

Sermon on the Mount - Witness

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[0 : 0 0] Okay, for a short while I want us to turn back to Matthew chapter 5 and as I said we are doing a study on the Sermon on the Mount and don't worry if you haven't been here for part of it, we haven't really done that much yet but we are calling our study Disciples trained by King Jesus and the reason we're calling it that is because that title tells us two key things. It tells us first of all what the Sermon on the Mount is. That's what the Sermon on the Mount is. It's training in discipleship. It's telling us how to be disciples, how to live as Christians and so that's what the Sermon is but secondly that's what we want to be and that's our goal in studying it, not simply to learn what the Sermon on the Mount says but that the Sermon on the Mount would actually train us so that we are living as disciples who have been trained and taught by King Jesus. Now as you can see I've made a diagram, I love my diagrams and I've had always been so and what the diagram does is it just splits the Sermon on the Mount into, I haven't even counted them, one two three four five six seven eight nine ten eleven twelve thirteen fourteen parts, each of which fall under a key heading that is part of a Christian life. So the first section we looked at was a character which is what the Beatitudes describe which is what we read and the key emphasis is how the characteristics that Jesus is looking for are so fundamentally different to what the world admires and what the world is looking for. Tonight we're going to be looking at witness but the other sections that are covered are obedience, our relationships, our integrity, our temperament, our motivation, our prayer life and so on, all of these are things that we need to give attention to as

Christians. If we are going to be disciples trained by King Jesus all of these aspects of our lives need to be shaped by what he is saying. So tonight we are on the number two, our witness.

Now this is an important topic to look at because witnessing is such an important part of our lives as Christians but it's also, well, witness is one of these words that instantly induces guilt I think because we feel the sense of failure but let's just see what Jesus has to teach us and what we can apply to our lives. The section of the Sermon on the Mount in this regard is the last four verses that we read, verses 13 to 16 of Matthew chapter 5.

You are the salt of the earth but if salt has lost its taste how shall its saltiness be restored? It's 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 that basket but understand 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. Now as I said a moment ago last time we were looking at the heading of character as we examined the Beatitudes and the Beatitudes highlights the character traits that Jesus expects of us and they're the very opposite of what the world is looking for. The world is looking for strong, confident, capable, powerful, ruthless people that's who are admired in the world, that's who that's the kind of people who are at who are running countries. Jesus says I want people who are meek, I want people who are merciful, I want people who are all too aware that they are pure in spirit and the great emphasis which we'll highlight again and again is the fact that disciples are different, disciples of Jesus are different from the world and if you remember and the key word that runs through the Beatitudes is what word happens again and again each one starts with the word blessed, blessed, yep blessed of the pure in spirit, blessed that's the key word now we said last time that the word blessed means more than just being happy it's rather a covenantal term it's the opposite of being cursed and it's referring to the fact that we enjoy special favor with our king, we enjoy the amazing privileges of being in a covenant with God and last time we said that that word blessed is pointing us back to the covenant that God made with Abraham, it's a covenantal term, a term of being in that relationship of favor with God and it points us right back to Genesis 12 where God came to Abraham to make a covenant, now the

[5 : 07] Lord said to Abraham to Abraham go from your country and from your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you and I will make you a great nation and I will bless you and make your name great so that you will be a blessing I will bless those who bless you and in him who dishonors you I will curse in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed so here we see one of the fundamental principles applying to God's covenant relationship with Abraham and and that's a model for his covenant relationship with all believers that those who are God's people are blessed, we are immensely blessed. Galatians highlights this that this now applies to us, know then that those of faith it is those of faith who are the sons of Abraham and the scripture foreseeing that God would justify the gentiles by faith preach the gospel before him to Abraham saying in you shall all the nations be blessed so then those who are of faith are blessed along with Abraham the man of faith so I hope that's clear and when we're talking about the Beatitudes being blessed it's echoing the covenant relationship that we have that privileged status that we enjoy where God is our God we are his people so Jesus is highlighting disciples are those who are blessed just as Abraham was and the Beatitudes explains all that however if we go back to Genesis 12 it doesn't just say that Abraham and his descendants will be blessed it says something else as well he says I will bless you and make your name great so that you will be a blessing and then he goes on to say in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed so do you see the twofold emphasis here Abraham is blessed Abraham is also going to be a blessing indeed a blessing to all the families of the earth and that's exactly what Israel was intended to be in the

Old Testament Israel enjoyed many blessings and privileges themselves but they were always to be a blessing to the other nations they were always to be a light to the nations the other nations of the world were to look at Israel and see that they were distinctive and Israel were to be a blessing so Abraham was blessed and he was going to be a blessing Israel was blessed but they were also meant to be a blessing to others now in the Sermon on the Mount Jesus is describing life in his kingdom which is the new Israel that's part of the reason why he sat and gave the the sermon on the mount to 12 disciples echoing the 12 tribes of Israel this is the new Israel the fulfillment of Israel and exactly the same principle applies we are blessed but we as disciples are also to be a blessing and that's exactly the pattern we see in the Sermon on the Mount because immediately after the Beatitudes when Jesus talks about how we are blessed he then goes on to talk about the impact that we are going to make on the world we are to be a blessing and he uses two images to describe that we are to be salt and light so I hope you can see the echo of what God is doing with Abraham

Abraham blessed was to be a blessing the attitudes we are blessed and then the verses on salt and light we are to be a blessing and so here in the verses before us we are discovering the fundamental truths that lie at the heart of our witness we're talking about witnessing as disciples and we can't cover everything there's a lot we won't cover but we are talking about the fundamentals because this is the very first thing that Jesus teaches about witnessing to his disciples so what is Jesus training us to do in these verses well we'll do it in two sections we'll start with verse 13 and then we'll do verses 45 and 60 here Jesus uses the metaphor of salt to describe us as disciples you are the salt of the earth now what does what's Jesus referring to well some of you will remember I'm sure that at our joint meeting almost a year ago Iyer Makritchi gave an excellent address talking about salt and he spoke about all the different properties of salt and he gave a really really good address and I learned a lot that I hadn't thought of from that but whilst we could spend a lot of time thinking about just salt itself and the properties of salt

I want us to sort of look at this verse a bit more broadly and so the reason I want to do that is because if you look at verse 13 let me ask you a question right what's the key word in that verse yeah I always talk about the key word or the key verb or the main phrase if you look at that verse right there's one key word right and I'm giving you a clue it's not salt no it's it's it's a bit I'm I'm being a bit cheeky here because it's a bit ticky it's not salt but salt is close saltiness do you agree with me the main gesture of what he's saying is not so much about the salt but it's about the saltiness of the salt and no it's very very nitpicky but if you look at that's what Jesus is emphasizing the words you are the salt of the earth is actually just an introduction to what he goes on to say because the rest of this verse is about salt that has lost its taste salt that has lost its saltiness and the implications of that are in the final sentence so that's what it's really about saltiness now the reason Jesus is saying this is that he is highlighting the fact that it is the distinctiveness of the salt that is most important he's saying that the taste the saltiness of the salt that's what makes it effective he's emphasizing that without it it stops being effective if salt has lost its taste then it's of no use and so the saltiness is what's really really important it's what makes the salt distinctive that's what's essential and so Jesus is just echoing the main point of the whole sermon on the mount the fact that as disciples we are to be different we are to always be different and that's why the sermon on the mount is always relevant because it's emphasizing the fact that we've got to be different from the world and that is true no matter when we live being a disciple means being different from the world so what makes us stand out from the world well it's our saltiness now what's that emphasizing well I think if you think about it the saltiness of salt is is unmistakable who's forgotten to put salt in the porridge it's disgusting compared to what it's like with the salt even a wee bit of salt you may say a tiny bit of salt in the porridge and you notice it stayed away saltiness is unmistakable it's very very distinctive and so as disciples our distinctiveness from the world should always be unmistakable we should always be clearly different and that's the point that Jesus make is making salt that's lost its taste has lost its distinctiveness therefore it's useless and so our saltiness our distinctiveness is essential to us being disciples in other words people should be able to look at us and they should be able to tell that we're Christians it should be unmistakable now of course the key question is how do we do that and we'll come to that in a wee moment but I want to emphasize another point here Jesus is talking also here about the fact that our saltiness as the people of God has got to be protected we have to make sure we protect it because if it's lost

how can it be restored and I think one of the reasons that Jesus emphasizes that is because in the Old Testament again and again and again Israel lost its saltiness Israel failed to be that light that people who were different and the fundamental problem for Israel in the Old Testament was that they looked at all the other nations and they thought let's just be like them let's just follow their example let's just do what they're doing and we face exactly the same temptation don't we because when somebody gets somebody hurts you the world says get them back but Jesus says disciples are different when you are attracted to somebody the world says have a bit of fun Jesus says disciples are different and all around us we see people who are trying for more money trying for more success trying for more power more influence more possessions and Jesus is saying disciples must be different and so the Christian church has to make sure it never loses its saltiness step one for witnessing step one

[16 : 02] I'm not going to give myself enough room here distinctiveness is at step one saltiness we're different noticeably unmistakably different now how do we do that how do we maintain that well one of the easiest things to say is that the best way to do that to maintain our distinctiveness is to cut ourselves off from the world it's not easy that that kind of makes sense doesn't it you think okay you've got the world here you know you've got life going on in the world all the busyness of life everybody's coming and going everything's going on in the world we should just stay over here we're safe terrible for you you know that's the world we'll keep away we're salty let's keep away and keep ourselves protective that's kind of logical isn't it it's so easy to think let's keep ourselves to ourselves let's avoid the world let's spend more time just at church more time in church run things we do protect our saltiness we need to keep ourselves away well is that true is that correct well that brings us to the next versus the second metaphor 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 the 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 now here Jesus changes the metaphor to light and again we could say a lot about light and the properties of light and that's not much to teach us but let's do our same test again what's the key word it's not light shine excellent exactly I think that's the key word therefore Jesus is not saying keep to yourself he's not saying avoid the world he's telling us to do the exact opposite as disciples we are a light our saltiness our distinctiveness is a light that should never be hidden under a basket but rather we are to shine openly and brightly and we are to give light to all that surround us and that's part of what it means to be a blessing not to conceal it under a light if we are a bright light we're not to be hidden we're not to be isolated we are to be exposed and I think one of the key things we emphasize in these verses is the idea of visibility our distinctiveness our saltiness must be seen and it's really very simple the only way it's going to be seen is if we have contact with the world and therefore disciples must never be cut off never be isolated never be separated from the world they must always be visible they must always be contact now here's a really interesting question right here's a really good a really important version I'm sure a verse that you all know we're talking about salt and light these two verses that they're fundamental but let's ask the question are we fulfilling the requirements

of these verses in our meeting here tonight are we fulfilling the expectations of these verses by being here tonight i'm going to be controversial no no no that's not to say that being here is not right being here is vital and other parts of the sermon in the night emphasize the importance of prayer the importance of orthodoxy the importance of teaching the importance of being together but being soft and light is not fulfilled here in the prayer meeting because these verses are not about being a blessing to each other there's other verses about that these verses that are about being a blessing to the world and so these verses aren't lived out here they're lived out at sunshine ocean they're lived at choir they're lived out watching the football they're lived at the funk they're lived out doing the sheep they're lived out helping a cafe center they were lived out at youth club they're lived out at work they're lived out on the bus they are lived out in all the things that you and I do that brings us into contact with other people and this is where we see that what you do on a daily basis what you do is not ever insignificant to God and what you do on a daily basis is never a waste of time in terms of discipleship what you do on a daily basis is always an amazing opportunity to witness because it's by doing these things it's doing what you do whatever you did today whatever you're going to do tomorrow it's by doing what you do whether it's when you actually physically meet people or whether you're on the phone to them or whatever your contact with people is where they will see you and by seeing you as a light they recognize your distinctiveness they see your saltiness so what you did today is essential and wonderful in God's work through his disciples and of course that should make perfect theological sense because we believe in providence God put you where you were today because that's where you want to be today God is sovereign God is in control and God says whatever you do work hard to be asked for the Lord not for men knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward you are serving the Lord Christ no matter how insignificant your day's work might have felt today or whatever it you do and I say work I don't believe in retirement retired people just work in different ways I probably would say that when I'm 65 I'm saying it now whatever you did and I really hope that encourages you because this is containing such an important word of encouragement for us because it's so easy to feel that unless you're kind of some sort of minister or doing some sort of ministry then you're of no use to God it's so easy to feel like that but it is so not true because the sermon on the mount is reminding us that every disciple every one of you in your routine every week in these ways God is using you as salt and as light these are your opportunities to be distinctive for your saltiness to come through for you to be visible for you to be a light so that's what this is emphasizing for us all step one

distinctiveness step two and visibility salt and light different and noticeably different but I'm sure probably you're justifying thinking well yes Thomas that's all very good but that's still very general isn't it and it is very general these terms and and yeah that's that's true and it prompts the question well yeah but how exactly do we do that how exactly are we distinctive how exactly are we salt and light how do we witness and there's lots of possible answers that could come to mind we think about sharing our faith with people which is a wonderful thing to do we think about challenging people or encouraging them or you know trying to get them to think that's a good thing to do we think about inviting people that's equally important asking people questions trying to get them to think that's important these are all good important and necessary things but in Matthew 5 Jesus doesn't mention any of them what does Jesus identify as the key to being salt and light tell me good words light that your life shine before others so they may see your good works and so that's telling us

Jesus is telling us the fundamental basic starting point for the activity of witnessing is good works and that makes perfect sense because salt and light both have a good effect don't they salt preserves against rotting you take two fillets of natural you leave one in soft and you leave one on the worktop i know which one i want to eat in the morning salt prevents corruption rotting deterioration and it enhances flame light removes darkness and it provides illumination salt and light both have a good effect and Jesus is saying we need to engage in works that do good that have a good effect on the world and that applies in countless ways and the Sermon on the Mount and the rest of the New Testament outlines it again and again and again so many ways speaking well speaking kindly to people showing care to one another working hard being honest helping people who are in need showing hospitality sharing their belongings encouraging people being patient with people listening to people loving our neighbor in all of these ways that is the practical outworking of being salt and light now it's so important that we maintain the priority that this should have in our lives and we must make sure that we never replace this with something else it sounds as easy there's a kind of danger for reformed believers like ourselves because we are we are the children of the reformation we uh stand on justification by faith we do not advocate any theology that says you're saved by your good works but we must never in our adherence to justification by faith alone throw good works out the window all together because as those who are justified good works must be part of our lives and we must never replace it with something else and uh and I talk to myself here because I love studying I could sit at my desk all day no problem

I love it but that is no substitute for practical good works in my life and if I was studying theology all day and all evening six days a week I'd be a pure desire we must not replace good works with anything else because that's what Jesus is asking us to do and so our witness as Christians is first and foremost based on a life of actions that are good now I probably sound very um I couldn't think of the right word to use but I probably sound very wishy washy I'm saying we've all got to just be good do good works uh and you can think you know that sounds all a bit kind of um you know wishy washy but the truth is it makes absolute and perfect theological sense because our good works as citizens of God's kingdom are part of the whole narrative of the restoration of creation under which the whole message of the bible falls because the world is rotting in sin therefore it needs salt and the world is dark in sin therefore it needs light it needs something good to come into the world something that will be good for the world it needs salt and it needs light and Jesus is saying the salt and the light is you and me and so we are doing a work of restoration for creation because the ultimately the whole we have to remember God's kingdom it's here but it's coming this is a probably a terrible diagram but uh that's the world and it's been fallen in sin Christ came and he established a kingdom of 12 people uh which grew in his lifetime and uh is now a kingdom of millions and millions of people uh but it's still not covering the whole earth but we as disciples are having a good influence on that world because we are looking forward to the day when the whole of the universe is recreated as God's kingdom where we are citizens where everything has been restored and everything has been put right we just like Abraham are to be a blessing to the world we are to do it good just like Jesus expects good works from us and so we have to remember these two things as disciples we are blessed and uh we'll remember my friend Murdoch Campbell gave a really good sermon at our convenience where he emphasized the fact we are blessed and as Murdoch told us we are to say

[32 : 37] I am blessed um but Jesus is reminding us that that's not enough and it's all we don't just say I am blessed we have to ask ourselves the question am I being a blessing the two go together and as a result people will give glory to our Father who is in heaven and we must remember that is our aim in our witnessing we want to witness we want to see people come to faith but our goal is not that our congregations would get bigger not that we'd have a lot of new members at our community again not even that we could say that there is revival in carol away that's not our goal our goal is that other people would honor God that people would give glory to God the glory that is due to Him and Him alone and so our passion our goal should always be this that God would be glorified and so there's step three good works now that's not all the steps involved in witnessing which many more but that's the fundamentals that's the ones that Jesus teaches us here and there are some important implications

I'm very nearly finished I'm on my last week but here I really hope I don't want to be misunderstood I am not at all saying that we don't try to share our faith that we don't invite people that we don't question people that we don't challenge people we must must do these things and I was speaking to Ian Rode Campbell and the Minister of Culture to Scotland this morning he was talking about Murti Dandvegan who he had met at Cameron Terrace filling station and it was just after Murti had moved home and Ian was saying that he was looking rough he hadn't shaved he was looking terrible he saw Murti Dandvegan and Murti Dandvegan comes up and the first thing he says to him is do you know the Lord and I and you think yourself oh God please make me like that Murtot he's got an amazing ability and people have that gift not all of us have that gift but some have that gift of an evangelist so I'm not saying we don't share our faith we do I'm not saying we don't invite people these are all important and all appropriate when the opportunity arises but these things are our occasional witness our occasional witness and by that I simply mean that it's something that we do when the occasion arises but our good works our visible saltiness is not our occasional witness it's our constant witness and that's why it's this that Jesus emphasizes first because we are doing this every day is an opportunity to do good to our neighbour and the beauty of it is that no one can stop you doing it people can stop you when you invite them they can stop you when you try to ask them about the Lord they can stop you when you try to ask a question they can say I don't want to know but no one can stop you being good to them no one can stop you and even when you don't realize it people can see your good works and of course the opposite is true this is our constant witness okay constant witness and this is the one that comes first because if we fail in our good works if we're horrible to people people we become a constant bad witness and if we are a constant bad witness then our occasional witness becomes useless because we haven't been birthed on a foundation and and you know that's true because we all know of people who who are Christians but their conduct is bad and also that I do not refer to anybody in here at all but you all know what I mean and you all know the effect that that has and it's so damaging and Jesus is just teaching us the basics of our constant good works good witness means that when the occasion does come for the other forms of witness it's on a sure and firm foundation so three steps be distinctive be sought be visible

that's step two be light and step three manifest and demonstrate all of these things by your good works and I think that everything that I've said is confirmed from experience because how many times have you heard people say I used to look at Christians and I saw that they had something different that's sermon on the mount witnessing and may God make us all disciples like that let's pray God her father we thank you for the wonderful teaching that Jesus has given us and we thank you that it's at one level so simple and yet so profound and we pray Lord that we would get the basics right in our lives as disciples and that we would see the potential in every day for witnessing through our constant good works our good conduct and also through the the other occasions that may arise in the other but we pray that we will get this one right and we will be different and distinctive that that would be visible to others and that it would be shown by your goodness in all that we do please forgive us when we've let you down in this because we all know that we have and it would help us Lord to be encouraged remembering that you work through disciples like us I thank you for it