

Lesson 3 | March 20, 2022

Upside-Down Living

Study Text: Matthew 5:1–16; 6:1–8

Central Truth: The kingdom of God stands in stark contrast to the kingdom of man.

Key Verse: Matthew 5:14

Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on an hill cannot be hid (KJV).

“You are the light of the world—like a city on a hilltop that cannot be hidden” (NLT).

Learning Objectives

- Students will examine Jesus’ teaching in the Sermon on the Mount and compare His standard for living with their personal values and actions.
- Students will recognize the need to move beyond passive commitment to their faith and embrace a proactive approach to faith that includes engaging others with the gospel.
- Students will commit to daily intercession in prayer and respond to the Holy Spirit’s direction in proclaiming truth and serving those in need.

Introducing the Lesson

Say: Have you ever considered yourself knowledgeable in some area or better at doing something than most people, and then heard a world-class expert give insights into that subject? You may have been surprised to discover that something you thought you were doing right or some fact you had confidently repeated was mistaken. The right decision in that moment is to recognize where you need to change and take full advantage of your new knowledge.

The Lord spoke to me through his Word this morning. While I quote Matthew 6:31 through 33 every day, I felt as though I was not fully understanding. What does it mean to seek the Lord? How do I seek the Kingdom of God? The Lord gave me more insight in David’s Psalm. Psalm 63 when David was in the wilderness. Plus the Lord reminded me, God gave all the Israelites mana from heaven. All of them had clothing and water. How many of them were seeking the Lord? If God is going to give you the things you need, why worry about them. Focus on God. Here is what I wrote this morning.

King David said, “My soul thirsts for you.” “I have seen you in your sanctuary and gazed upon your power and glory. Your unfailing love is better than life itself.” When this attitude rests in your heart, you are seeking the Lord. David went on to say, “I will praise you as long

as I live, lifting up my hands to you in prayer.” God satisfied David more than the richest feast. He told the Lord he would praise him with songs of joy. Then, he said something profound. “I lie awake thinking of you, meditating on you through the night. The King recognized the Lord as his helper so he sang to him in the shadow of his wings. He added, “I cling to you; your strong right hand holds me securely. David was convinced his enemies would come to ruin and die by the sword. As king he humbled himself and said I will rejoice in the Lord. All who swear to tell the truth will praise him. All liars will be silenced.

Opening Activity—Learning Something New

Ask: Give an example of something you learned that changed your way of thinking. What opportunities have you had to shape the thinking of a younger person? You may want to offer a personal example to help students think of something to share.

Say: Imagine the surprise of Jesus’ audience when they heard Him teach on a subject they believed themselves to be well-schooled in—that is, living for God. He spoke on life issues they had grown up studying in their synagogues. Yet Jesus was redirecting their understanding, sometimes in radical ways. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

As we have seen over the past two studies, becoming Christ’s disciples calls for complete surrender of ourselves to Him and a commitment to follow Him. It is a total change, not only of how we view life, but how we live. It is, in a sense, “upside-down living.” Jesus’ teaching helps us see that God’s plan permeates our lives, touching everything that we say or do. Discipleship is transformational, and it impacts every area of life.

Part 1—Unusual Blessings

Blessings From God

Matthew 5:1–9

[Mat 5:1-9 KJV] 1 And seeing the multitudes, he went up into a mountain: and when he was set, his disciples came unto him: 2 And he opened his mouth, and taught them, saying, 3 Blessed [are] the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. 4 Blessed [are] they that mourn: for they shall be comforted. 5 Blessed [are] the meek: for they shall inherit the earth. 6 Blessed [are] they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled. 7 Blessed [are] the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy. 8 Blessed [are] the pure in heart:

for they shall see God. 9 Blessed [are] the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God.

Say: Walk into your favorite bookstore, or type “self-help book” into your Internet browser, and you will find more self-help books than you could read in your lifetime. Relationships, fitness, finances, education, even spirituality—libraries of advice await you. Or read the Sermon on the Mount. In it, Matthew recorded a gold mine of instruction for life that you can read in a few minutes. These principles, if followed, bring fulfillment and purpose in living that self-help authors cannot even imagine. The key, of course, is that these blessings come from our Lord, not our own effort or understanding. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Jesus’ teachings in “The Sermon on the Mount” (Matthew 5–7) were very different from what His audience was used to hearing. Yet He wasn’t just teaching verbal puzzles. He wanted the crowd to shift their thinking about how to live.

The fundamental principle Jesus repeated was the direct, personal role that God plays in the lives of His children. In verses 1 and 2, Jesus did not directly address God as our Heavenly Father, but His later summary, “You are to be perfect, even as your Father in heaven is perfect” (verse 48, NLT), makes that relationship clear.

The idea of blessing is what gives the opening verses of the Sermon on the Mount the traditional title, “The Beatitudes” (verses 3–10). However, such blessing goes beyond emotional happiness and goes beyond the concept of reward that comes to mind when we consider being blessed by God. When God blesses us, He brings to fruition His plan for us. True happiness and blessedness arrive as we live each day to the fullest under the guiding hand of our Creator and Heavenly Father.

But there is another side to each statement. Jesus directly connected some of life’s most difficult experiences with the blessing, happiness, and purpose His Father gives. He did so redemptively, taking things like poverty, sorrow, humility, hunger and thirst, and shaping them into expressions of yearning for communion with God. Whether or not a person is penniless, if they open their eyes to their spiritually impoverished state without God and then turn to Him, He will begin to build His kingdom within them. Similarly, sorrow and mourning bring God’s intimate comfort, humility leads to immeasurable inheritance, and hunger and thirst for God’s righteousness bring complete fulfillment and satisfaction.

Jesus then began to shift from attitudes toward action. The call to mercy speaks to relationships, and pure hearts address our motives. In addition, we are to work for peace in a world riddled with conflict. In each case, God responds with equally concrete benefits.

Resource Packet Item 1: Personal Paraphrase

Distribute the work sheet and encourage your students to rephrase each of the Beatitudes from their own perspective, as a matter of application. Time constraints might allow for just the first one or two to be completed, with a few volunteers sharing their results. Encourage them to complete the exercise at home.

Discuss

? How have you discovered the effectiveness of one or more of these principles?

? Why is it necessary to seek God's enabling power to live out each point?

Immeasurable Reward

Matthew 5:10–12

[Mat 5:10-12 KJV] 10 Blessed [are] they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. 11 Blessed are ye, when [men] shall revile you, and persecute [you], and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. 12 Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great [is] your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you.

Say: Most experts offer advice with the promise of positive results from others if you follow their guidelines. Campaign strategists, for example, encourage politicians to say or do A, B, or C to garner votes from a particular group. Yet in the Beatitudes, the only response was opposition with varying degrees of persecution. From a human standpoint, that would compel many people to find another teacher. But there is a bigger principle here. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

In Matthew 5:10, Jesus was not saying that His followers should expect only conflict and persecution. Scripture describes the godly man or woman who faithfully lives out God's truth as prosperous relationally and even materially, though not to the extreme degree some popular teachers have claimed. For example, Proverbs 16:7 says, "When people's lives please the Lord, even their enemies are at peace with them" (NLT). Or consider Proverbs 21:5: "Good planning and hard work lead to prosperity, but hasty shortcuts lead to poverty" (NLT).

Jesus used the concept of persecution to drive home a truth fundamental to everything else He was saying: **This world and unredeemed humanity are fallen, and will eventually pass away.** Those who will accept the gospel and be redeemed will find themselves living within a world system deeply influenced by Satan and in total opposition to Christ. Resistance and rejection, then, are a natural byproduct of this opposition.

Amid whatever trials the believer might face, however, God is present. Note that Jesus' words in Matthew 5:10–12 are in the present tense. In the midst of persecution, God is present and blessing. Even as mocking, persecution, and slander come against the Christ-follower, God is present and blessing. Jesus said this of His faithful ones: "For the Kingdom of Heaven is theirs" (verse 10, NLT). Rather than a response of gloom or despair, He called for believers to respond with happiness and joy as they look ahead to heaven's immeasurable reward.

Discuss

? What negative reactions to your faith in Christ have been difficult to endure?

? How can we encourage and support fellow Christians facing persecution?

Part 2—Called To Make a Difference Preserving Agents

Matthew 5:13

[Mat 5:13 KJV] 13 Ye are the salt of the earth: but if the salt have lost his savour, wherewith shall it be salted? it is thenceforth good for nothing, but to be cast out, and to be trodden under foot of men.

Say: Modern life can cloud our understanding of a time-tested scriptural metaphor. Because salt is abundant in our culture and is added in unhealthy amounts to many processed foods, many people today have to watch their salt intake in order to keep high blood pressure and other ailments at bay. But too much of a good thing doesn't mean it is bad. Throughout history, salt has been vital for a healthy diet, as a food preservative, and as a primitive antibiotic. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Salt in the ancient world was hard to come by. It was even used as currency. Greeks bought slaves with salt, and the expression "not worth his salt" comes from that unfortunate practice. **Roman legions were sometimes paid in *salarium*, sal being the Latin word for salt, from which we get "salary."** Salt was primarily a preservative. In an age without refrigeration, this function was far more valuable than flavor enhancement.

For all these reasons, salt provided a powerful picture of how Christ's followers were to live among the people around them. They were truly precious agents of change in a fallen and debased culture. They were to bring about restoration and preservation, influencing the lost to turn to God.

The salt of Jesus' day was not the pure crystals commonly found on today's tables. Because of impurities, a salty compound could lose its saltiness if the actual salt leached out and left only the residue. **As illustrated by the "unsalty" salt Jesus mentioned, His followers could fail in their mission, proving to be ineffective in**

their service to the Kingdom. Jesus' audience may have envisioned the salt dregs that were scattered on the earthen roofs of houses to further harden the material and prevent leaks. Roofs at that time were built to be stood on, so the salt was trampled underfoot. This is a compelling picture of believers who fail to bring positive change to a culture and are simply overwhelmed.

The description "the salt of the earth" is still applied in everyday usage to people perceived as upstanding and honest. Yet this popular understanding is the barest hint of what Jesus intended for His followers. We are to be far more than perceived as truthful; we are to be His agents for pointing people to the ultimate Truth.

Discuss

? What opportunities can you identify to be a preserving and restoring influence on those around you, at home, on your job, or in your community?

? What situations might render a follower of Christ "unsalty"?

Active Lights

Matthew 5:14–16

[Mat 5:14-16 KJV] 14 Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on an hill cannot be hid. 15 Neither do men light a candle, and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick; and it giveth light unto all that are in the house. 16 Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.

Say: The popular children's song This Little Light of Mine was written in the 1920s or early 30s as a song for children. As well-meaning as we might have been in singing those lyrics in church, the light Jesus referenced was neither little nor owned. That light is who we are after being re-created through Christ. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Too often, when Christians speak of letting their light shine, it is a passive expression. As if just going about one's daily routine without falling into any obvious sin is all that Jesus meant by this command in Matthew 5:14–16. When applied this way, much of the personal responsibility Jesus connected with this teaching is ignored.

Indeed, Jesus began the illustration with ways that light is observed. A city on a hill and an uncovered lamp are, in fact, seen. But if that was as far as His statement went, then He would have been only describing light's appearance. But **Jesus connected the believer's light with action (verse 16). It is good deeds that do the actual shining**

for all to see. And these are not merely personal activities. They are actions that have an effect on others, to the point that people respond with praise to God.

This reference to praising God is important on two levels. **First, it includes the idea that Christ-followers are witnesses to a lost world through those actions that genuinely affect the lives of the lost and invite them into a redemptive encounter with the Heavenly Father. Second, it shows that any praise for good deeds rightfully belongs to God rather than to any person.** Jesus never taught a “gospel of works.” We can never earn our salvation through good deeds. However, we demonstrate the reality of what Christ has accomplished in us by our good works.

Resource Packet Item 2: Lamps and Cities

Distribute the work sheet, and ask students to consider ways they can shine individually as well as collectively with other believers. Encourage the class to act on one or more of the ideas for a group project.

Discuss

? How did someone else’s “light” influence you to accept Christ?

? What steps can you take to shine more effectively to lost people around you?

Part 3—Do Right for Right Reasons Don’t Give To Be Seen

Matthew 6:1–4

[Mat 6:1-4 KJV] 1 Take heed that ye do not your alms before men, to be seen of them: otherwise ye have no reward of your Father which is in heaven. 2 Therefore when thou doest [thine] alms, do not sound a trumpet before thee, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may have glory of men. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward. 3 But when thou doest alms, let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth: 4 That thine alms may be in secret: and thy Father which seeth in secret himself shall reward thee openly.

Say: Years ago, a famous telethon aired annually over Labor Day weekend. Its goal was to raise money for research to combat a terrible disease. Periodically the host invited a spokesperson for a sponsoring group to announce on camera the amount of money the group had raised. How differently those announcements could sound! Some were humble, brief speeches focusing attention on the need. Others were little more

than corporate advertising; it seemed as if the gift was given so the organization could be lauded on national television. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

As Jesus continued teaching the crowds, He focused on a subject very close to the heart of everyone in the audience—their motivation (Matthew 6:1). Fallen human beings are by nature supremely selfish. Even something done for the benefit of someone else, if not motivated by the Holy Spirit, can become an exercise in ego-building (verses 2–4).

In Matthew 6, Jesus focused on three righteous acts common in Jewish culture: giving to the poor (verses 2–4), prayer (verses 5–14), and fasting (verses 16–18). He gave the same counsel regarding each. **Believers are to shun public praise. If they seek such praise, the accolades they receive will be their only reward. But if they direct their actions toward God, they will enjoy a far more substantial reward.**

This is consistent with other statements in the Sermon on the Mount about momentary, decaying material life and the eternal and ever-new life God has in store for His children (cf., verses 19–20). **One who seeks human praise for a good deed misses out on what God would do in and for them.**

This point should not be stretched out of proportion to Jesus' intentions. **The Christian does not have to live in fear that a struggle to adopt proper motives will cast aside all potential blessing from God. But selfish motives themselves will not be blessed by God, and actions based solely on ego contradict God's desire that a believer act in humble dedication to Him.**

Discuss

? In light of Jesus' teaching, how should things like plaques and certificates of recognition in church culture be viewed?

? How can the believer balance a desire for a godly public reputation with humble commitment to pleasing the Heavenly Father?

True Prayer

Matthew 6:5–8

[Mat 6:5-8 KJV] 5 And when thou prayest, thou shalt not be as the hypocrites [are]: for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and in the corners of the streets, that they may be seen of men. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward. 6 But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret; and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly. 7 But when ye pray, use not vain repetitions, as

the heathen [do]: for they think that they shall be heard for their much speaking. 8 Be not ye therefore like unto them: for your Father knoweth what things ye have need of, before ye ask him.

Say: You may recall times when an invitation to pray at a public event completely changed a person's prayers. The prayer may have sounded more like a sermon or, worse, a statement of personal opinion regarding a church or individual. While prayer is an appropriate and necessary part of a special group or occasion, such **prayers must focus upon our Heavenly Father rather than the person praying.** (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Before Jesus gave the sample prayer, traditionally known as "The Lord's Prayer" (Matthew 6:9–13), He explained briefly some basic principles of prayer that should be applied to all prayer, especially intercessory prayer. While the Lord's Prayer succinctly shows us what should be included in prayer, Jesus first identified what should be excluded.

The first exclusion is any form of self-focus. Jesus singled out those who prayed hypocritically just so they could be seen and admired (verse 5). But there are hypocritical prayers that today's believer can fall into as well. **We must guard against our prayers treating God as if He owes us a blessing or can be controlled and told what to do in the guise of quoting a scriptural promise.**

Jesus called on His followers to pray privately (verse 6). More than a call to pray in isolation, this is a call for intimacy. **The believer who dedicates time to private prayer will grow in relationship to the Heavenly Father. Such prayers make the needed transition from superficial wish lists to substantive worship and intercession.**

The second key exclusion in effective prayer is mindless repetition (verse 7). Jesus was not prohibiting a repeated request. His parable about the widow and the unjust judge highlights the widow's persistence and connects it with persistent prayer (see Luke 18:1–8). **Here, Jesus directly referenced repetitious prayer offered like the prayers of pagans. In many false religions, repetitious prayer is a formula to control an idol or false god. So, again, this focuses on how we view God in our prayers.**

Both the call for private prayer and the call for focused prayer rely on faith. When the Christian seeks a deeper relationship with God, and that relationship drives his or her prayer life, a wonderful reality becomes ever more clear. Our Heavenly Father sees that our every need is receiving His full attention.

Resource Packet Item 3: Principles for Prayer

Distribute the work sheet. Invite students to work through the Lord's Prayer this week and apply it personally.

Discuss

? How can we apply the principles of the “prayer closet” during group prayer time?

? Since God already knows our needs, why do we pray?

What Is God Saying to Us?

Say: In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus calls us to total discipleship. We must trust the Holy Spirit to bring to life in us all that the Savior taught and lived. As we become disciples, we will encounter resistance from our culture, and perhaps even our closest friends and family. But our obedience will serve as salt and light to point lost people to eternal life.

Living It Out

Ministry in Action

- With the help of the Holy Spirit, address where your life fails to reflect Jesus’ teachings.
- Consider whether or not you are living out your faith as salt and light. Seek the help of the Lord if your reputation as Christ’s follower has been passive or lacking.
- Develop the discipline of a daily prayer closet and commit to regular intercession for those in need around you.

Daily Bible Readings

Monday:

The First Blessing.
Genesis 1:21–23

[Gen 1:21-23 KJV] 21 And God created great whales, and every living creature that moveth, which the waters brought forth abundantly, after their kind, and every winged fowl after his kind: and God saw that [it was] good. 22 And God blessed them, saying, Be fruitful, and multiply, and fill the waters in the seas, and let fowl multiply in the earth. 23 And the evening and the morning were the fifth day.

Tuesday:

Isaac Blesses Jacob.
Genesis 27:22–29

[Gen 27:22-29 KJV] 22 And Jacob went near unto Isaac his father; and he felt him, and said, The voice [is] Jacob's voice, but the hands [are] the hands of Esau. 23 And he discerned him not, because his hands were hairy, as his brother Esau's hands: so he blessed him. 24 And he said, [Art] thou my very son Esau? And he said, I [am]. 25 And he said, Bring [it] near to me, and I will eat of my son's venison, that my soul may bless thee. And he brought [it] near to him, and he did eat: and he brought him wine, and he drank. 26 And his father Isaac said unto him, Come near now, and kiss me, my son. 27 And he came near, and kissed him: and he smelled the smell of his raiment, and blessed him, and said, See, the smell

of my son [is] as the smell of a field which the LORD hath blessed: 28 Therefore God give thee of the dew of heaven, and the fatness of the earth, and plenty of corn and wine: 29 Let people serve thee, and nations bow down to thee: be lord over thy brethren, and let thy mother's sons bow down to thee: cursed [be] every one that curseth thee, and blessed [be] he that blesseth thee.

Wednesday:

God Blesses Your Work.
Deuteronomy 2:2–8

[Deu 2:2-8 KJV] 2 And the LORD spake unto me, saying, 3 Ye have compassed this mountain long enough: turn you northward. 4 And command thou the people, saying, Ye [are] to pass through the coast of your brethren the children of Esau, which dwell in Seir; and they shall be afraid of you: take ye good heed unto yourselves therefore: 5 Meddle not with them; for I will not give you of their land, no, not so much as a foot breadth; because I have given mount Seir unto Esau [for] a possession. 6 Ye shall buy meat of them for money, that ye may eat; and ye shall also buy water of them for money, that ye may drink. 7 For the LORD thy God hath blessed thee in all the works of thy hand: he knoweth thy walking through this great wilderness: these forty years the LORD thy God [hath been] with thee; thou hast lacked nothing. 8 And when we passed by from our brethren the children of Esau, which dwelt in Seir, through the way of the plain from Elath, and from Eziongaber, we turned and passed by the way of the wilderness of Moab.

Thursday:

Blessed by Not Stumbling.
Matthew 11:2–9

[Mat 11:2-9 KJV] 2 Now when John had heard in the prison the works of Christ, he sent two of his disciples, 3 And said unto him, Art thou he that should come, or do we look for another? 4 Jesus answered and said unto them, Go and shew John again those things which ye do hear and see: 5 The blind receive their sight, and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, and the poor have the gospel preached to them. 6 And blessed is [he], whosoever shall not be offended in me. 7 And as they departed, Jesus began to say unto the multitudes concerning John, What went ye out into the wilderness to see? A reed shaken with the wind? 8 But what went ye out for to see? A man clothed in soft raiment? behold, they that wear soft [clothing] are in kings' houses. 9 But what went ye out for to see? A prophet? yea, I say unto you, and more than a prophet.

Friday:

Blessed by Faith.
Luke 1:39–48

[Luk 1:39-48 KJV] 39 And Mary arose in those days, and went into the hill country with haste, into a city of Juda; 40 And entered into the house of Zacharias, and saluted Elisabeth. 41 And it came to pass, that, when Elisabeth heard the salutation of Mary, the babe leaped in her womb; and Elisabeth was filled with the Holy Ghost: 42 And she spake out with a loud voice, and said, Blessed [art] thou among women, and blessed [is] the fruit of thy womb. 43 And whence [is] this to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? 44 For, lo, as soon as the voice of thy salutation sounded in mine ears, the babe leaped in my womb for joy. 45 And blessed [is] she that believed: for there shall be a performance of those things which were told her from the Lord. 46 And Mary said, My soul doth magnify the Lord, 47 And my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour. 48 For he hath regarded the low estate of his handmaiden: for, behold, from henceforth all generations shall call me blessed.

Saturday:

Blessed in Death.
Revelation 14:12–14

[Rev 14:12-14 KJV] 12 Here is the patience of the saints: here [are] they that keep the commandments of God, and the faith of Jesus. 13 And I heard a voice from heaven saying unto me, Write, Blessed [are] the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth: Yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labours; and their works do follow them. 14 And I looked, and behold a white cloud, and upon the cloud [one] sat like unto the Son of man, having on his head a golden crown, and in his hand a sharp sickle.