

## “Back to School with Jesus: You Be Different”

Scripture: Matthew 5:13-48

Graphics: back to school, paper, books, backpack

Big Truth: The Sermon on the Mount is essential teaching for the Christian life and the promise of blessing that comes through poverty of spirit and mourning which are the key foundation of the sermon. It's great to learn the words of Jesus and even be able to recite them, as we share the good news. However, Jesus calls us to not only know the words and The Word, but to put those words into practice as we love and serve the world in Jesus' name. Let's go back to school with Jesus. Whether you are young or old, there is always something to learn so that you can put it into practice.

Focus Phrase: Jesus calls all disciples to be vastly different from the world.

### 1. Introduction

- A. **PRAY! (Jesus, You are Lord...)**
- B. The title of this morning's message in our *Back to School with Jesus* series is: **You Be Different!**
- C. We get conscious and subliminal messages bombarded at us all day long. These messages come from media and social media, marketing firms that want you to buy products, and even our friends and family. Oftentimes, the message is something like: “In order to be liked, you have to fit in.” Or, “If you want to be like THAT person, you need to look and act like him or her.” We don't like to admit it, but we buy into that, for sure...with what we wear, what we drive, what we do for vacation, and what we prioritize. It's all part of our human nature to want to be liked or respected or valued.
- D. I distinctly remember the days leading up to my sophomore year in high school. School shopping that year consisted of buying the coolest collection of rugby-style shirts that were very popular in the 1980s. These shirts were heavy, long sleeved, and had big wide stripes. Wear those with a cool pair of faded jeans, pegged at the bottom, of course, and you were cool. The other thing is that you looked like everyone else. See, that's subconsciously what we want at that age...and maybe still today, in some ways.
- E. The message Jesus teaches us today is: his followers are called **to be different**, to think and act differently, for the sake of the gospel about Jesus.
- F. Now, before we check out because we think this is another *believe and behave* message, understand it's not about our **behavior**. This is all about who and what we are **becoming**. This isn't about the clothes we wear to high school, but there's something to re-orienting our lives to Jesus' call to be different.
- G. Remember last week, if you caught the message, that we are blessed NOW because of a FUTURE REALITY when Jesus returns. What that means is that even though we live in THIS world, with all its allure to conform, our citizenship card reads, **Kingdom of Heaven**.

- H. Therefore, we are called to actively BECOME Kingdom people who look very different from that world. We are called to look a whole lot more like Jesus and his Kingdom...not on the OUTSIDE, but in your heart and mind AND actions.
- I. Jesus said, “You be different.” But what does that mean and how do we do that? Let’s find out as we go back to that mountainside with Jesus and his disciples and learn about salt and light, the Law, and what the Kingdom will be like when Jesus returns.
- J. We aren’t called to be different than the world for the sake of being different. We are called to be different for the sake of the Kingdom in which we serve the One who walked out of his own grave and forgives our sins completely.
- K. Class is now in session!**
- L. Turn with me to Matthew 5, starting in verse 13. We have a big chunk of scripture this morning. We won’t be diving in too deeply in each section. You can do some homework and read this section this week carefully. However, the main point Jesus is making is that **we’re called to be different** than the world and even what we’ve heard from the church in the past, at times.

## 2. Scripture

### A. READ MATTHEW 5:13-16

- i. This first section of the scripture today is a transition between Jesus’ proclamation of our blessedness now because of the coming kingdom, and what we will experience fully when that kingdom comes.
- ii. His first lesson is about salt, and light, and a city on a hill. Like any good master teacher, Jesus used some very common objects to give this lesson - salt (maybe he had some in a bag), and a light or candle, and a city on a hill (maybe at that moment he pointed to a visible city on a hill).
- iii. Without getting into all the properties of salt and light here today, Jesus wanted the disciples to know that their faith and action were anything but personal and private.
  - a. Salt does not exist for itself, but to enhance the flavor other food. Disciples do not exist for themselves, but to impact the world for Christ.
  - b. Light does not exist to be seen, but for other objects to be seen as they are. Disciples don’t exist to make sure people know they’re followers of Jesus. They let Jesus work through them and shine out into the world so other can see the truth about themselves and the world for what it is.
  - c. A city on a hill is not an island and cannot be hidden. It’s a beacon and people are comforted to know that, as they are approaching, in it they can find rest and provision. The church is a beacon to a lost and hurting world, not for the sake of the church, but for the sake of the world who is seeking peace and forgiveness and love and salvation from God.

- d. Jesus ended this section with an imperative (actually the first command gives in this sermon): "...let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven." Giving glory to your Father in heaven means that they come to faith in God and worship and serve Him. YOUR light and actions can and do point people to God...unless you keep your light hidden and your salt gets diluted with unholy ingredients.
  - e. Be salt. Be light. Shine your light!
  - f. And, remember, this is all based in the fact that we are blessed NOW - confident and courageous - because of the Kingdom that we're assured is coming when Jesus returns. Shining that light is shining the truth of your blessedness!
- iv. Let's keep going to the second part of this lesson.

### **B. READ MATTHEW 5:17-20**

- i. So, first, Jesus makes it clear that The Law (read: The Jewish Law) doesn't go away because of Jesus, but is fulfilled **through** Jesus.
- ii. What does that mean? Well, what he's starting to get at here is that **He is the perfection of the full intent of the Law**. God gave the Law to His people for one reason: so their hearts would be singly focused on loving Him, worshipping Him, and serving Him.
- iii. The problem was not The Law, but the hearts of the people that were commanded to follow the Law. They'd gotten to the place where they may've been following the letter of the Law, but were missing the HEART of the Law, which is where God was calling them.
- iv. Where do we do that in OUR lives? Where are we trying so hard to BEHAVE like our perception of good disciples yet we miss the opportunity to BECOME disciples after God's own hearts?
- v. See because Jesus is about to give us 6 examples of places where the people were tempted (and we're tempted) to make this all about the LETTER of the law, but miss the intent or HEART of the Law. And, on the surface, it appears that what Jesus was saying lessened the requirements of the Law or let them off the hook. In reality, what Jesus was asking was far greater.
- vi. Yet, Jesus was willing to do far greater things, because He was the fulfillment of the Law...and went to the cross to die to prove it.
- vii. Again here, we won't dive too deeply into these 6 examples, but see how they all tie together to teach this lesson about the HEART of the disciple.

### **C. READ MATTHEW 5:21-48**

- i. “You’ve heard it said...but I say to you...” Just like our formula from last week (Blessed ARE...for they WILL be...), Jesus gives us a new formula to learn and apply. Maybe he IS teaching some math to us!
- ii. Going back up to the previous section about the Law, Jesus was clearly stating that what the disciples and religious leaders have learned to DO and THINK about the letter of the Law misses the mark.
- iii. What they have HEARD is what has been their experience IN THE WORLD. What Jesus said is what they will experience when they BECOME citizens in the Kingdom. However, Jesus also knows that learning and applying is a process. He pointed them to a future reality, and asking them to start applying it today...in some pretty radically different ways than they had previously come to believe.
- iv. Here’s the summary:
  - a. *You’ve heard it said* that you should not murder. *But I say to you* that anger towards a Christian brother or sister that goes unresolved IS as if you have murdered that person in your heart. And what that anger/hatred does is trap you and you can only get OUT of the trap when you reconcile and release that anger. Not many of us have murdered anyone and gone to jail. Yet, where are the places in your life that you’re in emotional and spiritual jail because you’re angry at someone and you haven’t reconciled. This is a heart issue, not only a law of God (as we read in the 10 commandments). Be different than that.
  - b. *You’ve heard it said* that you should commit adultery. *But I say to you* that anyone who lusts after another person has committed adultery in their heart. Again, a heart issue is far deeper than a physical one. The physical law against adultery is one of the 10 commandments. God knew that unfaithfulness in marriage is extremely damaging to relationships. But the heart of the matter begins with lust (wanting someone else for consumption for yourself) which is another whole level. Our culture is off-the-rails with sexual free-for-all. Jesus is asking for holiness of heart and life. Be different.
  - c. *You’ve heard it said* that anyone who divorces should give a certificate...make it legal. *But I say to you* that anyone who divorces, except for unchastity, causes adultery. Related to the previous lesson, Jesus again gets to the heart of it. Divorce is a reality of our broken world. As a pastor, I know that for those who have been through that, it’s excruciatingly painful, for a long time. The church needs to act with grace, for sure, for those who have experienced divorce. Yet, Jesus is saying that it’s not about the paperwork, but moving your heart to a new place in your life and relationships, knowing what you know now. It

goes through reconciliation as much as you can and then becoming more and more a follower of Jesus, being like Jesus. Be different.

- d. What about Oaths? *You've heard it said* that you should not swear falsely and carry out your vows. (seems reasonable) *But I say to you* that you shouldn't swear an oath at all. What's He getting at? Again, with a kingdom view in mind, Jesus is calling people to always be guided by the Spirit and not just the letter of the law...by your heart and not the vow you made. See, because if your heart is in the right place with God, then the intent of the vow will be satisfied, without or without the vow itself. He said, let your yes be yes and your no be no. He even goes on to say that anything more than that simple process, then the devil has a chance to make a mess of your heart and the relationships involved. Be different.
  - e. *You've heard it said* that you should retaliate to make sure people get what they deserve. *But I say to you* that you should not resist an evildoer who strikes you or steals your coat. God is merciful. We are called to be merciful. Jesus is not saying we should be abused by anyone. But he IS saying that, as people who are becoming like Jesus, there'll be times of persecution and pain. Our job is not to retaliate to somehow right the injustice. That's God's job, church. We're called to let God do that work in us that we are tempted to do on our own and which the world tells us we should. Be different than that.
  - f. *You've heard it said* that you should love your neighbor and hate your enemies. *But I say to you* that you should love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you. This is related to the previous lesson. This is upside-down from the world's constant message. The Kingdom will not include hate or enemies. Be different. Live that out now. It's interesting that he adds, "Be perfect, as your Father is perfect." to this end of this lesson. We could spend a sermon on this idea, but Jesus said that phrase a few times to indicate that perfection will come...maybe not in this life, but moving in that direction because of Jesus' love and grace IN YOU now. Be different. Be perfect with Jesus IN you!
- D. Jesus calls all disciples to be vastly different from the world because of His presence in your life.

### 3. Application

- A. What will it take to be different from Jesus' perspective? What is He trying to teach us?
- B. #1 - It starts with letting THIS sink in deeply into your heart: **You are a citizen of the Kingdom of Heaven, first, then of this world.**

- i. That's different, for sure. Yet, it re-orientes your life to the values and vision for your relationships in the world.
  - ii. Your allegiance is to the Kingdom first, and the world second. In profound ways, that lets YOU off the hook to satisfy the demands of the world, while also calling you to cultivate the heart of Jesus FOR the world.
  - iii. This isn't removing yourself FROM the world, but approaching everything you do and say with the HEART of Jesus, even when it's not fair.
- C. **#2 - Reject the false laws that are not from God in your life, but that you've come to believe they are.**
- i. These are things that you and I DO because they are culturally-conditioned in us, and that have even been promulgated by the church.
  - ii. Murder is always the big one, right? But you and I are also tempted to legalistically lump any sin in with that. The church has gone so far in its history to lump in dancing, drinking alcohol, tattoos, smoking, and on and on.
  - iii. Now, those things CAN be sinful, for sure...and we see the destructive nature of those things when they ARE sinful. Yet, at the heart of it all is not rejecting those things legalistically, but embracing the holiness and single-minded focus on serving God with our whole heart and mind.
  - iv. It's sometimes WAY EASIER to follow a set of legal requirements than it is to listen to the Spirit moving in your life to call you to deeper levels of holiness and make the decision to reject the sins of this world for Him.
- D. **And #3 - Dare to be different...dare to be like Jesus.**
- i. You're already pre-blessed, church. You're already forgiven and freed from everlasting punishment, if you're on track with faith in Jesus.
  - ii. What's the worst thing that can happen if you dare to be different and follow Jesus? Not much! Death is good. Life is good. Because God is good!
  - iii. Give it a shot. Take one area of your life right now that looks like what the world would do and ask the Holy Spirit to give you the courage to make a 180 degree shift.
  - iv. If you're angry at someone, dare to forgive them and tell them. If you're drinking has become a cultural crutch, dare to not drink any alcohol - not because Jesus commands us not to be drunk, but so that He can do a new thing in your heart. If you're not giving to ministry, maybe for some good reasons, dare to test God in that by tithing for 6 months to see what God will do with that.
  - v. Dare to be different than what you've settled with now...and just see what God can do with that radical change in your life.

#### 4. Conclusion

- A. We all feel the pull to be accepted and part of the in-crowd.
- B. The question is, “How’s that working for you (for me), really?”
- C. Jesus calls all disciples to be vastly different than the world because of His presence in your life.
- D. Dare to be different. Dare to be like Jesus. Dare to go and shine your light in this world so that others can see your good deeds - your radical good deeds - and give glory to the Father in heaven!
- E. Let’s DO THIS! Class dismissed!
- F. Let’s pray...