

The Sermon on the Mount

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[0 : 0 0] Now imagine that you're one of Jesus' disciples. You've heard Jesus say, repent for the kingdom! of heaven is near. You've seen Jesus heal the sick. You've seen him cast out demons. And now these great! crowds are following about wherever he goes. And you're probably thinking, what's this kingdom of heaven that Jesus keeps talking about? And just as you think that, Jesus brings you up onto the mountain and he sits down and he begins to teach you. He begins to reveal the principles by which his kingdom is governed. And in today's passage, what Jesus is telling us is the sort of people who are a part of his kingdom and the impact those people will have on those around them. And this is very important because we can have a temptation to think that what Jesus is doing here is he's simply telling us what we should be, what we should do. Or even worse, we can think what Jesus is saying is here's a list of qualifications you need to get into my kingdom. Like this is the kingdom entrance exam.

But Jesus isn't saying you need to become the salt of the earth. He's not saying, you know, you need to become the light of the world. And if you you're salty enough, if you shine enough, then I'll let you in.

But rather he's saying, you are the salt of the earth already. You are the light of the world. And this goes back to a very important principle about the kingdom of heaven, an important principle about the Christian life. Because often we think that it's what we do that determines who we are. What Jesus is saying is actually, it's who we are that determines what we do. Now, that prompts us to think, okay, if it's not us who qualifies ourselves to get into the kingdom, if it's not us who change ourselves, then what causes this change?

And in Paul's letter to the church in Colossae, it's in the first chapter of Colossians, Paul is explaining that he's praying for the Colossians. He's praying that they'd live to be worthy of the Lord. They should live the life that God's called them to.

[2 : 2 6] But he bases this in who they are. And this is what he says, And giving joyful thanks to the Father who has qualified you to share the inheritance of his holy people in the kingdom of light. For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

So, what Jesus is saying is, we are brought in to the kingdom by God wresting us out of darkness. We're taken from rebellion from God into God's family. God is the one who transforms us first. And because we've been transformed, therefore we will live differently.

And this is exactly how God's always worked. If we remember in the book of Exodus, the children of Israel are in bondage, they're in slavery. And God doesn't come to them. He doesn't come to them and say, look, here's the Ten Commandments. And if you follow the Ten Commandments, you'll qualify to become my people. And then I'll rescue you out of Egypt. What God does is he comes to the people and he sends Moses to them. And through many signs and wonders, he brings them out of slavery, out of bondage, and he takes them to the promised land. And he says to them, you know, now that I've rescued you, now you're my people. And remember Moses, then it's Moses, after they've been rescued, goes up the mountain into the presence of God and receives the Ten Commandments, the way that God's people are supposed to live. And that's, we can see this at the start of the Ten Commandments.

They start saying, I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. You shall have no other gods before me. And so on. And what Jesus is doing is, he's doing the same thing as Moses is doing. Like Moses, he's announced that there's been a rescue of God's people, out of slavery to sin and into a new kingdom. And like Moses, Jesus goes up the mountain and he gives us a new way to live. But unlike Moses, you see, Jesus is different.

[4 : 51] Moses goes up the mountain into God's presence alone, and he receives the law from God. But Jesus brings us up the mountain into his own presence, and he himself teaches us.

And I say us for an important reason, because Jesus' words here aren't just to his disciples at that time, but to everybody here who's a Christian. Jesus is saying, look, I've taken you and rescued you.

I have changed you and transformed you. I've given you a new identity. And because you have a new identity, you're going to live differently. And when you live differently, that's an impact on those around you.

And Jesus uses two images to explain this impact. He uses salt and he uses light. Firstly, if we look at salt. Now, I like making bread, right? And there's lots of different things you can put in bread. You can put olives in, you can put cheese in, tomatoes in. You can make sweet bread, you can make savory bread. So if you take olives, you know, I like olives. I could put olives in bread. I think it would taste nice.

[5 : 58] But someone else might see olives and be like, well, I don't like olives. You know, it's personal preference. You can put olives in, you can take them out. But salt isn't optional. It's a fundamental ingredient.

If you make real bread, you only need four things. You need flour, you need water, you need yeast, and you need salt. You can't take any of these away. But there's a difference between these. If you leave out flour, instantly you'll notice you've just got a bowl of water with some stuff floating in it. It's not very useful.

If you leave out water, it's just a dry pile. You can't mix it together. If you leave out yeast, you can mix it, but it won't rise, it won't go anywhere. But salt's a bit different. See, salt's very small. It's not always noticed at first. So if you leave out salt, you can mix your bread, you can knead your bread, your bread will rise, you can bake it. But it's only when you take it out of the oven, you cut the first slice, and you taste it, you realize just how disgusting it is without any salt in it, and you'll spit it out. And the other thing about salt is, although it's a very valuable thing, it's not a particularly fancy, it's not expensive ingredient, it's an ordinary ingredient. It's very abundant around us. So when Jesus compares this to salt, he's saying these same things. He's saying, you know, we're fundamental, and our effect on the world around us, it's necessary, but sometimes it's subtle, and it's often ordinary. So when we look at why is the effect that we have on those around us fundamental? You see, when God made the world, when he made humanity, he made us to be in a relationship with him. There was a love between us and God, and there's a love between us and one another. But when we turned away from God, see, we began to hate God, we broke that relationship, and that broke the relationship we had with one another. We began to hate one another.

And so in order to fix this problem, God decided to show his love to us by sending Jesus to us. And in fact, what he's doing here is not creating something new exactly, but he's restoring the way things are supposed to be. But when God loves us, when he restores a relationship that we have with him, that also has an impact on the relationship we have with one another.

We could see this in 1 John. Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God.

Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love. This is how God showed his love among us. He sent his one and only son to the world that we might live through him. This is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.

[9 : 07] Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. And it's the same thing, you notice Jesus is saying here.

There's a necessary connection between God's love and our love for one another. In the same way, Jesus is saying, if you've been transformed into salt, you will be salty. So, because he says, if the salt loses its saltiness, how could it be made salty again? It's no longer good for anything except to be thrown out and trampled on their foot. So, the connection between us receiving God's love and us showing God's love to other people around us, it's so necessary that Jesus is saying, if you're not showing your God's love to those around you, then maybe, or definitely, you've not been the recipient of God's love either. But now, Jesus isn't saying this to try to make us feel bad or put a burden upon us. But really, he's trying to encourage us. Because remember, salt is subtle and salt is ordinary. Sometimes we can think, okay, well, what God's asking us to do is, if we want to really show God's love, we have to be someone special, someone important. We have to be like a celebrity pastor, or we have to do something amazing. We have to abolish slavery. We have to set

up a hospital or something like this. But Jesus is not talking about these big dramatic moments. He's talking about the everyday, the ordinary. He's saying that if you've become part of my kingdom, then I'm working in you to show my love to those around you.

Sometimes you won't even notice that's what's happening, but it will happen. And I'll give you an example. Some of my friends from university, in first year, they lived in student halls. And there's about five or six people in the flat. And they got on relatively well with most of their flatmates. But one of their flatmates, for some reason, really despised Christians, hated Christianity. But then later on, so there's just a bit of a rift between them and one of their flatmates. But later on, she became quite sick. And my friends decided, okay, well, she's sick. We should look after her. And they didn't do this thinking, oh, we're doing something amazing here. We're doing something dramatic here. And you just thought, well, it just came naturally. You see, they'd received God's love to them. And just second nature, it was to show that love to someone else. And because they looked after her, this little small thing had a massive impact. And then she changed from being someone who hated Christianity to someone who had a positive view of Christianity and of Christians.

Because that's the kind of impact Jesus is saying that his love has on us. We've received God's love. And just naturally, there's going to be this consequence of that love overflowing in small, subtle ways to those around us.

[12 : 14] The second picture that Jesus uses is of light. Now, notice again, the language Jesus uses. He doesn't say, you need to be the light of the world. He says, you are the light of the world.

And he goes further. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden. Once Jesus has made his people, we can't hide who we are. There's no way of disguising it. There's no way of undoing the transformation that God's worked in us. And then neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead, they put it on a stand and it gives light to everyone in the house. So when Jesus, if you will, lights us like a lamp, he's not even talking that it's possible to put that out. Even when you put a light under a bowl, it's still shining. There's always going to be a necessary consequence of our transformation. So when he's saying light, what exactly is Jesus talking about? Because light is used in a lot of different ways in the Bible. You have darkness versus light, good versus evil.

But two ways, I think, are pretty applicable here, if you think about light. Firstly, light brings us knowledge. If you're in a dark room, unless the light's turned on, you have no information about what's around you. You need light to see and to understand. Secondly, light can bring you not just information, but it can make you see the beauty and the wonder of something. If it was the middle of winter right now in Scotland and you were outside, it would probably be light enough that you could see where you were going.

But if someone asked you what your environment would be like, you'd probably say, well, it's, you know, it's a bit dreary. It's dreary. It's all doom and gloom. But if you are outside in a day like today, where the sun is shining brightly, you're probably going to be much more positive. You might even say, well, it's a glorious day, isn't it?

And it's the same thing here. When we, when it talks, Jesus talks about us as the light of the world, what he's saying is that we both reveal the knowledge of who God is, but also that we reveal and we reflect God's glory to those around us.

[14 : 36] So firstly, if you think about light is revealing knowledge. So why is it that people need to receive knowledge of God? Well, Paul talks about this in the first chapter of Romans.

For since the creation of the world, God's invisible qualities, his eternal power and divine nature have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that people are without excuse.

For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him. But their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened. Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools and exchanged the glory of the mortal God for images made to look like a mortal human being and birds and animals and reptiles. So although people by nature can have some understanding of God, automatically we, we don't want to look up at the one true God. Instead, we turn our eyes down to earth and we worship other things. So how does God solve this problem? Well, we see this earlier in Matthew.

So what God does is, we're not looking up at God. So God comes down to us.

So God comes down to us in Jesus Christ. And Jesus came down to open up people's eyes, to lift them back up, to worship the one true God. And you could see this a lot in the gospels. Jesus often

goes around and heals the blind. But when he heals the blind, he often remarks that though these people are physically blind, they spiritually can see, they understand that Jesus is the Messiah and he's the son of God.

[16 : 54] On the other hand, you have those around like the Pharisees, although who can physically see, but they lack spiritual sight. And so Jesus is saying, you know, he's not just here to heal people's physical sight, but to heal their spiritual sight as well. And the same way, we could see there's this chain of connection. Jesus comes to give people knowledge of God. And the same way, Jesus says, you know, I'm going to work in you and I'm going to reveal myself to those around you by how you live. If we go back to my friends I mentioned earlier. So you see, at first, they just did something small to help one of their friends. And then she, she, she, sorry.

And then she, thanks. See, at first there was a small change. At first, she received the love that they had for her. And then she had a positive view of Christianity. But then she moved from that and she thought, well, what is it that caused that change in the first place? And it was then that she became aware of God working through my friends. And eventually she became a Christian. But Jesus is just saying that we reveal mere knowledge of God. He's also saying that we reflect the glory of God. If we go back to Moses, remember Moses has brought the people of Israel out of Egypt and he's gone at the mountain, he's received the law. But later on, Moses goes, goes up the mountain again and he enters into the presence of the world. And he's gone up the mountain again. And he enters into the presence of God and he sees the glory of God. And he comes down the mountain and his face is shining with God's glory. But because it's so bright and because it's so glorious, the people of Israel can't bear to look at Moses' face. And so he has to cover himself with a veil. And the same, the same pattern happens with Jesus. Jesus has gone on the mountain. He's brought us up the mountain and he's taught us, here's how you're going to live. But later on in Matthew, in chapter 17, he brings his disciples up the mountain again. After six days, Jesus took with him Peter, James and John, the brother of James, and led them up a high mountain by themselves. There he was transfigured before him, before them.

His face shone like the sun and his clothes became as white as the light. Just then there appeared before them Moses and Elijah talking with Jesus. Peter said to Jesus, Lord, it is good for us to be here. If you wish, I will put up three shelters, one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah. While he was still speaking, a bright cloud covered them. And a voice from the cloud said, this is my son whom I love. With him I am well pleased. Listen to him. When the disciples heard this, they fell face down to the ground, terrified. But Jesus came and touched them. Get up, he said. Don't be afraid. When they looked up, they saw no one except Jesus. And again, we see Jesus offers something better than Moses. Jesus brings us up into the presence of God, into his own presence, and shows us his own glory. And this again, isn't just for Peter, James and John. As you see, as we heard in earlier reading, when Paul says, when Paul speaks of us beholding God's glory, beholding the glory of Jesus, he doesn't say, okay, in the future, we're going to see Jesus' glory, and we're going to be transformed. He's saying right now, we can see Jesus' glory. Right now, we're viewing Jesus' glory. And right now, we reflect his glory. And so, in the same way, there's this chain of, that connects all these three things together. Firstly, as Christians, we've received God's love. And that love overflows from us to those around us. Secondly, we receive knowledge of who God is. And through us, God reveals himself to others. And thirdly, we see God's glory. And once we've seen God's glory, God's glory shines through us.

[21 : 56] And this is important. Because very often, we can think, oh, look, okay, God did a bunch of things 2,000 years ago. And then right now, it's all up to us. Right now, Jesus is saying, okay, here's all the things you have to do. Or maybe we think, well, nothing we do really matters. We're just kind of hanging about and waiting for Jesus to get back. What Jesus is saying is here, is actually, if you're a Christian, in your life right now, in all these different ways, I'm working. I'm showing my love through you to those around you. I'm showing who I am to those around you. And I'm using you to show my glory on earth. And if you're not a Christian, this is what Jesus is offering to you.

He's saying, look, I can change you. I can transform you. I can give you a new way to live. And the new way to live is modeled after who Jesus is. So when we say we're the salt of the earth, when we say we're the light of the world, all that's saying is really we're like Jesus. Because you see Jesus, as he lives, you see this love he has for those around him. We see this care he has. But as well, we see there's a weight to what he says. There's an authority to what Jesus says. When people see

Jesus, they say, there's something different about that man. There's something unexplainable by ordinary human terms. There's something supernatural about him.

And that's what Jesus is saying he'll do to us. He will, when we receive Jesus' love, we will love like Jesus. When we come to know Jesus, that's us coming to know God. And when we see Jesus' glory, we too will reflect his glory around us. And that's what being a Christian, that's what being in the kingdom of heaven is really about. This is the new identity.

That's what Christian means. It means that we are becoming more and more like Jesus Christ. So let's... So let's...