

# Session 2

## RAISE THE BAR

*Matthew 5:13-37*

### Memory Verse

<sup>14</sup> *“You are the light of the world. A city situated on a hill cannot be hidden.*

<sup>15</sup> *No one lights a lamp and puts it under a basket, but rather on a lampstand, and it gives light for all who are 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 in heaven.*

– MATTHEW 5:14-16, CSB



## Raise the Bar

**THEOLOGICAL THEME:** God's Law has everything to do with people's lives today. For followers of Jesus, it is the blueprint to a life that pleases their Creator and Father. For those who do not follow Jesus, it is a mirror that reveals their desperate need of a Savior.

The flight between the two Ecuadorian cities of Quito and Lago Agrio is amazing. It only lasts about 45 minutes, but during that time the airplane weaves its way between multiple snow-capped peaks in the Andes Mountains. You may find yourself glancing out the window to see a magnificent mountain peak at eye level. It is surreal. You fly miles above sea-level and face a mountain that you hope the pilot doesn't veer toward on the return trip.

From that vantage point, the views are breath taking and awe-inspiring. Passengers pull out their cellphones to take pictures and videos. People smile and chat about what they see as they sip on ginger ale and eat pretzels. In a few short minutes, they are on the ground in the sweltering jungle.

From the airplane, the view of the mountains is exhilarating. However, if you were at the base of one of them knowing that you had to summit the peak, exhilaration would immediately give way to desperation. As you look up an impossibly steep grade that goes on forever, you would quickly determine that getting over the mountain is above your pay grade.

Our position or vantage point determine our feelings and perspectives. The same mountain looks very different from an airplane window and a basecamp.

God's Law is like that. For those who are not in Christ, God's Law is a desolate, lonely, and impossible place. But for Christians, God's Law is good and helpful and a sign of God's lovingkindness toward them. How does God's Law look to you?



What comes to mind when you think of God's Law?

---

---



How has your view of God's Law changed throughout your walk with Christ?

---

---

## Session Summary

Matthew 5:13-37 is a section of the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus' longest recorded sermon. In the first section of this sermon, known as the Beatitudes, Jesus encouraged His followers by affirming their current blessed state and assuring them of a future hope. Jesus was careful to identify who His true followers were by naming them by their fruit (meek, humble, etc.). In essence, Jesus said that His followers are blessed because all of God's promises to them will be kept. In today's passage, Jesus turned His attention to what it means to live as His followers. This message isn't just for Christians. It's also a powerful message to those who are outside of Christ. Jesus' standard here was impossibly high for people operating in their own strength and depending on their self-righteousness. The right response to this insurmountable task is to trust in Him.

### 1. Where There's Fire, There's Smoke (Matthew 5:13-16)

In verses 13 and 14, Jesus said to His disciples, "You are the salt of the earth . . . You are the light of the world." It is clear that He was talking to His disciples because of the context of the passage and also because of the meaning of these words. Only those who love and fear the Lord will inherit the kingdom of God, and only those who fear and love the Lord can be salt and light in a sin-soaked world.

These two metaphors for the Christian are appropriate for several reasons. First, both provide a great service to humanity. They are useful and undeniably good for mankind. Salt's preserving quality was invaluable in the ancient world. And it goes without saying

that light was essential, as it is today. Christians are to be a blessing to those around them by being witnesses both in word and deed of the one true and living God.

But there is another lesson we learn from these two metaphors. Both salt and light are naturally useful and good. You don't have to do anything to light or salt in order to make them useful. Christians, having been transformed by the power of the gospel, are naturally useful. They aren't perfect, but they are a new creation, indwelt by God's Spirit, and meant for good works (2 Cor. 5:17, Eph. 2:10).

**?** When are light and salt useful? What do these two images teach you about being a Christian?

---

---

**?** Application Question: Does your outward living reflect an inward transformation? Have you been saved by the power of the gospel message? If so, what is your testimony of salvation?

---

---

Jesus said that if salt loses its saltiness, then it's no longer good for anything but to be thrown out. Further, Jesus asked who would light a lamp to put under a basket. Salt that isn't salty and a light that is smothered under a basket make as much sense as a Christian who doesn't do good works.

True Christians are humble, repentant, meek, merciful and the like because God made them that way by the power of the gospel. That's the inward reality of a follower of Jesus. The outward reality will follow and can no more be detained than a candle giving off light or salt being salty.

## 2. God's Word Shows the Way (Matthew 5:17-20)

We cannot overemphasize the importance of context when we read the Bible. We must resist the temptation to lift out a verse or two and formulate a lesson or doctrine on those words alone. Each verse relates to the verses around it. Specific people wrote these words to specific people with a specific intention.

Jesus told His followers that they should be salt and light and let their good works be seen so that God would get glory. The next logical question is this: What works are the works of God? We may be tempted to stop reading there and start brainstorming. We could probably come up with a long list of ways to be salt and light in our homes, schools, and workplaces. But Jesus didn't intend for His followers to put their heads together to come up with ways to obey God. In the very next verse, He said: "Don't think that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets." Here is the meaning plain and simple: those who have been saved will read and obey God's Word.

Jesus said, "Don't think that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to abolish but to fulfill." Jesus came to uphold the Law of God. Furthermore, He said, "unless your righteousness surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never get into the kingdom of heaven." Later in the sermon, Jesus said: "Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect" (5:48).

Jesus said plainly that He would uphold the Law. Further, Jesus said that those who want eternal life must be found blameless in relationship to God's Law. In other words, if a person is imperfect in his or her obedience to God's Law, then he or she is unfit for the Kingdom.



What did Jesus indicate was His relationship to God's Law?  
What did He say about people's relationship to God's Law?  
What does this mean for the Christian? What does it mean for the non-Christian?

---

---



**Application Question:** Which do you see when you look at God's Law—an impossible, condemning standard or a joyful blueprint for obedience? Explain your thoughts.

---

---

God's Law is joy and life for the follower of Jesus, but it is misery and death for the unbeliever. The reason for the vast chasm between the two is the position of each (remember our illustration of the mountain from the introduction). God's Law no longer condemns Christians because Christ has redeemed them from the punishment for breaking God's Law. Those who are not Christians, however, must keep God's Law perfectly and perpetually or they will be found guilty. Of course, all people are already guilty, and even if they weren't, it is impossible for sinful people to obey God's Law.

For Christians, the Law is like a blueprint or a roadmap. It shows them how to walk in obedience to their heavenly Father. It shows them how to please their Father. This isn't drudgery for true Christians; it is a joy. Christians are people who have experienced the salvation of God in Jesus Christ. They long to worship God, desire to obey Him, and crave fellowship with Him. The Law of God for non-Christians is a mirror that reveals a corrupted, sin-sick heart. They see transgression on top of transgression and eternal punishment that will be justly administered.

God accomplishes His purposes by applying His Word to both believers and unbelievers. For Christians God's purpose is to give clarity about how to live as children of God. For non-Christians, God's purpose is to show them their desperate need of a Savior.

### **3. Not Just Hands, but Heart (Matthew 5:21-37)**


In the next section, Jesus explained specific examples of having a righteousness that supersedes the scribes and the Pharisees. In these examples, Jesus communicated three primary truths. Let's take them one by one.

Jesus revealed that the sort of obedience God expected was more robust than what the religious leaders had come to believe. Obedience wasn't meant to be only external actions, but also an internal perspective, not only their hands but also their hearts. They

were not only to obey the letter of the law with their hands, but also the spirit of the law by submitting their hearts. It isn't enough to simply not murder. Rather, love your neighbor. It's not sufficient to just avoid adultery, but guard your heart against even thinking about it. Don't just fend off a divorce, but esteem marriage the way that God esteems it. Finally, let your speech be the overflow of a heart that fears, loves, and worships the Lord.


Jesus expressed this same sentiment negatively when He called the Pharisees whitewashed tombs. "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! You are like whitewashed tombs, which appear beautiful on the outside, but inside are full of the bones of the dead and every kind of impurity" (Matt. 23:27).

Thus, these commands help the Christian know how to walk in obedience and how to repent. Christians aren't to view the Law as a means to make themselves right with God, but as a means to live in accordance with their new position in Christ as a child of God.

 What was Jesus' overarching message to His followers concerning these specific commands? What did these commands express to those who were not in Christ and depended on their own righteousness for salvation? What did these commands say about Jesus, the one who came to fulfill God's Law?

---

---

 Application Question: If you are a Christian, then which of these commandments are you struggling with the most? What are some strategies you can enact to fight against sin? If you are not a Christian, what will you do about your inability to obey God's law? What will you do with your sin?

---

---

Jesus' words showed the impossibly high standard of God's Law for those who want to be justified by it. God is holy, and He demands holiness. If a person seeks to be right with God by his or her own merits, then this is the standard that they must reach. Yet, every person is born in sin and is bent toward sin from birth. No one is righteous, not even one (Rom. 3:10). Nowhere are unbelievers confronted with their spiritual inability more forcibly than when reading the Law of God.

Jesus didn't come to abolish God's Law, He came to keep it perfectly. The writer of Hebrews described Jesus this way: "For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who has been tempted in every way as we are, yet without sin" (Heb. 4:15). In living a life of perfect obedience to God, Jesus proved that He was the Son of God. No mere man with a sinful nature could perfectly and perpetually obey God, but Jesus did. Jesus wasn't a mere man; He was the God-man, fully God and fully man.

Further, when Jesus lived a life of perfect obedience, He earned God's righteousness and made Himself to be a sufficient and effective substitute sacrifice. The righteousness that Jesus earned through perfect obedience was applied to the account of all who trust in Him, while their sin was applied to Jesus' account.

## Conclusion

God's Law is good. It is good for both believers and unbelievers. For Christians, the Law of God provides a blueprint by which they can joyfully and worshipfully obey their Heavenly Father. For non-Christians, God graciously reveals to them their need for a Savior by exposing their spiritual inability when they compare their lives to His Law.

Christians will produce the fruit of obedience because they are new creations in Christ. The fire of gospel transformation will produce the smoke of joyful obedience and humble repentance. If there is no smoke, then there can be no assurance of fire.


Finally, Jesus fulfilled the Law of God perfectly. He was tempted in all the ways that we are, but He never sinned. Jesus always did what God commanded, and He never did what God forbade. This very same righteousness that Jesus exhibited is what is applied to the account of those who respond to the gospel message with faith and repentance.



 Do you understand the concept of Jesus' righteousness being applied to the Christian's account? If not, talk with your pastor about this essential Christian doctrine.

---

---

 What do you see when you look at God's Law? What does that indicate about the state of your soul?

---

---

 Which of the commandments that Jesus commented on do you find the most applicable to your current situation?

---

---

 How might joyfully following God's Law enable Christians to point others to the truth about Jesus?

---

---

**CHRIST CONNECTION:** Those who are in Christ see God's Law as a blessing because it helps them know how to walk in joyful obedience to the one who saved them. For those who are not in Christ, the Law sends them running to Christ because they realize that they are unable to keep the commandments of God.

**MISSIONAL APPLICATION:** When Christians read God's Law, they respond in obedience with joy and thanksgiving because they remember that they were hell-bound, ruined people. Christians desire for others to share that joy, peace, and hope.



# FOR NEXT WEEK

## No Ordinary Faith

### Main Passages

- Matthew 5:38-48

### Session Outline

1. Instructions for Perfection (Matt. 5:38-44)
2. The Model of Perfection (Matt. 5:20, 48)
3. Only the Perfect are Rewarded (Matt. 5:46-48)

### Memorize

*<sup>14</sup> "You are the light of the world. A city situated on a hill cannot be hidden. <sup>15</sup> No one lights a lamp and puts it under a basket, but rather on a lampstand, and it gives light for all who are 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 in heaven.*

- Matthew 5:14-16, CSB

### Daily Readings

- Monday - 1 John 3:18
- Tuesday - Colossians 3:17
- Wednesday - Galatians 5:13
- Thursday - Ephesians 4:1-3
- Friday - 1 Peter 2:17
- Saturday - Matthew 20:28