

# WEEK 3: FAITHFUL WITNESS AND THE FULFILLMENT OF SCRIPTURE

Matthew 5:13–20



## The Place of the Passage

Jesus began the Sermon on the Mount with his nine Beatitudes. These hopeful statements affirmed and celebrated those who live the truly good life—the life that leads to flourishing in God’s kingdom now and forever. In this transitional section of Matthew 5:13–20 Jesus brings the Beatitudes to a conclusion by encouraging his disciples to live as faithful witnesses in the world. He calls his disciples to this life of good works by use of the metaphors of salt and light. Jesus also introduces the next section of his teaching by affirming that he has come not to abolish the law<sup>1</sup> or the prophets<sup>2</sup> but to fulfill them.

## The Big Picture

Jesus concludes the Beatitudes by encouraging his disciples to live as salt and light in the world, and he introduces his identity as the one who came to fulfill the Old Testament.

Reflection and Discussion

Carefully and thoughtfully read this section of the Sermon on the Mount, Matthew 5:13-20. Then use the provided questions to help you think more deeply about the text. (See *ESV Study Bible* notes on pages 1828-1829; online at [www.esv.org](http://www.esv.org).)

Faithful Witness: Living as Salt and Light in the World (5:13-16)

The first-century world used salt for many purposes: as a flavor enhancer, as a preservative, and in covenant-making settings to symbolize the permanence of an agreement. Although it is not clear which specific purpose of salt is in view here, in each case salt has a positive influence in the world. Jesus will soon clarify that this positive influence consists of good works. What are a few ways in which Christians can act as salt in their neighborhoods, workplaces, and broader culture?

Handwritten notes on lined paper.

What are some ways that Christians can lose their "saltiness" and become ineffective witnesses for Christ in society (Matt. 5:13)?

Handwritten notes on lined paper.

Jesus says Christians are the "light of the world" (Matt. 5:14). Just before the Sermon on the Mount, in Matthew 4:15-16 Jesus quoted Isaiah 9:2 to describe his ministry: "The people dwelling in darkness have seen a great light, and for those dwelling in the region and shadow of death, on them a light has dawned" (see also Isa. 42:6-7; 49:6). Jesus is the true light of the world, yet he calls his

followers to continue this sacred mission. How do Christians continue Jesus' light-shining ministry in the world today?

Handwritten notes on lined paper.

What specifically does Jesus say we are to do in order to shine as light (see Matt. 5:14-16)? Describe an example you have seen of a Christian doing this well.

Handwritten notes on lined paper.

What ultimate reason does Jesus give for why we should produce good works (Matt. 5:16)? How do our lives of good works, paired with the sharing of the good news about Jesus, ultimately lead people to glorify God?

Handwritten notes on lined paper.

How do the characteristics in the Beatitudes (vv. 3-12) help us understand what it looks like to live as salt and light? Which of the characteristics from the Beatitudes do you think is most urgent for Christians to express in our culture today?

Handwritten notes on lined paper.

**The Fulfillment of Scripture (Matt. 5:17–20)**

Jesus uses the phrase “the Law and the Prophets” to summarize the entire Old Testament (Matt. 5:17; see 7:12; 11:13; 22:40; Luke 24:27, 44). Jesus did not come to abolish the Old Testament Scriptures, but neither did he come merely to “teach,” “keep,” or “reinstate” them; he came to “fulfill” them. This means Jesus is that to which the Old Testament was pointing, with all of its commands, promises, and overarching storyline. What are a few ways in which Jesus brings the Old Testament to fulfillment?

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

Some people think that, because Jesus saves us by grace, it is not important for Christians to pursue good works seriously. How do Jesus’ words in Matthew 5:18–19 differ from that view?

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

The scribes<sup>4</sup> and Pharisees<sup>5</sup> were Jewish leaders who devoted their whole lives to obedience, yet Jesus expects his people to surpass their righteousness (Matt. 5:20)! What do we learn about these leaders’ “righteousness” from Matthew 15:7–9; 23:1–33? In light of this, how would you describe the different kind of righteousness for which Jesus calls?

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

Although Jesus does not require sinless obedience here, he is still calling for a new, radical, inwardly produced kind of righteous living. We may wonder how he can expect us actually to live this way. The key is understanding that Jesus is inaugurating the long-promised new covenant.<sup>5</sup> Read and note what you learn

from the central new-covenant promises of Jeremiah 31:31–33 and Ezekiel 36:26–27. How do these promises give you hope for moral transformation?

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

Some people claim that the Old Testament is no longer important for Christians. They believe it is irrelevant for helping people know Jesus and that Christians should leave it behind. How should we respond to such claims in light of Matthew 5:17–20?

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

Read through the following three sections on *Gospel Glimpses*, *Whole-Bible Connections*, and *Theological Soundings*. Then take time to consider the *Personal Implications* these sections have for you.

### Gospel Glimpses

**A NEW IDENTITY.** Jesus does not merely tell people to start pursuing good works; he first calls them to embrace a new identity. He always says “you are” before saying “do this.” Jesus does not call us to live moral lives or to love in order to earn a place in his kingdom. No, he first reminds us of our identity as his followers: *We are* the salt of the earth. *We are* the light of the word. It is not about what we do; it is a new identity that we receive as a gift. Only when we embrace this new identity in Christ can we then live it out. What a relief! We do not obey to become Christ’s; we obey because we are already his.

**A NEW RIGHTEOUSNESS.** Jesus calls his people to a righteousness greater than that of the professional law-teachers of his day. We may wonder if he is serious. Perhaps he simply wants us to despair so that we see our need of forgiveness. Three keys help us understand his meaning. First, it is true that we cannot obey

on our own. Jesus alone obeys perfectly, and he came to die in our place so that we could be forgiven. Second, he is calling us not to a greater *amount* of righteousness but to a different *kind* of righteousness—a sincere obedience from the heart, unlike the hypocritical Pharisees’ cheaply manufactured and hollow morality. Third, Jesus has inaugurated his kingdom, and with it the promises of the new covenant, which includes new hearts and Spirit-produced transformation (Jer. 31:31–34; Ezek. 36:27). Jesus calls us to sincere obedience, but he also provides both forgiveness for our failures and empowerment by his Spirit.

### Whole-Bible Connections

**THE FULFILLMENT OF THE LAW.** Jesus said he came not to abolish the law and the prophets but to fulfill them. He said elsewhere that the law and the prophets as a whole were prophetic: “All the Prophets and the Law prophesied until John [the Baptist]” (Matt. 11:13). The whole Old Testament—from its commands to its covenantal structure—pointed prophetically to the arrival of Jesus and his kingdom. Jesus does not merely fulfill a few scattered predictions; he brings the entirety of the Scriptures to their appointed goal. The Old Testament was an arrow, with Jesus as its tip. With his kingdom he brought in the new age that fulfills every ancient promise. He is the long-awaited prophet, priest, and king. He is the true temple of God’s presence and the final sacrifice for sins. He inaugurated the new covenant and launched the new creation. Now he generously pours out the promised Spirit to create new hearts in a new humanity that must live with glad-hearted obedience.

**THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD.** When Jesus calls his people the “light of the world” (Matt. 5:14), he echoes an ancient theme from the prophet Isaiah. In Isaiah 42:6 God said Israel was to be his servant and a “light for the nations.” Israel failed in this calling, so a new and better Servant, a true Israel, a singular Savior would come both to restore Israel and to be the true “light for the nations” (Isa. 49:6). When Jesus came, he announced himself to be this long-awaited Servant: “I am the light of the world” (John 8:12). He beautifully fulfills Israel’s calling to shine as light in the dark world. And, when he shines on us, we come out of darkness and into his marvelous light (Col. 1:13; 1 Pet. 2:9). Now all who are transformed by his light receive this new identity and mission: to join him in fulfilling Israel’s calling as the “light of the world” (Matt. 5:14)

### Theological Soundings

**GOOD WORKS.** Jesus calls us to shine brightly with kindness so that people “may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven” (Matt. 5:16). The Bible is clear: we are not saved *by* good works, but we are nevertheless

saved *for* good works. As Ephesians 2:9–10 says, although our salvation is “not a result of works,” we are nevertheless “created in Christ Jesus *for* good works.” Jesus, the only one to ever live a perfect life, died a “guilty” death in order to forgive all our sins. But he also rose again and poured out his Spirit to create a new humanity, eager to become like him. He did this to “purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works” (Titus 2:14). This is what it means to be a disciple: to learn from Jesus and to become like him by the power of the Holy Spirit. As we shine with good works, people will see God’s power and perhaps be drawn to trust and glorify him.

### Personal Implications

Reflect on how to apply what you have learned in this text to your everyday life. Make notes below on personal implications of (1) the *Gospel Glimpses*, (2) the *Whole-Bible Connections*, (3) the *Theological Soundings*, and (4) this passage as a whole. Also write down what you have learned that can lead you to praise God, repent of sin, trust his gracious promises, and live in obedience to him.

#### 1. Gospel Glimpses

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

#### 2. Whole-Bible Connections

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

#### 3. Theological Soundings

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## 4. Matthew 5:13–20

---



---



---



---



---



---

### As You Finish This Unit . . .

Take a moment to pray and ask for the Lord's blessing and help as you continue in this study of Matthew 5:13–20. And take a moment also to look back through this unit of study, to reflect on a few key things that the Lord may be teaching you—and perhaps to highlight and underline these things to review again in the future.

### Definitions

- <sup>1</sup> **Law** – When spelled with an initial capital letter, “Law” refers to the first five books of the Bible. The Law contains numerous commands of God to his people, including the Ten Commandments and instructions regarding worship, sacrifice, and life in Israel. The NT often uses “the law” (lower case) to refer to the entire body of precepts set forth in the books of the Law.
- <sup>2</sup> **Prophet** – Someone who speaks authoritatively for God. When the NT refers to “the prophets,” it is referring either to a specific group of OT books (“the Prophets,” with an initial capital letter, e.g., Matt. 5:17; Luke 24:44) or, more generally, to those who spoke to God's people on behalf of God throughout the OT between the time of Moses and the close of the OT (lower case, “the prophets,” e.g., Matt. 16:14; Acts 15:15).
- <sup>3</sup> **Scribe** – Someone trained and authorized to transcribe, teach, and interpret the Scriptures. Jesus often criticized the scribes for their pride, their legalistic approach to the Scriptures, and their refusal to believe in him.
- <sup>4</sup> **Pharisees** – A popular religious/political party in NT times characterized by strict adherence to the law of Moses and also to extrabiblical Jewish traditions. The Pharisees were frequently criticized by Jesus for their legalistic and hypocritical practices.
- <sup>5</sup> **New covenant** – Covenant prophesied in Jeremiah 31:31–34 and established through the death and resurrection of Christ. In this covenant, those who place their faith in Christ are forgiven through his atoning work, and these believers are enabled to remain faithful to God henceforth through the law's being “written on their hearts” by the Holy Spirit.