we are pursuing

These words are not suggestions. They are a charge. As parents, spouses, and children of God, we must shine in our homes, our churches, and our communities—not for our own glory, but so others may glorify our Father in heaven.

I. Matthew 5:13-16

A. Observation

1. What themes or key ideas are in this passage?
2. What words seem significant to understanding this passage?
3. How does Jesus transition from the Beatitudes into His teaching on salt and light? What do verses 11-12 have to do with verses 13-16?
4. In context, who is Jesus referring to when He says “you”?

5. List at least one observation per verse in the space below.

a. Matthew 5:13

b. Matthew 5:14

c. Matthew 5:15

d. Matthew 5:16

B. Interpretation

1. What is salt used for?

2. What is the problem with tasteless salt?

3. How would you describe a Christian who had lost his or her saltiness?

4. Why can't a city set on a hill be hidden?

5. What is the point of a lampstand? Why wouldn't you put a basket over it?

6. What does it look like when a Christian is hiding their light?

7. Is it really possible to live as God instructs and not be noticed? Why or Why not?

8. What is the most important/overall point of these verses?

C. Application

1. Do you believe you have had the kind of positive influence Jesus is describing in this passage? Why or why not?
2. List at least three facts or commands stated or implied in this passage that are relevant to your own life:
 - a.
 - b.
 - c.
3. What will you do this week to implement at least one of these facts or commands into your life?
4. Suggested Practice—Each night this week, ask: “How did I shine my light today?” Share with your spouse or children. This simple reflection trains hearts to look for daily opportunities to influence others for good.

D. Teach It

1. How would I teach my children or family what it means to be salt and light?
2. How can I model this in my home or work?
3. Conversation starter: “What’s one way someone has been a light in your life—and how can you do the same for someone else?”

II. Matthew 5:17-20

A. Observation

1. What themes or key ideas are in this passage?
2. What words seem significant to understanding this passage?
3. What is Jesus’ relationship to the Law and the Prophets according to verse 17?

4. List at least one observation per verse in the space below.
 - a. Matthew 5:17
 - b. Matthew 5:18
 - c. Matthew 5:19
 - d. Matthew 5:20
5. What will happen to one who “breaks” one of the commandments?
6. How does one become great in the kingdom of Heaven?

B. Interpretation

1. How do Jesus’ words about being ‘salt and light’ (vv. 13–16) prepare us for His strong emphasis on obedience (vv. 17–20)? Is there a connection between how we live and how seriously we take His Word?
2. What are the Law and the Prophets?
3. What does it mean to break the commandments (NKJV)? Note: The word translated break literally means “to loose or to release” and is also translated “annul” or “relax.” Relax seems to fit the passage best since the one doing the action is still a part of the kingdom of Heaven. This would not be possible if they were purposefully breaking a commandment of God and teaching others to do likewise (cf. Matthew 7:21, 15:3-9; James 2:8-13). It seems apparent that Jesus is referring to one who obeys all the commandments but regards some as insignificant and teaches others likewise (cf. Matthew 23:23).

4. What might breaking the commandments look like in our own lives? Is it possible to treat God's Word as mostly important, but ignore parts we find inconvenient?
5. Do these verses seem to indicate different levels of reward in Heaven? Why or why not?
6. In the context so far, what was wrong with the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees?
7. How can we exceed the righteousness of the scribes and the Pharisees?

C. Application

1. Do you believe you have annulled or relaxed any of God's commands?
2. List at least three facts or commands stated or implied in this passage that are relevant to your own life:
 - a.
 - b.
 - c.
3. What will you do this week to implement at least one of these facts or commands into your life?
4. Suggested Practice—Pick one of God's commands that feels small or easy to ignore (e.g., honoring parents, keeping your word, avoiding gossip). Write it down and focus on practicing it this week—not legalistically, but joyfully—because Jesus didn't relax the Word of God, and neither should we.

D. Teach It

1. How would I explain Jesus' relationship to the Old Testament to a fellow believer or a new Christian?

2. How can I model obedience to God's commands without becoming prideful or judgmental?
3. Conversation starter: "Are there any parts of God's Word that you tend to overlook or treat as less important?"

Conclusion

Jesus didn't come to make our lives easier—He came to make us holy. In this section of the Sermon on the Mount, He shows us what it means to live with visible righteousness and eternal purpose.

Salt that loses its saltiness is useless. A light hidden under a basket can't brighten a room. A disciple who blends in with the world cannot lead others out of darkness.

We are called to stand out—not in arrogance, but in conviction. To obey not just in part, but in full. To treat every command of God as weighty. And to pursue a righteousness that is deeper than religious performance—a righteousness that flows from the heart.

We are called to hold fast to God's truth without relaxing it, to illuminate a dark world with grace and truth, and to train the next generation to do the same. Let your light so shine.