

Holy Textures

Meeting Jesus in Matthew, Mark, Luke and John.
Short, easy to use, faith-provoking insights.



Matthew 5:13-20

Don't think that my teachings replace or reduce the law and the prophets. And don't think you can skip the details. Details count. But something more than the details is also needed. You must align your whole self with what God desires - that is what those in Heaven are like.



Year A

Epiphany 5

February 9, 2014

Sunday Between February 4 and February 10 Inclusive

Not used if assigned date follows Ash Wednesday.

May be replaced by Transfiguration Sunday if the assigned date is the last Sunday before Ash

Wednesday.

Read the passage at the bottom of this post: [Matthew 5:13-20, The Message](#) or [Matthew 5:13-20, The New Revised Standard Version \(NRSV\)](#).

Click [here](#) for an easy to print or email Adobe PDF version of this note.

Sermon by the Rev. Debra Bowman, "[Just Right -- Not!](#)"

Matthew 5:13-20 is part of [Sermon on the Mount](#). See my post, [Sermon on the Mount, Matthew, Chapters 5, 6, and 7](#), for an short overview of these chapters.

The sermon ends with a teaching from Jesus about a difference between those who are wise and those who are foolish:

Everyone then who hears these words of mine and acts on them will be like a wise man who built his house on rock. The rain fell, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on rock. And everyone who hears these words of mine and does not act on them will be like a foolish man who built his house on sand. The rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell--and great was its fall!

Matthew 7:24-27 (NRSV)

What is the crucial difference between the one who is wise and the one who is foolish?

It has nothing to do with what we usually associate with wisdom: knowledge, many years of experience, perspective, intelligence, insight, etc.

Nor does it have to do with **HEARING** what Jesus has said. Both cases begin - "Everyone who hears these words of mine ..."

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The difference between being either wise or foolish is in **ACTING** or **NOT** acting.

It is not enough for us to hear these words of Jesus; to study them; to be inspired by them; to have hopes / aspirations / dreams based on them. We must **ACT** on them; practice them; live them in our everyday lives.

So whatever passage we read from the Sermon on the Mount, we must hear it with one question in mind:

*What must I **DO** to make this the bedrock of how I live?*

The first thing to notice about this passage is the directness of the language. Like the previous passage, [Matthew 5:1-12, The Beatitudes](#), Jesus is speaking very directly to the people who are right there in front of him - **YOU**, you right here; you **ARE**, you are right now - you are now, already, with no extra qualifications or conditions to be met:

You are salt; you are light for the world.

Now stop and remember just who it is that Jesus is talking to. The movers and shakers? The people with power, money, education, good looks? No, no, no, and no.

Jesus is talking to the lowest and the least and telling them that **THEY** are the salt and light for the transformation of the world to reflect God's desires for the world. And since the poor made up about 80% of the population at the time of Jesus, and were the labour that produced all the wealth, seeing themselves as catalysts of production instead of pawns of the powerful would indeed change the world.

I wonder what the world would be like if the people with power, money, education, and good looks also would hear these as words addressed to them? To see themselves as blessed in order to be a blessing?

Matthew 5:13. You are the salt of the earth.

Bruce Malina and Richard Rohrbaugh (See footnote below.) provide this helpful background:

The "earth" is an outdoor earthen oven (see also Job 28:5 and Psalm 12:6) found near the home. ... The earthen oven used dung as fuel. The dung heap was salted, and salt plates were used as a catalyst to make the dung burn. Salt loses its saltiness when the exhausted plates no longer serve to facilitate burning.

Thus a good interpretation of this verse might be:

You are the catalyst to get things cooking ...

Matthew 5:14-16. Again, Malina and Rohrbaugh comment:

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It is (a peasant's) one-room house that is envisioned in the parable here, since all who enter can see the light stand. The normal way to put out an oil lamp was to put it under a bushel basket so as not to fill the house with smoke and fumes before retiring.

Thus a good interpretation of these verses might be:

Set an example. Not to get fame and glory for yourself, but so that others will see God's goodness.

Matthew 5:17-20. "For truly I tell you" means "By my word of honour" - and Jesus can be trusted to be a person of honour, can't he?

When will heaven and earth pass away? Never, according to Ecclesiastes 1:4. And so neither will the law nor the teachings of the prophets.

Thus a good interpretation of these verses might be:

Don't think that my teachings replace or reduce the law and the prophets. And don't think you can skip the details. Details count. But something more than the details is also needed. You must align your whole self with what God desires - that is what those in Heaven are like.

Having [blessed us](#) Jesus now tells us who we are and what comes from being blessed:

*Okay. Get ready for what is to come.
Here's what's at stake, and here's what is required of you.
You are blessed, now go and be a blessing.*

David Ewart,
www.holytextures.com

Historical background information in this post is drawn primarily from Social-Science Commentary on the Synoptic Gospels, see link below, pages 41-42.

* [Link to Amazon.com Bibliography for Bruce Malina, Richard Rohrbaugh, et. al.](#), Social Science Commentary on ... The Synoptic Gospels; The Gospel of John; The Book of Acts; The Letters of Paul; The Book of Revelation; and others.

Matthew 5:13-20 (NRSV)

¹³ "You are the salt of the earth; but if salt has lost its taste, how can its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything, but is thrown out and trampled under foot.

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¹⁴ "You are the light of the world. A city built on a hill cannot be hid. ¹⁵ No one after lighting a lamp puts it under the bushel basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all in the house. ¹⁶ In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven.

¹⁷ "Do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets; I have come not to abolish but to fulfill. ¹⁸ For truly I tell you, until heaven and earth pass away, not one letter, not one stroke of a letter, will pass from the law until all is accomplished. ¹⁹ Therefore, whoever breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches others to do the same, will be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever does them and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. ²⁰ For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.

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Matthew 5:13-20 (The Message)

¹³ "Let me tell you why you are here. You're here to be salt-seasoning that brings out the God-flavors of this earth. If you lose your saltiness, how will people taste godliness? You've lost your usefulness and will end up in the garbage.

¹⁴ "Here's another way to put it: You're here to be light, bringing out the God-colors in the world. God is not a secret to be kept. We're going public with this, as public as a city on a hill. ¹⁵ If I make you light-bearers, you don't think I'm going to hide you under a bucket, do you? I'm putting you on a light stand. ¹⁶ Now that I've put you there on a hilltop, on a light stand—shine! Keep open house; be generous with your lives. By opening up to others, you'll prompt people to open up with God, this generous Father in heaven.

¹⁷ "Don't suppose for a minute that I have come to demolish the Scriptures—either God's Law or the Prophets. I'm not here to demolish but to complete. I am going to put it all together, pull it all together in a vast panorama. ¹⁸ God's Law is more real and lasting than the stars in the sky and the ground at your feet. Long after stars burn out and earth wears out, God's Law will be alive and working.

¹⁹ "Trivialize even the smallest item in God's Law and you will only have trivialized yourself. But take it seriously, show the way for others, and you will find honor in the kingdom. ²⁰ Unless you do far better than the Pharisees in the matters of right living, you won't know the first thing about entering the kingdom.

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