



HG206: The Sermon On The Mount **Laws For Life**

Matthew 5:13-26

Home Group Study Notes

27 September 2020 - Pauline Woolnough



PLEASE COMPLETE AS MUCH AS YOU CAN
ON THIS WORKSHEET IN PREPARATION
BEFORE THE MEETING!

*Don't forget to take your Bible to Home Group
with you, along with any previous notes and other
resources which might be helpful for your discussions.*



Welcome (10 mins) *Ice Breaker*

You are on a desert island and in need of a few of life's essentials. You can have salt, and another two other "food" items. What would they be?



Looking Upwards (10 mins) *Worship*

In your time of worship, you may want to sing Songs of Praise; listen to a Worship CD, as well as using Meditations; Bible Readings; Prayers ...



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Home Group Sermon

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Introduction

Today salt is considered a staple of life along with oil and wine and it's something that we take for granted but for the people listening to Jesus and in the ancient world it was a scarce and precious commodity, so with this in mind, we know that regardless of cultural background, the people that were listening to Jesus say "you are the salt of the earth" understood that he was talking about a valuable commodity. He says "You are the salt of the earth and you are the light of the world." He doesn't say that perhaps one day you will be salt or that just some of you are light, he says, "You ARE the salt of the earth"—and "You ARE the light of the world." If you accepted Jesus Christ as your Lord and Saviour a change took place in you, a miracle happened and a transformation began and right now, in this time, in the place that you live and in whatever role you have in your family, community or workplace you are salt for the people around you and a light that cuts through the darkness. Each generation is responsible for the one that they live in so this is our time and we have an important role to play because salt preserves and Christians are meant to help preserve what is good in their culture and shine light into the darkness that invades the world.

It's our Season to Season

Salt, or sodium chloride, is a stable compound that can't lose its flavour yet Jesus says in Matthew 5.13 "but if salt has lost its taste, how can its saltiness be restored?" We have to take into account the times that Jesus lived in and the people that he was directly speaking to. Sodium Chloride today may not lose its saltiness and salt cannot change its chemical composition, but in the ancient world it was susceptible to contamination resulting in it losing both taste and value. In Jesus' day much of the salt was recovered from the Dead Sea and contaminated with various substances. The adulteration could become so pronounced making the salt impure and discarded as worthless.

When salt is scattered over food it seasons, preserves and transforms what it falls onto, and so we Christians are to go out and be scattered into the world and bear witness to the transforming life and power of the gospel of Christ by the lives we lead. Jesus didn't say you are only to be salt to the church or to your home group and to other Christians around you he said "you are the salt of the earth." If we are inwardly looking or the fire in us goes out, if we can't be bothered and prefer to do other things, if we think we are too young or too old or we become too busy with the things of the world, then we have lost our saltiness and we are of no use to Jesus or to anyone else.

Light up a dark world

In Jn 8.12 Jesus says "I AM The Light of the World" and again in John 9:5, he says "While I am in the world, I am the light of the world." Now he says something quite breath-taking because he says to believers. "You are the light of the world." Jesus needed followers that would continue his work and so he charged his disciples with reflecting his light in their lives. The result was a bold witness to the faithful work of grace in their lives and testimony to the light of Christ within them. So as followers today, again, it's not for only some of us to be lights, Jesus intends each of us to be a light—all shining brightly—but sometimes it can appear as if we have had dimmer switches fitted or else we are using those energy saving bulbs that give off a dim glow, or even that our lights are

turned off but with around 2.5 billion Christians in the world can you imagine what the world would look like if all our lights were switched on and shining brightly? This would be a very different world! We are not meant to be hidden away skulking in the dark, we are to be visible and seen all the time.

Our lights should shine in the way we treat and serve others, by the way we are in the workplace and in the home, the way we treat the person serving us in the shop or our annoying neighbour and family member. Seemingly small things but often the ones that catch us out especially when we are in a hurry or aggrieved by another's behaviour towards us. Sacrificial service draws people to us and to Christ. Volunteers are the bedrock of community action. According to the Church of England website each month, C of E volunteers devote over 23 million hours across the country to community action over and above their normal church activities. People may resist the church and its teachings and not be interested in finding out for themselves who Jesus is, and some may perceive us...(believe it or not)...as being boring, party poopers and at odds with society at times but they cannot easily dismiss the witness of those who devote themselves to the service of others.

Of course non Christians also give their time to volunteer for good causes but it is the love of the Saviour in us and for us that reaches out to others through us, that motivates Christians as we follow his call to be the salt of the earth and bring light into a dark world, and it is to Christ Himself who people respond to. It only takes a little light to make a big impact in a dark place and witness to others, but when we do the Father is glorified.

Jesus came to fulfil Scripture In Matthew 5.18 Jesus uses what some have termed his signature phrase when he says "I tell you the truth," no other preacher used this phrase and he goes on to say that not the smallest letter, not even a letter not much bigger than a dot or the least stroke of a pen will pass away from the law until everything is accomplished. Jesus had a very high view of scripture and never spoke against the law itself but against the abuses and excesses to which it had been subjected.

At the time the law was considered to be absolutely holy and divine yet now not only does Jesus appear to contradict it but he goes on to substitute some of it with his own teachings in our reading today, in verses 21 and 27. Matt 5 21 "You have heard that the law of Moses says, Do not commit murder. If you commit murder you are subject to judgement. But I say..... if you are angry with someone you are subject God's judgement," and 27 You have heard that the law of Moses says, Do not commit adultery. But as I say, anyone who even looks at a woman with lust in his eyes has already committed adultery in his own heart."

Jesus said that he did not come to abolish the Law or the prophets but to fulfil, so its confusing when we see him amend it and even break what the Jews called the Law, e.g. he did not observe the hand washings that the Law laid down and he healed people on the sabbath although the Law forbade it so it's helpful to understand what the Jews understood as the Law. They used it to mean the 10 Commandments, the first 5 books of the Bible known as the Pentateuch, the Law and the Prophets or the whole of Scripture as then, i.e. the Old Testament, and they used it to mean the Oral the Scribal Law. This last one was the one that Jesus openly condemned.

The Letter of the Law

The principles of the 10 Commandments that men and women were to live by were not enough for the Jewish people, they wanted detail. They needed rules and regulations to follow in order to be sure that they were abiding to the principles of the law set down by God, so a group of men arose called the Scribes who drew out literally thousands of rules and regulations from the law. Every minute detail of the law was argued over and became a rule or regulation to observe and the heart and spirit was knocked out of the law. In the end their religion was reduced to obedience to a legalistic code of moral law as opposed to personal faith in the God of the law. The Scribes and Pharisees made it their mission to keep all these rules and regulations and were wholly committed to meticulous observance of the law emphasising things like tithing, Sabbath observance and ritual purity and they were greatly admired and respected in Jesus day. Not by Jesus though.

The Jews may have respected them but when Jesus says that our righteousness must exceed that of the Scribes and Pharisees it was because he knew that their righteousness was only skin deep and for outward show. Like Hyacinth Bouquet, it was all about keeping up appearances, externally focused on the letter of the law rather on the spirit of the law, following the law with their heads but not their hearts and as long as they looked to be obeying the letter of law they felt that they had discharged their duty to both the law and to God. They looked good from the outside, pious and devout as they satisfied the demands of the law but their hearts were far from God.

The Spirit of the Law

Jesus warns us against such empty righteousness that puts rules and regulations above love and gratitude for what he has done for us and we need to be as concerned about our attitudes, actions and service that people don't see as about the ones people do. We need to live and serve as if the only person who ever sees us is God. Too often we want everyone to notice our "good works." Augustine said that the Christian life could be summed up in one phrase, "Love God and do what you like," because when we grasp how much God loves us our overwhelming desire is to surrender to him in thankfulness and our response to that love will manifest itself in ways that obeying the letter of the law never can. There is a popular saying, "The heart of the matter is the matter of the heart." God is as much interested in the attitudes of our hearts as he is by our actions, because our actions reveal what is in our hearts.

Laws for Life

This sermon is called "Laws for life" which suggests a list of rules and regulations that we are to live by and as we read the Sermon on the Mount we may end up feeling that there are certain things that we need to do in order to please God and be accepted by him, and worryingly, that its not that difficult to make him angry with us. Now not only is murder condemned but anger threatens us with the "fires of hell," and if your right hand causes you to sin, then perhaps you should have it amputated. However, we read scripture, with the benefit of knowing how the story ended and as Christians we know of and believe in the Cross of Christ and of the perfect love of our Saviour who died in our place in order to save us from our sins.

Matthew says at the very beginning of his gospel in 1.21, "For he will save people from their sins." We know that we are not accepted and loved by God because of anything we do, we are accepted and loved because of Jesus who died in our place. So although we may be asked to pray for our enemies and for those who hurt and persecute us, in doing so it is not about keeping rules and regulations in order to be righteous and accepted by God.... we do so.... we try to do so... because we are accepted and we are loved, and being salt and light to a tasteless dark world brings glory to our Father in Heaven.

I particularly liked Stephen's TFTD on Tuesday which said - "It is not according to the measure of our love for our fellow human beings that we pray for their souls and bodies, it is according to the measure of our love for Jesus." (Charles de Foucauld). We pray for and serve others because of our love for Jesus and because he first loved us.

Don't be tempted or mistaken into trying to keep any laws because in doing so you are in fact making a declaration of independence and trying to keep control over every aspect of your life and destiny. Following rules enables us to stay in control by ticking boxes, but we are not free, and in doing so we are excluding and rejecting the redemptive power of the Cross. Abiding by rules gives us power to feel and act superior, just like the Pharisees and the Scribes did. It allows us to assume power over others because we see ourselves as living to a higher standard than others and it grants us the freedom to point that out to them. Laws, rules and regulations can never bring freedom, only the power to accuse.

There is no mercy in the law and there is no grace in rules, Jesus fulfilled all of the law for us, and now, the demands that were once impossible to live by become promises that Christ will fulfil in us, but only when we surrender to him and give up our independence. Jesus came to fulfil the intention of the Old Testament and to bring it to its intended completion as seen in Deut 30.6

“The Lord your God will circumcise your hearts and the hearts of your descendants, so that you may love him with all your heart and with all your soul, and live.”....It’s all about love..... Everything comes down to love. What Jesus has in mind for us is hearts that are open and alive and full of love for God, it’s what he had in mind for us all along, but instead, rules and regulations were substituted for love.

Conclusion

Jesus wants us to be who he says we are, the salt and light of the earth and even in these times when we are more isolated from others and perhaps unable to be out as much as we would like there are still ways we can comply. He says to us, do what is right and fair, do what is just to those around you, be compassionate, kind and loyal, be generous with your time your love and also your money, love God and love your neighbour but also love your enemy, choose to overcome bruised feelings and be a peacemaker.

Choose to be self giving and vulnerable rather than defensive and be a part of your community where possible. It means that you might get hurt, in fact you probably will, it means you may be tired, there is a very good chance of that, you may have to put yourself out and put others first, that’s a given but we are to make a difference in this world and we are to reflect the love of Jesus to all around us. Father Gustavo Gutierrez said, “So you say you love the poor?” “Then name them.”

It’s easy to blame others for the world’s injustices if we compromise and align ourselves with the world. We may hate trafficking yet shop for cheap and fake products that may be made in sweat shops and contribute to a culture that pursues money, idolises celebrity and glamorises porn, but as the Lord’s salt we are to invade and season the earth with godliness and be known and seen for our love and concern for others that will draw them to us and to the Saviour. When we settle for and submit to the morals of the world and become seduced by its culture, then we become tasteless and invisible, our lights go out and opportunities to preserve what is good are lost but if our hearts are open to him, if they are ever thankful, mindful, grateful for what he has done for us, if we hold true to our convictions and to Christ with grace and humility then people will be take notice and be drawn to us. Jesus asks a lot of us, but then he gave everything for us.

Will we be obedient to every command he gives us? It’s unlikely. Will we fail him and let ourselves down time and again? Very probably, but should there be signs of us trying and evidence of some change having taken place in us that shows that we have been born again? There most certainly should and every command, rule and regulation should be seen and be accepted as a promise by him that he will fulfil in us.

Emmanuel Church Text for 2020

*“The Lord Your God is with you. He is mighty to save.
He will take great delight in you. He will quiet you with
His love. He will rejoice over you with singing.”*

Zephaniah 3:17



Looking Upwards (40 mins)

Bible Study

Read the text for this study, and any references given, then answer the following questions. You may find it helpful to listen to the sermon and/or read through the sermon notes as you do so. Discuss some, or all, your answers with your Home Group and, remember, these questions are only a guide to start your discussions.

1. As you look around your neighbourhood and town, where do you see decay needing salt and darkness needing light? In what ways are you being salt and light to address this?

2. What are some of the ways that lead us to lose our saltiness and that result in us being useless to the work of God's Kingdom?

3. As our lives are affected and hindered by the COVID pandemic, what are some ways we can still be "salt and light" to those around us?

4. Do you ever find yourself following the Pharisees and Scribes model of legalistic righteousness as opposed to an inward spiritual righteousness of faith in a loving God? Can you think of any examples of how or when this happens.

5. Many of us consider our faith to be a private matter. How can this result in being incompatible with being salt and light.

6. John Stott said “*The greatest hindrance to the advance of the gospel worldwide is the failure of the lives of God’s people.*” What do you think of this statement, do you agree or disagree?



Is there anything you most want to put into practice as a result of this study?



Looking Inwards (15 mins) *Caring For Each Other*

Reflecting on your life at the moment, is there anything you would like to share with other members of your home group which you feel is appropriate (this is an opportunity to share, not something you have to do, however, 'It's the sharing that enables the caring!') for:

Thanksgiving?

Prayer?

Encouragement?

Support in any way?



Looking Outwards (15 mins) *Concern For Others*

Is there anything concerning someone in your: family; circle of friends; neighbours or church, which you would like to share (please be sure not pass on anything that is confidential or which you think the person concerned would not wish to be shared) for:

Thanksgiving?

Prayer?

Encouragement?

Support in any way?

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