

## Unit 23

# Jesus the Teacher

## *Gospels*

### Memory Verses

“I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, just as the Father knows me and I know the Father; and I lay down my life for the sheep.”

—JOHN 10:14-15

# Jesus Teaches About Discipleship

**SESSION IN A SENTENCE:** In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus taught what it means to live as one of His disciples.

**BACKGROUND PASSAGE:** Matthew 5–7

Maybe you were the straight-A student who thrived in an academic setting, the first hand to spring up when a question was asked. A student who could hardly sleep the night before the first day of class, bursting with excitement about fresh lined notebooks, new pencils, and the uncharted territory of a brand new textbook.

Or perhaps you struggled more with school and had a hard time sitting still and paying attention in class. The words in those fresh textbooks represented a jumble of obscure facts that refused to stick in your brain. You also might have had trouble sleeping the night before, only anxious about the taxing day ahead.

Regardless of what kind of student you were (or still are), you understood the importance of the first day of school. Teachers recognize how important that first day is as well, so they use it to set the tone and expectations for all that is to come in the school year.



What kind of student were you in school? How has that school personality carried into your adult life?

# Group Time

## Point 1: Jesus' disciples are to be salt and light (Matt. 5:13-16).

<sup>13</sup> “You are the salt of the earth, but if salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything except to be thrown out and trampled under people’s feet.

<sup>14</sup> “You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. <sup>15</sup> Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. <sup>16</sup> 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.

The salt that Jesus referred to in this passage is more useful than the salt that saturates the average American diet. In Jesus’ day, salt was much more than a seasoning. In a time when there was no refrigeration, salt was an important ingredient in the **preservation** of food. Without it, Jesus’ listeners would have had to deal with rotting meat or fish. Similarly, believers find themselves in the business of **preservation** against decay.



What are some ways Jesus’ followers can serve as salt in the world?

According to Jesus, His followers are the light of the world. We were made to shine light into the darkest corners of creation for the glory of God. We do not produce this light. God’s Word makes it clear that in and of ourselves, all we are capable of producing is darkness (Matt. 6:22-23; John 3:19-20). It is God who lights our lamp (Ps. 18:28), and He lights it through the sacrifice of His one and only Son, Jesus, the true light of the world (John 8:12).

**Mission of the Church:** The mission of the church is to go into the world in the power of the Spirit and make \_\_\_\_\_ by proclaiming this gospel, calling people to respond in ongoing repentance and faith, and demonstrating the truth and power of the gospel by living under the \_\_\_\_\_ of Christ for the \_\_\_\_\_ of God and the \_\_\_\_\_ of the world.

## Point 2: Jesus' disciples are to obey for God's glory, not their own (Matt. 6:1-4).

<sup>1</sup> “Beware of practicing your righteousness before other people in order to be seen by them, for then you will have no reward from your Father who is in heaven.

<sup>2</sup> “Thus, when you give to the needy, sound no trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may be praised by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. <sup>3</sup> But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, <sup>4</sup> so that your giving may be in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

Jesus calls disciples to exemplary behavior as salt and light in the world, but then He cautions against misplaced motives in the midst of that exemplary behavior. He is not merely concerned with outward conformity to His precepts but with the right ordering of inward priorities. While our good works may be seen in the world, they are not to be practiced for show.



What are some ways we may be tempted to practice our righteousness for personal glory?

While we are to shine our light before men, this light of good deeds is to be shone not for our own praise or glory but that others might glorify our Father in heaven (Matt. 5:16). In this way we will be rewarded by God. Jesus teaches that our reward should not be in the applause or approval of human beings but in Him instead. His reward far outweighs the temporary reward that the trumpeters would receive from anyone who would listen.



How can we combat the temptation to seek the reward of human applause instead of God's glory and His eternal reward?

### Point 3: Jesus' disciples are to live purposefully (Matt. 7:19-24).

<sup>19</sup> Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.

<sup>20</sup> Thus you will recognize them by their fruits.

<sup>21</sup> “Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. <sup>22</sup> On that day many will say to me, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?’ <sup>23</sup> And then will I declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.’

<sup>24</sup> “Everyone then who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock.

After giving His listeners a blueprint for Christian living, Jesus issued an important warning: **Outward compliance to Jesus' commands is not enough to place someone in the kingdom of God.** You can look really good by the things you say and do. Prophesying, casting out demons, and performing miracles would seem like the pinnacle of good works to perform for the glory of Jesus' name. But just as it is possible to do good works as a show before human beings, it is possible to do good works as a show before God Himself—and He rejects all such shows.



What is the difference between outward compliance to Christ's commands and inward conformity to Christ's lordship?

In His warning about outward obedience, Jesus called those who practice seemingly biblical living without inward change “workers of lawlessness.”

In doing so, He emphasized yet again that the keeping of the law goes beyond just obeying a list of rules. If this law-keeping doesn't flow from a heart submitted to the God who sees the heart, then it is just as bad as lawlessness. Only if we obey through faith in Jesus can we be considered law-keepers, since Jesus is the fulfillment of the law (Matt. 5:17).

#### Voices from the Church

“The true disciple expresses the sincerity of his confession of Jesus' identity as the Lord through obedient living. Jesus was not pitting obedience against faith but was insisting that obedience is the necessary expression of true faith.”<sup>1</sup>

—Charles Quarles




# Daily Study

## Day 1: Read Matthew 5:1-12

So often those who knew Jesus missed the fact that He was the Messiah because He did not come to earth in the way that they had envisioned. Where they had expected Him to ride in on a blaze of glory, He was born to a young mother in the town of Bethlehem. While they expected Him to perform His signs and wonders to the din of thunderous applause, He often told those whom He healed to keep quiet about their healing. While they expected Him to throw off the yoke of their Greco-Roman society, He was crucified under its reign.

In the Beatitudes, Jesus beautifully captures the heart that He displayed here on earth—one of humility, mercy, purity, and peace, one that was willing to mourn, submitting to persecution, and was poor in spirit. And He reminded His listeners that even though these qualities were not often honored in the world, through these qualities they were marked as blessed by God.

By turning the Jews' expectations of the Messiah on their head, Jesus drew the focus away from the earthly trappings of royalty and toward the marks of royalty that are honored in heaven. He exemplified the type of spirit He required, pointing away from an earthly reward to a heavenly one, promising eternal blessing for those who heed His words.

 What are some ways you can practically exemplify the Beatitudes in your life?

### Voices from the Church

“The Sermon on the Mount describes how those who have already decided to follow Jesus (4:18-22; 5:1) are called to demonstrate the character of God and his kingdom through the character of their lives.”<sup>3</sup>

—Frank Thielman

## Day 2: Read Matthew 5:13-16

We often hear about how bad salt is for us. It is often linked to hypertension, causing great strain on your heart, brain, arteries, and kidneys. Many people are bent on eliminating as much salt from their diet as possible. But in our fear of excess, we know that completely eliminating *all* sodium from our diets would be equally detrimental. We need sodium for our muscles, nerves, and blood pressure to function properly.

We need light too. Without it, our bodies grow weak from Vitamin-D deficiency, our vegetation ceases to grow, and our vision dissipates.

Salt and light are a daily earthly necessity, and similarly, the salt and light that come as a result of the good news of Jesus' kingdom is incredibly necessary for a lost and dying world. God chose for His plan of salvation on this earth to include us, and through us, He is glorified before others because our works point them to Him.



How can you be salt and light in your everyday environment?

## Day 3: Read Matthew 5:17-48

We are used to seeing the Pharisees as the “bad guys” in the Gospel accounts, but in this passage, Jesus tells His listeners that “unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven” (v. 20).

Given the fact that the Pharisees and scribes prided themselves in obeying every iota of the law, it might seem impossible for our righteousness to surpass theirs, but that is the standard that Jesus has given us. He tells us that murder and adultery begin in the heart (vv. 22,28). Further, He charges us to keep our word (v. 37), turn the other cheek (v. 39), and love our enemies (v. 44).

The Pharisees were quite good at following laws they built around Scripture's laws, but that is not what Jesus is doing here. Instead of adding to the law, He is piercing through to the heart of the law, exposing mere outward compliance for what it is: a failure to submit to the Lord in our hearts. Our righteousness must come from a transformed heart instead of surface obedience.



How can we tell the difference between outward compliance to the law and inward compliance?



## Day 4: Read Matthew 6:1-34

After He told His listeners that their righteousness must exceed that of the Pharisees, Jesus continued to present the practical implications of that righteousness. He shows His listeners that the problem isn't in the righteous acts of the Pharisees but in the deadened, affirmation-seeking hearts behind those actions. He doesn't ask His listeners to *stop* praying, giving, or fasting but instead models how to do these things in a way that honors God.

Jesus reminds us that our treasure is not here on earth, in the physical gifts we might receive, but instead in heaven. He stills our anxious thoughts, reminding us that our prayers, fasting, and giving are not the things that produce His will but acts of obedience in the face of a God who cares for us. There are many times when Jesus speaks in parables that mask His meaning for those whose eyes the Spirit has not yet opened, but this passage offers some of His plainest instruction.



In what ways does this part of Jesus' sermon challenge you to exceed the "righteousness of the Pharisees"?

## Day 5: Read Matthew 7:1-29

Even the most biblically illiterate person you know can probably tell you that the Bible says not to judge. You may have had the words tossed at you when you were trying to point out sinful behavior, and perhaps you've been driven into an exasperated silence upon hearing this misapplication of the verse so many times. Matthew 7, however, is far from a primer on tolerance.

In this same passage, Jesus preaches that some of the very people who believe they are above judgment are hellbound. In addition to including the saying "Judge not, that you be not judged," this passage also holds condemnation like "Depart from me, you workers of lawlessness" (v. 23). Following the verse that is often taken out of context as a condemnation against any kind of judging whatsoever, Jesus clarifies that our judgment needs to start with a deep personal look at our *own* sinfulness. Then He tells us that once we have seen ourselves clearly, we are to turn our eyes to our brothers to judge (with righteous judgment; see John 7:24) their actions—and He tells us exactly the fruit we are to be looking for in both our lives and theirs.



How can we judge ourselves and others with righteous judgment rather than self-righteous judgment?



# THE GOSPEL PROJECT®

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## A Word from the Editor



### Brian Dembowczyk

Managing Editor—*The Gospel Project*  
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Jesus was born to die—a jarring statement indeed, but one that is quite true.

Christmas and Easter are fused together, linked hand-in-hand in such a way that each is dependent on the other for its meaning. The theology of such a statement is solid but incomplete, for Jesus was not born to die immediately but rather some thirty years later. Jesus' life, then, was not utilitarian—existing just so it could be taken away and picked up again—it had greater meaning and purpose. What Jesus did during those thirty years of walking the earth mattered; He lived a life of perfect obedience to the Father. He satisfied the demands of righteousness that we could not so He might take away our sin when we trust in Him and so His righteousness might be credited to us, making us fully pleasing to the Father (2 Cor. 5:21).

In this volume we delve deeper into the marvelous truth of the incarnation to see still further glimpses of Christ's glory on earth. His righteousness did not occur in a vacuum but rather among people, ordinary people like you and me. In each unit of this volume, we will look at Jesus' interactions with people as through a prism, making slight turns to see different yet equally brilliant perspectives of Jesus' works. In Unit 22, we will see Jesus' power to heal coupled with His deep compassion for people, even those who were marginalized in society. In Unit 23, we will see Jesus' riveting teachings empowered by His divine authority. And finally, in Unit 24, we will see Jesus' miraculous power over nature, revealing His identity as Creator God.

Each ray of light we will see points to the same truth: that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God given for our salvation. Jesus was indeed born to die, but He lived so that we too might live.

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