

Deep Discipleship: Useful Disciples ▪ Matthew 5:13-16

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Intro: Today is one of the special Sundays where we give thanks, and celebrate what God is doing through baptism and membership.

- For every person who professes faith in Christ, is baptized, and joins the church, behind the scenes, there has been some other *instrumental* people involved in the process. A parent, friend, spouse, or church leader.

In my own life it was a praying mom, and a youth pastor named Randy who first introduced me to the gospel. They were the ones God used.

- › The point being—Disciples must see their lives as *useful* to the Lord.

—That’s the main idea behind this very familiar passage.

Context:

—Jesus has just spoken a word about persecution in closing out the beatitudes (5:11).

—Disciples can react to persecution in some unhelpful ways.

Think about how you would react to persecution.

1) Retreat.

We can think of examples in history.

For example, monastic communities in Jesus’ day like the Essenes, detached from society to avoid mixing with the world. *Some even believe Jesus may have been teaching his disciples *not* to go down that path. Or the Amish, and other forms of Mennonites attempt to withdraw from the world.

But Jesus prays against the retreat.

John 17:15 ESV

I do not ask that you take them out of the world, but that you keep them from the evil one.

And the church is also told not to retreat from the world (1 Cor 5:9-10).

2) Revolt

- This was surely the approach that many thought Jesus should take. Revolt against Rome. Even to the point of Peter cutting off a guy's ear. (Mt 26:52)

Apply: Retreat and Revolt do not make us *useful disciples*.

We all likely lean in one of these directions, when it comes to dealing with the Word.

Jesus has a way for disciples:

3) Radiate (Be Useful)

There are:

Useful disciples prevent moral decay (v13)

In our day, we use salt mainly for flavor. Think of how fast food is intentionally loaded with massive amounts of salt, so that you get thirsty, then buy extra, large drinks.

In Jesus' day, salt was used mainly as a *preservative*.

- Rub some salt into your meat, and it at least *slows the decay down*. Pure salt was intrinsically useful.

And there is the first analogy and application.

Q: If our ultimate hope is to be with Christ—if heaven, not earth, is our home, why does God keep us around?

**Part of our purpose in this remaining life is to keep the world from further rot and decay.

But then Jesus says something that has puzzled even scholars.

“If the salt loses its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored?”

- Jesus is not making some scientific comment.

Illus: Though I’m no chemist, sodium chloride is very stable.

- But in Jesus’s day, the salt collected around the Dead Sea had the potential to have so many impurities mixed in it, that it essentially became useless.

--Some of it can look like salt, but is merely white powder with only trace a of actual sodium chloride.

It did nothing at preventing rot and decay.

- We can see now how the metaphor works and should be understood. Also, the Gk. can also be translated “become foolish” —so there seems to be a play on words.

“Don’t lack wisdom.”

Colossians 4:5–6 ESV

Walk in wisdom toward outsiders, making the best use of the time. Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer each person.

Apply: Is my life “salty” or are there enough *corrupting impurities* in my life that I’m useless.

Is my conduct “wise”.

Useful disciples avoid corruption and embrace wisdom.

Apply: So this is a massive task laid on us—to help stop the decay and moral rot. It’s based on us living with constant godliness; living out the values pressed on us in Jesus’ sermon, and all the Word.

It also very much involves us. “Speaking the truth in love” even when many don’t want to hear or accept truth.

- › Having a clear, bold, firm stand on the truth is a way of preventing the moral decay.

But remember, at the end of the day—our influence will only go as far as a character. Which is why the call for Christ-like character is so high

Useful disciples don’t hide (14-15)

There are some obvious things that we just don’t or can’t keep hidden.

—A city on a hill

- Ancient houses were built with white limestone, so you can imagine when the sun refracted on the town, it’s visible to all. Even at night, with lamps, fires, and torches, a small village could light up a dark countryside.

—A lamp under a basket

- The small oil lamps that people lit at night did not give off much light. Think of a single candle in your house. It makes no sense to block even that little light.

In other words, don’t be an invisible disciple.

Do you remember the “Where’s Waldo” game? It’s a book with a character that wears glasses and a striped shirt—and the goal is to try to find him among thousands of other little cartoon characters.

But it was challenging, because he was intentionally hidden.

Apply: We obviously don't do good deeds to get noticed, as Jesus warns later on (6:1).

But neither does he want us to be "modest" or "private" about our faith.

***In the sermon on the mount, there is no category for private, invisible discipleship.*

Disciples don't hide—they are visible!

- There is also something else implied: The world is in a state of massive darkness. The world is not a place of light. Morally, it's utter darkness.

No matter how much technology advances, no matter how much more comfortable life can be....it's still so very dark.

Millions of people sit in darkness right now.

This is why disciples cannot hide.

- › The world that our Lord Jesus has sovereignly placed us in needs light....so don't hide.

Useful disciples radiate (16a)

- The Jewish people saw themselves as something of a light in a dark world (Rom 2:19), "a light to those in darkness". But this message is not for Jews—it's for disciples (5:1).

You—disciples—who profess to know Christ and follow him.

Light in the Bible can stand for many things: moral purity, truth, God's revelation, God's presence. The metaphor also means that the world is in darkness.

Since the final statement Jesus makes is about good works (v16)—that helps is to see concretely what Jesus is saying.

- Good works = Any deed that I do simply for the fact that I'm in Christ.
- The good works are found throughout the Sermon on the Mount—they are morally good, and beautiful.

These good works ([Eph 2:20](#)) God's has prepared in advance ([Eph 2:20](#)); a result of faith working through love ([Gal 5:6](#)).

Philippians 2:15 ESV

that you may be blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world,

Finally, note the scope of this “radiant gospel living”.

“The earth”. “The world”.

***There is something missional, something big.*

- Think about it. Most of the people listening to Jesus likely did not see themselves as big or highly important. They were like us, mostly ordinary and unknown.

***But Jesus says... I have a big work for you to do.*

Friends—your life as a disciple is very useful to Jesus!

Again, note how personally directed it is. You. Ordinary disciple.

God has a big work for you to do. It may seem small but living faithfully as a light makes a big impact.

Apply: There is also a picture of what God is doing in preparing us for the end of this age, and his eternal kingdom.

Daniel 12:3 ESV

And those who are wise shall shine like the brightness of the sky above; and those who turn many to righteousness, like the stars forever and ever.

Light has two functions. Exposes what is in the darkness; and also provides a way out of the darkness.

That is how God uses disciples now in this age—exposing darkness, pointing people out of darkness by pointing others to the light of life

Useful disciples glorify God with their lives (16b)

Jesus drives this home with “So that”.

- So that—indicates design and purpose.

Illus: I got dressed and drove my car “so that” I could attend the church service today.

- All of our good works are to be done for one design and purpose: “give glory to your Father in heaven.”

**This is the first time the word *Father* is used to describe God in Matthew, and in the entire NT.

- › Apply: And we get a vital lesson: When we think or speak of God the Father—the first thing that should come into our minds: *This is the one I live to glorify.*

“What is the chief end of man? Glorify God...and enjoy him forever.”

The “so that” gets to the heart of *motivation*.

- Because at the end of the day this is most important, and what separates the true useful disciples from the rest.

Apply: Sadly, I’ve seen too many “discipleship failures”.

I’ve seen people look promising, talented, and gifted but then fall off.

What makes the difference?

- › What will make the difference in *my* discipleship, and *your* discipleship?

Motive. (Which at the end of the day, only the Lord can discern.)

Sadly, in this fallen world our motives are never perfectly pure.

But on a larger scale, we are either motivated with self-glorification, or desire bringing glory to God.

**Do I want to get the glory from this, or do I want it all to go to God?

Useful disciples are unified by their one motive: that God may be glorified.

Conclusion:

So whether you are joining in membership today, or have been part of this church family for decades, the challenge of our Lord Jesus remains the same for all of us.

Be Visible— our lives need to be a visible display of the gospel that transforms.

Be Doxological—our main motive for all that we do in life, must be “to give glory to your Father in heaven”.