



Message: ***Us Against Them*** | February 8, 2026 | Speaker: **Pastor Eddie Eddy**

Matthew 5:13-20 New Living Translation **Teaching about Salt and Light**

¹³ “You are the salt of the earth. But what good is salt if it has lost its flavor? Can you make it salty again? It will be thrown out and trampled underfoot as worthless.

¹⁴ “You are the light of the world—like a city on a hilltop that cannot be hidden. ¹⁵ No one lights a lamp and then puts it under a basket. Instead, a lamp is placed on a stand, where it gives light to everyone in the house. ¹⁶ In the same way, let your good deeds shine out for all to see, so that everyone will praise your heavenly Father.

Teaching about the Law ¹⁷ “Don’t misunderstand why I have come. I did not come to abolish the law of Moses or the writings of the prophets. No, I came to accomplish their purpose. ¹⁸ I tell you the truth, until heaven and earth disappear, not even the smallest detail of God’s law will disappear until its purpose is achieved. ¹⁹ So if you ignore the least commandment and teach others to do the same, you will be called the least in the Kingdom of Heaven. But anyone who obeys God’s laws and teaches them will be called great in the Kingdom of Heaven.

²⁰ “But I warn you—unless your righteousness is better than the righteousness of the teachers of religious law and the Pharisees, you will never enter the Kingdom of Heaven!

Leader: *This is the word of God for the people of God*

People: ***Thanks be to God***

Us Against Them?

These are some strong words that end our lesson today. What goes through your mind when you hear these words of Matthew 5:20? “But I warn you—unless your righteousness is better than the righteousness of the teachers of religious law and the Pharisees, you will **never** enter the Kingdom of Heaven” That word “never” has an almost threatening sound to it. How are we supposed to respond to the idea that unless we get this righteousness stuff correct...we will **never** enter the kingdom?

For me...when I hear Jesus say never...it sure gets my attention. When you heard it...did a bit of a shiver run down your spine too? Last week we heard how blessed we are when we are poor, when we mourn, are meek, when we try to keep peace, when we are hungry for righteousness, when we are merciful and when we are persecuted...and now we hear...that we may never get into heaven.

Has Jesus just set the bar so high...that we can never even reach it? You know...if we look at the way the Pharisee’s live their lives...how they faithfully tithed and how they dedicated themselves to keeping the law in every aspect...do we see a standard that we just don’t live up too? Do we have to quit our jobs...sell all our stuff...become missionaries to an island with people who don’t know Jesus yet...to even have a chance at Heaven?

PAUSE

Or...as we have read the bible and have interpreted it through our own rose-colored glasses...is it more comfortable for us to take Jesus's trip to the cross on our behalf for granted? Do we think we have this heaven thing all locked up and we really have nothing to fear about our eternity?

Do we see the teachers of the law and Pharisees as "Those Guys". They are the nit-picky, joyless, holier-than-thou sticks-in-the-mud who misplaced their faith in God. They put their faith in the law and feared what the consequences might be. They didn't get the point of faith.

If you have noticed...our passages the past few weeks have a focus on the separations we create in our cultures. There seems to be an "us against them" theme in the lessons. As I read this passage from Matthew 5...my initial observation was just that...I saw a dividing line being drawn between the Pharisees and those who either choose to follow Jesus or those who were being invited to follow Jesus.

"But I warn you—unless your righteousness is better than the righteousness of the teachers of religious law and the Pharisees, you will never enter the Kingdom of Heaven!"

PAUSE

The more I read and the more I prayed over this...I started to understand this a bit differently. Jesus wasn't calling us to be in competition with the religious leaders. Jesus isn't promoting a fight to the death between anybody. He was encouraging us to understand the meaning of righteousness. He was...and is...speaking to us about the lack of control we have...to be righteous.

Let me see if I can make some sense of this. Jesus is talking with people who look up to the religious leaders. The Pharisees have established themselves to be the ultimate role models for all of those who seek God's mercy. To them...it's as if entering the kingdom of heaven comes from their own goodness, and their own ability to live completely pure and moral lives. As role models...other people emulate that practice and feel it is up to them to earn their own way too.

If we believe that righteousness is only about a good relationship with God and with other people...then we must also admit that our best efforts at that...fall far too short.

When Jesus delivered this message to the seekers at the sermon on the mount...he was delivering a message that went against normal thinking. Not the typical us against them...but a message of together with them. And by together with them...I mean God and us.

Righteousness is not a man-made attribute. It is a gift of God's grace. Righteous is actually how we are seen through the eyes of God, not of man.

Ephesians 2:8-9 says this: "For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God — not the result of works, so that no one may boast." Jesus has done what we could not do for ourselves, so that our salvation does not depend on our works, or our righteousness. We enter the kingdom of heaven only because Christ has opened the gates for us.

PAUSE

Our passage for today signifies a shift in ideas following the beatitudes. Verse 13 starts the teaching about how the church responds to God's grace and favor. This sermon started out addressing the crowd that had gathered. A group who was experiencing the hardships of a harsh empire. A crowd who needed to hear the word of grace. A crowd which included many who were "poor in spirit."

But now, starting with verse 13, Jesus' focus shifts to the church as a whole...with an emphasis placed on the church leaders itself, the disciples.

Before verse 13, Jesus pronounces the blessings. After verse 13, Jesus identifies the mission of the church. Becoming the church requires a response from those who hear and receive God's word of grace. The church represents all those who follow Jesus. And... Jesus expects some things from those who follow him: If we follow Jesus, we pray in a certain way, we forgive in a certain way, we use our money in a certain way. If we acknowledge God's grace and blessing, and if we are actively claiming to follow Jesus, Jesus holds us to a higher standard.

PAUSE

Knowing that...we can begin to understand the seemingly misunderstood message in verse 20. "But I warn you— unless your righteousness is better than the righteousness of the teachers of religious law and the Pharisees, you will never enter the Kingdom of Heaven!"

Jesus calls the church to a righteousness that comes from the heart. God's heart beating in us.

If we see our righteousness this way, we realize that, even though verse 20...at first glance...might send a shiver up our spines, we don't respond to Jesus' call to follow out of fear. We respond with the recognition that God transforms us so that we can become righteous.

Friends...this transformation leads us to a life of discipleship. We find our righteousness in the mission Jesus has called us to. We are to be salt and the light of the world.

You know...without salt...our hearts won't beat. Salt adds flavor. Makes food taste better.

Salt can also suck the life out of something. This is a piece of warthog skin from Africa. I harvested this animal in 2008. It was rubbed with so much salt that nothing can live in it now. It's lifeless and will stay preserved that way for eternity.

We can over salt our ministries too and leave people with a bad taste in their mouth. The Pharisees were becoming salt with no flavor. They had placed so much emphasis on being faithful to the law...that they no longer shared the goodness of God's righteousness.

If the church has the mission to be the light of the world...then we must help the world see both its sin and the grace of God, who takes away sin. The darkness of the world is the basket that tries to hide God's light. We as the church are have been enabled remove that basket and let God's light shine so people can see hope through the midst of its despair.

But like too much salt can be harmful, too much light can blind someone. Have you ever been pulled over by the police? That spotlight can be blinding. It can get you disoriented, and you can't focus on anything.

Friends. We are called to share the righteousness of God. To give the Glory of our salvation to the one who makes us righteous in his eyes. This faith journey is not ours to win or lose. It is ours to Our mission is not us against them...share so that others can see and taste the goodness of God. Our mission is not a battle of us against them...but a mission to create an atmosphere of together with them.

To God be the Glory. Amen

Gracious and Holy God,

We thank You for meeting us in Your Word today. You have reminded us that righteousness is not something we earn, nor a ladder we climb, but a gift that flows from Your own heart into ours. You call us...the broken, imperfect, and still learning...to be salt and light in a world that hungers for hope and longs for truth. Help us, Lord, not to lose our flavor nor hide Your light under any basket of fear, pride, or complacency.

Keep shaping us by Your grace.

Keep softening us where we are hardened.

Keep illuminating us where we walk in shadows.

Make our lives a testimony...not of our goodness...but of Your transforming love.

And now, Lord, we dedicate to You the offering we bring.

Take these gifts, humble as they may be, and season our ministries with them. Use them to bring flavor where life has gone bland, and to shine the light of Christ in places where despair has settled in.

Bless every giver and every gift, that together they may help this church fulfill the mission You have entrusted to us: to share Your goodness, to carry Your hope, and to reveal Your grace to all we encounter.

We pray all this in the name of Jesus,
our Light, our Righteousness, and our Redeemer.

Amen.

Benediction

Go forth knowing that it is **Christ in you** who makes you righteous.

It is **Christ before you** who clears the path.

It is **Christ beside you** who walks the journey.

It is **Christ behind you** who redeems your past.

And it is **Christ above you** who shines through your life.

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit...

go in peace, to love and serve the Lord. Amen.

Next Steps:

- I will read Matthew 5:13-20 this week
- I will work on being salt and light
- Sign me up for Growth Group: _____ (class code)