



Citizens and Strangers (Part 6) - Character and Influence

Matt Chandler – April 8, 2018

[Video]

Female: The kingdom of God is as multifaceted and mysterious as our Creator, a kingdom we only see now through a glass darkly. Though we can't picture it fully, God's kingdom is the story told in Scripture, from the garden to the city, and in the middle of the story God chose to reveal his kingdom in a new way.

The gospel is not only Jesus coming and dying to save us from our sins; it's also the story of God establishing his dwelling, dominion, and dynasty in the world. We live as both citizens and strangers, prisoners of hope in this shadow kingdom, all while knowing it's not our true home, that something better is coming, that God's perfect kingdom *is* coming.

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Well, good morning. If you have your Bibles go ahead and grab those. We're going to be in Matthew 5. The next six weeks for us here in our *Citizens and Strangers* series on the kingdom of God shifts its emphasis from what the kingdom is and who the King of the kingdom is now to the implications on the citizens of that kingdom.

Our plan is to dive into the Sermon on the Mount over the next six weeks, which is ambitious. You could do 12, 14, or 30 weeks on the Sermon on the Mount, so we're going to put a lot into each one of these weeks. Just a heads up: The Sermon on the Mount is going to be like looking into a spiritual mirror. There are going to be some things you see that you like, and there are going to be some things you see that you don't like, and yet what we're confident in is that the grace and mercy of Jesus Christ rests on us regardless of how we see into the mirror. Are you with me?

If I could summarize the next six weeks, I would quote Dr. Thomas Schreiner. Here's what he says: "Disciples have a distinct profile over against the world. They admit that they are poor in spirit, are peacemakers and merciful, endure persecution, do not hate those who mistreat them, are not marked by lust and abuse of women, love their enemies, do not practice religion for the praise of others, trust God for their physical needs, and do not judge others. [...] They communicate their difference from the world and shine as witnesses in a dark world." There it is. You don't get off that easily, though. We're going to dive in.

Not long after my conversion to Christianity, I had this profound experience of the grace of Jesus Christ and an understanding of who Jesus was and that he wanted to have a relationship with me. I wanted my friends to know this also. What I had experienced, the freedom I felt... I wanted my friends to know, so I would invite them. I would invite my friends. I would invite friends from the team, and then we would go to church, and rather than the gospel, they were met with what I'll just call *moralism*.

I'd get them to church. I'd just want them to hear about Jesus, and instead they would hear to not have sex. I'd get them to church, and I'd want them to hear about Jesus, and they would hear you shouldn't party. I'd get them there, and they'd hear about how *this* or how *that*... That experience, for me, for a long time, put this weird sense that I couldn't trust the church to introduce my friends to Jesus Christ. It literally put a bit of a barrier between me and church work for a long time.

In fact, if it weren't for Steve Hart down in Dallas, I don't know that I would be a pastor. I was happy doing ministry outside the walls of the church rather than inside because of this *moralism* issue. Does that resonate with anybody else? "Yeah, I experience that. I've felt that. I understand that," and yet, there's a difference between *moralism* and *morality*. Let me tease that out.

Moralism is any teaching that would say, "In order for you to be loved by God, in order for you to be accepted by God, here are the behaviors you must conform to to be one of the good guys." It's a checklist mentality that would say, "If you behave *this* way, God will then bless you *this* way." That's *moralism*. God hates that. It's nonsense.

If you have a background where your understanding of Christianity is that you have to behave a specific way in order to be loved and accepted by God, and that has raised up in you hostility toward God as you have fallen short of that list, I'm telling you, you have not heard the good news. We are not *moralists*, but we do believe in *morality*. Here's what I mean by morality.

Morality is being transformed by the Spirit's power to God's revealed will for human flourishing. Christianity has a moral component that is linked to God's design for us. We read about this throughout the Bible in passages like, "You have made known to me the path of life..." This is David saying, "The boundary lines have fallen for me in pleasant places."

There's a moral aspect to our design as human beings that, when we get into the path of life, those boundaries that have fallen in pleasant places, human flourishing actually occurs in a way it does not, and I would argue cannot, outside of those boundaries. There are hints and shadows of this from creation on in the Bible. I want to highlight some of them before we dive into Matthew 5. We see even in creation some shadows of the morality God has built into us as human beings. Genesis 1:27-28 says,

"So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. And God blessed them. And God said to them, 'Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth.'"

This is designed in the beginning. He gives man and woman work. We see very early on that one of the moral implications of being a human being is if humans are going to flourish, we're going to work. If you flip that on its head, to refuse to work, to be lazy, to expect other people to work on your behalf would be *immoral*, because in God's design you have been asked, you have been designed, and you have been created to work.

If you're out of a job right now, I'm not talking to you. Now, if you're sitting on your couch playing Xbox and expecting everybody else to make ends meet, then I am talking to you. Fortnite is a great game, but you have to get a job. You have to get a job. We see, then, not just around vocation but around relationships. Genesis 2:23-25:

"Then the man said, 'This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man.' Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh. And the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed."

This text is clearly about marriage, and yet there are all sorts of moral implications built into this, God's good design. Sin has not entered into the world at this point. Nothing is fractured and broken. The man and woman are naked and unashamed, which means they're not hiding anything. What do we see in regard to morality in this text? What's the shadow we're looking at before sin enters the world? I'll lay some of it before you.

We, as husbands, are to love our moms but cling to our wives. There is a leaving and a clinging that occurs in marriage that is good and right for human flourishing. That means two things. That means, brothers, your responsibility is to your wife, not to your parents. Wives, I don't need your help today. Did you hear me? I just don't need your help.

In fact, I would say a surefire way to short circuit the Spirit's work in your husbands heart is for you to take on the role of the Holy Ghost. You get into the car, and you're like, "I don't know what you heard there, but I hope you heard that first seven minutes. Stop texting your mom and listen to me!" I'm saying, you don't step into that role. You let the Spirit of God conquer that. We see it's a man and a woman right there in the text. That's a moral design that's in our design from day one.

We see, if we would take this outside of marriage and apply it to relationships, this concept of *naked and ashamed*, it is moral and right to be known fully, and it is immoral to hide and live duplicitous lives. You can begin to see human flourishing actually occurs when we line our hearts up with God's good design. If you're fully known, you're not in the dark. You're walking in the light.

Think about the depth of your relationships. How can you be truly known, how can you be truly loved, and how can you walk with any sense of peace if you're constantly hiding aspects of your life from your roommates, your single friends, your spouse? Think of the disjointed weariness that comes when you live counter to the shadow of God's morality.

It's also important to note that all of this is happening in the unfettered presence of God. This morality is being lived out because God is there and they are with him. This concept of *dwelling, communing...* It's not just *connecting*, not just *knowing about*, but being in the presence of God is shaping this.

Then again in the book of Exodus, hopefully you're aware of some things. I'm going to do a pop quiz here in a second, but I'm going to give you a really easy hint. For my good, I learned at the 5:00, I need to give a really easy hint to not despair. God saves his people out of bondage, delivers them

from slavery in Egypt, takes them to Mt. Sinai on the cusp of the Promised Land, which is this piece of land that sits right in the middle of all the ancient powers in this period of human history, and here's what he has Moses tell them:

"Now therefore, if you will indeed obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession among all peoples, for all the earth is mine; and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation." What do priests do? They bring people into the presence of God. **"These are the words that you shall speak to the people of Israel."**

What does God immediately give his people after this? There are 10 of them. Good job, 9:00. He gives them the Ten Commandments. He gives them the Law. I want you to see God's wisdom here. God has now called his people to himself, he has positioned them around the great powers of the world, and he has now given them a moral law to follow.

For what reason? So that they might be for him a kingdom of priests, that the empires that surrounded them, even though they were small and weak in comparison, would be able to look into how they lived, how they loved, how they raised children, how they viewed the opposite sex, how they worked, how they took a Sabbath day off... That alone was so revolutionary, this moment in human history, as to be confounding to ancient Near Eastern thought.

He positioned them there so the nations would see, be compelled by, and be drawn in by how the people of God dwelt with their God and lived out of that dwelling a morality that was tied to God's design for human flourishing. It is important to note that what's among the people in Exodus is the tabernacle...we're back to it...*God with us*. I'm going to keep hammering away that the key to the Christian life is dwelling and communing with Jesus.

I need to say this because it sets us up to understand our experience: *For fallen people like you and me, rules, commands, and external authority always threaten our autonomy*. We want others to do good to us but don't want to be told we have to do the same to them. This reveals, I think, in a very clear way what's broken inside of us. We don't want anyone to tell us what to do.

"Who knows what's best for me other than me? I know what's best for me. I know what I need. I don't need to be told by anyone what's right for me." This is the God of our age. "No authority but me. No right or wrong except what I decide." Even when confronted with what is clearly seen in Scripture, we will often times, under compulsion, justify disobedience to God's revealed will.

We think the Bible has a lot of asterisks, and if we cross-reference those asterisks we see a picture of ourselves. We begin to lie that, "If God only knew me, if he only knew where I came from, if he only knew... God certainly didn't have me and my situation in view when he gave that to all humankind across all time and space." This is why we see Adam and Eve rebel, this is why we see the people of God rebel, and this is why you and I have rebelled.

Jesus shows up, and if you've been here, he does what? He comes, gathers his disciples, and begins to preach the good news of the gospel of the kingdom. Let's look at it together. Matthew 5, starting in verse 1: **"Seeing the crowds, he went up on the mountain, and when he sat down, his disciples came to him. And he opened his mouth and taught them, saying..."**

By the way, this is called the *Sermon on the Mount*. It's not the "Suggestion on the Mount." It's not, "Hey, think about these things. Email me back what you want to consider. Let's negotiate here. I don't want to be unreasonable." This is the Sermon on the Mount from Jesus Christ, coeternal with the Father, second person of the Trinity, the King of Kings and Lord of Lords.

"And he opened his mouth and taught them, saying: 'Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted. Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.

Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy. Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God. Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God. Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you..." This is huge. **"...falsely on my account."**

If you're being reviled and hated, people are lying about you, and it's true and not because of Jesus, you're probably a jerk and need to repent. You can't be like, "The world hates me because I'm so..." No. It's pretty clear in the text that it needs to be false and it needs to be because of Jesus. Otherwise, I love you, but you're a jerk, and you need to repent. Verse 12:

"Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you. You are the salt of the earth, but if salt has lost its taste, how shall its

saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything except to be thrown out and trampled under people's feet.

You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven."

If I could lay before you what the Sermon on the Mount is, it is a proclamation of the kingdom for the citizens of the kingdom. This mirrors, in a very real way, what you're going to see in the book of Exodus as Moses heads up onto the mountain and the people of God gather around the mountain to hear from the Lord through Moses, except now God himself has come and will teach his people.

Jesus is the greater Moses. I hope that language isn't confusing. He's surrounded by his disciples, that they may be taught, as Israel was taught by Moses, to be holy, but he's doing more here than just giving the disciples something to legalistically obey. That's not what this is. In fact, it's something brand new. He is beginning to lay before them a transformation of heart that is not outside-in but, in our dwelling and communing, inside-out.

He is laying before them heart transformation that leads to a conformity of moral life that lays before all who are watching the path to life, and that the boundaries have fallen for us in pleasant places. It is not good or right to look at the Beatitudes as a replacement for the Ten Commandments, nor to view either of those as salvific.

Your obedience to the Ten Commandments... First of all, what you won't be able to do, even if you could do it, would not save you. It'd be a salvation via works and not grace and faith, and therefore it is an illegitimate salvation. Your obedience to the Beatitudes, which you're going to see we're going to be talking about heart-level stuff, is impossible.

Let's just say you were able to do it with white-knuckled discipline. First, I think you'd be miserable. Secondly, that still doesn't save you. No: Salvation is by grace alone through faith alone, so when Jesus is preaching the Sermon on the Mount, when he's preaching these Beatitudes, he has not brought a new law, but rather a mirror for us to gaze into and pull where we fall short into his presence and ask for transformation. Are you with me so far?

Let's dive into this text. The Beatitudes are built in quads. There are four that have to do with our relationship with God that spills over into our relationship with others, and then we have the last four that deal with our relationship with others. That's the buildout there. There are some guys who go, "Uh...actually, no. There are triads here." I just don't think they're right, so let's look at this in regard to relating with God.

Verses 3-6: **"Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted. Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied."** Let's take these one at a time. Don't panic. I promise we're going to be fine.

1. *The poor in spirit.* Here's the first one: **"Blessed are the poor in spirit..."** One of the things we see throughout the Scriptures is those who have a humble heart, those who are lowly and know they are in need, those who know they are spiritually bankrupt outside of God, filling that tank... They experience God in a unique and beautiful way.

I think one of the ways you can grab hold of, **"Blessed are the poor in spirit..."** is to flip it upside-down. We don't have time to do this, but you can do this by going over to Matthew 23 and looking at the *woes* or going back into the book of Isaiah and looking at the *woes* there. What we see in the Scripture would be, "Woe to you who think you have no need of God. Woe to you who refuse to become like children. Woe to you when you think you've got this, you can handle this, and you can do this."

It's the poor in spirit who are blessed. It's the, "God, help me. I can't." It is the weak, the weary, the worn out who are blessed. This kingdom ethics flips things on their heads. We celebrate strength; God says, "No, no. It's not faux strength. Because that's all it can be. It's not faux strength. It's honest weakness that is blessed."

2. *Those who mourn.* Then he moves from *poor in spirit* to, **"Blessed are those who mourn..."** Those who mourn either because of economic injustice or personal sorrow have God's ear. This is a refrain in the Bible. If you remember back to our study in Exodus, God's people in slavery for 400 years are crying out to God, and when God calls Moses through the burning bush, what does he say? "I have heard their cry."

Those who suffer under economic injustice... By the way, I'm pulling these definitions from Isaiah. I'm not pulling them out of the air. When I'm talking about economic injustice, I'm pulling that from Isaiah. That has a lot of ties to the Sermon on the Mount. Those who suffer under economic injustice or personal sorrow have the ear of God.

For those of us who have monetary abundance or emotional reserves, this calls us into action.

"Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted." How are those mourning comforted? By those, I believe, who have emotional reserves or who have monetary reserves. We step into those spaces, and we love those who are bankrupt in this space.

What struck me personally, what convicted me personally upon studying this is God is blessing a group of people whom I tend to try to avoid. People who are emotionally bankrupt can be exhausting. Are y'all just going to let me sit up here like y'all are all awesome? All right. Does anybody want to come finish this sermon then, since y'all are so holy?

I'm just saying, someone who is emotionally bankrupt... You can't fix that. You can be present, you can pray, and you can encourage, but sometimes that brokenness is so deep that you're talking about longtime years of faithful presence and prayer while guarding against enmeshment and other things that aren't good for the person. **"Blessed are those who mourn..."**

3. *The meek.* Then he says, **"Blessed are the meek..."** Meekness is freedom from pretension. This is what I mean by that. If you have experienced the grace of God, and if you are saved by grace alone through faith alone, then you have no right to have any swagger. You just don't. What did you do? You got saved. Who did that? Not you. Who rescued you, ransomed you, pulled you out of the muck and the mire? You didn't pull yourself up by your bootstraps. You got yanked out of the muck and the mire by the Ghost.

This eradicates pretension. It lowers me and makes me meek because I didn't do it. God did it, and God blessed, and God gifted, and God called, and God established. This should make us meek people. Not weak people, meek people. Here's where I'll quote Aristotle, not because I'm smart and I've read a bunch of Aristotle but just because I know this quote: "Meekness is strength under control."

4. *Those who hunger and thirst for righteousness.* Then I love how he ends up this section, this quad around relating to God: **"Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled."** Blessed are those who have tasted and seen that the Lord is good, and they want

more of it. I'm hungering for more. If God is an inexhaustible wealth, there's always more to be had, and I want more.

The promise here is that we will be filled. Two things: If you're in a dry season, if you're walking through the desert, if you're in that season where your prayers feel like they're hitting the roof, like nobody is there, you have no experience, and you're just walking by faith, that is amazing and awesome. Never hate that.

God is strengthening your inner man for a pour-in that's coming later. You will be filled. Don't lose heart. God has not betrayed or forgotten you. He lives inside of you. How could he? The Spirit of God dwells inside of you. How could you be forgotten about or abandoned? God could not abandon himself, and he dwells in you. Take heart, brother or sister.

Here's the second thing. If you're hungry, or if you're thirsty, eat. Here was yesterday morning. I set the alarm. I've been running. It's been a hard season for me, so I wanted this sermon in my bones. I got up and made some coffee, and I'm at our bar reading over this and adding in... I'm like, "This is too long. I have to cut this. I have to move this. We'll push that to next week, or, no, we'll push it to the week after that, because that one is already too long..." I want this sermon in my bones.

I had to get out to the football field. I got Reid all dressed, and we went out to his game. When I got to the game I realized I had had four cups of coffee and nothing to eat. I realized that because I was trying to change the down marker, and I realized either I have developed a tremor or I need some food.

After the game, I got in my car, and I was like, "I am starving." I did not think once I got to my truck, "This will work itself out." I didn't think, "You know what? I'm not going to get anything. I'm just going to go, and eventually, food will appear." No. I stopped and I got something to eat. It was Chipotle, and it was delicious.

In the same way, let's consider: If you hunger and thirst for righteousness, then eat. Open up the book. It's been given to you. The temple veil has been torn. The presence of God is available to you. Stop and eat. "Well, I don't know what..." Read the gospel of John. "Well, that confuses me." Pick a psalm. "I don't know if I understand the Psalms." Get a *Message* Bible. Just eat. Get in the Book. God has given it to you.

Don't be like, "I don't like paraphrases. I like the Greek." Brother, you ain't eating nothing. Have a salad. Eat. Are you hungry or thirsty to walk in God's ways? Then get in his presence and eat. It's available to you. It's right there. Christ's life, death, and resurrection has offered it to you. Come to the table and eat. **"Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness..."** You will be filled. Then he moves to how we are to relate to people, starting in verse 7.

"Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy. Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God. Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God. Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven..."

5. *The merciful*. I'm going to need to lean in here on some of these. I love you. I'm for you. I'm for us, but I'm going to lean in a little bit here. When we talk about *mercy*, we're talking about exhibiting compassion for the unfortunate as an ethical act of worship. That language is new language for us, but it's rooted, yet again, in the book of Isaiah. In fact, we might have to add Isaiah as a book we need to preach through because of some of these definitions I think will help us, especially in 2018.

There is an ethical component to worship that is tied to being pure of heart, and what we see here is *mercy* is compassion extended to others as an ethical practice of worship to God. Not just singing, but engaging. Maybe this language will help. There are two components of what it means to be a Christian. There is *orthodoxy*, right belief, and there is *orthopraxy*, right practice. It is important to note that God and Jesus both reserve their harshest judgment not for those with wrong belief but for those with right belief who have divorced right practice.

Do you want to watch God pronounce woes? Do you want to watch God press on his people? It's always because they have right belief and wrong practice, that they know what's right but they don't walk in it. I'll let Dr. R. Kent Hughes be blunt for me. "If we have no mercy toward those who are physically and economically in distress, we are not Christians. Notice I did not say we become Christians by showing mercy toward the unfortunate, but that we are not believers if we are unwilling to show mercy to them."

That's a heavy quote, isn't it? I'm not even sure I fully agree with him, but I like the weight of it. I think what he's trying to draw attention to is right belief without right practice is not and cannot be

Christian. Why? Because even the demons believe what is true about God, and they shudder, but we will certainly not be worshiping Jesus with them in glory.

It is right belief, which is important, that leads to right practice. You cannot call yourself a Christian if you have a fruitless life, if you have not found your heart more and more and more surrendering to the things of God over an extended period of time. I'm not saying everybody needs to move to South Sudan right now. I'm just saying, without the capacity to be merciful, you're revealing a pretty significant fruit of the Spirit that is not in your life. This is Hughes' argument.

6. *The pure in heart.* Then he says, "**Blessed are the pure in heart...**" so those who help the unfortunate with honesty, sincerity, and integrity truly worship God. "**Blessed are the pure in heart...**" They see God. I want a pure heart. I tend to be skeptical and cynical, and I always have to run things through a grid, and not the grid of the Bible, but my own bents and prejudices.

7. *The peacemakers.* Here's one I want to talk about, because I really want us to do something here that it seems our world cannot do, but I believe by the power of the Ghost we can do it. "**Blessed are the peacemakers...**" In fact, I want you to look at this one. Look back with me in verse 9. "**Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.**"

God's people have experienced a profound peace with their Creator. This experience of peace should settle peace in our hearts, in our dwelling, and in our communing with God that then leads to lives of peacemaking. Jesus' disciples, citizens of the kingdom, are meant to work through polarizing hostility and seek peace.

Here's what I want to ask us to do. I want us, by the grace of God and by the power of the Holy Spirit, to refuse to participate in the violent polarization of our day. Can we talk partisan politics for a second? I have the time this week to answer your emails...maybe. Actually, I don't, but go ahead and send them in.

As hard as it is for many of you to believe, there are Bible-believing, Jesus-loving, fully-surrendered men and women who are Democrats, and as hard as it is for you Democrats to believe, there are Bible-believing, Jesus-loving, seriously biblical people who are Republicans.

I am not asking any of us to agree. That's not unity. What I'm asking is you take this command seriously and seek to understand the position of another rather than characterizing and putting on

blast on your Facebook page. What would it be like for us to refuse to participate? What would it be like for us to seek to understand?

I'm going to tell you, there are some people who perplex me. I don't get it, but here's the charity that, as Christians, we should give one another. "You love the Word of God. You love Jesus. Goodness, we're a part of the same community of faith. I don't get it. Help me understand." You come with humility because you have meekness and you seek to understand, and then when you understand, if you disagree, you can disagree charitably while showing love based on Christ's oneness in our midst.

We have to stop cannibalizing one another, unless you just think you know everything and you have nothing to learn. You can giggle at that, but many of you post like that. There should be among the people of God a lowliness that never cannibalizes our own but seeks to understand, and in seeking to understand, we acknowledge this person is made in the image of God and they are my brother and my sister.

"I don't get it. I want to try to get it, so I'm going to ask you to help me understand. I'm going to shut up and listen, and not just, 'Uh-huh, uh-huh,' and wait for you to finish talking so I can latch on about how Hillary is a demon and how you want to kill babies." This nonsense has to stop. Don't give in to it. Why? Because if we don't give in to it, the Bible says they'll see we're the sons of God. What happens when we're peacemakers? "**...they shall be called sons of God.**" Did you read that? I had to go look at it so you would see it.

When your coworker is like, "I tell you what..." you're able to go, "You know, I think I land where you land. I was a little bit confused on how you could land there, but I know not everybody on that side is insane. I have this guy at my church, and we sat down and talked about it. Here was his perspective. I don't think I completely agree, but I kind of understand where he's coming from now a little bit more, and I'm walking with him."

Think about how discombobulating that is in a time where there's heightened language, a ton of caricatures, and a lot of misunderstanding. I'm asking us, can we not participate in that? Can we pump the brakes on that? It's slandering the name of Jesus in our day.

I'm grateful that you're passionate. I'm never going to ask you to dial back on the passion. I just want your passion to be appropriate to Jesus. It's funny to me that you get all geeked up about this

stuff and can't get all geeked up about the King of Kings and Lord of Lords. I'm not trying to shame you. I'm just saying a lot of energy and reading of what I would consider, on both sides, nonsensical blogs and posts... I'm asking you, pleading with you, let's not participate. Let's seek to understand one another, love one another, and disagree charitably.

I am under no illusion that we're all going to agree. I'm not asking you to agree. Gosh, I have pastor friends whom I love deeply who theologically, philosophically, and in practice are in a different universe than I am. They are my brothers, they are my friends, and they will be in glory with me, so I will not slander them. I will not slander them, and I'm asking you, don't participate. Don't give yourself over. **"Blessed are the peacemakers..."**

8. *The persecuted.* Lastly, "Blessed are you when you are persecuted, reviled, or when evil is spoken of you." I think it's because of where I am in life right now as a pastor and a leader and where God has positioned me by his grace, but I've been thinking about Plato's Cave Theory. If you don't know what Plato's Cave Theory is, Plato used this illustration to explain hostility.

I just remembered this from a leadership class I had in college, so if you have this picture of me smoking a pipe and reading Plato, you have the wrong picture, all right? I just happened to remember this. It settled into my mind and heart back in college. Plato said you could explain hostility a little bit like this.

There's a group of men... I'll make it more egalitarian. There's a group of men and women, and they are chained in a cave, and there's a fire behind them. The fire casts a shadow on the wall that dances because of the flame. Plato said, "Let's just say one of those broke free from the chains and went outside, and when he went outside he saw blue skies, green grass, rivers, stars, and color. In his excitement, he wanted the others to know that it was out there and to break out of their chains, come out, and check it out."

Plato argued if that man came back in and tried to convince the others who were chained up, they would turn on him and kill him. Their reality, being the shadows on the wall, would have so conformed their thinking that anything that might be different than their thinking would be seen and received and responded to with hostility, anger, rage, and wrath.

Again, I think this is connected a little bit to peacemakers, but here's what I want to lay before you. It is a new idea that Christians are not going to be persecuted, that we shouldn't be, that we should

be culturally accepted... That is not our history for the majority of our time singing the praises of Jesus.

We have been arrested, killed, fed to lions, sawed in two, boiled alive, put in prison, had our stuff looted according to the book of Hebrews, and had our houses burned to the ground. It is a new idea that you and I will be able to be cool enough and argue well enough to be accepted by men and women.

In fact, Jesus goes as far as to say, "You're in a bad spot if everyone speaks well of you." If everybody speaks well of you, chances are you have held back living and saying what is true. You have conformed to your environment in a way that is unhealthy for you and really undermines being salt and light.

I just think we should expect to be misunderstood, to be peculiar, to be lied about, and to be falsely accused. Even as I started our service saying it... The things that have been said about us on more than one issue are absurd. They're not true, and yet we should expect such things if we're going to walk in the light and we're going to live the truth of the Word of God fully.

By the way, I'll tell you, it is not the outside world's criticism, lies, and reviling that sting. It'll be those inside the church that do the most damage to our hearts. Let's look at verse 13. I have to wrap this up. I know those of you who have been here are like, "Okay, so he has 26 more minutes." No. I promise, I'm going to try to do this quickly. Verse 13:

"You are the salt of the earth, but if salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything except to be thrown out and trampled under people's feet. You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven."

If you wanted to do a little bit of research on how salt is used and viewed in the first century, if you Googled it or opened up your Logos Bible study app, or if you have your ESV Study Bible or whatever you have, here's what you would find. Salt is used as a preservative and a flavoring agent. It's a substance to treat wine skin. It was an agent used to slow down fermentation in manure so it could be used as fertilizer. On and on and on it goes.

What Jesus is doing is he's laying an absurd example. He's using an absurd illustration to make a point. Here's his point: Salt can't lose its saltiness, or it isn't salt. That's his point. Salt is salt. It cannot be not salt because it's salt. The illustration is one of trying to point out that if you are citizens of heaven you are citizens of heaven, or you are not citizens of heaven; therefore, you are not citizens of heaven.

"If salt loses its saltiness..." would have been met with an odd chuckle. "How is that even possible?" Salt cannot lose its saltiness. It can be diluted, but it can't lose its saltiness because it's salt. Jesus' argument here is that citizens of the kingdom, in varying ways and on a spectrum of growth and progressive sanctification, look like this. They're not perfect. They're in need of grace, but all of these things were given to you and given to me upon our conversion, and now they are cultivated by the Spirit of God and by what I'll call *grace-driven effort*.

I don't seek to become these things because God will love me if I do. I seek to become these things because God has put them in me and has empowered me to walk in them. I'm going to fall short of those things, and I'm not going to beat myself up for falling short of those things. I'm going to bring that into the presence of Jesus and ask for help.

Surrender to these things, specifically corporately as a church, not just as individuals, but as a church, brings forth a picture of the future for the world to see. Did you hear me? A community that is serious about these things and walks into the presence, dwelling, and communing with God becomes a picture for the world of the future that is to come, the coming of the kingdom when all is said and done.

This "already but not yet" concept... The church is meant to be the salt and light that shows what the kingdom will be when it arrives in full power, not in our perfection but in our willingness to get up off the ground when we fail and step back into the presence of Jesus because he's enabled us to do so by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Let me tell you what I think will be helpful and won't be helpful. What I don't think will be helpful for you as we look into the mirror is for you to grab your pen and be like, "Oh, *peacemaker*... I stink at that. Golly. I have posted some crazy blogs. I need to watch that. I need to go apologize to this guy I called this series of names..." or, "Man, I have not been meek. I have been arrogant. Let me add *these* things to my life and take *these* things out of my life."

I am not trying in any way to ask you to not own your sin before God and to others. I think you do need to do that, but more than white-knuckling transformation, here's what I'm going to ask you to do: Pay attention to the compulsion underneath what's causing that. I'll stay on *peacemaker* because it tends to resonate and be the most awkward. People are like, "You're not allowed to say this. No one is going to come back here."

I'm more committed than ever to finding those who want to, over an extended period of time, walk faithfully with Jesus in imperfect hope that Christ will do something special among us. I'm more committed to that than ever, so if you can't handle this kind of awkward, weird conversation, I think you're going to hate it here.

If we're to take that, what is it that makes me so angry when these conversations come up? That's the compulsion. You act on that anger, but I'm wanting you to stop and go, "What's causing that compulsion? What erupts inside of me that makes me give myself over to lust, give myself over to anger, and give myself over to pride?"

Then what we want to do is take that compulsion and bring it to Jesus, and we want to ask Jesus to do what he has promised he would do. We want to bring that compulsion to Jesus and go, "I don't understand this about me. Will you help me? Will you shape me? Will you change me? Will you do something significant in me?" and then take steps of obedience. We repent. We own our sin to others, but we're doing it out of, "Jesus, help me," not, "Let me do these things so God will accept me."

For the next five weeks, we're going to stare into the mirror Jesus puts up in front of us. My hope is at the end of it all what you'll see when you look into the mirror is Jesus. He's the one who has fulfilled all of this for us. He is the one whose grace is lavished upon us in such a way that no matter how many times we stumble he's there to pick us up and encourage us to keep walking. Let's pray.

Father, we bless you. I thank you that all these things we've talked about today, salt and light, are rooted in communing with you, dwelling with you, knowing you, and being shaped by you. Thank you for your mercy and grace in our lives.

I just ask, Father, as we look into the mirror that we wouldn't lose heart; that, if we know you, we wouldn't wrestle with whether we know you or not, but rather that you would encourage us and

build us up in ways that we might be that salt and light; that we might be, as the Village Church in this area, along with other Christian brothers and sisters in other churches, a picture of the future that is to come. Help us. We need you. It's for your beautiful name I pray, amen.

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