



Sermon on the Mount Study Guide – Week 3

September 23-29

Matthew 5:13-20

The Divine Conspiracy, pp. 139-144

Following the study on the Beatitudes, Dallas Willard wants to make sure we see the connection from last week's passage to this week's. By connecting the "blessed's" and the "salt and light of the earth" Jesus was showing the multitudes that through him, they find blessing in the Kingdom. The Kingdom can be seen where these two groups meet, in Christ.

The misconception is that the Kingdom comes through the 'best and brightest' on the human scale. But Jesus spoke to the ordinary people – the multitudes who had found blessing in the Kingdom through Jesus. Even though they were not the 'best and brightest,' Jesus says they are the ones who make life on earth manageable by living from the kingdom. God gives them "light" = truth, love, and power; so that they might be light for their surroundings. And God makes them "salt" = to cleanse, preserve, and flavor the times through which they live.

God gives these "little" people a certain radiance. These people, without any of the qualifications humans insist are necessary, are the only ones who can actually make the world work. Their radiance shines brilliantly, like a lamp that sheds light over everyone in the house. "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)

But why are these "little" ones the people to spread God's radiance and brilliance? Willard argues that the "law and the prophets" at the time had been twisted around to authorize oppressive religious and social orders. They would twist it so that the rich, the educated, and the powerful would be in possession of God.

It is this false religious system that Jesus came to upend. True, he did not come to abolish *God's* Law or Prophets, nor did he come to abolish true religious devotion to God. Jesus came to correct the relationship. These false prophets who twisted relationship with God into something it wasn't – they were about to be dumped out of their positions of privilege. And in their place, Jesus raised ordinary people with no human qualification into fellowship with Him!

Jesus proved that true righteousness transforms a person! It surpasses legalism, and it surpasses power and privilege. This transforming righteousness turns ordinary people

into salt and light in a dark and distasteful world – proclaiming the present rule of Jesus Christ.

Discussing the Text:

1. What does it mean to be the “salt of the earth”? What implication does that have?
 - a. Going further: Discuss Jesus’ statement, “But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything...”
2. Jesus said he came to fulfill the law, not abolish it. Talk about what the differences would look like between abolishing and fulfilling the law.
3. How is our visibility as God’s “salt and light” in the world related to our responsibility to the Law?
 - a. “Hypocrites” is a word often directed at Christians. Why is this?
 - b. What is the relationship between Matthew 5:13-16 and 5:17-20?

Discussing the World:

1. In what ways are God’s “Law and Prophets” twisted around today to become something they’re not meant to be?
 - a. If you have time, discuss the charge that Christian “religion” was never something that Jesus intended or wanted?
 - i. In what ways is “religion” a good thing?
 - ii. In what ways isn’t it a good thing?
2. In Matthew 5:13 and 14 Jesus declares that we are “salt of the earth” and “light of the world.”
 - a. In what areas of your life are you radiant and salty? What does that look like?
 - b. Name the areas of your life where you need to add radiance and saltiness? What would that look like?
3. “There shouldn’t be anyone in the world who can say that God doesn’t make a difference; because if Christians are actually loving God, the people around them will not be able to deny that God is making a difference in the world.”*

Action: Try practicing the Spiritual Disciplines of Community, Discipleship, or Service this week, and let your light shine – or be a bit salty.

- The purpose here is to reflect the helping, caring and sharing love of God
- Walk the talk – be what you profess
- Be a mentor, participate in a service project, or volunteer your time
- Look at interruptions differently – see them as opportunities to do good.