

Lesson Overview

Biblical Passage Matthew 5:13-16, 43-48

Supporting Passage John 13: 34-35

Memory Verse Matthew 5:16

Biblical Truth Jesus gave His followers high standards to live by.

Context This lesson is the first of two studies on Jesus' teachings from the Sermon on the Mount. Jesus taught with authority about the Scriptures, and revealed that He had authority to interpret them and the same authority as them. This lesson addresses two teachings in Matthew 5: how to have an influence on others and how to love our enemies. The next lesson will address more of Jesus' teaching in the Sermon on the Mount, as He told His disciples to seek God's Kingdom.

Learning Goals

- Students will identify how Jesus expects His followers to interact with the world.
- Students will evaluate their lives according to Jesus' standards.

Prayer Suggestions

As you prepare to teach this lesson, pray for those in your group.

- Pray that students will identify how Jesus expects His followers to interact with the world.
- Pray that students will evaluate their lives according to Jesus' standards.
- Pray that students will desire to live in ways that reveal Christ to others.

Biblical Commentary

Investigation

Jesus' Sermon on the Mount is possibly the best known of all His teachings presented in the Gospels. Matthew 5:1 states, "When Jesus saw the crowds, he went up on a mountainside and sat down." The crowd Jesus taught included His disciples, those people He had just healed, curious bystanders, and others. Matthew pointed out that Jesus' disciples approached Him as He began to teach them all, indicating that this was a public address to everyone there. As was the custom for teachers of His day, Jesus sat on the side of the mountain so everyone could hear Him. Then He began teaching about the characteristics, values, and relationships found in the Kingdom of God, which He said was "near" (Mt. 4:17).

In the first part of His sermon, Jesus taught eight blessings (commonly referred to as the "Beatitudes"). Jesus made it clear that the Kingdom cannot be earned, deserved, or achieved. Instead, those whose hearts have been transformed by the work of the Spirit are brought into His Kingdom.

Importance

This passage is important because it emphasizes that **People are God's Treasure**. Jesus called His followers to live as salt and light in this world so that they can draw people to faith in Christ. Because actions speak louder than words, Jesus emphasized the importance of a Christian's lifestyle as the evidence of his or her faith in Christ. Through living each day as witnesses for Christ, believers have been given the opportunity to shine the light of God into darkened human hearts. Unfortunately, those whose hearts are darkened by sin do not always appreciate the bright light of God's holiness exposing their evil thoughts and deeds. Therefore, Jesus challenged us to love our enemies and to pray for those who persecute us. He reminded us that because **People are God's Treasure**, His followers can glorify God by showing God's love to those who do not yet know Him.

In addition, this passage emphasizes that **The Bible is God's Word**, helping us to understand the standard of Christian living to which God calls His followers. This passage also supports the truth that **Jesus is God and Savior**, the One who has the ultimate authority for interpreting God's Word.

Interpretation

Matthew 5:13 Although in New Testament times "salt" had a variety of uses, the functions Jesus most likely had in mind related to flavoring and preserving. Salt enhances the flavor of otherwise bland food. In addition, salt preserves food that might otherwise spoil. In the past, salt was often rubbed into fresh pork to preserve it before refrigeration became common. This is still the process for country ham, which can be kept at room temperature for months (or years) because it has been preserved with salt.

Jesus wanted His hearers to know that true disciples have a responsibility to flavor and preserve life in the same way salt does. Believers add flavor when their lives overflow into the lives of others. These people then experience the blessings of Christ touching them. In preserving, Christians have a responsibility to keep the world from rotting. Just as salt must be rubbed into the meat to have a preserving effect, so Christians must be close enough to other people in the world so the love of God has a chance to rub off.

Matthew 5:14-15 "Light" refers to that which is good, as compared to darkness that so often symbolizes what is evil. In speaking to His followers, Jesus emphasized that their nature was also that of light. Only true followers of Christ can be the light of the world, because their nature is derived from Him, the "light of the world" (Jn. 8:12).

In ancient times, before the use of candles, small pottery bowls with a pinched spout for a wick burned olive oil in order to provide light inside houses. Because many of the dwellings were windowless, the occupants depended on lamps to illuminate the rooms so they could see. Usually, these lamps were placed on a high stone that stuck out from the wall so the lamp would light up the whole room. Jesus noted how foolish it would be to light a lamp and then cover it up. That would completely defeat the purpose of having a lamp.

Jesus referred to Himself as the Light of the World. Because the Holy Spirit lives inside believers, His light simply cannot be hidden. As a city that sits on a hill cannot be hidden because of the light it gives, so a person walking with Christ cannot hide the light that is within him or her.

Matthew 5:16 Jesus drove home His point in verse 16. Just as a lamp in a house or a city on a hill shines forth its light, Christ's disciples are challenged to let their light shine before others. In this verse, Jesus commanded His listeners to "shine"--to do what they were created to do. Jesus went on to inform those listening that letting their "light shine" meant practicing "**good**" deeds that pointed people to God. Just as a clay bowl (that holds oil and a wick) and a city are not actual lights, but merely holders of the light, so Kingdom people are the vessels used to display the light of Christ.

As Christians shine their lights, their motive should not be to bring attention to themselves but to bring glory and praise to God. When the light of Christ shines through us to others, the honor will go only to God.

Matthew 5:43-44 Leviticus 19:18 commands "**love**" for neighbors. Many Jews had a limited definition of a "neighbor." Some believed the term referred only to fellow Jews, thus eliminating **Gentiles** (non-Jews) and **Samaritans** (half-Jews). Others excluded Jewish tax collectors (such as Zacchaeus) who worked for the Roman government. Still others, primarily Pharisees, included only other Pharisees as their neighbors. At a later time in His ministry, a Jewish scholar asked Jesus to define whom his neighbor was supposed to be, but instead of giving a strict definition of who was included and excluded, Jesus told the Parable of the Good Samaritan. In this story, Jesus emphasized that anyone in need should be considered a "neighbor."

The Jewish rabbis interpreted Leviticus 19:18 to mean that there were groups of people to be loved and enemies to be hated. Jesus repeated the saying just as the people were used to hearing it. Then, as He did at other points in His Sermon on the Mount, Jesus explained how God really intended for His Law to be carried out. To those listening, as well as to those reading His words today, these were and are shocking statements. It is human nature to dislike our enemies and to seek revenge for wrongs done to us. But rather than doing what comes naturally, Jesus called Kingdom people to love and pray for their enemies. The greatest example of love for enemies is seen in the life of Jesus: He died for sinful humanity even though we were His enemies (Rom. 5:10) because of our sinful, rebellious nature. Additionally, in response to those who called for and carried out His crucifixion, Jesus asked His Father to forgive them even while He was suffering on the cross.

Matthew 5:45-47 Jesus said that one of the characteristics of a child of God is love for one's enemies. Similarly,

John 15:12 says, "My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you." Believers are commanded to love others. And this love not only includes friends; it includes enemies. Through the Holy Spirit, a believer is transformed to the point of loving his or her enemies, just as God does. Only God can bring about this transformation in an individual's life.

Jesus continued by reminding His hearers how God demonstrates this very action. Jesus noted that God causes the sun to rise on both the evil and the good and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. In other words, God exhibits love for all people; therefore, His children are to do the same. Likewise, Jesus added the fact that "tax collectors" and "pagans" greet those whom they love. His point was that even those who are thought to be evil and sinful greet those whom they love and who love them in return. But those who have been saved by Christ Jesus are to be different from everyone else, not only loving those who love them but also those who despise them or try to hurt them.

Matthew 5:48 This verse captures the essence of the character of those who belong to God's Kingdom. Believers are to "be perfect as their heavenly Father is perfect." Too many people want to compare themselves to other people. Yet Jesus did not want those who followed Him to compare themselves with others. Instead, He gave them the highest standard by which to compare themselves. He called them to reach the standard set by God. This not only refers to a faultless moral character but also to a complete devotion to God's ways. Jesus' words here serve as a fitting conclusion to His teachings in chapter five about the characteristics of Kingdom people: Their goal is to be like their Father in Heaven.

Is this goal of perfection attainable? Yes and no. When believers compare themselves to this standard and reach for perfection as Christ commanded, we fall far short, and we see our need for Christ. This failure to keep the Law brings us to utter dependence on God's grace and mercy. This should cause us to cling to Christ and receive His righteousness, His perfection. This is the meaning of the term to justify or justification (see Rom. 3).

Christ gives us His perfect standing before God, and at the same time He continually transforms our hearts so that our thoughts, attitudes, and actions move closer to God's standard of perfection.

Implications

Disciples of Christ are to penetrate their world by allowing God's nature to be exhibited through them. This was what Jesus did during His time in the world. As we follow His example in our daily lives, the world will have an opportunity to see us doing what Christ commanded—following His Word and doing good deeds. By God's grace, when others see and experience the reality of Christ lived out in us, God will ultimately receive the glory. How are you allowing Christ's life to flow out of you into a world that is spoiling from sin and living in darkness? What good works (see Eph. 2:10) do you see Christ doing through your life? How are others praising God as a result of your life?

Often in our Christian lives, we tend to compare ourselves to other believers in an effort to make us feel good about our progress (or lack of it) in following Christ. Yet when we compare ourselves with others, we either become satisfied with where we are and begin to relax in our spiritual growth, or we become discouraged and stop, thinking that we'll never be as good as they are. How have you compared yourself with others? What effect has it had on your growth? How do you measure up to the standard seen in the life of Jesus?

Jesus undoubtedly issued extremely high standards for His followers. Yet we cannot even begin to fulfill these

requirements and expectations apart from transformation by the Spirit of God. By surrendering our wills to the will of the Father, by admitting that without Christ we can do nothing, and by asking the Lord to intervene and transform our minds, hearts, and wills, we as believers make a difference in our world. How has Christ transformed your heart this past year? Can you see that He has made you more like Him than you were a year ago?

Teaching Plan

Connect

Review Questions

(5-8 minutes, easy set-up)

Students will answer five review questions from the previous lesson.

Download the "Review Questions" sheet. Print one copy for your own use.

After greeting students, use the review questions to test what they can recall from the previous lesson as well as to provide context for today's lesson.

Master Teacher Option: Signaling Light

(10 minutes, easy set-up)

Students will discuss the importance of light shining in the darkness.

Ask: **How can a light save your life?** Allow students to respond. Then read the following story: **In 1976, the city of Baltimore began building an authentic replica of a Baltimore Clipper, the first ship of its kind to be built in 150 years. The ship was commissioned in 1977 as The Pride of Baltimore and sailed more than 150,000 nautical miles in nine years. In 1986, however, a sudden and violent squall north of Puerto Rico caused the ship to sink. Six crewmembers floated in a life raft for more than four days with little food or water. During these days, they spotted six different sailing vessels. However, they were only rescued at night when a Norwegian ship spotted their SOS signal from a flashlight.**

Afterward, ask the following questions:

- **How was the difference between light and dark illustrated in this situation?**
- **How did the light of the flashlight affect the dark night around the sailors?**
- **How did the light make the difference between life and death for these crewmen?**

Allow students to discuss their answers. Then, explain that today, students will discover that Jesus commanded His followers to live in a way that is as significant as light in the darkness.

Explore

Master Teacher Key Study: Being Salt and Light

(10 minutes, easy set-up)

Students will study Matthew 5:13-16 and 5:43-48 to understand Jesus' call to be salt and light.

Print a copy of the Master Teacher Key Study for your use. Also provide a copy of the Student Worksheet and a pen for each student.

Learning Goal: Students will identify how Jesus expects His followers to interact with the world.

Pass out pens and copies of the Master Teacher Student Worksheet. Then, use the Master Teacher Key Study to teach Matthew 5:13-16 and 5:43-48.

Transform

Deeper Discussion

(10 minutes, easy set-up)

Students will discuss how to be spiritually effective in the world.

Learning Goal: Students will evaluate their lives according to Jesus' standards.

Emphasize that our goal as believers is to become "salt" and "light" to the world so the world can see Jesus in us. Say: **Christ gives us His perfect standing before God, and at the same time He continually transforms our hearts so that our thoughts, attitudes, and actions move closer to God's standard of perfection.** Lead students to discuss:

- **How can we maintain our potency as Christ-followers in the world around us?**
- **Jesus calls us to be different from those who do not follow Him. Why is it so important that others see a difference in us as Christ-followers?**
- **Whom do you consider to be your enemies? Why is it so difficult to show selfless love to those people?**
- **Is it possible for us to be perfect? If not, why does God require it?**

Lead students in response prayer, encouraging them to call out words to each of the following prompts:

- **What does it look like specifically to be God's "salt" in the world?**
- **What does it look like specifically to reflect God's "light" in the world?**
- **What is our purpose in being "salt" and "light"?**

Conclude: **Lord, teach us to be Your "salt" and "light" so we can fulfill Your purpose in the**

world. Amen.

Master Teacher Option: How to Be Salt and Light

(10 minutes, easy set-up)

Students will discuss what they can do to be “salt” and “light” in their worlds.

Learning Goal: Students will evaluate their lives according to Jesus’ standards.

Ask: **How would approaching life with the intent to make a difference change the following areas in your life: dating, friendships, money, entertainment, and how you spend your time?**

Write these life issues on the dry erase board. Lead students to discuss how our lives often fall short of Jesus’ standards to be an agent of change in the world in these areas. Ask: **How would our lives be different if we approached these areas with the intent to change the world for Christ? How would the way we impact others change?** After responses, instruct students to join with one or two other students. Instruct students to record their responses to their group discussions on the back of their worksheets as you lead them to discuss these questions:

- **What are at least three things you can do as students to make a difference for Christ in your family, school, church, or community?**
- **Do each of the things you identified as difference makers measure up to the standards Jesus set in this lesson? Why?**
- **How will these actions reveal Christ clearly in your life?**
- **Will these actions demonstrate unconditional Christian love for both your friends and those whom you consider--or who would consider you--enemies?**
- **Do these actions show that you are taking Jesus’ instructions seriously?**

After groups have had time to respond to each of these questions, lead students to share one action that they can begin to work on this week. Point out that having accepted Jesus’ gift of salvation, we are expected to live our lives accordingly--in a way that reflects Jesus as our Savior and fulfills God’s purpose in our lives. Lead students in prayer, asking God to help students become more aware of how they can be God’s “salt” and “light” in the world.

Take Home Activity

Family Devotion

(10-15 minutes at home, easy set-up)

Distribute copies of the Family Devotion to students and encourage them to share the devotion with their family.

A copy of the Family Devotion will be included in your lesson PDF download.

REVIEW QUESTIONS

(5-8 minutes, easy set-up)

Use these questions to review the content from Lesson 13: "His Power Over Nature"
The correct answer for each question is printed in bold, italic font.

1. What body of water were the disciples sailing on when the storm arose?
 - a. The Jordan River
 - b. The Dead Sea
 - c. *The Sea of Galilee***
 - d. The Mediterranean Sea
2. Before Jesus calmed the storm, why were Jesus and the disciples sailing across the Sea of Galilee?
 - a. *To rest from the crowds.***
 - b. To begin a missionary journey.
 - c. To escape the anger of the Pharisees.
 - d. To escape the anger of the crowd in the synagogue.
3. How severe was the storm that arose on the Sea of Galilee?
 - a. The Bible described it as "normal."
 - b. *The Bible described it as "furious."***
 - c. The disciples were exaggerating its severity.
 - d. No one would survive.
4. What was Jesus doing at the time of the storm on the Sea of Galilee?
 - a. He was watching the waves hit the boat.
 - b. He was praying.
 - c. *He was sleeping.***
 - d. He was comforting the disciples.
5. What did Jesus do when His disciples awakened Him during the storm?
 - a. He began to pray.
 - b. He told the disciples to abandon ship.
 - c. He began to walk on water.
 - d. *He told the storm to be quiet and to be still.***

BEING SALT AND LIGHT

(15–20 minutes, easy set-up)

Use this outline and any of the corresponding activities to share the Biblical Truth with students.

Introduction: How do your parents, teachers, and coaches communicate to you what they expect from you as a member of your family, as a student, or as a member of the team? Which of their expectations are relatively easy to meet? Which ones are challenging? In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus led His hearers to a deeper understanding of what He expected from His followers. More than a legalistic obedience to the Law, Jesus wanted His followers to be great examples for the world. In this passage, Jesus called His followers to live in a way that leads the world to ascribe great glory to God.

1. Jesus calls us to change the world through our lives (Matthew 5:13).

Biblical Background: Jesus used a metaphor for salt to describe how His followers are to interact with the world around them. Salt was used for a variety of reasons in Jesus' culture, including seasoning and preserving food. No matter how salt was used, if it was mixed with impurities, it was worthless for its purpose. Jesus told His followers to remain effective in the world by eliminating impurities (v. 13). As we are effective in the world, we will not leave it unchanged. We will affect those we encounter for Christ.

Illustration: Zach Hunter is a young student who is passionate about freeing modern-day slaves. He wrote a book, *Be the Change*, in which he tries to encourage people that they can make a difference today despite any challenges. Zach understands that God has called us to have an impact on the world.

Application: We are only effective at creating change for Christ in the world if people can understand that we are different because of Christ in our lives. We must, however, have relationships with people in order to be “salty” in the lives of others. Therefore, while we interact with those who need Christ, we also must allow Christ to work through us to show them who He is.

2. Jesus calls us to reflect His light into the world (Matthew 5:14–16).

Biblical Background: Jesus used another metaphor to describe how His followers should glorify Him in the world (v. 14). Jesus said that just as light makes the darkness disappear, His followers should reflect His light in order to dispel the darkness of the world (vv. 15-16). Reflecting the light of Christ is not for the purpose of drawing attention to us, but for the purpose of allowing others to see Christ.

Illustration: Did you know that as wonderful a nightlight as the moon is at night, it actually emits no light of its own? Instead, the moon only reflects the light of the sun. The light in our life is Jesus Christ, and we reflect His light to all those around us.

Application: Followers of Christ are called to live differently from the world while still having relationships with non-believers. Because **People are God's Treasure**, Jesus calls us to live in ways that reflect the light of Christ and draw others to Him.

3. Jesus calls us to hold ourselves to a higher standard (Matthew 5:43–48).

Biblical Background: Part of living differently from unbelievers is evidenced in the way that we treat others. Jesus stated that even unbelievers love people who love them in return. But Jesus commands us to love even our enemies and to also pray for them. Loving in this way illustrates God's perfect and selfless love.

Illustration: Jennifer Gash had a great job working for the city of Nashville and was considering a career in politics . . . until she attended a mission trip to an orphanage in Moldova. She was particularly bothered by the dirty mats that the children had for beds. When she returned home, she started a ministry, *Sweet Sleep*, to raise money to buy beds for Moldovan orphans. A year later, she quit her job so that she could work full-time to help her orphans. Jen's call to be salt and light went far beyond helping her Nashville neighbors. The organization has now provided over 25,000 beds worldwide. (For more info, visit www.sweetsleep.org. The website provides a video clip that you can show to your students.)

Application: Loving others who are lovely can be easy. Just as Christ loves us who are sinful, when we love our enemies, we reflect the love of God to the world. Loving our enemies requires that we act selflessly—putting others first and seeking their best interests.

Conclusion: We can give the world a poor reflection of Christ or an accurate reflection of Christ. Christ's reputation in the world is at stake, and we must keep our responsibility to make a difference in the world in mind as we consider our decisions and actions in life.

LESSON 14

BEING SALT AND LIGHT

CHRISTOS
STUDENT EDITION

Biblical Passage: Matthew 5:13-16, 43-48

Memory Verse: Matthew 5:16

“In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.”

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1. Jesus calls us to _____ the world through our lives (Matthew 5:13).
 2. Jesus calls us to _____ His light into the world (Matthew 5:14-16).
 3. Jesus calls us to _____ ourselves to a higher standard (Matthew 5:43-48).

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- How can we maintain our potency as Christ-followers in the world around us?
- Jesus calls us to be different from those who do not follow Him.
Why is it so important that others see a difference in us as Christ-followers?
- Whom do you consider to be your enemies? Why is it so difficult to show selfless love to those people?
- Is it possible for us to be perfect? If not, why does God require it?

WHAT ARE WE TO BE IN CHRIST?

Write what Matthew 5:13-16 says we about how we are to be the following:

WE ARE SALT:

WE ARE LIGHT:

OUR PURPOSE IS TO BE:

SOMETHING TO THINK ABOUT . . .

“Nothing that you will ever do will be perfect. Only what God does is perfect. Hence, if you are to reach the perfection which God requires, it must be as the result of his working for you and in you.”—*James Montgomery Boice*

LESSON 14

BEING SALT AND LIGHT

Biblical Passage: Matthew 5:13-16, 43-48

Sometimes the smallest things can make the biggest impact. For instance, the flu virus can make you terribly sick, and since it spread so easily, it can also infect a huge number of people in a very short period of time. Or think about how a termite can cause great damage to wood, weakening and ultimately destroying entire structures one little bite at a time. Small things can also have a positive effect. Have you ever noticed how hearing the laughter of someone you love can lighten your mood? Or how a hug from a loved one can bring comfort and peace by making all the stress fade away (even if only for a few moments). The small things in life can truly have tremendous impact on us. This is what Jesus taught while He was on earth. We are given small opportunities in life to make a big impact on the people we come in contact with.

Read Matthew 5:13-16 and 5:43-48. In these verses, Jesus explained how we might impact the world. Just as salt must retain its saltiness to season and preserve the food it touches, believers who live out their faith will share the gospel with the people they encounter, knowing the gospel has the power to save lives. And just as a light shines forth to dispel the darkness, believers can shine the light of Christ into a world darkened by sin, suffering, and hopelessness. By following Jesus' commands to love their enemies and pray for those who persecute them, believers will be known for their good works, which in turn, will glorify God and draw others to Him.

As followers of Christ, we can influence others to know and accept Christ in their lives. Parents can show their children how to follow God's standards as they teach and model the difference Christ makes in their lives. In turn, their children can reach others in their schools, on their teams, and in their neighborhoods with the living message that Jesus Christ changes lives. By committing to letting our faith in Jesus shine forth in our lives, we will have the opportunity to share the gospel with hundreds of people throughout our lifetimes.

CONNECTION QUESTIONS:

- Why is it important that others see the difference that Christ makes in our lives?
- What do you think it means to hide your light? How can we make sure that we shine the light of Christ into our world?
- Why does Jesus ask us to love our enemies and pray for those who persecute us?
- How does our obedience to these commands bring glory to God? Draw others to God?