

XVI. Matthew in Biblical Perspective
The Christian and the Church in the World – Part 3
Matthew 5:13-16
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May 16, 2010 – Morning Sermon

Our study is on the ministry of the Christian and the church. It is a two fold ministry that is described here in this passage. For those who the Gospel has blessed with a changed life described in the beatitudes He speaks this passage to them found in Matthew 5:13-17, **13** “*You (Gospel blessed, Gospel changed, Gospel driven, Christ centered) are the salt of the earth, but if salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything except to be thrown out and trampled under people's feet.* **14** “*You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden.* **15** *Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house.* **16** *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.”*

The grass withers. The flower fades. This is God’s Word. It abides forever and by His grace and mercy may it be preached for you.

I’d like to take a moment to indulge here on this matter of salt and light that we haven’t dealt with yet. We reduced the salt and light. We looked at salt in our last study and we are looking at light in this one. I’d like to come back to this text and wrap it back up with that phrase “*they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.*” I think there are some key things for us as a church and to the church in general but certainly for us as a local church. I will wrap it up with that in the next study and then will press on to the Gospel use of the Law that Jesus moves to after that.

We covered Matthew 5:13 in the last study about salt and in this study Matthew 5:14-16 is about being light and I want to look at it again; **14** “*You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden.* **15** *Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house.* **16** *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.”* Those of you who enjoy God’s continued blessing of Christian music are probably aware there was a song that was developed out of this text as its foundation which is called *Shine Jesus Shine*. The song says “Fill the world with the Father’s glory” and that was the text that it was brought from. Perhaps some of you can go way back to the toddlers Sunday school class. You all have it as you are holding up your finger and it goes “This little light of mine, I’m going to let it shine. This little light of mine, I’m going to let it shine, let it shine, let it shine, let it shine. Don’t let Satan blow it out, I’m going to let it shine. Don’t let Satan blow it out, I’m going to let it shine, let it shine, let it shine, let it shine.” Thank you very much, I appreciate that. What a great little chorus and the chorus has a couple of things in it that I’d like to mention at the end of this study.

Let’s look back at the text. Matthew 5:1-12 gave the Gospel blessed, character changes that happen. When someone is Gospel blessed there are eight character changes that happen and they are called the beatitudes. There is poor in spirit which is spiritual poverty. We are not arrogant. We’ve been humbled by God’s convicting work which leads us to mourn over our sins and their consequences. That leads us to meekness

because we know we have the power of God but we hold it gently and graciously. Meekness or gentleness is the way Christians walk in the strength of the Lord. Have you ever seen a really big strong man? We tend to call them gentle giants because they don't really need to prove anything. They know their strength so they walk gently. We know the strength of the Lord so we walk gently in this life that we have.

So the poor in spirit leads to mourning and the mourning leads to meekness. The meekness leads to a hunger and thirst for righteousness and how important was that? It is so important that every appetite of my life is supposed to be here for God's glory, whether you eat or drink or whatsoever you do, do all to the glory of God. You can't do that until you get this appetite. When you get an appetite to hunger and thirst for righteousness then that will control all the other appetites and we won't live to eat but we'll eat to live for Jesus. We won't live to drink but we'll drink to live for Jesus. Our knowledge won't become pride and arrogance. We'll hunger and thirst for knowledge because we want to know more about Jesus and make Him known. Sex won't be an appetite that drives us into immorality, ungodliness, promiscuity or perversion but it will be that, that is held within the sanctity of marriage. Why? It is because we hunger and thirst for righteousness. This isn't the righteousness that gets you to heaven. No, we have been given that righteousness by Jesus but those who have been given the righteousness of Christ then hunger and thirst for righteousness as an offering of love back to Christ.

What does that lead you to? It leads you to merciful. We who receive mercy love to be merciful to others who are caught into sin. Then that leads us to pure in heart. God, would you please work in my life from the inside out. I don't want to be a white washed tomb. I want You to do something in me that comes out of me. I want sincerity and integrity. I want to be authentic in my walk with Christ. Where does that lead us to? Then we will be a peacemaker which means evangelism. We will have the message of reconciliation. You can have peace with God and you can have the peace of God because of the Prince of Peace who has brought you who were enemies into a relationship with Him. So the Gospel of peace will go from us and the peace making will come from us.

Where does that lead us to? You'd think the world would say what a wonderful group of people. No, they will persecute you. The majority report will be persecution and what do we do then? You are to rejoice. Don't go and die in a pile or have a pity party. Rejoice and be glad, why? In the Old Covenant they did it to the prophets and in the New Covenant they are going to do it to you. So rejoice and be glad because they did it to your Savior and they will do it to you. Rejoice and be glad for your reward is great in heaven. You don't live for now you live for then and now you want to make an impact for Him on the way to then in which you get your reward from Him. That's the way we live. When you have that in your life what is the result? You will be the salt of the earth.

So here's what we have learned thus far in this salt and light study. We have learned two things. Number one we won't make a difference in our culture, in other words, there will be no cultural transformation without personal Gospel reformation. You can't have Matthew 5:13-16 without Matthew 5:1-12. When the Gospel changes you, He'll use you in life. Number two personal Gospel reformation will, of necessity, create cultural transformation. You will make a difference. In our first service we had our graduates and some day they will lead, treat or help you and you need to pray for them. The fact is, wherever they go is just like wherever you go. If that Gospel blessed,

Christ centered life that is described in Matthew 5:1-12 is yours then you will make a difference inevitably. That means it will be hidden like salt. You don't see salt working and it works out of proportion to its size but you'll make a difference. You'll make a difference in your office when you decide you're not going to steal from your employer. You'll make a difference with the words that come out of your mouth and with the words that don't come out of your mouth. I'm not talking about self righteousness. I'm talking about a different life that's changed where you'll inevitably make a difference. So Jesus says you're the salt and light.

Jesus tells us two things about us and then says by doing that He tells us two things about the world. The two things He tells us about our self are that we're salt and light. These are common word pictures and they would have understood immediately what He meant. Salt seasons, preserves, prevents decay, restrains and retards corruption. Light, if you lived in the darkness of Galilee you would understand light and you would say "light the lamp, put it up on a stand, otherwise I'll trip over everything because the darkness is blinding me." You are salt and I'm going to use you season life with zest and the joy of the Lord. I'll use you to restrain the inevitable corruption of sin in a depraved world. And you are light. I'm going to use you to light the way to Me. I'm going to bring My light through you in a world of darkness.

By the way, those are the two things He says about the world. We are salt and light because it assumes what the world is. The world is under the curse of sin and because of that it has decadence, decay, deterioration and corruption. The world is in a spiritual death spiral and free fall unless Christians who are salty shows up and restrain it from being as evil as it would be. Then the world because of sin walks in darkness and despair and will be paralyzed in its destruction unless Christians show up who are light.

Having said that let me remind you what I said about salt. Salt is describing the Christian of the church as an antiseptic that prevents or restrains the inevitable deterioration of the world's depravity of sin therefore we must avoid two things. We must avoid contamination by adulteration and we must avoid containment by isolation. Salt is salt but if you lose your saltiness then you have just thrown out under feet in the trash heap of the world. Do you remember the warning to the seven churches in the book of Revelation? If you don't repent, I'm going to remove your lamp stand. You're no longer effective as a church. Take David, he was forgiven but he lost his effectiveness. He lost his witness. Lord, I don't want to lose my effectiveness by contamination or adulteration that is mixing in worldly concepts in what I believe. I want to believe the truth of God's Word. Or mixing in worldly activity and conforming to the world's ideas of what is life which is actually death, I don't want that. I want You to make me different and I want to carry that difference with humility.

I also don't want to be isolated. This is a very deep burden on my heart. I believe we as Christians, whether it's a mid-term election or the next presidential election or some media act, keep waiting for some body to do for us what God said "I've called you to do. You're the salt and the light." It doesn't take a prophet to see the death spiral and the free fall of the culture that I'm a part of but that should not surprise me because this text tells me the world left alone will decay and deteriorate. So if my culture is in a free fall that shouldn't surprise me but it ought to make me take a look because that means that the salt is either not in the world or the salt has lost its saltiness. I think we have isolated ourselves where we build our churches, put up our food courts and come and eat

with each other. I love table fellowship but I want you to go get a cup of coffee with lost people. I don't want us to just write our books back and forth to each other. We keep isolating ourselves in the name of purity and safety. We keep trying to raise ourselves in a Christian bubble. When are in the world but not of the world. Don't let the world in you.

Then we get blackmailed by the world because the world says, "Unless you live more like us and believe more like us, we're not going to come and listen to you." We buy that from the world and think if we live like them or look like them in terms of the choices we make in life, and we modify our message and minimize the commitment of our commitment to Christ as to how we live, speak and do with everything. But actually then the world won't come to us because they're not looking for people like them with a little bit of religion, they are looking for people in whom God has made a difference in. That's what they are looking for. They handle and hold that difference with gentleness and graciousness but with courage and conviction.

We wonder why there is a free fall. Go look at our divorce rates in the church. They are not any different. In fact the last time I saw a statistic the divorce rate among professing Christians in this state (Alabama) is higher than that of non-professing people. Why would they listen to us? Come to Jesus He'll make a difference. He does? We have the same appetite for their entertainment. Our language isn't much different. Is there any difference in us? Again, I'm not talking about self-righteous arrogance. I'm just talking about Jesus making a change and I don't have to talk or walk that way any more but I want to love you and bring you to the One who makes a difference in my life. We have to have the salt and we can't be isolated.

Now, He says you're the light of the world. He says four things in this text that I want to walk you through. The first thing He says is you're the light of the world. He doesn't say I want you to go work on becoming light. No, He says if you're Gospel blessed, Christ centered, you are THE light of the world. I don't have another light company some where. You're My light company and you're going to send lights everywhere in this world as you know the saving power of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Where all this darkness is, you are the light. Church, Christian in concert with your brothers and sisters, I've called you together to be the light (singular) of the world. Together you lift up the light of Christ to this world. You lift Him up with the way you live so that they will see your works, they'll see your life and say, "What made a difference?" You will say, "Nothing, but I'll tell you Who made a difference. It is Someone. I'll tell you the One who made a difference who has loved me and is ready to love you and set you free." You are the light of the world.

Go back 2000 years with me and feel the astounding, extraordinary nature of this. Here we are on the side of a hill at the Sea of Galilee and Jesus looks at these people and says, "You are the light of the world." It's not Galilee, Israel, or Palestine. While He is saying that in this little corner of the world, the entire world is shrouded in darkness in paganism and all of its forms and all of its deception. Yet He is saying 2000 years ago in this little corner of Galilee that you are the light of the world. Less than 25 years after this one of those pagans in Europe is going to say something that's recorded in the book of Acts. This pagan will say, "These people who have turned the world upside down now have come here with this salt and light." That's not exactly the way he said it but he said,

“Now they have come here also.” They came with salt and light to restrain sin and to see it turned around, to see it by the hand of God turn things around.

Restraining sin (salt) is necessary in God’s common grace in this world and it’s a holy calling but God hasn’t just called us to be a restraint upon sin. God’s called us to be instruments to transform what’s around us by seeing people transformed. When they’re changed all of their relationships and the way they live their lives are changed. When that happens everything else happens so we’re not only salt to restrain, we are the light of the world to see transformation so that darkness vanishes. You are the light of the world.

Secondly, He gives another picture of this light thing by saying, “You’re a city set on a hill.” I have been to Israel nine times and I’m headed back this coming March to take a group of people. We call this learning the Bible in the land of the Bible. I so love to do this because I get to watch people connect the dots, their eyes open up and their Bible take on a whole new dimension. Since the first time I went I love to go my first night to the Sea of Galilee, put my stuff in my room and I walk out into the darkness to look over the Sea of Galilee. I look above the North and the East and I’ll see small cities on the hills. In my mind’s eye I will travel again back to this passage where these people in Galilee would look up and see those small cities. You didn’t see the ones in the valley but you did see the ones on the hills. Just like I want my light on a stand and not under a basket I also want my light on a hill like a city.

When Jesus says this immediately these well educated synagogue goers in Capernaum would immediately run to Old Testament passages that said Jerusalem was a gleaming city on the hill. Now they just found out in the New Covenant it’s not that Jerusalem back there. In the New Covenant it’s you are the city set on the hill of this world. You are that city.

Thirdly, He gives you a warning. You are the light of the world and the warning is you don’t want the light hidden. Don’t put the light under a basket. If you put the light under the basket it’s no good and eventually as you know it will go out. I want the light to be able to shine. The light is there to shine and be visible, not hidden. It is there to be radiant, not withdrawn. So He says “Don’t let your light be under a basket and hidden.”

Fourthly, He gives you a challenge. The challenge is to put it on the stand or a city set on a hill. Lift the light up. At the end of our Christmas Eve service every year we light candles at the end of the service from the Christ candle who is the Light. We start with the Christ candle and then pass the light on to somebody else while we are singing the hymn *Silent Night, Holy Night*. On the last verse of the hymn we lift up our candles and those candles had taken that darken room and changed it but when we lifted the candles up it was amazing what happened. Whenever you light the light and lift it up darkness has to flee. If you have darkness and light, every time light wins. What is darkness? It is the absence of light. When you bring the light what happens? Darkness has to go and it flees in proportion to the visibility and radiance to the light. God, shine bright in me and I want to make it visible. I don’t want to make it visible for people to look at me but I want to make it visible so people can see Jesus, in me, from me, and they can come to Him. That’s what I’m asking You to do in me and through me, Lord. I want the light to be visible. I don’t want it hidden. I want to put it up on the stand. I want it to make an impact because every time light is lifted up darkness, of necessity, by definition, has to flee. If the darkness is overcoming my culture either we have hidden the light, or we haven’t been putting it on the stand. It’s one of the two.

Here is the takeaway. The Christian and the Christian Church serves as light by living and proclaiming the Gospel of Jesus Christ which powerfully transforms men and women thereby transforming culture by banishing darkness and despair. How do we serve as light? It is by two things. One is living so that they may see your works. We serve as light by the way we live and by proclaiming/speaking with our lips the Gospel of Jesus Christ. We live the Gospel and speak the Gospel. You have to have them both. If you don't live the Gospel but you speak the Gospel, what's the word you'll hear? The word is hypocrite. If you live the Gospel and don't speak the Gospel then what are you doing? People will take a look and say, "Oh yeah religion, I guess that's what you need, maybe I'll go be..." and they go pick some religion. We want to be able to live to unlock the moment to share the truth of the Gospel that changes people's lives. So Lord, I want to have a life that lives as light by living the Gospel, by sharing the Gospel that transforms men and women and when that happens the culture changes. When the culture changes we banish darkness. It begins to flee. We banish despair and in its place come hope and joy that's found in Jesus Christ.

Do you remember the song *This Little Light of Mine*? I know what we mean by that song. It's kind of like that saying we had in church – here's the church, here's the steeple, open the door and here's the people. It's a good rhyme, good motivation but bad theology because the church is not the building. It's the people. The building is where we meet. The song *This Little Light of Mine* has good motivation, good effort but there's a couple of things in it that aren't quite right. This little light of mine? Is this my light or am I His light? I am His light in this world, not mine. Then we get to the verse that says "Don't let Satan blow it out." I have some good news and I have some bad news here. The good news is Satan can't blow it out. The bad news is he will give you some baskets to hide it under. As I was working my way through this I thought "These baskets are showing up all over my life."

What are the baskets that Satan gives us? He gives us the basket of self absorption where we will even take Jesus and the Gospel to make it all about us. Jesus did much to save you and me but Jesus didn't do much to save you and me to make much of us. He did much to save you and me to free us so that we could make much of Him. He didn't die on the cross for me to get the next model car or to put two more zeros to my bank account. He died on the cross for me, to gain me. Along the way He's going to trust me with some health, some resources and this and that, but 'name it and claim it'? I don't even own it so how can I claim it. He owns me which means He owns that. Now, Lord, what are you going to give me that I'll use for You? This idea that the Gospel of Jesus Christ is some notion of consumerism in the life of someone is a lie that is born out of the pit of hell. Jesus died that we could be delivered from sins and brought to Him, know Him, and make Him known. It's not about us because it's no longer I who live but Christ who lives within me. For to me to live is Christ, die is gain.

With self absorption we will even pervert the Gospel in churches today. We can become so consumed about ourselves that we won't take time to meet with the Lord daily. We won't take time to gather with His people on the Lord's Day unless it fits our schedule. The average attendance today for gathered worship on the Lord's Day for members of professing evangelical Christianity in the United States, please notice I didn't say mainstream Protestantism or roman Catholicism, is one out of every three Sundays. Yet we will say I vow not to forsake the assembling of myself together. I know there is

Providential hindrance and things that come into our life but we become so absorbed with ourselves I lose track of encouraging my brothers and sisters in worship. I lose track of gathering together with God's people to worship the Lord on the Lord's Day according to His command. We get so absorbed with ourselves that the things of this world begin to capture us and that's another basket Satan gives us which is counterfeit gods where my life is about my money, things, or power. No, our life is about Jesus Christ.

Listen, 300 years from now no body will know or care how big your house was and how many zeros were in your bank account. I will tell you what will be known 300 years from now. It will be the lives that you touch that touch the next generation and the next generation because what you do for Christ today will echo into, not just 300 years, but eternity. They will glorify the Father. Harry, are you saying I can't have a big house? No, I'm just saying your house can't have you and I'm not asking you how much money you have but your money can't have you. Jesus has to have you and until that happens we are not salt and we are not light. We are hidden because they'll just see us the way everybody else does.

45 years ago when they did an interview with graduating high school students going to college, they asked them, 'why did you choose the college you chose?' The vast majority said they chose a particular college because it was related to the education they would get generally or in a specific field. 15 years ago they did the same survey and the answer was they chose a particular college because of what it would mean for them in salary in the future. It had to do with making money. We have allowed counterfeit gods in our lives. If money was that great would you mind telling me why all the people that have it are in despair, have three psychiatrists, and have to go to recovery centers? When they have all that stuff that we think makes our lives meaningful, why is it that their lives are in despair? They have what Satan says makes your life. All it does is destroy their life. Then we let the celebrities of this world set the pattern for our life.

Satan has baskets of self absorption, counterfeit gods, undistracted lives, making thoughtless decisions about who we're dating, who we marry, how we handle things that God has entrusted to us, about the words that come out of our mouth. Every time we make these thoughtless decisions we hide the light and it no longer is seen. You're a city set on a hill. You are a light. It's not enough to be light. You need to make it visible. You need to have it shine which means I don't want it hidden. What do I want to do? I want to put it on a stand. I don't want to put me on the stand. I want to put the light on the stand. What's the stand? The stand is me. I don't want me to be on the stand. I am the stand. I want me life to be lived so that it unlocks the door for somebody to ask, "Who made the difference?" So every time God allows me to have an achievement He just gave me a platform for the light. Every time God gives me an award He just gave me a platform for the light. Every time God gave me a relationship whether it's with my wife or children or grandchildren or friend, He just gave me a stand for the light.

I want to give you something practical here. When your life unlocks the opportunity to share the light you need to be able to speak the light. What do I mean here? I think every practical Christian ought to have three 'Gospel light' talks/speeches. Whenever God gives you an opportunity and someone asks you something then you need these three talks handy. One of them is what I like to call my Gospel elevator talk. I'm on an elevator with my badge on and someone says, "Are you a preacher?" I say, "Yeah." They say, "Where are you a preacher?" Okay I only have two floors and I'm

going to get Jesus to this person. I used to call it my airplane crash talk but that's just not too inviting. The pilot comes on and says, "We're going down and we're going to crash in two minutes." I want a talk where I can lead the guy next to me to Jesus in two minutes or less, before we hit, in between my praying that we won't hit. I want to be able to get that across so let me just call that the elevator talk.

Secondly, I want my conversational talk. I meet somebody and we just start a conversation. I have more than two floors and two minutes. Hint, hint, hint...Bridge to Life training for the believer is a good one for that conversational talk.

Thirdly, I want my relationship talk – saying, "Would you meet with me? I'd like to get to know you. Let's discover things together in the Bible, things about life." Any time God opens up a door, opportunity or platform you are able to take advantage of it right then. There is an elder in this church who met with me when I first came and he took me out to play golf. He whipped me like a yard dog and then when we finished we sat down for a coca cola. We began talking and he started sharing his testimony. He had been an alcoholic and God had saved him. Ever since then he had served the Lord faithfully in this congregation for many years as an elder but his ministry was to alcoholics. He said to me, "Harry that's a tough ministry and I'm going to make the same offer to you that I made to Frank Barker. When you run into one of those guys, you're probably not going to be able to handle it so go ahead and study for your sermon and hand them over to me. I'll help them. I've been there and I think I know how to help them."

He just keeps on doing that and even this week he saw me and said, "Harry I need you to pray about something." He gave me a guy's name and said, "This man is an alcoholic, losing his life, his family and everything but he came to talk to me and I've been meeting with him for a couple of months. The other day he called me and said, 'do you have a Bible study I can come to?' and I said to him, 'what are you doing Monday night?'" Now this guy is in a Bible study and he's just about to fall into the Kingdom. Life unlocked the opportunity and then he began to share Christ. He is bringing people to Christ which is going to make a difference in his life, his marriage, his family and among his friends. We say 'no' to Satan's baskets. We're not going to put these under our baskets. He can't blow the light out and I'm not going to take your baskets either. By the way, here are some stands in my life and I'm going to be ready to take advantage of them.

The final thought is make sure that the light has been lit. What does that mean? It is found in John 8:12. Please look this Scripture up at home. It is where Jesus said, "I am the Light." You can't be the light of the world until Jesus is in you so you have to come to Christ. You may say, "Harry, I've done that." Okay, then be in His Word! Thy Word is a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path/life. Surrender to His Holy Spirit who will illuminate the Word. Get among His people. I have had four men in my life for 28 years who have been right with me, to encourage me, to hold me accountable and I wouldn't have given anything if I had done that the first year I was converted. Get those people close to you to keep you focused on the light of Christ. Get those people around you to hold you accountable and will pray for you and encourage you. That's what God has called you to be and to do and that's what God has given you the ability to do. It is being in Christ and Christ in you. He is the Light of the world. When He is in you, He uses you. You are the light of the world.

Recently, I was reading an article that said, “Man is a mere mortal.” That is such a stupid statement. I know the man who wrote the article is much more intelligent than I am but that is a stupid statement. You have never and will never meet a mere mortal. Everybody you meet has an eternity and you are the light to point them to Christ. Don’t hide it. Put it on a stand. You are the light to point them to Christ. What a joyful privilege that is. Shine, Jesus, shine, fill the world with Your glory. Let’s pray.

Prayer:

Father, thank You for the moments we could be together. Thank You for the opportunity to be in Your Word together in this study. Thank You for this amazing calling that You have given to us who are Christ-centered and Gospel driven. It’s not because of us but it’s because of Christ and the Gospel. You have blessed us and taken us where we were and changed us. Now You are using us to change others which will change everything around them. So Father help these Your people. You are not only the salt of the earth but God by Your grace help us be the light of the world with what we do and what we say to banish darkness that men and women might flee to Christ and that the light of their salvation will be embraced when they come to our Savior, Jesus. I pray in His Name, Amen.