Lesson Four

**The Distinctive Life of Disciples**

**Focal Text**
Matthew 5:1-16

**Background**
Matthew 5:1-16

**Main Idea**
Distinctive qualities and actions are to characterize Jesus’ disciples.

**Question to Explore**
How is living an ordinary human life different from living as a disciple of Jesus?

**Quick Read**
Those who live by the Beatitudes change the world.

**Commentary**

A Muslim who became a Christian offered this prayer:

> O God, I am Mustafah the tailor and I work at the shop of Muhammad Ali. The whole day long I sit and pull the needle and the thread through the cloth. O God, you are the needle and I am the thread. I am attached to you and I follow you. When the thread tries to slip away from the needle it becomes tangled and must be cut so that it can be put back in the right place. O God, help me to follow you wherever you may lead me. For I am really only Mustafah the tailor, and I work at the shop of Muhammad Ali on the great square.¹

Whose thread are you? This week’s study will help you and your class answer that question in a transforming way.

---

**Live a life God can bless (5:1-2)**

When our sons were growing up, my wife consistently encouraged and taught them to “live a life God can bless.” Jesus did the same for his followers.

The Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5—7) is the most famous sermon of all time. It takes about fifteen minutes to preach, and a lifetime to obey. It is the first of five teaching sections in Matthew’s Gospel (see Matt. 10; 13; 18; and 23—25). Here our Lord reversed our definition of success. We are not “blessed” by being prosperous and popular. Rather, we are blessed by our Father if we admit our need of God, mourn for our sins, submit to our Master, hunger for righteousness, show mercy to all, seek his purpose in all we do, strive for peace, and suffer for right living.

By the time Jesus preached the Sermon, he had been engaged in public ministry for about eighteen months. He had called his first disciples (4:18-22); with them, he “went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom, and healing every disease and sickness among the people” (4:23). As a result, “large crowds from Galilee, the Decapolis, Jerusalem, Judea and the region across the Jordan followed him” (4:25).

Now our text begins: “When he saw the crowds, he went up on a mountainside and sat down” (5:1). Jesus’ sermon was delivered at one of the most famous places in Israel. The Mount of Beatitudes marks the traditional location for the Sermon on the Mount. It is located on the northwestern shore of the Sea of Galilee, between Capernaum and Gennesaret.

Christians have commemorated this site for more than sixteen centuries. A beautiful Roman Catholic Franciscan chapel was built here in 1938. Every time I lead a study tour of Israel, we stop in the gardens of this chapel and monastery. Here I recite the Sermon and we take time to consider its transforming application to our lives.

Somewhere on this hillside, Jesus sat down, the traditional posture of a rabbi and teacher (consider the academic chair today) while his listeners stood. As the crowds gathered on the mountainside, “his disciples came to him” (5:1b), drawing close to their Master. “He began to teach them” (5:2). This statement is Matthew’s indication that the Sermon was intended for Jesus’ followers. It does not explain how to become a Christian but how to live as one.

Jesus began his message with statements known as Beatitudes. The term comes from the Latin beatus, meaning to be blissful. Each statement begins with the word “blessed,” which translates makarios, a Greek word that describes a sense of tranquility that transcends circumstances. Happiness depends on happiness; God’s blessing does not. Our
Father is waiting to bless his children today: “the LORD longs to be gracious to you; he rises to show you compassion. For the LORD is a God of justice. Blessed are all who wait for him!” (Isaiah 30:18).

The Sermon on the Mount is not legalism, a set of rules we must follow to earn God’s favor. Rather, it details the life God is able to bless, how we can position ourselves to receive the grace God intends to give.

**Admit your need of a King (5:3)**

The first Beatitude lays the foundation for all the rest: “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven” (Matt. 5:3). There are two Greek words translates by the English “poor.” *Penes* describes an impoverished person, someone who has nothing to spare. *Ptochos* describes a destitute person, someone who has nothing at all, who has no means of survival. Jesus used the latter, Meaning *utterly destitute*.

“In spirit” shows us the kind of poverty Jesus commends. To be destitute in spirit is to recognize our complete and utter spiritual need, the fact that we must have the help of the Spirit. The New English Bible translated the phrase: “Blessed are those who know their need of God.”

Jesus’ culture taught just the opposite, and so does ours. The more self-reliant you are, the more others will admire you. The self-made person is the hero of our culture. We don’t like depending on anyone for anything.

By contrast, those who depend entirely on God’s Spirit are “blessed.” Why? Because “theirs is the kingdom of heaven.” As we learned last week, the kingdom of God is that realm where his will is done on earth as it is in heaven (6:10). When we make God our King, he is able to bless us and meet all our needs according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus (Philippians 4:19). When we make him our King, we position ourselves to experience his “good, pleasing, and perfect will” (Romans 12:2). But only when we make him our ruler and master.

It’s been said that there is a single throne in every human heart, and two candidates for it. Either God is enthroned in your life, or you are. Because we are fallen people with an inherited sinful nature (Rom. 5:12), our *default* position is self-rule. Unless we intentionally and consciously crown Jesus our King every day, we sit on the throne of our lives.

Another way of stating this truth is similar: there is a crown and a cross in every heart. If Jesus is wearing the crown, you’re wearing the cross. If you’re wearing the crown, Jesus is wearing the cross.
When last did you crown Jesus your King?

**Mourn for your sins (5:4)**
The closer we get to God, the further away we realize we are. The stain I didn’t notice on my jacket in the dark is visible in the light.

Jesus’ second promise follows from the first: “Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted” (Matt. 5:4). “Mourn” translates *pentheo*, which means *to grieve with a grief that so takes possession of the whole being that it cannot be hid*. Such people “will be comforted” (*parakaleo*, meaning *encouraged, lifted up*).

Did Jesus encourage all mourning for all reasons? How would such teaching align with the biblical exhortation to “rejoice in the Lord always” (Philippians 4:4)? How would it fulfill Jesus’ promise to give us life “to the full” (John 10:10)? How can he promise that every person who mourns, every time they mourn, will immediately be comforted? How would such a statement relate to Jesus’ theme of discipleship?

While Jesus came “to comfort all who mourn” (Isaiah 61:2; see Luke 4:18-19), it is clear from the discipleship context that this Beatitude relates especially to those who mourn for their sin. The more we know our need of God, the more we will mourn for the sins we recognize in our lives.

When Isaiah entered the temple on that fateful day, he saw himself in the light of his contemporaries and culture. But when he saw the Lord “seated on a throne, high and exalted,” and heard the angels proclaim his holiness (Isa. 6:1, 3), he then responded: “‘Woe to me!’ I cried. ‘I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the LORD Almighty’” (6:5).

The Holy Spirit must have a holy vessel to use. Disciples need a regular time for spiritual inventory. This is a simple but important discipline for Jesus’ followers. Take a piece of paper and a pen. Set aside thirty minutes to be alone with God. Invite the Spirit to show you anything that hinders his work in your life, and write your thoughts on the paper. Confess each sin, specifically and deliberately. Throw away the paper and claim his forgiving grace.

Know that your Father separates your sin as far from you “as the east is from the west” (Psalm 103:12), buries it in the depths of the deepest sea (Micah 7:19), and remembers it no more (Jeremiah 31:34). But he can forgive only what we confess. He can heal only what we trust to his grace. If we refuse to admit that we need his forgiveness, “we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us” (1 John 1:8). Even worse, “If we claim we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar and his word has no place in our lives” (1 John 1:10).
When last did you mourn for your sin?

**Submit to the Spirit (5:5)**

Jesus’ Beatitudes are arranged in a strategic order. First we admit we need Christ to be our King. Then we confess anything that hinders his rule in our lives. Now we choose to submit our lives to his Lordship: “Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth” (Matt. 5:5).

“Meek” translates *praus*, a fascinating Greek word. It can be rendered *mild* when describing things, *gentle* or *pleasant* with regard to people, *lenient* or *kind* in relation to activities or punishments, and *tame* when describing animals. Which meaning is intended in the third Beatitude?

The Greek Old Testament (the Septuagint) uses *praus* almost entirely with regard to inferiors or servants and their superiors. As a result, it never uses *praus* of God. It does, however, use the word in describing Moses: “Moses was a very humble man, more humble than anyone else on the face of the earth” (Numbers 12:3, italics added for emphasis).

Jesus used the word twice to describe himself: “Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls” (Matt. 11:29, italics added for emphasis); “Say to the Daughter of Zion, ‘See, your king comes to you, gentle and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey” (Matt. 21:5, quoting Zechariah 9:9, italics added for emphasis).

*Praus* is a result of the Spirit’s work in our lives: “the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control” (Galatians 5:22-23, italics added for emphasis). It enables Jesus’ followers to disciple others without arrogance: “Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently” (Gal. 6:1, italics added for emphasis).

Paul endorsed *praus* for God’s servants:

The Lord’s servant must not quarrel; instead, he must be kind to everyone, able to teach, not resentful. Those who oppose him he must gently instruct, in the hope that God will grant them repentance leading them to a knowledge of the truth, and that they will come to their senses and escape from the trap of the devil, who has taken them captive to do his will (2 Timothy 2:24-26, italics added for emphasis).

He encouraged Titus to “remind the people to be subject to rulers and authorities, to be obedient, to be ready to do whatever is good, to slander no one, to be peaceable and...
considerate, and to show true humility toward all men” (Titus 3:1-2, italics added for emphasis).

Peter counseled us to exhibit praus as we defend our faith:

   In your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect, keeping a clear conscience, so that those who speak maliciously against your good behavior in Christ may be ashamed of their slander (1 Peter 3:15-16, italics added for emphasis).

James taught us that divine understanding must be demonstrated “by deeds done in the humility that comes from wisdom” (James 3:13, italics added for emphasis).

In summary, the Bible uses praus to describe those who are humble toward God and gentle or gracious toward others. The first leads to the second—if I submit my life to God’s Spirit, I will manifest his grace to those I meet. In relation to disciples, where the context refers to those who follow their Master, the third Beatitude encourages us to be tame toward our Lord and King, that we might encourage others to make him their Master as well. This is a decision we must make every day of our lives.

We become Christians once, when we ask Jesus to forgive our sins and become our Lord and Master. But we must submit to his rule every day. Scripture requires us to “be filled with the Spirit” (Ephesians 5:18), controlled by his power and direction. The best time to make this decision is early in the morning. Make time to be alone with your Father. Ask the Spirit to bring to your mind anything that displeases God in your life, and confess all that comes to your thoughts. Ask your Father to forgive you and cleanse you, claiming his grace and mercy (1 John 1:9).

Then ask the Holy Spirit to take control of your life. Pray through your day, giving each element to him. Crown him the King of your plans and problems. As you go through the day, pray about each opportunity and challenge you face. Ask the Spirit to lead and empower you. Seek the glory of God by obedience to his word and Spirit. Practice the presence of Jesus. And the praus you exhibit toward God will enable the Spirit to produce praus in your relations with others (Gal. 5:23).

A power drill must stay connected to its power source to accomplish its intended purpose. We must stay connected to the Holy Spirit to fulfill God’s purpose for our lives. So begin every day by admitting your desperate need of God. Turn your life over to his Spirit, making him the King of your day. And you will be “blessed.”

When last did you submit to the Spirit?
Seek to be right with all (5:6)

Remember that Jesus’ Sermon was directed to his disciples, and was intended to be understood as a roadmap for discipleship from his time to ours. When we admit that we need a King, mourn for the sins that separate us from him, and submit our lives to his Spirit, we are now ready to apply the fourth Beatitude to our lives: “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled” (Matt. 5:6).

“Hunger” translates peinontes, meaning to be hungry, to desire strongly; “thirst” renders dipsontes, meaning to thirst strongly. “Righteousness” translates dikaiosynen, meaning to be upright with God, others, and ourselves.

This drive to be righteous in our relations with our Father, his children, and ourselves cannot be fulfilled in our ability: “There is no one righteous, not even one; there is no one who understands, no one who seeks God” (Rom. 3:10-11). Religions try to climb up to God, but all of them fail. We have all sinned and fallen short of his glory (Rom. 3:23), earning the physical, spiritual, and eternal death that results from our sins (Rom. 6:23). No matter how hard we try, we cannot achieve righteousness in our lives for long. Our best efforts and strongest resolutions inevitably fail us.

But if we make God our King, asking his forgiveness and mercy for our sins, and submit our lives to the control of his Spirit, he will make us what we cannot make ourselves to be: we “will be filled.” “Filled” translates chortasthesontai, meaning to eat one’s fill, to be fulfilled and satisfied. Not, they might be filled or they can be filled. Righteousness with God, others, and ourselves is the inevitable product of the Spirit’s unhindered work in our lives.

However, there is a balance between divine power and human initiative. Noah was told to build the ark, then God would close the door. Moses held his rod over the Red Sea while God parted its waters. The children of Israel marched around Jericho, and then God destroyed its walls. Jesus sent his disciples to preach to all nations, with the promise of his presence and enabling power (Matt. 28:18-20).

Seek righteousness in every relationship of your life. Desire it strongly, above all that would compete with it. Seek to do the right thing every time in the way you serve God, treat others, and relate to yourself. Then as you work, God works. Your desire becomes his fulfillment.

How would God describe the purity of your relationship with him? How would those you know say you treat them? How healthy is your relationship with yourself? When last did you ask the Spirit to help you be righteous?
Forgive as you have been forgiven (5:7)

To be right with others, there will be times when you must forgive them. Jesus’ fifth Beatitude leads us to this commitment: “Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy” (Matt. 5:7).

“Mercy” translates eleemosyne, meaning to be sympathetic, compassionate. It can be defined as pardoning, refusing to punish. While grace is getting what we don’t deserve, mercy is not getting what we do deserve.

We have received great mercy from the God “who is rich in mercy” (Ephesians 2:4). He showed us this mercy when he granted us salvation: “In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade—kept in heaven for you” (1 Peter 1:3-4).

Paul reminded us that “he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy” (Titus 3:5). Now we “wait for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ to bring you to eternal life” (Jude 21).

Now we are to tell others of his mercy toward us: “Go home to your family and tell them how much the Lord has done for you, and how he has had mercy on you” (Mark 5:19). And we are to extend to others the mercy we have received from our Father: “Shouldn’t you have had mercy on your fellow servant just as I had on you?” (Matt. 18:33).

Jesus quoted his Father, “I desire mercy, not sacrifice” (9:13, quoting Hosea 6:6). He chastised the teachers of the law and Pharisees for neglecting “the more important matters of the law—justice, mercy and faithfulness” (Mat. 23:23). The Samaritan fulfilled the law when he “had mercy” on the injured traveler (Luke 10:37).

God’s wisdom is “full of mercy” (James 3:17). However, “judgment without mercy will be shown to anyone who has not been merciful” (James 2:13). When God pardons us, he expects us to pardon others.

Such behavior is vital for disciples. How can others believe that “God is love” (1 John 4:8) if they don’t see such love in his followers? People judge Christ by Christians. We are the only Bible most will read. If they see mercy demonstrated in our lives and relationships, they may believe that the One we serve is merciful.

Remember Jesus’ terrifying parable of the man who owed his king ten thousand talents, worth 160,000 years’ wages, but was forgiven this unimaginable debt (Matt. 18:24-27). In turn, he found a servant who owed him a hundred denarii, 100 days’ wages, and threw him into prison until he repaid the debt (18:28-31). The king said to his servant: “You
wicked servant. I canceled all that debt of yours because you begged me to. Shouldn’t you have had mercy on your fellow servant just as I had on you?” (18:32-33).

Who has injured you? Who has treated you unfairly, gossiped about you, slandered you? Have you done the same and much worse to your Lord? Has he forgiven every sin you’ve confessed to him, extending mercy greater than all your sin?

When last did you pardon a “fellow servant”?

**Love God and others (5:8)**
Remember the progression of Jesus’ Beatitudes in the context of discipleship: Make God your King, grieving your sins and submitting to his Spirit. Seek to be right with God, others, and yourself, and the Spirit will produce such righteousness in your life. Express that righteousness toward those who have harmed you by extending God’s mercy in yours. Now we are ready to apply Jesus’ sixth Beatitude: “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God” (5:8).

“Pure” translates *katharos*, meaning *to be clean, free, ritually pure, unstained*. In world religions, worshipers are expected to cleanse their bodies as they enter the presence of their god(s). However, Jesus’ expectation is different: he wants us to be “pure in heart.” “Heart” translates *kardia* (from which we get the word *cardiac*), referring to the interior and center of our lives.

Viewed in this context, *katharos* acquires the sense of *integrity, consistency, to be of one mind*. It means to have a single purpose to our lives. To quote Kierkegaard: “Purity of heart is to will one thing.”

What should be that “one thing”?

When Jesus was asked that question, he replied: “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. . . . Love your neighbor as yourself” (22:37, 39). We love him with our “heart” by entering a personal relationship with him by grace through faith (Ephesians 2:8-9). We love him with our “soul” by worshiping him daily: “Give me an undivided heart, that I may fear your name” (Psalm 86:11). To “fear” God is to honor and worship him. We love him with our “mind” by knowing and obeying his word: “Be transformed by the renewing of your mind” (Romans 12:2). Then we are able to love our neighbor as ourselves: “The goal of this command is love, which comes from a pure heart” (1 Timothy 1:5).

This is God’s standard of success: a personal, passionate, growing relationship with him that empowers us to love others as he loves us. In a culture that measures us by what we have and how we look, Jesus’ Beatitude is liberating. It sets a standard anyone can meet,
with his help. When he is our King and we are cleansed and empowered by his Spirit, seeking righteousness and showing mercy, he will enable us to live with this single-minded focus on loving God and others.

Picture a group of disciples who lived every day by this one purpose. Imagine their impact on their fragmented, fallen culture. Envision the power and joy they would experience in their intimacy with the God of the universe. You’re picturing early Christianity, a movement which “turned the world upside down” (Acts 17:6, KJV).

We can continue that movement today. When last did you make God’s “one thing” yours?

**Seek peace (5:9)**

What will be the result of such a movement of committed disciples? They will be persecuted peacemakers. Jesus’ seventh Beatitude illustrates the first: “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God” (Matt. 5:9). Peace translates *eirene*, the Greek word for the Hebrew *shalom*. These words picture a person at peace with God, others, and self, in that order.

God wants us to be at peace with him: “The LORD gives strength to his people; the LORD blesses his people with peace” (Psalm 29:11). Jesus assured us, “Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid” (John 14:27). Later he added, “I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world” (John 16:33).

“Peace” is one of the “fruit of the Spirit” (Galatians 5:22). It is the product of the Spirit’s work in our lives, not human ability. We cannot create peace ourselves. We can only receive it from God: “He himself is our peace, who has made the two one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility” (Eph. 2:14). As a result, “Since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ” (Rom. 5:1).

Knowing we are at peace with God by grace, we choose to obey his word: “Great peace have they who love your law, and nothing can make them stumble” (Psalm 119:165). God said through his prophet, “If only you had paid attention to my commands, your peace would have been like a river” (Isa. 48:18).

Now we can give our problems to God: “Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus” (Phil. 4:6-7). Trust the will of God, and you’ll say with the
prophet: “You will keep in perfect peace him whose mind is steadfast, because he trusts in you” (Isa. 26:3).

On this foundation, we are able to be peacemakers with others: “If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God’s wrath, for it is written: ‘It is mine to avenge; I will repay,’ says the Lord” (Rom. 12:18-19).

Scripture teaches that “God has called us to live in peace” (1 Corinthians 7:15). It exhorts us: “Live at peace with each other” (1 Thessalonians 5:13). God commands us: “Make every effort to live in peace with all men and to be holy; without holiness no one will see the Lord. See to it that no one misses the grace of God and that no bitter root grows up to cause trouble and defile many” (Hebrews 12:14-15).

At peace with God and others, we can be at peace with ourselves. Jesus said that peacemakers “will be called sons of God.” He did not claim that we become sons of God—that would be works righteousness. But people will know that we are God’s children as we give his peace to them: “By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another” (John 13:35).

Disciples of the “Prince of Peace” (Isa. 9:6) will exhibit his peace in all their relationships. Would God say you are at peace with him? Would those you know say you are at peace with them? Are you at peace with yourself today?

Serve courageously (5:10-12)

Such discipleship comes at a price: “Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven” (Matt. 5:10). Jesus’ eighth Beatitude continues: “Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you” (5:11-12).

Verse 10 can be translated literally, Blessed are the ones who have been and now are being persecuted for the sake of righteousness. “Persecuted” translates dediogmenoi, meaning to be pursued, pressed on, driven away. Jesus knew his disciples would suffer for following him. And they did.

They were “insult[ed]” (5:11), translating oneidisosin, meaning to be reproached, reviled, insulted, mocked. They were made the objects of gossip, slander, and ridicule. Enemies of Christ said “all kinds of evil” against them. “Evil” translates poneros, referring to those who are wicked, vile, degenerate, vicious.
Jesus warned them that “in this world you will have trouble” (John 16:33). Paul warned early disciples that “we must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God” (Acts 14:22). Peter added: “Dear friends, do not be surprised at the painful trial you are suffering, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice that you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed” (1 Peter 4:12-13).

Persecution has been a constant theme of Christian discipleship from Jesus’ day to ours. Some twenty-five million believers died for their faith in the first nineteen centuries of Christianity. More than forty-five million died for Christ in the twentieth century. And the number of martyrs continues to grow around the world.²

Our ultimate enemy, of course, is Satan. Jesus called him “a murderer from the beginning” (John 8:44). Peter warned us: “Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour” (1 Pet. 5:8).

But there’s another side to the story. Those who suffer for Jesus will experience great joy—we will be “blessed” by him (Matt. 5:11). We can “be glad” (5:12), literally leap with inexpressible joy.

The early apostles did: “They called the apostles in and had them flogged. Then they ordered them not to speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go. The apostles left the Sanhedrin, rejoicing because they had been counted worthy of suffering disgrace for the Name” (Acts 5:40-41).

Early martyrs did. Justin, one of the earliest martyrs, wrote to his accusers: “You can kill but not hurt us.”³

They knew that “great is your reward in heaven” for courageous faithfulness. Paul could testify: “I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us” (Rom. 8:18). While imprisoned on Patmos, John saw the reward for those who suffer for Jesus: “Never again will they hunger; never again will they thirst. The sun will not beat upon them, nor any scorching heat. For the Lamb at the center of the throne will be their shepherd; he will lead them to springs of living water. And God will wipe every tear from their eyes” (Revelation 7:16-17).

We can rejoice to be part of an enduring community of fellow faithful: “In the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.” The writer of Hebrews described those who suffered for serving the one true God:

Others were tortured and refused to be released, so that they might gain a better resurrection. Some faced jeers and flogging, while still others were chained and put in prison. They were stoned; they were sawed in two; they were put to death
by the sword. They went about in sheepskins and goatskins, destitute, persecuted and mistreated—the world was not worthy of them” (Heb. 11:35-38).

And we can rejoice because of the kingdom we will inherit: “Theirs is the kingdom of heaven.” The first Beatitude made this promise; the last repeats it. When we suffer for Christ we prove that he is our king. And then we join him in his kingdom. Paul assured us, “If we endure, we will also reign with him” (2 Timothy 2:12). John was told that those who stood faithful to Christ in the face of persecution “they came to life and reigned with Christ” (Rev. 20:4). We will suffer for a short while, and then reign with Jesus in his kingdom forever.

We show the depth of our discipleship by our willingness to pay the price it requires. When last did it cost you something significant to serve Jesus?

**Conclusion**

Jesus came to inaugurate the kingdom of God on earth. As his Beatitudes prove, his rule is different in every way from the reign of mankind. The results of living by his word make us even more distinctive: “You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled by men” (Matt. 5:13). Salt purifies, preserves, and seasons—the same functions Jesus expects of us in our fallen, decaying world. When we taste salt, we know it. There is nothing like it. So it is to be with us.

Further, Jesus called us “the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven” (5:14-16).

The “city on a hill” in Jesus’ sermon may have been one of the cities further up the mountainside from him—such communities stood out at day and especially at night. The “lamp” to which he referred was a small clay vessel filled with olive oil. Its floating wick was difficult to light; once lit it was shielded by a “bowl” at night so those in the house could sleep. When its light was needed, it was put on its “stand,” typically a protrusion in the wall of the single-room peasant house, where “it gives light to everyone in the house.”

In the same way, we are to show the light of our love for God and others for this purpose: “that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.” Light always defeats dark, but it must contact that which it is to influence.

If we were to live by Jesus’ Beatitudes, our lives would produce the effects of salt and light in our world. Note that his pronouns are plural: *All of you* are the salt of the earth
(5:13); all of you are the light of the world (5:14). No clergy-laity distinctions here. Every believer, living by the Beatitudes, accomplishes this Kingdom purpose in our world.

Would those you know characterize you as salt and light in their lives?

See [www.baptistwaypress.org](http://www.baptistwaypress.org) for additional study materials on

**The Gospel of Matthew: A Primer for Discipleship**

and more than forty other Bible studies by BaptistWay Press®,
or call 1-866-249-1799
(M-Fri 8:30 a.m.-5:00 p.m. central time).

A recent book by Dr. Denison, *The Bible—You Can Believe It: Biblical Authority in the Twenty-First Century*, is also available from BAPTISTWAY PRESS®. The price is only $4.95 each plus shipping and any applicable taxes. A **Teaching Guide** is available for only $1.95 plus shipping and any applicable taxes.

---

To receive Dr. Denison’s free daily e-mail, “Denison Forum on Truth and Culture,” see [www.denisonforum.org](http://www.denisonforum.org). The brief essay discusses current events and issues in light of God’s word and provides practical applications to life.

Twitter @JimDenison

---