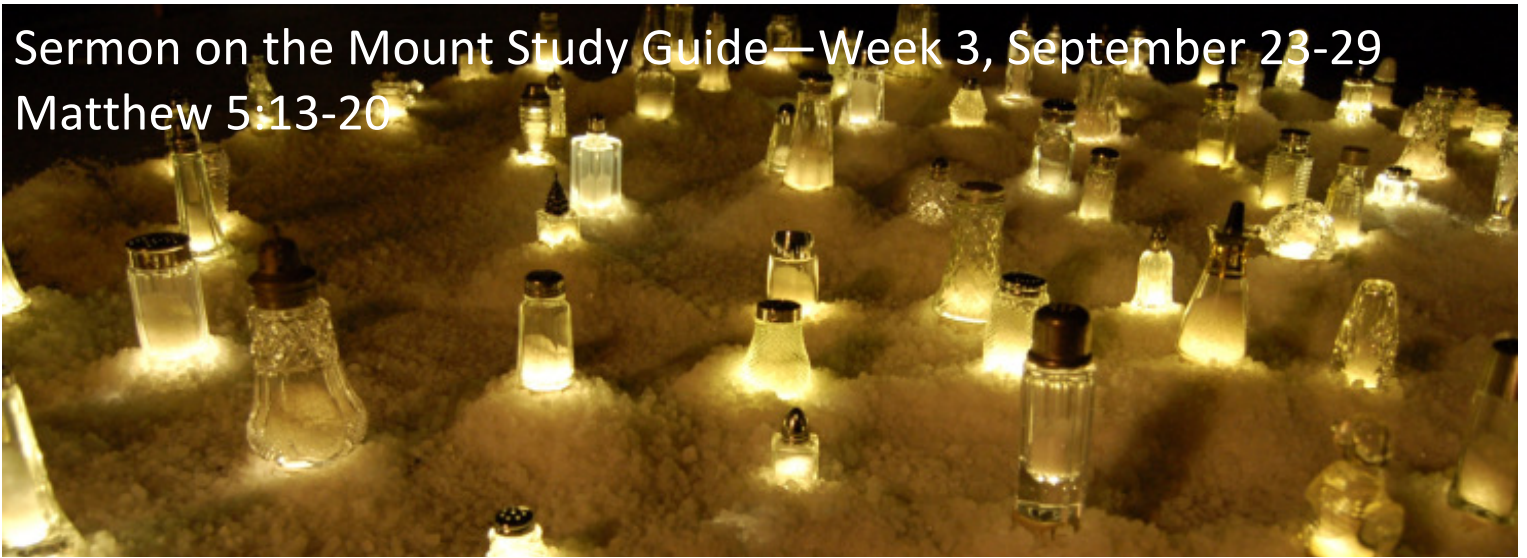


Sermon on the Mount Study Guide—Week 3, September 23-29

Matthew 5:13-20



- I. “Now, when Jesus saw the crowds, he went up on a mountainside and sat down. His disciples came to him, and he began to teach them.” (Matthew 5:1-2)
- II. Opening prayer for Illumination
- III. Read Matthew 5:13-20
- IV. Stott Study Guide: pp. 14-20
- V. *The Divine Conspiracy*, pp. 125-127 (Matt. 5:13-16), 139-144 (Matt. 5:17-20):

Following his study of the Beatitudes, Dallas Willard works to draw a connection between those who Jesus pronounced blessing on in Matthew 5:1-12 and those who he deems “salt of the earth” and “light of the world” in Matthew 5:13-16. Willard writes,

Speaking to these common people, “the multitudes,” who through him had found blessing in the kingdom, Jesus tells them it is they, not the ‘best and brightest’ on the human scale who are to make life on earth manageable as they live from the kingdom (Matt. 5:13-16). God gives them “light”—truth, love, and power—that they might be light for their surroundings. He makes them “salt,” to cleanse, preserve, and flavor the times through which they live.

These “little” people, without any of the character or qualifications humans insist are necessary, are the only ones who can actually make the world work....And God gives them a certain radiance, as one lights a lamp to shed its brilliance over everyone in the house. Just so, Jesus says to those he has touched, “Let your light glow around people in such a way that, seeing your good works, they will exalt your Father in the heavens” (Matt. 5:16). (125)

But why is such luminescence necessary? Why are these “little” people the ones to spread God’s radiance and brilliance? Because, as Willard argues, the “Law and the Prophets” at the time “had been twisted around to authorize an oppressive, though religious, social order that put glittering humans—the rich, the educated, the ‘well-born,’ the popular, the powerful, and so on—in possession of God” (127).

It is this false religious system that Jesus came to upend. True, he did not come to abolish *God’s* Law or Prophets. He did not come to abolish true religious devotion to God. But he did come to dump these “glittering humans”—these false prophets who twisted relationship with God into something it wasn’t—out of their positions of privilege. And in their place, Jesus raised “ordinary people with no human qualification into divine fellowship” through their faith in him (127).

In so doing, then, Jesus proved that true righteousness, righteousness that surpasses that of “the Pharisees and the teachers of the law,” righteousness that focuses on him and transforms one’s whole being, is indeed the righteousness by which ordinary people become salt and light in a dark and distasteful world, proclaiming the present rule of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

VI. Questions of 1st Importance:

1. Questions for the Text

- i. What does Jesus mean when he says, “But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled underfoot”? If we are the “salt of the earth,” what implications does this have for us?
- ii. What is the difference between abolishing and fulfilling when it comes to Jesus and the law?
- iii. As Christians, we don’t follow a number of Old Testament laws. For instance, most of us don’t keep Kosher or regularly sacrifice. How does that line up with Jesus’ assertion that “until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished”? Do we just get to pick and choose which parts of the Law to keep? Which parts don’t we need to keep anymore and why? What is Jesus referring to here? See Willard, pp. 144-147 for further discussion.

2. Questions for the World

- i. How are we doing at being “salt and light” in the world? In what ways do we live into that calling? In what ways do we fall short? Are we relying on God’s power for that task, or are we relying on our own strength? What is this supposed to look like?
- ii. In what ways are God’s “Law and Prophets” twisted around today to become something they’re not meant to be? How do we feel about the charge that Christian “religion” was never something that Jesus intended or wanted? In what ways is “religion” a good thing? In what ways isn’t it?
- iii. Willard writes that, “Actions do not emerge from nothing. They faithfully reveal what is in the heart” (*DC*, 144). Thus, Willard argues that Jesus is really after our hearts when he is talking about the fulfillment of the law in verses 17-20. He maintains that if we transform our inner lives, our behavior will naturally and easily follow. Does this sound right to us? Is this true in our experiences? Why or why not?

VII. Questions of 2nd Importance:

1. Questions for the Text

- i. As the “light of the world,” we are visible people. As Jesus says, we give light to “everyone in the house.” How aware of this are we? Do our lights shine in such a way as to glorify our Father in heaven? When are we dimmer? When are we brighter? Should this be a constant shining? Why?
- ii. How is our visibility as God’s “salt and light” in the world related to our relationship with the Law? “Hypocrites” is a word often directed at Christians. Why is this? What the relationship between Matthew 5:13-16 and 5:17-20?

2. Questions for the World

- i. Who are the “glittering humans” our world values? In what ways do we strive to be like them? In what ways does Jesus unseat them in his teaching in Matthew 5:13-20?
- ii. In Matthew 5:13 and 14 Jesus declares that we are “salt of the earth” and “light of the world.” How much of the earth/world does that commission encompass? What arenas of life are part of our work as “salt and light”? Are there any areas of God’s creation or in our lives where we’re not called to be salt and light?

VIII. If so desired, watch Monday’s chapel on this week’s text at:

IX. Suggested Spiritual Discipline for this week: Worship