

1/18/26

Sermon Title: The Greater Righteousness in Christ

Preacher: Pastor Kim Soonbae

Scripture Passage: Matthew 5:13-20

Salt and Light

¹³ “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 underfoot.

¹⁴ “You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden.

¹⁵ 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.

¹⁶ In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.

The Fulfillment of the Law

¹⁷ “Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them.

¹⁸ For truly I tell you, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished.

¹⁹ Therefore anyone who sets aside one of the least of these commands and teaches others accordingly will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever practices and teaches these commands will be called great in the kingdom of heaven.

²⁰ For I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven.

Jesus continues His teaching in the Sermon on the Mount.

When large crowds gathered from Galilee, the Decapolis, Jerusalem, Judea, and the region across the Jordan—having seen Jesus heal every disease and

sickness—Jesus went up on a hillside and began to teach the good news of the kingdom of heaven before the crowds and His disciples.

As His first teaching, He spoke about the life of the Beatitudes, which are both the conditions for inheriting the kingdom of heaven and the standards that citizens of that kingdom are to live by.

Jesus teaches that a life marked by poverty of spirit, mourning, meekness, hunger and thirst for righteousness, mercy, purity of heart, peacemaking, and endurance of persecution for His sake is a blessed life, because those who live such lives will inherit the kingdom of God, the kingdom of heaven.

And then He went on to speak about the identity and conduct of those who live according to the Beatitudes—that is, the people of the kingdom of God.

Jesus likened the identity of God's kingdom people to salt and light.

He does not command them to become salt and light, but declares that they *are* salt and light.

Here, “you” refers not to the crowds but to the disciples; Jesus is speaking specifically to His disciples, not to the multitude.

First, He compares them to salt and warns them not to lose their saltiness.

¹³ “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 underfoot.

Salt is used for many purposes, but its most important functions are to provide flavor and to prevent decay through its saltiness.

However, when salt contains too many impurities, it loses its saltiness, becomes useless, and is thrown out.

That the disciples' identity is described as salt means that just as salt remains useful and beneficial to the world by retaining its pure saltiness, so the disciples must keep their hearts pure and become people who are necessary and beneficial to the world.

Jesus also compares them to light and teaches that through the practice of good deeds, they are to lead the people of the world to give glory to God.

¹⁴ "You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden.

¹⁵ 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.

¹⁶ In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.

Light does not exist for its own sake.

Its purpose is to illuminate the darkness.

When light shines, the darkness disappears and everything is revealed.

Light itself does not lose its brightness, but it can be prevented from shining when it is hidden by something.

That is why people do not put a lamp under a bowl, but on its stand, so that it gives light to everything in the house.

The light of the world refers to those who are faithful before God.

This idea is rooted in the "Servant Songs" of Isaiah.

In Isaiah, God's faithful people are described as a light to the nations.

Since the mission of illuminating the nations is the task of the servant of the LORD, those who are called to be the light of the world can be said to possess the identity of a servant.

(Isa 42:5) This is what God the LORD says—the Creator of the heavens, who stretches them out, who spreads out the earth with all that springs from it, who gives breath to its people, and life to those who walk on it:

(Isa 42:6) “I, the LORD, have called you in righteousness; I will take hold of your hand. I will keep you and will make you to be a covenant for the people and a light for the Gentiles,

(Isa 42:7) to open eyes that are blind, to free captives from prison and to release from the dungeon those who sit in darkness.

Jesus came as a great light to those living in darkness and to those sitting in the shadow of death.

As the Servant of the LORD, Jesus is the ultimate light foretold by Isaiah.

This mission of light is entrusted to the disciples.

Jesus calls his disciples the light.

In Jesus, the disciples are light.

Salt and light declare the very existence and role of the disciples.

The disciples possess a value that is indispensable to the world.

Salt gives flavor and light shines only through concrete action.

Jesus calls these actions the disciples’ “good deeds.”

People will see their good deeds and glorify God.

From the moment they are called, disciples not only illuminate the world but are also exposed to it.

Therefore, their good deeds bring glory to God.

On the other hand, evil deeds—no matter how secretly they are done—will inevitably be revealed and will obscure God’s glory.

Thus, in an age when the world is concerned that the church has lost its true identity, believers must demonstrate their faith through their lives.

The disciples' good deeds are directly connected to the Beatitudes mentioned earlier and to the "greater righteousness" in verse 17-20.

From this point on, the Sermon on the Mount enters its main section.

Jesus' clear and detailed teaching on the ethical life of his disciples is unfolded.

Jesus' teaching was entirely different from existing approaches.

It shattered traditional interpretations of the law.

The religious leaders of the time were alarmed by his actions and accused him of undermining the traditions of the law.

In response, Jesus clearly states his position regarding the fulfillment of the Law and the Prophets.

Jesus makes it unmistakably clear that he did not come to abolish or invalidate the Law or the Prophets.

Rather, he declares that he came to fulfill them, affirming the completeness and enduring nature of the law.

Matthew has already shown, from the very birth of Jesus, that his coming was the fulfillment of the prophets' promises.

¹⁷ "Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them.

¹⁸ For truly I tell you, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished.

"The Law and the Prophets" refers to the Old Testament.

Jesus makes it clear that He did not come to abolish the Law or the Prophets, but to fulfill them, so that no one would misunderstand His purpose in coming.

But what does it mean to fulfill the Law?

It means accomplishing the intent and purpose for which God gave the Law, emphasizing that the messianic age that makes this possible has arrived.

Here, God's intent and purpose is not merely ethical but salvific.

The Law is fulfilled through Jesus, the Messiah, who completes the work of salvation.

Thus, the Law does not end with the Old Testament history but is completed in the kingdom of heaven brought by the Messiah.

The fulfillment of the Law is Jesus Himself.

Therefore, the Law is not abolished or destroyed by the coming of the Messiah.

Not a single letter or stroke will disappear.

Jesus teaches His disciples this Law, which He fulfills completely.

They too are called to be salt and light in the world, and they must not destroy even the smallest part of this perfect Law, nor treat it lightly in teaching others.

¹⁹ Therefore anyone who sets aside one of the least of these commands and teaches others accordingly will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever practices and teaches these commands will be called great in the kingdom of heaven.

²⁰ For I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven.

Jesus contrasts the righteousness of the religious leaders with that of his disciples.

What kind of righteousness did the religious leaders pursue?

It was "self-righteousness," produced by legalism.

In contrast, the righteousness of the disciples who have come into Jesus Christ is not a literal, rule-based observance, but a relational obedience.

It is not obedience to the law, but obedience of faith.

It is not obedience in order to become righteous, but obedience that flows from already being righteous.

Jesus is speaking of a righteousness that is completely different from the righteousness sought by the religious leaders.

He calls this “a greater righteousness.”

This greater righteousness is the righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ—the righteousness declared by the new commandment that Jesus himself fulfilled.

It is a righteousness that only those who are in Jesus can possess.

Without this righteousness, no one can enter the kingdom of heaven.

The disciples are already in the kingdom of heaven, and they receive the new commandment proclaimed in that kingdom as the guiding principle of their lives. Living in obedience to that commandment is the righteous identity through which they become salt and light.

Jesus emphasizes the disciples’ faithful response to the new commandment that he gives them.

Beloved members of Church of Godly Dreams,

Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount is not simply a moral code.

This teaching does not describe the conditions for entering the Kingdom of God, but rather shows how those who already belong to God’s Kingdom are to live.

Jesus did not say to His disciples, “Be salt” or “Be light.” Instead, He declared, “You are the salt of the earth. You are the light of the world.”

This is not a command, but a declaration of identity.

The identity of being salt and light must be expressed in the way one lives—through good deeds.

These deeds are not acts done to be seen by others, but the natural fruit of a life flowing from a relationship with God.

People see this life and give glory to God.

Jesus grounds this life in the “better righteousness” He gives, not in the self-righteousness of the religious leaders.

This righteousness is not earned by obeying the Law; it is the righteousness already given in Christ, lived out in obedience from within Him.

Therefore, the disciples’ life is not a struggle to become righteous, but a life lived as those who are already declared righteous.

The life of the Beatitudes, the life of being salt and light, the life of good deeds—all flow from this better righteousness.

What kind of life are you living today?

Are you living in a way that reveals your identity to the world as a citizen of the kingdom of God?

Are you living so that, through the good works that flow from the greater righteousness already given to you in Jesus Christ, others are led to give glory to God?

Let us live as those who reveal our identity as citizens of the kingdom of God through good works, so that our lives may lead others to give glory to God.