



grow. pray. study.

April 26, 2026 *Salt, Light, and Six Hard Sayings*

The Sermon on the Mount

Matthew 5:13-16 (NRSV)

Being “the Salt of the Earth”

MONDAY 4.27.26 Matthew 5:13-16

Today, salt is inexpensive and easy to take for granted. In Jesus' day, refined salt was much less common. Jesus used the image of “unsalty” salt to say that his followers must remain distinctively Christian, or they become useless for God's purposes. When Jesus called his followers “the light of the world,” light, too, was precious. That world had oil lamps, candles, and torches, but nothing like modern electric lights. And from creation's first light ([Genesis 1:3–4](#)) to the eternal radiance of God's presence ([Revelation 22:5](#)), light represented God's character and work throughout Scripture. *

- In Jesus' day, what was called “salt” was often a white powder from around the Dead Sea that mixed sodium chloride with many other elements. With no refineries, “the sodium chloride was probably the most soluble, easily washed out component. The residue of white powder still looked like salt... but it neither tasted nor acted like salt. It was just road dust.” * How can you keep your culture from “washing out” your Christian distinctiveness? What practices and people help you remain a “salty” follower of Jesus?
- Scholar William Barclay said people “are to see our good deeds. In Greek ... there is the word *agathos* which simply defines a thing as good in quality; and there is *kalos* which means that a thing is not only good, but that it is also winsome and beautiful and attractive. The word used here is *kalos*.” ** Have you seen efforts to share “light” that weren't very winsome and attractive? What would it look like for your witness to be genuinely attractive rather than just “correct”?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, you called your followers to be salt—both preserving goodness and enhancing life's flavor. In this darkened, lonely, hurting world, make me more and more transparent so that your light can shine out of me like a beacon, spreading love, grace and peace. Amen.

* Article “Light” in Leland Ryken, James C. Wilhoit and Tremper Longman III, general editors, *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1998, p. 509.

** John Stott, *The Message of the Sermon on the Mount*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1978, p. 60.

Righteousness That Goes Beyond Rule-Following

TUESDAY 4.28.26 Matthew 5:17-20

Jesus' words may surprise you. Many Christians think the Old Testament is “all rules” and the New Testament “all grace,” that Jesus **did** come to abolish “the law.” Scholar N. T. Wright said Jesus was fulfilling, not wiping out, the law and the prophets. “Israel's whole story, commands, promises and all, was going to come true in him.” A way was opening up “to make God's covenant a reality... changing behavior not just by teaching but by a change of heart and mind itself.” *

- The Old Testament prophets repeatedly said that God cares about the inner spirit driving our acts far more than any outer show of piety (see [Isaiah 1:10–15](#); [Jeremiah 6:20](#); [Amos 5:21–24](#)). Jesus hadn't come to “do away with” the law but to apply it to the true source of both good and bad: our often-hidden inner self. When have you realized that your outward behavior didn't match what was inside you? What specific area(s) of your life has Jesus transformed from the inside out?
- Verse 20 must have stunned Jesus' hearers. How could anyone be MORE righteous than the Pharisees, who strictly observed every detail of the law? Wright said God's “kingdom of heaven” was even then breaking in, and “those who want to belong to the new world he is opening up must discover a way of covenant behavior that goes far, far beyond anything the scribes and Pharisees ever dreamed of.” ** What's the difference between dutifully obeying rules with an unchanged heart and having your heart transformed to want what God wants?

Prayer: Eternal God, you were with King David when he wrote, “You want truth in the most hidden places” (Psalm 51:6). You taught that same truth in the Sermon on the Mount. Transform my heart, not just my outward behavior. Plant your truth deep inside me. Amen.

* Wright, N. T. *Matthew for Everyone, Part 1: Chapters 1-15* (The New Testament for Everyone) (p. 41). Westminster John Knox Press. Kindle Edition.

** *Ibid.*

Reconciliation, Not Anger: Jesus' Radical Teaching

WEDNESDAY 4.29.26 Matthew 5:21-26

Jesus quoted the sixth commandment: 'Don't commit murder' (Exodus 20:13). Then he vastly widened its reach from actions to thoughts. He said emphatically that contempt, anger, and words that tear down and destroy others are as morally vicious as physical murder. They harm others but also damage us greatly when we harbor such feelings and thoughts. Jesus lived this truth—he didn't seek to kill his foes but willingly laid down his life for them.

- Scholar William Barclay noted that Jesus addressed escalating levels: first, the brooding anger we refuse to let die; then *raca* ('idiot'), a word describing “the whole accent of contempt”; and finally *mōros* ('fool'), which “was not to criticize mental ability; it was to cast aspersions on moral character; to take away name and reputation.” * How does Jesus' teaching apply to the heated words—often on social media—we see today? What makes you want to use words that tear down rather than build up?
- Jesus did just say, “Bite your tongue.” Scholar N. T. Wright said Jesus offered “two remarkably specific, practical commands: Be reconciled; make friends.” But, he added, this seems “impossible until you look at Jesus,” who “took the anger of his enemies within Israel, and of Israel's own enemies, the Romans, on to himself, and died under its load.” ** Jesus absorbed anger instead of returning it. He said worship without reconciliation is hollow. Will you let Jesus' Spirit reshape your inner self to be like him? Is there someone Jesus is calling you to reconcile with right now?

Prayer: Loving Jesus, I'm tempted to say, “You don't know the people who make me angry.” But when I see how people defamed and hated you, I realize you understand completely. Chip away my resistance and reshape my angry thoughts and feelings in your image. Amen.

* William Barclay, *Daily Study Bible Series: The Gospel of Matthew—Volume 1, Chapters 1–10* (Revised Edition). Westminster John Knox Press, 1976, pp. 139-140.

** Wright, N.T. *Matthew for Everyone, Part 1: Chapters 1-15* (The New Testament for Everyone) (pp. 44-45). Westminster John Knox Press. Kindle Edition.

Jesus' Hard Sayings About Integrity of Heart

THURSDAY 4.30.26 Matthew 5:27-37

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus took up painful topics: adultery and lust, divorce, and oath-taking. Like Israel's prophets, he taught that God cares about our hearts, not just our actions. These hard teachings have caused much pain when misapplied. Jesus wasn't creating new legalistic rules but calling his followers to be utterly serious about faithfulness, covenant-keeping, and honesty. God and everyone else, especially those who love and trust us, should always be able to depend on our word.

- Jesus wasn't literally telling you to mutilate your body in verses 29-30. As one scholar noted, "Cutting off an offending member would not necessarily end one's sin. Jesus here uses hyperbole, or rhetorical overstatement, to graphically underline his point: do whatever is necessary to evade destruction." * What can Jesus' startling images teach you about taking your inner life seriously? What destructive habits or wishes might Jesus call you to "amputate"—to radically remove from your life? What makes this difficult?
- Jesus spoke tersely about divorce here. Other passages ([Matthew 19:3–9](#), [Mark 10:2–12](#), [Luke 16:18](#), [1 Corinthians 7:10–16](#)) gave more nuanced help for the hard reality of broken marriages. Jesus never aimed to shame those whose marriages have failed (see [John 4:16-26](#)). "Jesus certainly didn't want his hearers, or the later church, embroiled in endless debates about just what was allowed.... Jesus is not just giving moral commands. He is unveiling a whole new way of being human." ** If your promises (marital or other) were **always** trustworthy, how would that lead you toward Jesus' vision of a whole new way of being human?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, your hard sayings challenge me to take faithfulness seriously—in my thoughts, my commitments, and my words. Keep me growing in integrity so my "yes" means yes and my "no" means no. Shape me into a person others can always trust. Amen.

* Craig Keener, comment on Matthew 5:30 in *NIV, Cultural Backgrounds Study Bible* (p. 8804). Zondervan. Kindle Edition.

** Wright, N.T. *Matthew for Everyone, Part 1: Chapters 1-15* (The New Testament for Everyone) (pp. 48-49). Westminster John Knox Press. Kindle Edition.

No More Tit-for-Tat: Live Generously

FRIDAY 5.1.26 Matthew 5:38-42

Palestine was an occupied land seething with hatred. Roman soldiers were “the enemy”—they could legally slap you, take your shirt, or force you to carry their load for a mile. Jesus called his followers to act graciously even toward those enemies. As Eugene Peterson paraphrased Matthew 5:42, “No more tit-for-tat stuff. Live generously.” * “You must not oppose those who want to hurt you” has sparked much debate. But Jesus didn’t accept abuse or injustice. He offered a way beyond violent revenge or passive victimhood—creative, nonviolent resistance rooted in love. **

- Jesus called his followers to live in bigger ways than they'd ever dreamed—to love their enemies and pray for those who harassed them. (He did exactly that for the Roman soldiers executing him—[Luke 23:33-34](#).) What cultural patterns of retaliation or “getting even” might you be stuck in? When you feel like “evening the score,” how can you respond more like Jesus instead?
- Jesus began this section saying, “I haven't come to do away with [the Law and the Prophets] but to fulfill them” (Matthew 5:17). The “eye for eye” law ([Exodus 21:24](#), [Leviticus 24:20](#), [Deuteronomy 19:21](#)) had mercifully reduced unlimited revenge to proportional justice. Jesus fulfilled that law's deeper intent by citing a greater command: “You must love your neighbor as yourself” (Leviticus 19:18). He called that one of two great commandments ([Matthew 22:37-39](#)). He knew revenge just begets more revenge. How easy or hard do you find it to adopt Jesus' approach when someone has hurt you? What makes choosing generosity over retaliation so difficult?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, teach me how to offer grace even to enemies, to respond to hurt with generosity rather than revenge. Transform my instinct for retaliation into your way of love. Make me an agent of reconciliation, not escalation. Amen.

* Peterson, Eugene H., *The Message Numbered Edition Hardback*. Navpress. Kindle Edition.

** Sadly, abusers have too often misused these passages. Jesus was not calling people to enable ongoing abuse or remain in dangerous situations. His radical love doesn't mean passively accepting harm. It means refusing to let enemies define us, breaking cycles of violence with unexpected generosity when we can do so without accepting destructive harm.

Jesus Calls Us to Perfect, All-Inclusive Love

SATURDAY 5.2.26 Matthew 5:43-48

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. preached his last Christmas Eve sermon on December 24, 1967. He spoke about *agape*—"an overflowing love which seeks nothing in return." King said, "This is what Jesus meant when he said, 'Love your enemies.' And I'm happy that he didn't say, 'Like your enemies,' because there are some people that I find it pretty difficult to like." King had witnessed too much hatred and concluded, "Hate is too great a burden to bear." Why is hate such a burden? Because it chains us to our enemies, letting them control our emotions and actions. Jesus offered a different way: love that reflects God's character. He made a similar point with a simple statement with big implications: God "makes the sun rise on both the evil and the good and sends rain on both the righteous and the unrighteous."

- Jesus—and Dr. King—knew that one way we often deal with fear is to turn it into hate toward those we fear. Following Jesus' teaching, Dr. King identified a better option. He told "our most bitter opponents": "We will meet your physical force with soul force. Do to us what you will and we will still love you.... we will so appeal to your heart and conscience that we will win you in the process, and our victory will be a double victory." *** How does refusing to hate your enemies—even when they harm you—actually give you power rather than making you weak? When has loving an enemy been harder than you expected?
- In Matthew 5:48, Jesus called us to be "complete in showing love." The English version John Wesley, Methodism's founder, read used the word "perfect" in that text. But Wesley rejected the idea that "perfect" meant never sinning (never missing the mark) and understood the text to mean we are always growing toward loving with God's all-inclusive love. Does it challenge you more, or less, to see "perfect" as about your heart's orientation rather than flawless outward actions? How might you live with God's same generosity toward the "unrighteous" people you know?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, you call me to love my enemies and pray for those who harass me. This is impossibly hard on my own. Fill me with your Spirit so I can love as you love—generously, inclusively, without seeking return. Make hate too great a burden for me to bear. Amen.

* While Leviticus 19:18 commanded loving neighbors, it didn't explicitly command hating enemies—but that's how many in Jesus' day interpreted it, limiting "neighbor" narrowly and treating outsiders as enemies. Jesus rejected that limitation.

** "A Christmas Sermon on Peace," in James M. Washington, ed. *A Testament of Hope: The Essential Writings and Speeches of Martin Luther King, Jr.* San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1986, p. 256.

*** *Ibid.*, pp. 256, 257.

Prayer Requests – [cor.org/prayer](https://www.cor.org/prayer) *Prayers of peace and comfort for:*

To **Rebecca Claasen** following the death of **Sylvia Moore** (aunt), who passed away on **3/29/2026**

To Susan Vermes following the death of Nicole Vermes-Rojas, who passed away.