

GLENKIRK CHURCH



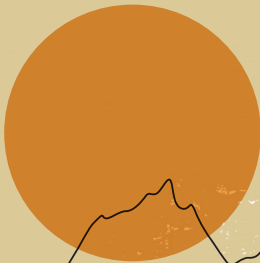
WEEKLY DEVOTIONS

# The DEVO

SEPTEMBER 4 - 8, 2023

## Re-Formed:

Sermon on the Mount



Sermon Series 9/3 - 11/26

# MONDAY

Read **Matthew 5:1-12**

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## Being the Salt of the Earth

One distinctive element of Jesus' teaching was His use of metaphors and similes. Both are figures of speech, but a metaphor identifies one thing, such as "*You are the salt of the earth,*" whereas a simile likens one thing to another, such as "*The kingdom of God is like ...*"

In today's text Jesus uses two metaphors to describe His audience, *salt* and *light*. Whenever we encounter such metaphors, we need to ask ourselves, "What is the primary point of comparison between the subject and that to which it is being compared?" This is especially true for the metaphor of *salt* since salt has many uses. Salt can be used to flavor food, to preserve food, as a currency for trading (our word "salary" derived from "salt"), to lower the freezing point of water for deicing roads, to kill slugs, and to remove coffee and wine stains. Certainly, Jesus did not have all of these uses of salt in mind when He said to His followers, "*You are the salt of the earth.*" So just what did Jesus mean by this metaphor?

We should always look to the context first when attempting to interpret the Bible, and in the following statement, Jesus gives us a clue: "*But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled*"

*underfoot.*” Although pure salt never loses its saltiness, salt in Jesus’ day was likely to include impurities that resulted in the salt flavor dissipating over time. It seems clear that Jesus primarily was referring to salt’s flavoring properties. With this clue, we could then paraphrase Jesus’ metaphor to: “You are the flavoring of the world”; that is, His followers are the ones intended to influence the world around them in a positive manner.

Our job as Jesus’ followers is to live in such a way that God’s grace, truth, and wisdom is sprinkled throughout society that others may know and honor Him. The title of a popular Christian book first published in 1979, *Out of the Saltshaker and into the World*, reminds us that our purpose as the salt of the earth should be externally focused.

## QUESTIONS

How do you flavor your community with grace, truth, and wisdom? What impurities, if any, might reduce your “saltiness” as you follow Jesus?

## PRAYERS

*For Bryant and Anne Wilhelmsen (Global Grace Fellowship)*

Praise God for the willingness of one particular German congregation to step forward in protecting a refugee family from deportation, even though it meant months of risk and sacrifice. May both the church family and this refugee family be blessed with an eternal bond of love and fellowship to the glory of God.

# TUESDAY

Read **Matthew 5:13-15; 2 Corinthians 2:14-17**

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## Being the Light of the World

Today's text from Matthew's Gospel expands on the metaphor of salt by adding a metaphor of light: *"You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead, they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven."* With this metaphor Jesus makes the meaning explicit: His followers are to be a light as those who set an example for others. Their conduct is to be so exemplary that others glorify the Father.

One of the specific attributes of light that Jesus emphasizes is its public nature. Whereas darkness makes it difficult to discern colors and shapes, light that is accomplishing its purpose cannot be hidden. Whereas darkness hides, light makes things plain. Shining light on an object exposes its shape, features, color, and size. In a similar way, Jesus' followers are to live lives that are transparent to others. We are to reflect the light of Christ through our humility, grace, truth-telling, and caring for others.

Paul uses a similar metaphor in his second letter to the Corinthians when he speaks of Jesus' followers as the *"pleasing aroma of Christ"*

*among those who are being saved and those who are perishing”* (2 Corinthians 2:15). While this aroma is pleasing to God, Paul says, it smells like death to those who are perishing. That is, Jesus’ followers expose the folly, sin, and selfishness of those who have rejected Jesus and chosen to pursue their own way. But to those who have chosen to follow Jesus, other believers are an aroma that brings life.

Paul’s use of this metaphor reveals a dual purpose of light that is likely also present in Jesus’ use of the light metaphor. Those who follow Jesus not only present a standard of truth, grace, and love for all the world to see how great God is, but also demonstrate to Jesus’ followers the standards by which they should live. Our good deeds should be so obvious that those who encounter us should know they have been in the presence of a Christ follower.

## QUESTIONS

How does your light shine in your community? How would neighbors, colleagues, and the public describe you?

## PRAYERS

**For Bryant and Anne Wilhelmsen (Global Grace Fellowship)**

Pray for trainees to come alongside Bryant and Anne, believers willing to embrace the personal, spiritual, and legal challenges involved in assisting displaced people—whole families in most cases—from nations where their lives are in constant danger. Many suffer from the effects of trauma.

# WEDNESDAY

Read **Matthew 5:17-18, 23:23-24; Mark 7:14-19**

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## The Permanence of the Law

The first statement of today's text, "*Do not think I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets*" (v. 17), likely reflects a common charge leveled against both Jesus and the early church to whom Matthew was writing. After all, was not Jesus the one who associated with "sinners," whose disciples "worked" (i.e., plucked grain) on the Sabbath, and who said that "*Nothing outside a person can defile them by going into them,*" thereby declaring all foods clean (Mark 7:14-19)? Did that not make Jesus and His followers lawbreakers in the eyes of devout Jews? Jesus clarifies that His purpose was not to abolish the Law or Prophets but to fulfill them. In making such a statement, Jesus validates the Hebrew Scriptures and affirms their authority for all His followers.

Jesus further affirms the permanence of the Law by stating that even the least mark used when writing the Law will not disappear until everything is accomplished. However we understand Jesus' other teachings about the Law, we should not think of them as detracting from or denigrating the Law that God had given to Israel through Moses. Rather, His life and teachings are intended to be an example of what it means to fulfill the Law.

Bible scholars often distinguish between the ritual (or "cultic") aspects of the Law—laws that prescribe certain forms of worship—and the

ethical aspects of the Law—laws that instruct how people should relate to God and to one another. Throughout Jesus’ ministry He emphasized that the latter aspects of the law outweighed the former.

At one point in His ministry, Jesus blasted the Pharisees for focusing too much on the minor details of the Law and neglecting the heart of the Law. *“Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You give a tenth of your spices—mint, dill, and cumin. But you have neglected the more important matters of the law—justice, mercy, and faithfulness. You should have practiced the latter, without neglecting the former”* (Matthew 23:23). Notice that Jesus did not declare tithing unimportant. He merely emphasized that justice, mercy, and faithfulness were higher order requirements of the Law that all were expected to fulfill. Jesus thus illustrated what He expected of His followers, that the Law is meant to be fulfilled through one’s actions.

## QUESTIONS

What role does the Law play in your practice of following Jesus?

## PRAYERS

**For Bryant and Anne Wilhelmsen (Global Grace Fellowship)**

Pray for those who have left everything they own, everything and everyone familiar to them, to find a safe haven for their families and themselves. May the Lord direct their steps and provide them with what they need to reestablish their lives in a land of an unfamiliar language and culture.

# THURSDAY

Read **Matthew 5:19**

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## Least and Great in God's Kingdom

Jesus' statement in today's text (v. 19) draws a contrast between two types of people, based on their response to God's Law. On the one hand, there is what we might refer to as the Law-negater, the person who *"sets aside one of the least of these commands and teaches others accordingly."* Such a person, Jesus stated, *"will be called least in the kingdom of heaven."* On the other hand, is what we might refer to as the Law-affirmer, the person who *"practices and teaches these commands."* By contrast, Jesus stated that person *"will be called great in the kingdom of heaven."* This teaching reaffirms the high value Jesus placed on fulfilling the Law as we saw in yesterday's text.

There are several observations worth noting about this text. Firstly, Jesus is concerned with both the behavior and influence of His followers. His concern is not merely about what a follower does or does not do in relation to the Law, but also in what His followers teach others. Whether such teaching is implicit in their behavior (i.e., by neglecting or practicing the Law, they set a negative or positive example for others) or explicit in their teachings, Jesus expects that His followers will powerfully influence others. Jesus' practice of fulfilling the Law through His actions and teaching others to do the same is an example for His followers to emulate.



Secondly, notice that Jesus affirms that both categories of followers—the Law-negaters and the Law-affirmers—are part of the kingdom of heaven. The former are least and the latter are great in God’s kingdom, but Jesus is not speaking about a matter of salvation. Rather, Jesus has differentiated between levels of honor in God’s kingdom. Notice also that the contrast is not between *least* and *greatest* (as one might expect) but between *least* and *great*. Jesus is not establishing a rank order for the kingdom but simply contrasting behavior that reflects one’s commitment to the righteous kingdom God has established. The Law-affirmers are those who are seeking first God’s kingdom and His righteousness (Matthew 6:33) and encouraging others to do the same.

## QUESTIONS

Why do you think Jesus’ followers sometimes set aside God’s commandments and encourage others to do the same? What does a commitment to fulfilling the Law look like in today’s world?

## PRAYERS

For Bryant and Anne Wilhelmsen (Global Grace Fellowship)

Pray especially for Anne’s ministry to the children in the refugee encampments. After significant disruption by COVID, which is still a challenge, may the Lord continue to open doors for Anne to show His love and care through the activities she organizes for the kids. She is a healing presence in their lives.

# FRIDAY

Read **Matthew 5:20; 23:13-39**

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## Real Righteousness

The final verse of our primary text for this week serves as a transition between the verses that precede it and those that follow. Jesus summarized the importance of fulfilling rather than abolishing the Law and Prophets and prepared His audience for the deeper understanding of the Law that He was about to give them. Jesus used the Pharisees and teachers of the Law as a point of contrast. Many in Jesus' audience would have considered them the paragons of righteousness. As a reform movement within Judaism, the Pharisees had emphasized the importance of studying God's law to obey it. In fact, the emergence of the synagogue as a place to gather and study God's Word was largely attributable to the Pharisees. When Jesus stated that unless His followers' righteousness exceeded that of the Pharisees, His followers would have had little hope of entering the kingdom.

However, as we see in Matthew 23, Jesus viewed many of the Pharisees as hypocrites, focused on details of the Law and oral traditions without adequate attention to the heart of the Law. As such He referred to them as "*blind guides*" (23:16, 24), "*blind fools*" (23:17), "*snakes*" and "*brood of vipers*" (23:33). Such name-calling was no doubt offensive to the Pharisees, but Jesus used strong language to challenge them to recognize their peril of failing to enter God's kingdom (23:13). This

understanding of the “righteousness” of the Pharisees and teachers of the law was the basis for Jesus’ exhortation that His followers’ righteousness must exceed that of the Pharisees to enter God’s kingdom.

In the verses that follow in Matthew 5, Jesus presented several examples of upholding the true intention of the Law rather than merely obeying it in a technical manner. One example is Jesus’ teaching about the law of retribution: “Eye for eye, and tooth for tooth” (5:38-42). In Calvin Miller’s *The Singer*, he notes that this view of vengeance is “a fair, satisfying and rapid way to a sightless, toothless world” (p. 105). Jesus expected His followers not to practice retribution, but rather to love those who would attempt to harm them. This was merely one example of how His followers’ righteousness must exceed that of the Pharisees. True righteousness for Jesus was a heart fully devoted to loving God and loving one’s neighbor.

## QUESTIONS

How do you practice righteousness in your daily life? What misperceptions of God’s Law do you need to correct?

## PRAYERS

For Bryant and Anne Wilhelmsen (Global Grace Fellowship)

Pray especially for Bryant as he interacts with church leaders, trains Bible study leaders, and builds trust with government officials who are tasked with crucial decisions as they deal with the constant influx of asylum seekers and other refugees. They are stretched to the limits and beyond.

## Sources

- Rebecca Manley Pippert, *Out of the Saltshaker and into the World: Evangelism as a Way of Life* (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1979).
- Calvin Miller, *The Singer: A Classic Retelling of Cosmic Conflict* (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 2001).

