

Grace to Live – You Are

Matthew 5:10-16 | Sunday, July 29, 2018 | By Brian Brookins

YOU ARE

Matthew 5:10-16

“Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

“Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

“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.

“You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. 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. 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.

We are just passing out of the introduction to the Sermon on the Mount and into the body of the teaching. The last three verses of the introduction, the Blessings section, the Beatitudes, as they are called – we read just the end of that, where Jesus tells us something rather astonishing: Happy are you, blessed are you, favored of God. Things are going great for you if people make false accusations and accuse you and persecute you and revile you if you suffer for my name’s sake.

Again, we are seeing this upside down world that Jesus is describing. This is the life of a follower of Jesus Christ. Then he moves into these statements: “You are the salt of the earth.” “You are the light of the world.” We are beginning now, as we get into the body of Jesus’ teaching to see that he is describing for us this impossible life. You may have heard portions of these verses. You may have heard these statements: “You are the salt of the earth.” “You are the light of the world.” But if you step back and think about it, these are really preposterous. Imagine that I have a new neighbor who moves in. I go out back, stand at the fence, and meet this neighbor. “Hey, how are you? I’m so and so.” “I’m so and so.” “Well, that’s great. My name is Brian. I’m a pastor, but really I’m the light of the world. I’m the salt of the earth.”

I’m going to tell you a story. It’s probably going to make you think less of me and I apologize in advance. It was something I did, really, just to be funny, so please don’t judge me right now. Just set aside judgment. In fact, we’ll get to that in Matthew 7: “Judge not lest you be judged.”

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My wife and I were traveling. We were on vacation and had trouble getting to Colorado. Our airline had messed up our flight and had to shuttle us to Miami, so we flew out of Miami. Then when we were coming home, we get to this little airport in Colorado and they tell us, “The flight is hours and hours late and it’s just getting later by the moment. You’re not going to get home until 6:00 tomorrow morning.” If you travel at all, you understand that these are moments for negotiating, right? They have failed to meet your expectations and to deliver according to what you want. So you have to tell them why they should compensate you, why they should give you travel vouchers, move you to first class, and treat you special, and you make your case. So my wife and I both kick into gear. It’s a small airport and no one else is around. There are four attendants, and for an hour and a half, we are trying to convince these people why this is just unacceptable.

After an hour and a half, a woman walks up to me. She is in her mid-eighties and she says, “Excuse me, sir, but don’t I know you from somewhere?” I immediately start to replay the last hour and a half in my head. What have I said? What have I done? How have I acted? Have I done anything? I’m thinking, “I really don’t want to answer her questions. What if she knows me?” She goes, “What is it that you do for a living?” Please, again, don’t judge me. I said to her, “Well, you’re not going to believe it if I tell you, but I’m a male stripper.” That’s a true story, I’m afraid to tell you, I’m afraid to admit to you.

And she says without missing a beat: “Huh, that’s where I know you from.” At this point, of course the four flight attendants know that that is not true or possible. I just want to say for the record: I do not go to strip clubs. I have never danced. I can barely walk. So my wife says, “Come on. Own up to it. Tell her what you do.” And I tell her: “Well, I’m a pastor.”

Now, we had a sweet exchange. What happens in that moment is I’m immediately aware that when I tell people what I do, there is an expectation of what I should be, how I should act, what I should do, and all of those things, right? Jesus is communicating to you, “When you are my follower, you are the light of the world; you are the salt of the earth.” You may choose to hide that so that people don’t have an expectation that you are now associated with Jesus, but his actual point is that it’s unnatural for you to hide light. It’s unnatural for you to be unsalty. This is a part of who you are.

In fact, what he does here, if you think about it, it’s really fascinating. He ends his introduction after telling you: This is the character of the person who follows me. This is the change I bring to their lives. This is the transformation that I bring. I bless them in extraordinary ways and they are transformed from the inside out.

Now, I pour out my grace. I pour out my mercy. I help you to become something you could never become on your own, however, don’t make this mistake and think that that blessing is just for you. That blessing is to flow through you to others. And immediately, as he closes out the introduction then moves into the body of his teaching, **Jesus begins to**

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teach us: “You have a mission. You are experiencing my favor in order to share it, in order to spread it, in order to bless other people.”

This is a little opposite for us, a little backwards. We want to get to the end of the sermon. We want to be mature. We want to be at a certain level, then we will go on mission, then we will help other people. We want to kind of have our act together, but Jesus begins in this place. This is a pattern for Jesus. In fact, as Jesus begins his earthly ministry in Matthew 3 and 4, he goes to call his very first apostles, the 12. And the first thing that Matthew records Jesus saying to those followers is: “Follow me and I will make you fishers of men,” from the very beginning. In fact, it’s the first thing that Jesus does in Matthew’s book, in his exchange with his followers, then it’s the last thing. If you go to the very end, the very last verses, he tells them: “Go and make disciples.”

We are called to bless other people. The teaching is so powerful in that it carries this impact so that we don’t just shine light, we *are* light. We don’t just bring the benefits of salt, that’s actually who we are. It is showing us that the action and the essence are one.

Let’s get into it. Let’s unpack it. The title is: “You Are” because it’s so direct. “You are the light of the world.” I’m going to break this down into seven parts. You are: #1 – different.

1. You Are Different

The salt is different from the meat. The light is fundamentally different from the darkness. The application that I think is most helpful and most likely what Jesus intended when he talked about salt is its feature of preserving and delaying or preventing decay. For me, when I think about salt I think about flavor and seasoning. But in a time when there was no refrigeration and things would go bad very quickly, I think the main application here is one of preservation. In order for the salt to be effective, it comes in as an “other than” agent. It comes in as something other than the meat.

This is important for us to understand something about strategy, if I could use that word, in terms of: How does the church operate? How do Christians live?

It is not that fundamentally we try to be like everyone else. There is a difference in who God calls us to be. In fact, John Stott thinks that that’s the theme of the entire teaching that Jesus gives. Later, when Jesus is comparing his disciples to other people, he says, “You are not to be like them. This is the way people normally act. You are not to be that way.”

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I get it. That's a little dangerous in that we don't want to be puffed up -- "I'm better than. I'm different than." It's not about what we claim of ourselves. It is a desire to say: "In order to be what God calls me to be, there is something different about my life."

Let me do this before I move to the second point and point out something that's rather fascinating to help you understand what I think is the theme of the teaching. Right before the Sermon on the Mount begins in Matthew 4, this summary statement is given: "And Jesus went throughout all of Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom (notice that phrase: proclaiming the good news of his kingdom), and healing every disease and every affliction among the people."

There is a preaching/teaching aspect, a word aspect, and then a doing/deed aspect. **Christians, we love other people in word, with our message, and with our actions.** Jesus models that and this is the summary.

Then, if you go to Matthew 9, verse 35, you have a very similar summary statement. "And Jesus went throughout all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues and..." doing what? "...proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom (the good news of the kingdom) and healing every disease and every affliction."

So, you have these two summary statements, and in between you have this teaching that we have called the Sermon on the Mount, Matthew 5, 6, 7. Then two chapters that are healing stories, Matthew 8 and 9. I think these are bookends. This is a section of Matthew's book. He tells you: This is what Jesus did. This is what Jesus did. And in between, he gives you a description of it. The teaching – Matthew 5, 6, 7, then the healing, Matthew chapters 8 and 9.

You say, "Okay, great. What does that mean?" What it means is that **the theme of the Sermon on the Mount is the kingdom of God.** This is what it looks like to live in the kingdom. This is what it looks like to be a citizen of God's kingdom. We immediately should think about Jesus reigning in our lives. Jesus is the Lord of our lives. In fact, that's the basic Christian confession, according to the Apostle Paul: "No one can say Jesus is Lord unless the Holy Spirit is at work in them, helping them to see that, helping them to do that." 1 Corinthians 12:3. Jesus is Lord.

It's unthinkable for a Christian to think, "Well, I want God to save me. I want to be forgiven of my sin. I want to go to heaven. I want to live forever, but I'm not going to live for Jesus. I have no desire to live for Jesus." That's unthinkable. When Jesus comes in and cleanses us, he gives us a new heart. And even though we are immature and we have a lot of growing to do, there is a desire for Jesus to be the Lord of our lives and a growth and a progression that carries us through all of life. So, you are different, right? But that's because of who Jesus is, and Jesus is in you.

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2. You Are Needed

Fundamentally, the two metaphors of salt and light – Jesus is saying it's contrary to nature for salt to lose its saltiness and for light to be used in a way other than its obvious purpose. We don't hide light. It's really impossible to hide light. It is part of the intrinsic nature of what it is. **And the world needs you to be who you are fundamentally as called by Jesus.** Then the next two unpack that. I'm going to summarize them with these two words: "You are preventing," and then "You are spreading."

3. You Are Preventing

4. You Are Spreading

You are preventing and you are spreading. I'm thankful to Tim Keller, pastor/teacher/professor/popular writer. He really does a great job of unpacking these two ideas. The two metaphors of salt and light – one is primarily negative and one is largely positive. The Church and the Christian have a role of preventing the negative, preventing decay, preventing corruption, preserving what is good in the world and in culture and in society. Then on the offense kind of application, a positive spreading of what is right, influencing in a way of bringing change, the light shining.

Keller does a great job presenting this case. He says, "When you look at society, especially Western society, all of Western Europe, the Americas -- you look at our culture and our history and our thinking -- you see right now a lot of Christian thought that is underneath everything that is happening. The basic idea that every person is equal and every person has rights and that people should be treated equally with the same rights -- you really find the roots of that in our culture and society in this very sermon and in the teaching of Jesus.

Quite often, the ideas that are presented here would be very radical and contrary to culture, but they've been absorbed deeply into Western thinking. There is a place where, as Christians, we want to get into that space and preserve the erosion of that, the decay. But at the same time, we have an influence, a change to bring, so that more and more what's happening is society, culture, is moving away from the foundations of why we can say every person is of value, and with dignity, and equal. The denial of God, and the denial of the ultimate existence, and of right and wrong -- the severing of that removes the ethic from the foundation.

Understanding every person is of value – well, why? What does that look like as it's lived out? We have a place to come and say, "Listen, that has to be attached to and that is in us because God exists and we are made in his image." When you lose that, you eventually will lose the ethic that is built on that foundation. Are you with me?

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So, preventing and also spreading. Again, this is language that I borrow from Keller. He says, “That means Christians go in where others want to run. That’s our fifth point: As Christians we are going in.

5. You Are Going In

When we get around situations where people are hurting and messed up and battling problems, we are often aware that “If I get involved in this situation, I’m going to get so entangled. Do I even want to?” There is a place for us as Christians where Jesus is saying, “I’m calling you to go in. I’m calling you to get involved. I’m calling you to be salt and to be light. I’m calling you to be others-focused. I’m calling you to be a blessing to other people. I’m calling you not to be indifferent or detached, but to be involved and available and accessible.”

You know, I think part of what we learn in the teaching of Jesus is that we don’t apply that legalistically, but the Spirit of God leads us in it so that it’s life-giving. We participate. We get involved.

Here is a great picture of that – John Ensor tells the story that Eva Fogelman recounts in her book, Conscience and Courage, about World War II and a Polish teenager. Wladyslaw was his first name. The Germans took Wladyslaw and said, “Listen, you are going to have to work in this concentration camp. We want you to oversee this group of inmates. He was in charge of 30 women. They were running a little rabbit farm so the rabbits could be harvested and furs could be made to keep soldiers warm on the Russian front.

Wladyslaw personally began to care for these enslaved women in the concentration camp. He would smuggle food in – potatoes, bread, and vegetables -- in his pockets and on his person in order to feed them. Then one day, a woman took ill. She contracted a mysterious infection. She had sores all over her body, all over her arms. He knew that if the soldiers saw those sores, they would immediately kill her. Here he was, in a place where he needed to hide her. He could not smuggle a doctor in, so what would he do? He took the most direct route. He infected his blood with her blood. Then, listen to this, he went to a doctor, received diagnosis, got medicine, shared the medicine with her, treated himself, and treated her. They both were cured and they both survived the war.

Now, that’s going in, isn’t it? That’s a whole new measure of going in. It is the parable of the Good Samaritan, if you are familiar with that story Jesus told. In the gospel of Luke it’s recorded. We immediately are aware that once I align myself with someone who is really in a desperate position, who is really hurting. All of the risk that they are facing in some way or another endangers me.

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No one is saying for a moment we dismiss the idea that we need wisdom in terms of how we go in, but Jesus is calling us to go in. It's sobering, isn't it? Are you thinking, "Brian, could you just lift us up a little bit now? Alright, I'm going to lift you up right now: We are also rejoicing.

6. You Are Rejoicing

This is amazing. This is what Jesus tells you to do. He says, "Listen, I'm going to bless you. I'm going to pour out my blessing on your life. It's going to be so extravagant. You are going to be a new you. And you will be the light of the world. You don't just do it for you. You will be a blessing to other people. And oh, by the way, some people are going to try to kill you because you do it. You will be persecuted. You will be reviled. False things will be said about you. And you will be so happy!" I don't know, right?

There is an association that Jesus is making. He is saying, "You will be blessed and experience blessing because you are associated with me, and you are associated with the prophets. That's how they were treated. When that happens, when you are persecuted for righteousness' sake, when you are persecuted for me, you will know it's because you are being light, because you are being salt. **You are in my kingdom and you are completely blessed and you will rejoice.**"

Notice very carefully that when Jesus gives us this teaching, he tells us that you don't rejoice when you are persecuted because you are obnoxious, because you are difficult, because you are clueless, because you are insensitive. In fact, there's an interesting reference. Peter takes this on more than once in his writings. In 1 Peter 4:15 he says, "Let none of you suffer." He is telling people how to suffer for Christ. He says, "By the way, don't suffer as a murderer or a thief or an evildoer," right? But then he adds this: "...as a meddler."

I don't know: murder, meddling? That's a pretty big scale. He is talking about a busybody – someone who is just insensitively butting in and meddling. He says, "That's going to provoke opposition. Don't suffer because of that." We are to be sensitive to our environment, sensitive to our world, sensitive to what people are going to hear and how they are going to hear it. We don't change our message, but there is a place where when we go in, we are not being indifferent or insensitive. And when we go in and we receive opposition, we want to rejoice.

Some of you have heard me tell the story before, but there was a time many years ago when the mayor of Coral Springs asked me and some other spiritual leaders periodically to pray. At one time many years ago the church was located in Coral Springs and I was asked to pray at a city commission meeting. So I went into this meeting and I would pray. And they would have rabbis and pastors and all kinds of people from different faiths and no faith at all come in. I don't know when you have no faith at all who you pray to, but they had those people come and pray as well.

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One day I received a letter, then I went to the mayor's office to follow-up. The letter said, "Brian, you cannot pray at the city commission meetings in the name of Jesus." I was like, "Wow, that's rough." Picture me there at the counter in that little airport. This is time to negotiate, right? This is time to get aggressive. But very nicely, I went to the mayor and I said, "Mayor, I come in to pray and I'm going to be sensitive that not everyone is of my faith. I get that. I'm not pushing anything. But when you ask me to deny Jesus, now you put me in a tough spot, because I can't do that."

Then I asked the mayor this question. I said, "Mayor, have you told rabbis not to mention Moses? Can people pray to Mohammed? Is there any other name or anyone else that can't be mentioned?" "No. Just Jesus." "Well, I don't know. This doesn't seem right to me. You are trying to achieve an environment of respect and equality by asking everybody to come in, but you are only telling Christian pastors, 'We are going to censor your prayer.'"

There is something about Jesus and how he comes in to transform. He makes a claim on your life that is so radical. It's so revolutionary that you can't be indifferent if you really understand who he is and what he claims. Right? You are put in a place.

Tragically, that mayor ended up in jail. It's a really sad story. I had a chance to visit him on Christmas Eve, in prison. He wrote me the kindest letter afterward, saying that he felt completely abandoned. His imprisonment was very shameful and it was in the papers. I think, friends, that God orchestrated an opportunity for me to love on a man who, in a very small way, rejected Christ in me. We have a long way to go in terms of our growth in that, but that's what Jesus is telling us to do. The rejoicing comes because, "Oh man, this is a validation of who I am and that God is at work and he will work."

Alright, here is the last one: We are also giving thanks.

7. You Are Giving Thanks

As we are rejoicing, we are also aware that God is at work, that God is orchestrating events and laying those events out before us. And there is a place for us to just overflow with gratitude.

So, listen to me. I was praying on this passage, meditating on it, and thinking about it, and this was so energizing for me when I began to see this. You see, thanksgiving is something that Christians are told to do all the time, in every circumstance. I could go to multiple verses. I'll just give you one or two examples. We are told, "Give thanks in all circumstances for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus."

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You go to the ticket counter. You are in Colorado. You are tired. Your wife wants to get home. “I’m not going to get home till 6:00 in the morning? Ha, ha, ha! I’m so happy! Thank you!” I don’t want to give thanks in that circumstance. I have to rent a car now. I have to drive to Denver, three hours away. Oh, what a hardship! I’m going to tell you, there is something in me that wants to get so aggressive, so ugly. Come on, you can relate, right? Shame on you. Stay with me.

God is saying, “I’m going to do such a transformation in you that you just quit living for your comfort and your selfishness so you can hoard, so you can have, so you can coast through life. I am going to make you a blessing, whether you like it or not! And you will like it. You will love it. You will relish it, because I am transforming your heart.”

Now, here’s part of how (stay with this, this is deep) the **essence** and the **action** are one, and they flip. I can’t explain it, but there I am, having my quiet time and I’m saying, “Wow, this stuff works! This is true! Thanksgiving is to characterize everything about us and everything we do, because God is in control! And he has saved us! This isn’t just random. It’s all purposeful. Jesus is doing something outside of us. He is doing something in us. God is so faithful. He is so merciful. I would have given up on me a long time ago, and look at how God is working! I am so encouraged.”

Now listen, essence and action. What happens is, if that essence gets in you – a heart of gratitude -- your response, your action of giving thanks through life will be salt and light. It will be radical. I’m not talking about a Pollyanna, kind of, “Oh, everything’s great!” **I’m talking about a real-time, in the trenches gratitude that I’m full of the hope of Jesus Christ.**

I’ll almost end on this. That means I’m not going to end on this. My wife and I were laughing. I can’t explain it. We spend five days in the mountains. It’s beautiful. It’s wonderful. But we just wanted to get home. So my dear wife says to me, “I can’t do this. I can’t do this.” Now, this is a scary thing for a husband, when a wife announces, “I can’t do this.” I’m like, “I don’t know. What does that mean?” Okay, I’m going to pull my wife aside. “Sweetheart, I can do a lot of things, but I cannot get this plane here.” She is, of course, laughing at me. She is just expressing, “This is not what I wanted.” But there was this moment where something flipped and we said, “Hey, look at this. God has given us an extra 12 hours of vacation time. Let’s just enjoy it.” And by God’s grace, we did.

That’s not a real trial. I get that. It’s minor. But it does illustrate the challenge, and this is where I’ll end. I want to remind you of this because I want you to see it as a grid for us as we move through the Sermon on the Mount. The beauty, the lunacy, and the glory. I look at what Jesus instructs here. He says, “Your life is going to shine so brightly because of me in you that others will see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven. You are going to be a blessing.”

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Isn't it beautiful to consider a person who is so blessed and in the same way is a blessing to other people, as opposed to a person who is blessed and hoards it and keeps it from others? Do you see the beauty of what Jesus is calling us to?

At the same time, you see the lunacy of it, the impossibility of always being others-focused. This week there was an ultramarathon in Death Valley. In California, there is what they call the Badwater 135. These people run 135 miles. This just happened. They start at 11 o'clock at night because it's so hot. At 11 o'clock at night it was 104 degrees. Only 100 people qualify for this ultramarathon. And they start running.

The next day it reached 127 degrees. The winner took almost 25 hours. So it runs all night, all day, and just before midnight the next night, finishes. They have a team of people that help them do this. They carry 10 or 12 pairs of shoes because their shoes melt. The last few pairs of shoes are a size, then two sizes bigger because their feet swell.

They call it the toughest foot race in the world. Yeah. Not only that, but they go from way below sea level to 8000 feet. They ascend 13,000 feet in altitude over the course of 135 miles. Just shoot me now. Their team has to make sure they drink 20 ounces of fluid every two miles. At the end, the guy who won the race? His team was having to point him in the right direction because he couldn't run in a straight line. When I tell you that, you're like, "That's amazing! It's amazing what people can do physically." If I tried to do that, I'd just say, "No, that's just impossible. I could train my whole life and that would never happen."

Now, what if we double it? It's the Badwater 270. What if we make it x 10? There is a point where no human anywhere at any time could accomplish that physically. **What are the spiritual limitations that you face when it comes to forgiving and helping and blessing and loving and demonstrating the life of Christ? The life that Jesus calls you to is way beyond your natural capacity, and when it's taken seriously, it does seem crazy. But that's the glory of it. Jesus is transforming those who trust in him into something really magnificent – a supernatural light of God shining through you.** Let's pray.