



**Bible Study, January 25, 2023**

**Series: The Discipleship Training of Jesus Christ | A Study of Matthew 5-7**  
**Lesson 3: The Disciples Mission & Righteousness**

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**Pastor Reginald Rogers, Facilitator**

**Introduction**

Making disciples of the people living in this world is the major drive of evangelism (CF: *Matthew 28:19*). Jesus Christ was insistent about His first disciples having an understanding about the mission that was before them. The disciples present with Him knew that they were called by Him, "Fishers of Men." Now they are learning from Him about what that phrase means. The world was their mission field and it is still the mission field of the church today. Jesus prepared them to be the *salt of the earth* and *light of the world* to accomplish the mission. Also, He focused on His fulfillment of the Law and Prophets and the measure of their righteousness as His disciples.

**The Scripture Reading | Matthew 5:13-20**

- <sup>13</sup> "You are the salt of the earth. 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.
- <sup>14</sup> "You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden.
- <sup>15</sup> 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.
- <sup>16</sup> In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.
- <sup>17</sup> "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.
- <sup>18</sup> For truly I tell you, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished.
- <sup>19</sup> Therefore anyone who sets aside one of the least of these commands and teaches others accordingly will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever practices and teaches these commands will be called great in the kingdom of heaven.
- <sup>20</sup> For I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven.

**Examining the Text**

- <sup>13</sup> "You are the salt of the earth. 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.

I call this verse and the next one the "You are" verses because of Jesus' emphasis about His disciples being the *salt of the earth* as He taught them. Notice that Jesus did not say "You will be" which is the future tense. But right now, in the present tense they are the *salt of the earth*. Why the comparison to salt? Let us review the Old Testament to understand the use of "salt" that describes the disciples.

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***The Old Testament Comparison***

During the times in Ancient Israel, salt was used to make an agreement binding between two parties. Consider the following paragraph that describes how this was done:

*In the ancient world, ingesting salt was a way to make an agreement legally binding. If two parties entered into an agreement, they would eat salt together in the presence of witnesses, and that act would bind their contract. King Abijah's speech in [2 Chronicles 13:5](#) mentions just such a salt covenant: "Don't you know that the LORD, the God of Israel, has given the kingship of Israel to David and his descendants forever by a covenant of salt?" Here, Abijah refers to the strong, legally binding promise of God to give Israel to David and his sons forever.<sup>1</sup>*

There are other references in the Old Testament Law that command the use of salt. One such commandment told the Levitical Priesthood to season all grain offering with salt and do not leave the salt covenant that they have with GOD out of the grain offerings (CF: *Leviticus 2:13*). So, Jesus uses this precious commodity to describe the importance of His disciples.

***The Meaning of the Verse***

Jesus was saying to His disciples that they have significant influence, importance, and value in this world. You are the "salt of the earth" a preserving influence that will change the course of fallen mankind throughout the world. There will be no evangelizing in Israel only. It will begin in Jerusalem and extend to the four corners of the world (CF: *Acts 1:8*) The Lord made it plain that their mission was to win the world for His kingdom. They were to become the savory flavor for the lost world to consume its taste.

***The Application of the Verse***

Just like the early disciples, we must win this fallen world as the "salt of the earth." We must be on guard against losing our salty flavor and taste. If this happens, then our ministry will be ineffective and of no use for the kingdom of heaven. How do we avoid this from happening during our Christian walk? Paul the apostle said it best when he wrote Timothy instructing him in the following: *Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth.* [2 Timothy 2:15] In other words, develop a plan for studying GOD'S word and be ready to share the word of truth with an unsaved person so that GOD will approve you.

- **Create a list of some ways in which you can be salt in the earth. From your list, which ones are you doing now? Which ones will require some improvement?**

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<sup>14</sup> "You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden. <sup>15</sup> 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.

This is the second of the "You are" verses that Jesus called His disciples. His disciples were to be seen as a bright light shining in a dark world. After all, He came into this as the life and light for all mankind. John in his gospel wrote these words: *In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.* [John 1:4-5] So, let us now see why we as disciples are the "light of the world."

**Old Testament Comparison**

In the Old Testament, righteousness is seen as a pathway of brightness. While darkness is viewed as a stumbling block. The comparison of light to darkness is mentioned in the Book of Proverbs: *The path of the righteous is like the morning sun, shining ever brighter till the full light of day. But the way of the wicked is like deep darkness; they do not know what makes them stumble.* [Proverbs 4:18-19] This was Jesus' expectation of His disciples when He called them the "light of the world." What did it mean to be called the light of the world?

**The Meaning of the Verses**

Once more, the mission of the disciples was to win the world for the kingdom of heaven. The brightness of their pathway was to shine for the entire world to see. Jesus reminded them that no city or town that is built up on a hill cannot be hidden. He prepared them to be visible and vocal where ever they would go. Why? Because where ever He went He declared the following: *"I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life."* [John 8:12] As Jesus' church today, we are to declare this light of life everywhere we go. The expectation is for the Body of Christ to win the world today. Lastly, Jesus reminded His disciples that people do light a lamp and then hide it. A lamp is put on a stand so that it will give light to everyone in the house. Here He is restating how important it is to shine the light of life for all the world to see.

**The Application of the Verses**

I have already stated that the expectation for the Body of Christ is to win lost souls throughout this world. This is the mission of evangelism. Jesus did not limit this work for the Apostles, Prophets, Evangelists, Pastors, and Teachers to do alone. When Paul wrote the church at Ephesus, he stated that these gifts would be used to equip the saints for the work of the service (CF: Ephesians 4:8-13). Therefore, discipleship training is very important to the building up of the Body of Christ.



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- Over the past year, tell of a time or times in which you have shared the faith with another person to win him or her into the kingdom of heaven. How did it make you feel? Were you met with any resistance when sharing your testimony?
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<sup>16</sup> In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.

Whenever I see the word "let" I think about the word "choice." I have a choice to shine or not to shine the light. By choosing to shine the light I am obeying Jesus' command to do this. This verse is packed with instruction on the importance of evangelizing. Observe what the Lord taught.

#### **Old Testament Comparison**

In the Old Testament, Isaiah the prophet proclaimed that the glory of the LORD would rise, and the nations of the world would come to His light. Let us look at the Scripture stating this very thing: *"Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the LORD rises upon you. See, darkness covers the earth and thick darkness is over the peoples, but the LORD rises upon you and his glory appears over you. Nations will come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your dawn."* [Isaiah 60:1-3] Here Isaiah the Messianic Prophet in Ancient Israel foresees the coming Messiah (Christ) with His gospel message of salvation. It is the gospel that will compel the people living in darkness to come into the light. Do you see the comparison in this verse to our text verse to let your light shine before others?

#### **The Meaning of the Verse**

The idea in our text is the very presence of the light of truth shining in the darkness of the nations. Remember, the Lord is emphasizing that their mission for evangelism is the world. The presence of His disciples in the world is to shine the light of GOD'S truth as a beacon that brings light to the dark hearts of sinful mankind. Jesus told His disciples that they will be displaying their good deeds for the world to see and bring glory to the Father in heaven. The bottom line here is that GOD alone will be glorified.

#### **The Application of the Verse**

Today, we are the beacons that take the light of truth to nations smothered in darkness. The primary framework of the gospel message is still "Repent for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." We may not be expressing those exact words, but we are proclaiming salvation for all to hear. Paul in writing the church at Rome declared these words: *If you declare with your mouth, "Jesus is*



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*Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you profess your faith and are saved. [Romans 10:9-10]* Everybody deserves to hear the gospel message of salvation.

- Describe a time in which you let your gospel light shine before others to share what was in your heart. Did those listening to you want to hear more about eternal life?

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<sup>17</sup> "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.

Jesus has given His disciples their mission and now He addresses their righteousness. Living righteously points directly to Jesus Christ. His life is a righteous life and the standard in which all His disciples must measure up too. Let us spend some time to learn this from the Lord.

#### **Old Testament Comparison**

When it comes to this teaching by the Lord there are no Old Testament comparisons specifically about the Law and the Prophets that agree here.

#### **The Meaning of the Verse**

The lifestyle and ministry of Jesus Christ fulfilled significant parts of GOD'S revelation to Israel given by the Law and the Prophets. The things that Jesus did while ministering proved that GOD'S will was being done on earth. The Law and the Prophets represents a broad portion of Jewish Scriptures. The only section not mentioned here by the Lord is the Poetry. While the disciples could not fulfill the revelations made known by the appearance of Jesus Christ; they would learn from Him the importance of following His example of living.

#### **The Application of the Verse**

We should understand these words spoken by Jesus in the following: *You study the Scriptures diligently because you think that in them you have eternal life. These are the very Scriptures that testify about me...* [John 5:39] Jesus is saying that all the Holy Scriptures speak of Him. Yes, we study them too, but we should know that they point to the prophecy and the fulfillment of the Scriptures about Him.



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- Where in the Scriptures is the coming of the Christ first mentioned? What is the promise made by GOD about Christ? To whom did He declare this?

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<sup>18</sup> For truly I tell you, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished.

Jesus assured His disciples, as well as the crowd not fear that the Law and the Prophets would be removed. He continued to enlighten His disciples on the importance of GOD'S Word remaining until the end of time and this included the smallest letter and the least stroke of a pen.

#### **Old Testament Comparison**

The birth of the Christ was foretold by Isaiah the prophet (CF: *Isaiah 7:14*). The place of His birth was foretold by Micah the prophet (CF: *Micah 5:2*). The journey to Jerusalem by Him for His crucifixion was foretold by Zechariah the prophet (CF: *Zechariah 9:9*). The crucifixion of the Christ is foretold by the Psalmist (CF: *Psalms 22:16-18*). The persecution of the Christ was foretold by Isaiah the prophet (CF: *Isaiah 53:3-7*). I ask you in last week's study about the impact those verses had upon you. These and many more prophecies represent the fulfillment of what took place in the life and ministry of Jesus while He lived on earth.

#### **The Meaning of the Verse**

Jesus encouraged His disciples by telling them that every proclaimed word in the Law would be accomplished. He would be the reason that this accomplishment would take place. Let us consider Jesus' words in the following: *Truly I tell you, this generation will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened. Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away.* [Matthew 24:34-35] These are confirming words about the point He was making to His disciples. Paul the apostle in writing Timothy called Jesus Christ's words sound instruction and GODLY teaching because His words are true. (CF: *1 Timothy 6:3-4*).

#### **The Application of the Verse**

The Body of Christ today can accept and believe this same teaching by the Lord. We should be watchful of modern-day false teachers who proclaim that certain books in the bible are not true. We should be on guard against those same false teachers who add to or take away from the Scriptures to influence their listeners. In the next verse, we will see the consequence for false teaching.

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- **In your Christian walk have you experienced false teaching that caused you to stumble? How did you recover from it?**

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**<sup>19</sup> Therefore anyone who sets aside one of the least of these commands and teaches others accordingly will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever practices and teaches these commands will be called great in the kingdom of heaven.**

I mentioned just now that there are consequences for those who deliberately mislead believers in the teaching and practice of the Scriptures. Here in this verse, Jesus explains what will happen to those who misleads, as well as, those who lead believers in the teaching and practice of the Word of GOD.

**Old Testament Comparison**

Evidence of false teaching in the Old Testament is found in the following verses: *But I said, "Alas, Sovereign LORD! The prophets keep telling them, 'You will not see the sword or suffer famine. Indeed, I will give you lasting peace in this place.' " Then the LORD said to me, "The prophets are prophesying lies in my name. I have not sent them or appointed them or spoken to them. They are prophesying to you false visions, divinations, idolatries, and the delusions of their own minds.* [Jeremiah 14:13-14] False prophecies and false teaching occurred in Ancient Israel many centuries before Jesus Christ came and lived on earth. This is some of the proof that lies were being told to the people in GOD'S Holy Name.

**The Meaning of the Verse**

Jesus made it plain in this teaching moment that He wanted His disciples' proclaiming truth about the kingdom of heaven. Jesus wanted everything that He commanded of them to be commanded of all believers who followed them through Him. To teach and practice commandments that are not true would result in being called "least" in the kingdom of heaven. However, teaching and practicing commandments that are true and the truth will result in being called "great" in the kingdom of heaven,

**The Application of the Verse**

Do you want to be called great in the kingdom of heaven? Then, teach the truth and practice living right according to the Word of GOD. It may seem like this is hard to do. But just as athletes practice their sports until they are at their best, we must practice the commandments that Jesus gave us until we are at our best in living them.



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- **Make a list of the things that Jesus Christ commanded of His disciples found in the “Sermon on the Mount.” Review the list to see which ones you are doing well and which ones you need to improve upon.**

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<sup>20</sup> For I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven.

This verse is the heart of everything that Jesus lived and taught during His ministry. When Jesus went to John the Baptist to be baptized by him, John did not feel worthy to baptize the Lord. As a matter of fact, John wanted Jesus to baptize him. But Jesus made an interesting reply when He said, "*Let it be so now; it is proper for us to do this to fulfill all righteousness.*" Then John consented. [Matthew 3:15] It was now time for all righteousness to be fulfilled. Let us look at the teaching.

***Old Testament Comparison***

The LORD GOD has always desired righteousness because He is righteous. Those who live in righteousness shall surely see Him (CF: Psalm 11:7; 33:5; 145:17). There is much written in the Old Testament and especially the Psalms about the righteousness of GOD. So, when Jesus taught this verse to His disciples, He wanted them to see righteousness fulfilled and manifested.

***The Meaning of the Verse***

Jesus knew that the self-righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees was not a true righteousness being observed. They sought the approval of their fellow countrymen instead of honoring and pleasing GOD by living righteously. They were not just and fair with the people in Israel. They did not show mercy to the people of Israel. They were unfaithful in how they treated the people of Israel (CF: Matthew 23:23). The Scribes and the Pharisees self-righteousness was more outward in appearance than genuine within the heart. Jesus taught His disciples that their righteousness must surpass the self-righteousness of the Pharisees and Scribes or they would not enter the kingdom of heaven.

***The Application of the Verse***

Is your righteousness a pretense or for real? You ask, “How would I know?” As a disciple of Jesus Christ, your lifestyle and including mine must go well beyond that of religious people (the Pharisees and Scribes). Other people should see Christ’s integrity, Christ’s character, and Christ’s





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faithfulness to do the whole will of GOD. This is challenging for each of us, but we must live in true righteousness in order to honor and please GOD.

- **Look at Matthew 5:21-48 to see if your righteousness surpasses the self-righteousness seen in religious people. As you go through each of the five “You have heard...” situations rate your righteousness on a scale of one (being the lowest) to five (being the highest) and prayerfully see if you are honoring and pleasing GOD.**

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#### Endnotes

1. S. Michael Houdmann, *What Does It Mean That Believers Are to be Salt and Light*, Got Questions Accessed January 17, 2023 <https://www.gotquestions.org/salt-and-light.html>.
2. Unless otherwise stated, all Scripture is taken from *The Holy Bible, New International Version*®, *NIV*®, Copyright©1973, 1978, 1984. 2011 by Biblica, Inc.® Used by permission of Biblica, Inc.® All rights reserved worldwide.