

## **“Conspicuous Christianity” Matthew 5:13-20**

### **Wednesday 6/5/19 – Jeff Lyle**

Jesus calls His followers to live out well-seasoned and brightly shining lives. We are not to hide from the world. Christians do not live in retreat or recluse. The goal of the Gospel points upward in worship and outward in mission. In these verses from the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus reminds us who we are in Him, and what He has fully accomplished for us. He exposes the weakness of trusting in moral religion. Jesus declares that He has fulfilled all that the Law demands so that we are free to live motivated by trust and love rather than fear and striving. He is calling us to put Him on full and public display as we live out our lives in a world that does not know Him. Religion demands that we behave. Jesus demands that we believe. Between these two demands, eternity hangs in the balance for us.

#### **I. Jesus Speaks of a Seasoned Life (13)**

##### **A. A current reality - "You are the salt of the earth..."**

Much has been written about this statement of Jesus from so long ago. Speaking to those who were to be His followers, He begins to speak identity and destiny over them as citizens of His kingdom. When Jesus declares that we are the salt of the earth, we can recognize at least three things about this metaphor that He declares over us:

1. Salt prevents decay - Salt was packed around meat to keep it from spoiling. Natural corruption would take over, but the salt served as a preserving agent to resist decay. Kingdom people, living in the power of Jesus, serve as agents of preservation against the corrupting influences of a culture that does not know God.
  
2. Salt promotes flavor - as salt makes what is naturally bland more tasteful to those eating, Jesus-followers will bring spiritual flavor into their spheres of influence. Joy, peace, faith, goodness, meekness and the other components of the fruit of the Spirit are not found anywhere else but in the people of God. As the salt of the earth, we add Kingdom flavor to a culture that is bland with the sameness of sin.
  
3. Salt produces thirst - when we consume salty foods, we soon sense an increase in our desire to drink something. Saltiness creates thirst in the natural. As the salt of the earth, when we are living in cooperation with Holy Spirit, those who are not following Jesus will experience a curiosity, a longing, or even a desperate thirst for what they see in our lives.

**B. A potential loss - "...but if salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored?"**

Salt, chemically speaking, never loses its essence as NaCl, sodium chloride. Yet, it can certainly diminish in its effectiveness as a flavor enhancer, preservative and thirst producer if it is diluted through contamination. In Jesus' day, salt was taken directly from certain water sources, packed and transported. Along the way in the process, it could become intermingled with all sorts of contaminants. If the various contaminants arrived in too high a degree, the salt would be functionally worthless. It would no longer be suited for any of its purposes. In this illustration point, Jesus is giving a gentle warning to believers that we also might lose our effectiveness through living contaminated lives. We still retain the content of our salvation, but we cannot serve the purposes that God has designed for us if our lives are contaminated with the sinful influences of a world that does not know Jesus.

**C. An alarming possibility- "...it is no longer good for anything except to be thrown out and trampled under people's feet."**

When salt lost its punch in Jesus' day, they would often set it aside and use it in slippery places where people walked. In the temple courtyard, it was common for salt to be thrown all along the stone in order to prevent people from slipping and falling during wet times. This same practice could be used on streets to provide a grip for people to walk more securely. Jesus is likely referring to this practice when He releases the alarming possibility that our own lives become valueless if we lose our spiritual-saltiness. We who are destined for glory could actually end up living such contaminated lives that the world around us uses us as grips for the bottom of their feet. In essence, we might live as doormats if we do not live at the level of honor and dignity afforded us in Jesus.

**II. Jesus Speaks of a Shining Life (14-16)**

**A. His surprising declaration (14a) - "You are the light of the world..."**

To further exhort His audience, Jesus swaps metaphors from salt to light. Jesus declared Himself to be the Light of the world in John 8:12. Amazingly, He now looks at us and tells us that we are the Light of the World. What He was in His earthly life, His disciples are in our earthly lives. He illuminated the Kingdom wherever He went. He spotlighted the true meaning of love, righteousness and holy power. He spotlighted the wicked works of the devil and those who belong to Him. Jesus also shined a spotlight on the deceptions of human religion. Wherever Jesus went, He offered revelation unto the nature of His Father and the plans of eternity. Now, Jesus teaches,

His followers share in that same role through the Word of God and the indwelling Holy Spirit. We are light. We are agents of revelation and illumination. We expose the hidden works of darkness and the deceptive practices of human religion just as Jesus did. We highlight love, truth and power just like Jesus did. We function in His place as lights to a dark world.

**B. His two illustrations (14b-15a) - "A city set on a hill cannot be hidden {Exposed}. Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket {Undimmed} ..."**

Jesus further illustrates that His followers are to be publicly, conspicuously visible. We are not to live lives of retreat. We are not to hide from the culture that does not honor God. We are to live exposed lives that serve in visual, measurable distinction from our culture. The exposed city and undimmed lamp speak to us of answering the call to live lives that are markedly, visibly different from those who do not know Jesus. We cannot hide. We will not blend in. We are not ashamed of our King.

**C. His clear expectation (15b-16) - "...put it...on a stand; and it gives light to all in the house. 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."**

Notice that Jesus' desire for His followers to be visibly connected to Him is paired with a couple of action-items. Jesus commands us to intentionally give off His light, which is also our light, to the world around us. Passive Christianity was never an option that Jesus offered the Church. He calls us to structure and live out our lives so that people see God and His kingdom through the good works that we do. Jesus declares that, when we live this way, the Father will be glorified. We can assume that He means that people will experience the good works we do that benefit them and others, and some of those people will be able to see that we are who we are and do what we do because we are followers of Jesus. Yes, our intentionally visible Christianity is meant to spur people to consider how we are living and to ultimately connect these lives of distinction to the message of Jesus that we share.

### **III. Jesus Speaks of a Scriptural Life (17-19)**

**A. What Jesus explains to us concerning the Scriptures (17-18) - "Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. 18 For truly, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law until all is accomplished."**

While there is so much in the moral law of God which we read in our Old Testament, the ceremonial and sacrificial law given through Moses to Israel is not binding on New Testament believers. All of the Law points to Jesus. He says this in the two verses above. Jesus lived in perfect, unbroken obedience to the Law of God given to Israel. He never came short of anything in the precepts, principles or prohibitions of the OT Law. He did not disregard them, He fulfilled them. This is part of why the Father spoke over Jesus that He was well-pleased in His beloved Son. Jesus always did the things which pleased the Father (John 8:29). When Jesus declares that Heaven and Earth will pass away but the Law will not, He was stating emphatically that God's Word is true and trustworthy. God has spoken, His words have been written down accurately, and what God has said will surely come to pass. Fulfillment is inevitable. Even the smallest letter of the Law will be fulfilled. Even the smallest pen stroke of the Prophets will be accomplished. Jesus declared that all of this will come to pass through Him. Below are three simple, discernible ways in which we can understand that Jesus fulfills the Law of God.

1. Jesus fulfills the symbolism in the Old Testament
2. Jesus fulfills the demands of the Old Testament
3. Jesus fulfills the prophecies of the Old Testament

**B. What Jesus expects of us concerning the Scriptures (19) - "Therefore whoever relaxes one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever does them and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven."**

Be wise here about to interpret this statement from Jesus. He has just said that He came to fulfill the Law of God. After His death and resurrection, this was fully and finally done. There is no longer any need for us to live under the demands of the Law of Moses. Now that the Law has been completed by Jesus on our behalf, we are no longer obligated to keep it ourselves. It is not that the Law itself has gone away, but only that our obligation to keep has been removed, because Jesus has already kept (fulfilled, completed, accomplished) it for us. By application, Jesus also teaches that anyone who discounts the importance of God's Word will suffer loss by being called "least in the kingdom of heaven." Jesus is the One Who kept and taught the Law, and as a result, Jesus will be the One Who is called great in the Kingdom of Heaven (Matt 5:19). We should not teach believers to follow the Law out of obligation, but neither should we teach that the Law is no longer in force. Rather, we teach that the Law has been fulfilled by Christ's work, and we rest in His perfect accomplishment of the Law rather than in our own futile efforts to keep it. As in all things within the Kingdom, we point people

to Jesus. We honor the God who wrote the Law, but we also honor Him by trusting in His son as the only one who ever fulfilled the righteous demands of the Law. When we capture the spirit of the written Law, we will find ourselves pressing in to Jesus who accomplished it on our behalf. We teach the spirit, not the letter, of the Law. We obey the righteous commands found in the New Testament that are rooted and grounded in our faith and abiding in Jesus. We still obey the Word, and even the spirit of the Law, but it is done in devotion to the One who has fulfilled the Law. We are freed to obey as those motivated by love, not fear. Here are three considerations about our heart posture as pertains to the written Word of God, the Bible:

1. Learn for yourself what Scripture says
2. Share with others what Scripture says
3. Obey what Scripture says

#### IV. Jesus Speaks of a Superficial Life (20)

##### **A. A religious understanding of holiness - "...unless your righteousness exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees..."**

Jesus leaves His listeners with a stunning statement. He tells them that even the righteous deeds of the Pharisees are not sufficient to find approval from God. He tells His listeners that their own righteousness would need to exceed that of the most conservative, biblically informed, and disciplined group of religious people that existed in their day. All of His audience would have experienced a mind-blowing moment when these words came forth from Jesus. Why? Because of what He says next.

##### **B. A defeating underestimating of holiness - "...you will never enter the kingdom of heaven."**

Mark it down: Jesus just said that anyone trusting in their own righteousness will never enter the Kingdom. Also, Jesus has dropped the bombshell that the entire religious system set up and maintained by the scribes and Pharisees would result in them being excluded from the kingdom of God. If anyone felt entitled and deserving of Kingdom entrance, it was the scribes and Pharisees. Jesus says in no uncertain terms, "These men and those who follow their examples will not make it into my Kingdom." The reason why is that their own righteousness was insufficient to merit and entrance into the eternal Kingdom. Jesus tells the audience that the people they admired most as God's representatives did not have a spiritual leg to stand upon. They would be eternally excluded if they continued trusting in themselves.

### **C. A biblical understanding of holiness**

This part of the Sermon on the Mount is best closed out with some summary statements about what Jesus has taught. He clearly calls us to a visible, consecrated conspicuous Christianity as we live lights that are like salt and light. We are no longer bound to live as those who strive to fulfill the Law of God. We have already failed in that endeavor and can never attain to the holy standard of God as revealed by the Law. We are not despair however, because Jesus has done this for us. He fulfilled the Law and therefore the Law, which still stands as the revelation of the righteousness of God, has been accomplished by Jesus alone. The Word is still true, and we do not diminish anything written in the Bible as unnecessary or unimportant. While we cannot say that we have obeyed it, we can trust in Jesus who obeyed it perfectly. This results in an imputed righteousness that God places on our account when He declares us justified. This imputed righteousness will also be seen to be imparted righteousness. He makes us holy like Him. We, as those who have righteousness imputed to us, will prove to have lives that reveal righteousness imparted to us. In the end, all true believers live out in practical ways our position in Christ which He has secured for us.