

Matthew 5:13-16 Study Questions

Matthew 5-7 records a portion of scripture called the Sermon on the Mount. Jesus begins the Sermon with the Beatitudes. The Beatitudes, sometimes called the beautiful attitudes, describe the character of someone who is following Jesus in the midst of a broken, sinful world. Read Matthew 5:1-12.

- What does it look like to live out the Beatitudes? Can you think of an example of someone who exemplifies one or all of the Beatitudes?
- Is it possible to live out the Beatitudes in a merely private way?

Read Matthew 5:13-16

When Jesus first gave the Sermon on the Mount, he was speaking to a small group of disciples who were relatively poor, uneducated, and unremarkable by the world's standards. Yet he tells them that they are the salt of the earth and the light of the world. This highlights the fact that God is pleased to use ordinary men and women to do his work in the world.

- Can you think of an example of God working through an individual or a small group of people to accomplish his work?
- Has God ever worked in your own life to show his love to others or lead people closer to him?

Jesus tells the disciples, "You are the salt of the earth" (verse 13). In the ancient world, salt was used as a preservative, to keep food (especially meat) from spoiling and to maintain its goodness. Salt was also used as a spice, to add flavor, much as it is today. A little salt can take a bland dish and make it distinct.

- Given these uses of salt in the ancient world, what do you think Jesus means when he tells his disciples they are the salt of the earth?
- Practically, what might it look like for believers to live as the salt of the earth today?

- Read verse 13 again. Jesus is concerned about salt losing its saltiness, or taste. What might cause a Christian to lose saltiness? How would this effect his or her witness?

Jesus tells the disciples, "You are the light of the world" (verse 14). Jesus also refers to himself as the light of the world (see John 8:12).

- In what way is Jesus the light of the world? In what way are his disciples the light of the world?
- Read verses 14-15. What do these verses tell us about how Jesus wants us to live out our faith?
- Read verse 16. According to this verse, what is the primary way believers are to let their light shine before others?
- According to verse 16, why should believers do good deeds?

John Stott was an English author and pastor. Summarizing verse 16, he writes, "Indeed, the primary meaning of 'works' must be practical, visible deeds of compassion. It is when people see these, Jesus said, that they will glorify God, for they embody the good news of his love which we proclaim. Without them our gospel loses its credibility and our God his honour."

- Do you agree with Stott's assessment?
- What do you think he means by practical, visible deeds of compassion? What might such deeds look like?