

Matthew 5:1-16 Kingdom Values

Introduction

¹ When Jesus saw the crowds, He went up on the mountain; and after He sat down, His disciples came to Him. ² He opened His mouth and *began* to teach them, saying...

Multitudes have gathered around Jesus. Multitudes have gathered to Him from the surrounding towns of Galilee, also from Jerusalem and Judea, the center of Jewish religion, politics and culture, and also from the Decapolis, Gentile cities to the north and east of Galilee. They came to be healed. They came to see miracles. They came out of curiosity. And now they have begun to wonder, "Who is this Jesus? What has He come to do? What's His connection to the prophets of old?"

Matthew has made clear that we are to recognize Jesus as a king, Messiah, the long awaited son of David. He is also something more, Immanuel, God with us. That's clear, at least, to us the readers because of Matthew's words in chapters 1-4. Jesus' identity is not so well defined to the gathered multitude. He has been teaching in the synagogues a Gospel of the Kingdom. And now we are getting ready to hear some of what He has been saying.

Jesus sat down and began to teach. That's what He is doing. Where He is doing it, is on a mountain.

That's got to be significant. I don't know how many people in the gathered crowd made the connection to Moses on Mt. Sinai, but with all the Exodus references in chapters 1-4, Matthew has certainly set us up to make that connection.

Jesus is not only being presented to us as king. He is also being presented to us as the mediator of a new covenant. Biblical covenants are Kingdom agreements. God, the great King, communicates His expectations to His vassal people, through covenant. When God communicates a covenant, he does it through a Covenant mediator. There are six Covenant mediators in Scripture. Through Adam and Noah, God established covenant with all of human kind. Those covenants still stand. God is not just the King of one local nation or one specific religion. God is King over all humanity, whether all humanity recognizes Him as King or not. He is King of Earth and King of Heaven. He is King of all things that have every been made or ever will be made, whether physical or spiritual.

When we talk about entering God's Kingdom or about God's Kingdom coming, we are recognizing that something is really not as it should be. We do not mean to suggest God is not King of everything, right now and always. We are acknowledging something else. We are acknowledging that the majority of humanity exists in rebellion to the rightful King.

That rebellion began under the reign of Adam and Eve, the first vassals God commissioned to rule over and fill the Earth. The rebellion continued after the Great Flood because Noah and his family carried in their fallen nature the same seeds of rebellion. Human beings want to be king. We want to give ourselves definition. We want to define God. We want to set the moral agenda. That human drive was exemplified after the Flood, at the tower of Babel, "Let us make for ourselves a name." They would give themselves definition; they would set the agenda; they built a tower up to heaven to bring God down to Earth; to tell God who God ought to be.

God also frustrated that human rebellion. And then He moved to a new stage in His plan of redemption. He moved to the divide-and-conquer stage. He chose a man and a woman who were not a nation, who could not even have children, and He made a covenant with them. Abraham became the first Covenant mediator of a new kind of covenant. It was not a covenant with all of human kind, but a with a specific people. And then, when that family of Abraham grew to become a nation, God rescued them out of slavery in Egypt, He took them to Mount Sinai, and He established another covenant, another set of expectations for a nation through the Covenant mediator, Moses.

According to Exodus 19:6, they are to be a "kingdom of priests and a holy nation." By their obedience to the good law of God, they will shine as a light to the nations and as priests, they will lead others into communion with God. At least that's God's charge to this new nation.

God added one more very specific covenant in the Old Testament through His servant David, when He promised to set his son on an eternal throne.

So those are five Covenants with five mediators: Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, and David. We are not done because Old Testament prophets as far back as Moses were telling us that something new is going to come. Before his death, Moses prophesied in Deuteronomy 18:15, “The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your countrymen, you shall listen to him.” A prophet like Moses, a Covenant mediator prophet. Much later, the prophet Jeremiah told Israel to expect something new, “Behold, days are coming,” declares the LORD, “when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah” (Jeremiah 31:31).

I’m explaining the big picture of Kingdom and Covenant to make two points. First, we recognize that God is King of all people. We can say He reigns as King over everything. We also recognize that humanity is in rebellion. Not all people recognize the reign of God. So Kingdom language can point to God’s general reign over all things, but Kingdom language can also emphasize those who have yielded to God and entered into a right covenant relationship with Him. They’ve submitted themselves to His rule and in that sense, they’ve entered into His Kingdom; they’ve become part of His willing Kingdom people.

By the end of the Old Testament special covenant had been mediated through Abraham, Moses, and David. But the prophets have also prepared us for something new. Something new is happening. The Son of David has come as King. He has taken followers up on to a mountain and He is going to give them law.

This law is given in the context of Kingdom. It’s being delivered not only by a Covenant mediator, but by the one who is King: the son of David. So I’m going to give some focus to that Kingdom context in the way that I recognize the different sections of Jesus’ sermon in the structure. The Kingdom titles that I’m giving to this sermon fit this motif of the context that Matthew set up. And not only that; the Kingdom titles also draw on the language that Jesus uses in the actual sermon. His first words are going to be, “Blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.” Then later He is going to teach us to pray, “Thy kingdom come, thy will be done.” And then even later, He is going to teach us to seek first His Kingdom, and then God’s righteousness and all the things we need will be added unto us. So, for our study, we are going to divide the Sermon on the Mount in six sections. And these are the Kingdom titles that I’ve given to each section.

Kingdom Values will be our introduction in 5:1-16;

Kingdom Commandments in 5:17-48;

Kingdom Piety in 6:1-18;

Kingdom Priority in 6:19-34;

Kingdom Wisdom in 7:1-12; and

Kingdom Decision in 7:13-29.

We will address the introduction, Kingdom Values, in this episode. It divides into three parts. Verses 5:1-2 provide the context, verses 3-12 provide a list of Kingdom values, and verses 13-16 emphasize the importance of Kingdom witness. We’ll look at the values in 3-12, and then we’ll move on to witness in 13-16, but first let’s pick up just one more detail from the context. I’ll read again Matthew 5:1-2.

Kingdom Context (5:1-2)

¹ When Jesus saw the crowds, He went up on the mountain; and after He sat down, His disciples came to Him. ² He opened His mouth and *began* to teach them, saying...

What is Jesus doing? He is teaching the Gospel of the Kingdom.

Where is Jesus teaching? On a mountain, just like Moses of old.

Who is Jesus teaching? After He sat down, His disciples came to Him.

This is the one more point I want to focus on. Who are these disciples?

Jesus had already begun calling full-time disciples to follow Him, men like Peter, Andrew, James, and John. They are certainly with Him. The term is broader, though, than the twelve who will be designated as apostles. Anyone who follows after Jesus to learn from Him fits the description of, disciple. In the Gospels the term, disciple, includes a wide range of men and women who follow Jesus for any number of reasons. Some will become disillusioned and leave. Others will come to see the Kingdom of God in a completely new light.

Jesus teaches His disciples more like they are apprentices than students. Jesus' disciples do not learn theory in a room behind a desk. Jesus' disciples learn by listening to Jesus. They also learn by watching how Jesus lives, and serves, and prays. Not just that, they learn by doing. Jesus sends them out. Jesus expects them to put into practice what they hear.

And when that goes well or when it does not go well, the disciples comes back to hear more, to understand better, to grow in their ability to live for God, and then to go out and put that into practice, and then to come back and be with Jesus in an ongoing process of going out to do, and to practice, and coming back in to listen and to reflect.

Jesus ends his sermon in 7:24-27 with this expectation that we would not just be listeners, but that we would be doers.

²⁴ "Therefore everyone who hears these words of Mine and acts on them, may be compared to a wise man who built his house on the rock. ²⁵ "And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and slammed against that house; and yet it did not fall, for it had been founded on the rock. ²⁶ "Everyone who hears these words of Mine and does not act on them, will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand. ²⁷ "The rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and slammed against that house; and it fell—and great was its fall."

Jesus expects us to build our lives on the words of this sermon. Not only that. He promises that if you do not build your life on the words of this sermon, everything you have; everything you have built will tumble down like a house overcome by the swirling waters of a flood.

Who says things like that? Who makes that kind of claim? I mean, think about that. How audacious is that? "My words and my words alone are the foundation for life. Everything else is sinking sand."

What kind of rabbi, that kind of preacher makes that kind of claim? Jesus is not just any preacher. Jesus is not just any Rabbi speaking to any group of disciples. Jesus is a King and He is speaking as one who has authority over life and death.

Since we're so close to the end, let's go ahead and read the final two verses. The first two verses give us the context at the beginning of the sermon. The last two verses add to that context. This is Matthew 7:28-29.

²⁸ When Jesus had finished these words, the crowds were amazed at His teaching; ²⁹ for He was teaching them as *one* having authority, and not as their scribes.

The beginning context emphasizes that this teaching is teaching for those who would be disciples. The end emphasized that this teaching is not held in secret for an elite few. The crowd is present. And Jesus invites all of them to learn from Him by putting into practice the words He speaks.

What is that word? What is the word that Jesus would have us put into practice? Well, He starts with a list of Kingdom values. This is introduction, part 1, Matthew 5:3-12.

Kingdom Values (5:3-12)

³ "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. ⁴ "Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted. ⁵ "Blessed are the gentle, for they shall inherit the earth. ⁶ "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied. ⁷ "Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy. ⁸ "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God. ⁹ "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God. ¹⁰ "Blessed are those

who have been persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.¹¹

“Blessed are you when *people* insult you and persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of Me.¹² “Rejoice and be glad, for your reward in heaven is great; for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

Beautiful, right? It just sounds spiritual. It sounds like something Jesus would say. But what does it mean?

I don't believe Jesus' audience had any idea what He was talking about. It is beautiful, it's poetic, it's spiritual. But what do these beatitudes mean? How do we translate these values into actual practice? You know, more than just a verse on the wall?

Let's consider the whole set of statements and then we're going to go back and look at each one individually. Though, I will give you a spoiler. I do not think we have enough to go on in this passage to interpret what Jesus is saying. We can observe it. We can look and see what we see, you know, what does the text say. But we can't know how to interpret it, that is, what does the text mean until we get more context from Jesus. The key to interpretation is not going to be going back to the Old Testament and looking up related verses on “poor in spirit” and “gentleness” and “pure in heart.” I mean, those verses are there. But that's not going to be the key to understanding where Jesus is going with this. The key to interpretation is going to be in the context provided by the rest of the sermon. We are just going to have to wait and see where Jesus leads us.

But there's a lot to observe right away so let's do that. What do we see here in the text?

Jesus gives us eight statements that follow the same formula. A particular trait or value is affirmed with a statement of blessing. That language of blessing assumes that it is God who is affirming the value; it is God who gives the reward. rewards. God blesses people who exhibit these values. It's not a completely general blessing. The blessing is expressed as a specific outcome or reward. We are told how a person who has this value is blessed. That language of reward is not my language. It is in the context of the last blessing, verse 12,

¹² “Rejoice and be glad, for your reward in heaven is great; for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

This language of reward will show up again in chapter 6 so we'll talk about it more then. For now we will just accept it as part of the formula of these blessings, sometimes called, “beatitudes.” “Blessed is the person who is like this, for they shall be rewarded in this way.” Instead of the word, “blessing,” we could use the word, “happy.” We could say, “Happy is this kind of person because of this kind of outcome follows.” That word, “happy,” communicates part of what it means to be blessed, but it misses the idea of a benefactor. Blessed communicates happiness and also favor. The kind of person who shows this kind of virtue receives favor because this is a virtue that God values.

One more point about the list as a whole. The reward of the first is the exact same as the reward of the last. “Blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are those who have been persecuted for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.” Kingdom of Heaven – Kingdom of Heaven. In biblical literature that's called, “an inclusio,” when the first thing and the last thing are identical to one another. It's a particular kind of parallelism. This inclusio suggests that all of the rewards in the list have something to do with the Kingdom of Heaven. The Kingdom of Heaven seems to sum up everything.

All right, so we see that's the whole of the list. Now let's consider each value statement. And I'm not going to interpret, yet. I'm just going to observe.

1. Blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the kingdom of heaven (3).

Wait a minute. Does that make any sense? Who should get the Kingdom of Heaven? Should the poor in spirit get the Kingdom? Shouldn't it be the rich in spirit who get the Kingdom? This was a big spiritual question of the day. Who gets into the Kingdom of Heaven? And everybody knew the answer. The righteous get into the Kingdom of Heaven. There was a lot of disagreement about who is

righteous and how righteous you have to be. But nobody was answering this question, “You have to be poor in spirit.”

And Jesus does not say here, “Blessed are the poor.” That is an emphasis we are going to get elsewhere in Jesus’ teaching, namely, in the Gospel of Luke. Here Jesus says “Blessed are the poor in spirit.” But that just doesn’t sound right. Not the poor; the rich! The rich in spirit. The ones who pray, and worship, and give. The ones who know their Bible. The ones who delight in God. The ones who share their faith. The ones who love their neighbor. The good ones. The righteous ones. The spiritually rich. Not the spiritually bankrupt, the spiritually destitute. It’s not the greedy, and the proud, and the selfish. Why would the poor in spirit inherit the Kingdom of Heaven?

That’s a confusing start. Let’s consider the next one.

2. Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted (4).

But why is mourning a virtue? Are we supposed to go around sad all the time? Doesn’t God want a cheerful giver? Isn’t the joy of the Lord my strength? This is especially a problem for Jesus’ listeners. They tended to believe in a kind of prosperity gospel. Those who mourn probably brought it on themselves by not living for God, by not walking in faith. That’s what the disciples assumed in John 9 when they passed by a man born blind. They didn’t even think about it. They knew it was somebody’s fault. “Who sinned, this man or his parents?” It had to be somebody! Who is responsible for the mourning, the sorrow? It shows God’s disfavor. God is not pleased with this man, or his parents.

On the other hand, everybody assumed the rich young ruler was good. He had nothing to mourn about. They knew he was good because he was blessed. And he couldn’t get much more blessed. I mean, he was rich. He was young. And he was a ruler. He is not mourning. He is rejoicing!

Why is mourning a value? Mourning indicates something wrong with the person. Why would God favor mourning?

There is more.

3. Blessed are the gentle, for they shall inherit the earth (5).

And “gentle” here can be interpreted, “meek,” or “humble.” But we know this isn’t true. It’s not the gentle who inherit the Earth! It’s the strong. The assertive. The influencers. The wealthy. The powerful. They inherit the Earth. Not the meek, the gentle, the humble. They might be nice to be around. They are not causing problems. But they are not going to inherit the Earth. And if we have cause to question whether the gentle will inherit the Earth, the people of Jesus day would scoff the idea. Who inherits the Earth? The wealthy, proud, and strong. The Romans.

In the Roman Colosseum, nobody mourned the gladiator that lost. We love an underdog. We applaud the “thumb up” by Ceasar in our movies. We like that. Show mercy to the loser. He fought well. That’s a foreign sentiment in the first century. They applauded the “thumb down.” Let him die. He lost. Glory is earned by the strong. The proud rightly inherit the Earth, not the meek and the gentle. And the Jews may not have been as “survival of the fittest” as the Romans. But the religiously elite Pharisees are known more for zeal, rigorous obedience, and judgment of sinners than for humility and gentleness. And if we are going to inherit the Earth, or at least our part of the Earth, we need the Maccabees, we need the hammer. We need somebody strong, not somebody meek and gentle.

What’s next?

4. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst after righteousness for they shall be satisfied (6).

So this one also feels backwards. Why would those who hunger and thirst after righteousness be satisfied? The implication of hunger and thirst is that they are famished. They desire righteousness. But their desire shows that it is something they have not attained. The righteous are satisfied by their own righteousness. The hard worker sleeps well because he has worked hard. The righteous are satisfied because they have done what is right. It is not enough to hunger and thirst after

righteousness, is it? You know, I wish I was righteous. I long for righteousness. I want to be righteous. But you have to actually be righteous to be rewarded.

That's the first four blessings. The last four seem to make more sense from a religious point of view, but we still can't be sure of exactly what Jesus is saying.

5. Blessed are the merciful for they shall receive mercy (7).

We can agree with that to a point. But this is not a society that puts a high value on mercy. Again, consider the blind man outside the Temple. He deserves to be blind because of his sin or his parents' sin. We might pity him. But people need to pay the penalty of their sin. To what extent does Jesus expect us to push this idea of mercy?

6. Blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God (8).

The pure in heart will see God. But how are the poor in spirit, pure in heart? And what does it mean, to be pure in heart? We know how to achieve ceremonial purity in the Temple, but purity of heart? How is Jesus going to define that?

7. Blessed are the peacemakers for they shall be called sons of God (9).

Peacemakers are sons of God, but peacemakers with whom? With those who deserve peace, right? Or with those who are willing to come over to our side? Or to those we can make some kind of compromise with? How far are we expected to push this? How much do I have to give up to make peace? And with whom? With everybody?

8. Blessed are those who have been persecuted for the sake of righteousness for theirs is the kingdom of heaven (10-12)

Those who are persecuted for the sake of righteousness inherit the Kingdom. That sounds good. And that sounds Jewish. I mean, it brings in one of the base assumptions of Jesus' audience. The righteous get into the Kingdom. But there again we have to ask, what kind of righteousness? How is Jesus going to define righteousness? And why are the righteous persecuted? So it makes sense to His audience if it was Gentile Roman persecution against Jews who hold tightly to Torah obedience. And that may be the first thing Jesus said that really makes sense. The righteous are persecuted. Yes!

But Jesus then goes on to develop this beatitude. It's the only one that gets developed. And He does not connect "persecution for the sake of righteousness" to persecution for Torah obedience. He connects it to Himself.

Blessed are you when *people* insult you and persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of Me. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward in heaven is great; for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

Jesus makes Himself central to the idea of righteousness. "When people persecute you because of me." That's the kind of persecution that gets blessed.

And what is He implying when He says, "in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before?" Who persecuted the prophets? In the Old Testament narrative, it's almost always the Jewish establishment that persecutes the prophets, not unbelieving Gentiles. You're going to receive persecution in your own society.

These blessings do not make a lot of sense. Even the ones that sound plausible are left undefined. What's Jesus talking about? I think that is exactly the kind of question Jesus wanted His listeners to be asking at this point in the sermon. "What are you talking about? We're going to have to pay attention to see where you're going with this."

But he is not done yet with the introduction, yet. He has another value to emphasize. Jesus expects His disciples to be witnesses for the Kingdom. However these values are going to get defined, Jesus expects that His followers will exemplify these values in society and that their living witness will make a difference.

That's the second half of the introduction in Matthew 5:13-16. It's all about Kingdom witness.

Kingdom Witness (5:13-16)

¹³ “You are the salt of the earth; but if the salt has become tasteless, how can it be made salty *again*? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled under foot by men. ¹⁴ “You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden; ¹⁵ nor does *anyone* light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house. ¹⁶ “Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven.

My colleague Nolan Sharp emphasizes two qualities that capture what it means to be salt and light in society. Jesus is telling His disciples to be present and to be unique.

Present

When salt is there on the food, you know it is there on the food. Steak, hamburger, chicken - pass the salt, please. The salt plays no role if it is not experienced, not tasted. Salt packed up in the pantry is not fulfilling its purpose. It needs to be present.

Light is similar. Why would you get up in your dark house, find the matches, light a lamp, put the lamp on a table, and then put a bucket over the lamp, plunging the house back into darkness? The point of the lamp is to provide light for everyone in the house.

Religious people that hide away from the world are not present in the world. And if they are not present in the world, they cannot be tasted. They cannot illuminate.

Presence is necessary, but presence is not enough.

Salt and light make an impact because salt and light are unique in their environment.

Uniqueness

Salt enhances the flavor of the food. Salt does not taste like chicken. Salt enhances the chicken. What’s the point of steak-flavored salt? Salt has a unique flavor of its own. Its different from everything else in its environment. And it’s supposed to be different, unique, an influencer, a change-agent. And you don’t need a whole lot of it. In fact, you don’t want to be too salty, too weird, too overwhelming. You want to be unique in a way that adds something positive to society.

Light also has a profound impact on its environment. Light illuminates. Again, you do not want to take that lamp and shine it right up in someone’s face, like an interrogation. You want to light the house, so people can see the reality of their surroundings. Or like a city on a hill that shines as a beacon in the dark to lead the weary traveler home.

This is what you are supposed to be, Jesus says. You are supposed to be salty and illuminating, present and unique. When the people of God stop adding flavor, then we’ve got to ask, are they really the people of God? If there is no apparent added value to society that stands out as different and unique that marks the people of God as the people of God, then the people of God have lost their very purpose. They have become tasteless. They taste like everything else, or they taste like nothing at all and they might as well be thrown out.

If the people of God claim to be a light and yet do not shine the light into the world, then what’s the point of the light?

Jesus is driving us towards purpose. What is the whole point of Jewish society? What is the whole point of a Christian church, or community, or movement?

Purpose

Verse 16,

¹⁶ “Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven.

This is the focal point of the two metaphors. The whole point of being salt and light is summed up here. Live in such a way that society will see your good works. Be present. And seeing your good works, they will be moved to glorify your Father in Heaven. Be unique: unique in a way that reflects

the goodness and transformative power of your Father in Heaven. And that's how you bring Him glory.

The idea that you live to glorify your Father in Heaven is an idea that works nationally for Jews, but maybe not so well on the personal level. The Jews of Jesus' day were very careful in how they referred to God. God is the Father of Israel in the Old Testament. But speaking to God as my Father – my Father in Heaven – that would be too intimate, presumptuous. But we're going to see through the sermon that Jesus insists on it.

God is your Father. He is also your Father who is in Heaven.

Our works here on Earth bring glory to our Father who is not here on Earth, not visibly here. God's authority as King is fully expressed and experienced in the spiritual realm of Heaven. We are supposed to live in such a way that we reflect the character and values of our Father in Heaven, so that when people see how we live, they will be moved to glorify Him.

We are to be present and unique, visible and noticeable.

You never know who is watching. But people are always watching.

We invited a student to church with us one Sunday. She was sitting in the row behind me. And I was doing that thing parents of young children do, trying to follow the sermon while holding my Bible with one hand and my baby with the other. And Ana did that thing that babies do and grabbed hold of whatever came within her general vicinity. On this occasion, she caught hold of my Bible and ripped a page. I kissed her hand and put my Bible away. As I was doing it, I myself thought it was an odd response. I do love my Bible. I am very attached to it. And I am the kind of Dad who would get very cross at his child for tearing his Bible. But for some reason, I didn't.

A couple years later the student who had been sitting behind me in church told me she never forgot my response. She was a little shocked that I didn't rebuke Ana, I didn't show frustration. I just kissed her hand.

It's such a little thing. Just a little bit of salt. Just a tiny, little bit of light. And it glorified God, and it made a difference. And as I said, I'm the kind of guy who really gets frustrated when people mess up my stuff. But God is the kind of God who works in and through us to bring about goodness.

The little things matter. But there's an indication here that Jesus does not just have in mind the little things.

Tension

When we bring together the two parts of this introduction, a strong tension arises.

And here is the tension. Jesus just said, "When people see your good works, they glorify your Father in Heaven." Is that a promise? Is that always true? No. The last blessing let us know that we might experience a very different response.

Blessed are those who have been persecuted for the sake of righteousness for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

People are not always going to stand up and applaud when you act as salt and light. Sometimes they will not even notice. Sometimes they are just going to ignore you. Sometimes they are going to discount you. Sometimes they are going to misinterpret you. And sometimes they will oppose and persecute you. It is possible that you will experience verbal abuse, physical violence, or even legal action for living in the way Jesus wants you to live.

Blessed are you when *people* insult you and persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of Me. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward in heaven is great; for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

How ought we respond to that persecution when it comes? Do we close our mouths and draw back? Do we stop doing the offensive behavior? Do we insulate ourselves in Christian community? Those

would be very natural responses. But those responses develop a kind of victim mentality that distorts our purpose as the people of God.

There is a connection between that last blessing and the exhortation to be salt and light. Do not give in when you are persecuted. Your purpose requires that you be present in society. But not only present. Don't avoid persecution by blending in. Your purpose requires that you be unique in society.

This is who you are. You are salt and light. You are the kind of people who do good works that proceed from your personal relationship with God who is a Father to you.

Don't give up when you encounter persecution. Be courageous. Continue to engage. You will at times experience backlash. But you will also at times help other people see the goodness and awesomeness of God. He will be glorified because of good works you have done.

Drawing back as victims is not the only response to persecution that might prevent us from being salt and light to our communities. Persecution might cause flight. It might also cause fight. Fight is not always bad. There is a right toughness required to stand up when opposed. But what kind of fight is Jesus calling us to? What kind of toughness does He want from us? What kind of courage?

What kind of words are we supposed to use? What kind of heart attitude is expected? How do we respond to insult? How do we treat our enemies?

Jesus has not said yet. He has not told us what kind of persecution for His name's sake is valid. He has not told us yet what it really looks like to be salt and light. But He is getting ready to.

Conclusion

This introduction raises more questions than it answers. We have had an odd start. We are not to be rich in spirit; we are to be poor in spirit. We are not the ones who rejoice, but the ones who mourn. The meek inherit the Earth. The hungry and thirsty are filled. How does all of this work? We are challenged to be salt and light. We are not to hide away. But what kind of salty are we supposed to be and what kind of salty are we not supposed to be? What kind of light? How do we illumine? What works glorify our Father in Heaven? Jesus is giving us Kingdom Values. These values may be fuzzy now, they may be confusing, but that's an invitation to lean in because they are going to become clearer and clearer in our next section when Jesus communicates the law of the New Covenant, the Kingdom Commandments. That's the rest of chapter 5 and that's where we are going to pick up in our next lesson.