

July 7

Lesson 6 (NIV)

FULFILLING THE LAW

DEVOTIONAL READING: Psalm 119:105–
112

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: Matthew
5:13–20

MATTHEW 5:13–20

¹³ “You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled underfoot.

¹⁴ “You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden.

¹⁵ Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. ¹⁶ In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.

¹⁷ “Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. ¹⁸ For truly I tell you, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear

from the Law until everything is accomplished. ¹⁹ Therefore anyone who sets aside one of the least of these commands and teaches others accordingly will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever practices and teaches these commands will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. ²⁰ For I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven.”



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KEY VERSE

Let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven. —**Matthew 5:16**

COVENANT IN GOD

Unit 2: A Heartfelt Covenant

LESSONS 5-9

LESSON AIMS

After participating in this lesson, each learner will be able to:

1. Identify the dos and don'ts of being a follower of Jesus.
2. Contrast the righteousness Jesus described with the righteousness of the teachers of the law and Pharisees.
3. Evaluate for improvement his or her "saltiness" and/or "luminosity" as a Christian.

LESSON OUTLINE

Introduction

- A. Deadly Darkness
- B. Lesson Context
- I. Who Disciples Are (MATTHEW 5:13-16)
 - A. Earthy Salt (v. 13)
 - B. Bright Light (vv. 14-16)
More to "Tel"
- II. Who Jesus Is (MATTHEW 5:17-20)
 - A. Fulfillment of the Law (vv. 17, 18)
The Heroic Outlaw
 - B. Teacher of Righteousness (vv. 19, 20)

Conclusion

- A. I'm Gonna Let It Shine
- B. Prayer
- C. Thought to Remember

HOW TO SAY IT

Beatitudes	Bee- <i>a</i> -tuh-toods (a as in <i>mat</i>).
Mosaic	Mo-zay-ik.
Pharisees	Fair-ih-seez.
Philippians	Fih- <i>lip</i> -ee-unz.

Introduction

A. Deadly Darkness

When I was growing up, my father, older brother, and I enjoyed a yearly hunting week in the back country of Idaho. We went in October when the snow had just begun to fall and the deer had descended from the high mountains. We didn't always bag this elusive game, but we had great times of bonding and excitement. We partnered with another family who had two sons the same age as my brother and me, so there were two fathers and four sons.

The year I was 12, the other father, his older son, and my older brother decided to try something new since we had not seen any deer in two days. They studied the forest service maps and thought there was a trail winding down an isolated creek near our camp. There was road access at the head of this stream and at a bridge about five miles below. The plan was for my father to dump the three out at dawn at the creek's head and let

them hunt down the isolated stream while we drove down to pick them up at the bridge in the early afternoon.

My team hunted near our camp that morning, then headed down to the bridge. We built a huge fire and began to cook a meal for the other team. We were sure that they would be cold and hungry when they arrived.

But they did not come. It began to get dark, and the below-freezing night was near. We drove as far up the creek as we could, but the other team was not found. Finally, we stopped and fired a series of three shots from a rifle, the hunter's universal signal. No response; the roar of the creek drowned out the sound of these shots. We worried. We doubted the three could survive the night. It hit me hard: my beloved brother and my friends might die if we couldn't find them!

Finally, my father decided to turn his Jeep around on the narrow road and go back to the bridge. He thought we might have missed them somehow. The vehicle turning was tricky, but we managed. We were just ready to drive away when we heard shots. We waited as the other three came bounding out of the trees. They had not heard our earlier shots, but they saw the headlights of the Jeep. What happened? The trail down the creek had failed them. As a result, they had waded through the icy water for several hun-

dred yards where the stream went through an area with sheer rock walls. They were soaked and nearly frozen. They would not have survived the night alone, but they saw the lights and were thereby saved.

B. Lesson Context

Matthew's record of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount extends the length of chapters 5-7 in his Gospel. The opening feature is the section known familiarly to many as the Beatitudes (last week's lesson). There Jesus spoke eight beatitudes in third person, seemingly as general statements of truth ([Matthew 5:3-9](#)). But in the two verses that follow, Jesus switched from third person to second person. This seemed to aim his thoughts there directly at his disciples. It is they who could expect to be insulted, persecuted, and generally bad-mouthed. But those eventualities were not to deter them from carrying out the role he had for them—the subject of today's lesson.

I. Who Disciples Are ([MATTHEW 5:13-16](#))

A. Earthy Salt (v. 13)

13. "You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and

trampled underfoot.

There are two popular ways of understanding what it means for Jesus' followers to be *the salt of the earth*. One focuses on the preservative quality of salt. Salt, if applied to fresh meat or fish, will keep it from rotting and allow such to be used as food months after the animal is butchered. Similarly, Jesus' disciples, the members of the kingdom of Heaven, preserve evil society by keeping a check on sin. The influence of the righteous may not always win the day, but it tamps down dangerous sin enough to allow communities to function in semi-lawful ways ([Romans 8:12, 13](#); [Titus 3:8](#)).

If this influence is lost (salt losing its *saltiness*), then this preservative function is also lost. If the people of God neither practice righteous behavior as examples nor stand against injustice in their communities, they become worthless. They must provide a contrast to *the earth*, those people who live according to the laws of the world ([1 Corinthians 15:48–50](#)). Should Christians fail to do so, they might as well be joined to the dirt and walked on without respect.

This interpretation finds parallels from the days of Noah, when the Lord found humanity to be so wicked that he decided to destroy the great majority of people with a flood ([Genesis 6:5–7, 10–13](#)). God recognized the righteous behavior of

Noah ([6:8](#)), but that man's influence was not enough to preserve society.

A second interpretation of *salt of the earth* relies on the property of salt to cause thirst. Earlier, Jesus spoke of those who "thirst for righteousness" ([Matthew 5:6](#)). A purpose of the disciples is to cause the general population to be "thirsty" for the righteousness that Jesus brings. The right relationship with the Lord will satisfy those with spiritual thirst ([Isaiah 55:1–3](#); [John 4:10–14](#)). If the witness of Jesus' disciples becomes tainted and compromised and no longer causes society to desire what Jesus offers, then the church's role as salt has failed. Its people are no different than the unsaved masses; they might as well join them as ordinary dirt.

Both interpretations have merit, and it is difficult to dismiss either of them. The first ("salt as preservative") has a long history and many advocates. The second ("salt as thirst-causer") fits the context in [Matthew 5](#) well and offers parallels to the next metaphor ([Matthew 5:14–16](#)). Considering parallel passages in [Mark 9:49, 50](#) and [Luke 14:34, 35](#) does not clarify which interpretation Matthew intends to be the primary reading.

What Do You Think?

Where will you place your saltiness emphasis: on being a preservative or being a thirst-causer? Why?

Digging Deeper

Which is better: to be really good at one of those two, or to strive for a balance? Why?

B. Bright Light (vv. 14–16)

14. “You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden.

Nighttime is very dark in Jesus’ time because artificial lights are relatively rare. Such light comes from something being burned: a candle, an oil lamp, a pitch-soaked torch, or a wood fire. Lighting in a home after sundown is expensive and mostly unnecessary. Galilee, where Jesus is speaking, is close enough to the equator that it averages about 12 hours of daylight year-round (see [John 11:9](#)). For both fiscal and solar reasons, people rise to work at sunrise and retire for the night at sundown. The typical home is lighted artificially as little as possible.

This situation means that there is rarely light pollution after sundown. Darkness after sunset ensures that even small lights can be seen at a considerable distance. Cities with many lamps and torches are easily visible for many miles. *A town built on a hill certainly cannot be hidden!* Like Jesus, his followers are to shine in the darkness, showing the way to life ([John 8:12](#)).

MORE TO “TEL”

When visiting Israel, a tourist may notice that many historic sites begin with the same three-letter word *tel*: Tel Aviv (compare [Ezekiel 3:15](#)), Tel Afek, Tel Kinrot, Tel Hazor, Tel Achziv, Tel Avdon, and many, many more. In a modern sense, the word *tel* is an archeological term. It refers to a man-made hill or mound under which are the ruins of a city or cities.

Each time the city was destroyed, the next city built on that site had a higher elevation. A city on a natural hill would be reinforced by raising the slopes of the hill. This cycle would repeat again and again. For this reason, a tel has several layers of accumulated construction. War and disaster would not cause a city on a hill to be wiped away. On the contrary, destruction of a city on a hill would only ensure that the next layer would be more visible!

The church of our Lord Jesus is truly a city on a hill in this ancient sense. Time after time, tyrants have attempted to extinguish her light. They only succeeded in putting that light on an even higher tel! How has your past elevated the reach of your light?

—J. E.

15. “Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house.

Jesus also appeals to his hearers' practical use of light in a household setting. Because of the expense of burning candles or lamps, most homes limit their use. It is foolish, then, to squander the resource of light by covering a *lamp* with a *bowl* (Mark 4:21; Luke 11:33). Instead, the wise homeowner places the lamp *on its stand* to maximize its usefulness for the entire room (8:16).

What Do You Think?

What are some ways to ensure the visibility of your light for Christ?

Digging Deeper

Which is better to focus on: making the light itself brighter, or clearing away the things that are blocking others from seeing our light?

16. “In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.

Jesus applies both of his lessons about lights (visibility in darkness, fiscal irresponsibility of limiting their shining) to his disciples in a spiritual way. The shining *light* represents *good deeds*, the righteous lives he expects of his followers (1 Corinthians 10:31; Philippians 1:11; Titus 2:14). As the saltiness of their witness points to the quenching of their spiritual thirst with God, so their blazing good works also point to God.

Their lighted lives cause those who see them to *glorify* the *Father* (Matthew 9:8). That the Father is *in heaven* emphasizes that his ways are above the ways of the world and cannot be achieved by earthly means. His ways are to be desired and followed (6:9–13).

What Do You Think?

What guardrails can we erect to ensure that we are not fooling ourselves regarding how much our lights are shining?

Digging Deeper

Under what circumstances would a Christian benefit from having a light-shining accountability partner? Why?

II. Who Jesus Is (MATTHEW 5:17–20)

A. Fulfillment of the Law (vv. 17, 18)

17. “Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them.

Jesus moves to speak of the relationship of his teachings to the lifestyle of good deeds that are practiced per *the Law* and *the Prophets*, the Jewish Scriptures. Jesus does not minimize the simple requirements of the law, but instead he takes the law's principles and emphasizes

them for his followers ([Matthew 5:21](#); [Romans 3:31](#)).

Jesus explains his relationship to the Law of Moses in two ways. First, he has no intention of abolishing *the Law or the Prophets* (compare [John 10:34](#): “Scripture cannot be set aside”). The word *abolish* used in the verse before us is not from the legal world, but from the builder’s world. It has the sense of “demolish.” Jesus is no wrecking ball for the Mosaic code that Israel has followed for hundreds of years.

If Jesus has no plans to knock down the law, then what is his relationship to it? Maybe he should be a law-strengthener, a law-builder, or the giver of a new and better law. Jesus does not go that direction, but says that he has come neither to establish nor build the law. Jesus’ second point is not the opposite of his first. Instead he has come *to fulfill* the law.

18. “For truly I tell you, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished.

Jesus reinforces that he is fulfilling the law, not destroying it, by emphasizing the lasting nature of the law ([Psalm 119:89](#); [Isaiah 40:8](#); [55:11](#)). It will continue until *heaven and earth disappear* at the end of time ([Matthew 24:35](#); [Mark 13:31](#); [Luke](#)

[21:33](#)).

The Law of Moses is not modified by Jesus. Not *the least stroke of a pen* is changed in the law ([Luke 16:17](#)). Jesus has no interest in modifying the law or getting into technical discussions with the teachers of the law as to its interpretation. Jesus is certainly aware of the influence of those teachers, with their reputation for accuracy in copying Scriptures. Yet even the most careful scribe can make a mistake by misplacing *the smallest letter*. In exaggerated language (hyperbole), Jesus emphasizes that the law will not change by his hand.

At first glance, one might think Jesus is treating the law like a prophecy that must be fulfilled. Fulfillment of prophecy is important in this Gospel (see [Matthew 1:23](#); [2:6](#), [15](#), [18](#), [23](#); etc.), but that does not seem to be what Jesus means here. A text with the specific wording is necessary to fulfill prophecy in this way. Jesus does not fulfill isolated pieces of the law but the entire law. Jesus and his ministry are that to which the law points. One author, Robert Banks, has pointed out that this is not about Jesus’ relationship to the law, but about the law’s relationship to Jesus.

God did not give the law intending that it would last forever. Ultimately it points to Christ, who makes perfect what the law could not perfect ([Romans 3:20–31](#); [Hebrews 7:16–19](#)). It has an end

time when it will *be fulfilled*. This fulfillment begins with Jesus himself, and we understand this to mean that we, as Christians, follow Jesus and not the law of the Old Testament.

THE HEROIC OUTLAW

Few literary characters are as well known as Robin Hood. He is portrayed as a supporter of the late twelfth-century King Richard the Lionheart. Richard's younger brother, John, mismanaged the kingdom while Richard was participating in the Crusades. John's excessive taxation led Robin Hood and his men to wage a shadow war against him by stealing taxes from collectors and returning them to the peasants.

Robin Hood of legend was an outlaw but stood for a higher law of compassion and justice. His purpose was not to be lawless. He desired to do what Richard, the true king, would have wanted.

A real person existed of whom Robin Hood is a mere shadow. Jesus was unfairly portrayed as a lawbreaker ([Matthew 11:19](#)). Yet he did not come to declare anarchy, but to fulfill the law of the true king of Heaven. How does Jesus' fulfillment of the law lead you to greater righteousness?

—J. E.

B. Teacher of Righteousness (vv. 19, 20)

19. “Therefore anyone who sets aside one of the least of these commands and teaches others accordingly will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever practices and teaches these commands will be called great in the kingdom of heaven.

Having declared the law's fulfillment in his person and ministry, Jesus now issues a dire warning for those who continue to follow the law. It is not for them to pick and choose what *commands* to keep, and they should not honor teachers who disregard the full impact of the law. The law must be taken as a whole, and those who break even a small commandment are guilty of breaching the entire law (see [James 2:10](#)). Jesus teaches that reward and recognition from God *in the kingdom of heaven* depend on this consistency. This kingdom is present in Jesus' ministry and is a contrast to the powers of the world that function on the basis of their own desires rather than following God's laws ([Ephesians 6:12](#)).

Since the law is fulfilled in Jesus and his teachings, this verse must point to him. He does not offer an immoral, amoral, or careless approach to living a God-pleasing life. The law reveals the moral obligations of God's people, and we must pay attention to its principles in light of our faith in Jesus. Later, Jesus teaches that the entirety of the Law of

Moses and the Prophets is summed up in two principles: love God and love people ([Matthew 22:36-40](#)). When we live this way, we honor the smallest aspect of the law, even as we realize that certain aspects of it applied only to Old Testament Israel (example: animal sacrifices).

What Do You Think?

What specific things can be done within the church to maintain integrity in teaching the Word of God?

Digging Deeper

Consider both proactive (preventative) and reactive (after the fact) methods.

20. “For I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven.”

Jesus’ final statement in this section is a shock to his original hearers. He advises them that they must have a *righteousness* that is superior to that of *the Pharisees and the teachers of the law*, or else they will not be participants in *the kingdom of heaven*. The hearers assume that righteousness is determined by adherence to the Law of Moses. The religious leaders are prime examples of men who keep the law.

This verse features the second of 19

occurrences of the phrase *the teachers of the law* in this Gospel (see [Matthew 2:4](#)). Older versions of the Bible refer to such individuals as “scribes.” These men are trained to write on a readable medium such as parchment. In the book of Matthew, they are more than copyists or stenographers. To be sure, they make copies of the law with great accuracy and care, but they also read the law and give interpretations as to its implications ([7:29](#); [17:10](#)). They specialize in studying the Law of Moses and serve as the law’s expert interpreters. They miss nothing that should be obeyed ([23:23-26](#)).

The Pharisees also figure prominently in this Gospel ([Matthew 3:7](#); [9:34](#); [12:14](#); [22:15](#); etc.). They are a group of Jewish men who attempt to keep the Law of Moses down to the tiniest detail. They are not paid for their efforts, but their law-keeping is done publicly and gains them great respect among fellow Jews ([23:2-7](#)).

Paul himself was a Pharisee, as was his father ([Acts 23:6](#); [Philippians 3:5](#)). He describes the Pharisees as “the strictest sect” of Judaism ([Acts 26:5](#)) and claims that in his life as a Pharisee he was without fault when it came to keeping the law. He was righteous within its limits ([Philippians 3:6](#)). Paul would not be alone among the Pharisees in this boast.

There is surely some overlap between these two groups (some teachers of the

law are Pharisees), and the synergy of their relationship is strong. The Pharisees need the teachers of the law to give them strict interpretations of the law so that they can follow it in every aspect. As scribes, the teachers of the law write the regulations, and the Pharisees enforce them in their own lives. This situation results in a legalistic understanding of righteousness and one's relationship with God.

Jesus proclaims a new type of relationship with God, one honoring the law but not based on keeping the law. This relationship is much bigger, much deeper, and results in a righteousness far superior to that of the greatest Pharisee who ever lived. Those who hunger and thirst for this ultimate righteousness will find it as Jesus' followers ([Matthew 5:6](#)). Their righteousness in God's eyes will be far superior than the self-made righteousness of the Pharisees, for it depends on faith rather than works ([Isaiah 26:2](#); [John 3:5](#)).

What Do You Think?

In what ways will your light-shining be the same as demonstrating righteousness? In what ways will it differ?

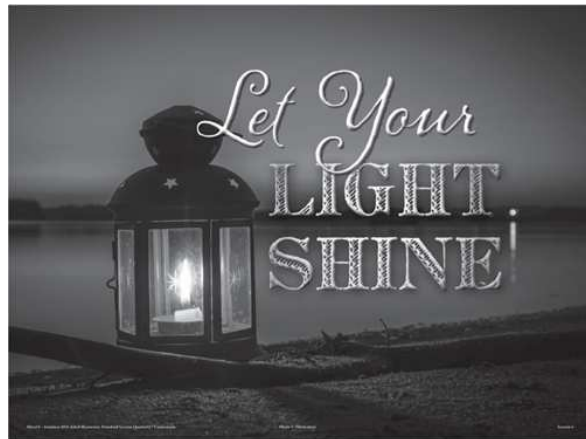
Digging Deeper

Think in terms both of what you will do and what you will not do.

Conclusion

A. I'm Gonna Let It Shine

Visiting the famous Jewel Cave in the Black Hills of South Dakota, one is taken into the bowels of the cavern using an elevator, walkways, and electric lights. At a very deep point, the guide will halt the group and turn off all the lights. The darkness is so profound that you can wave your hand an inch from your nose and not see it. After letting everyone's eyes adjust to the darkness, the guide will light a single match. The tiny flame seems like a blazing torch at first, breaking the darkness in a startling manner.



Visual for Lesson 6. Use this visual to introduce the discussion question associated either with [Matthew 5:15](#) or [5:20](#).

For many, life is like living in a very dark cave with no light. The darkness in the world refuses to acknowledge God as king or live in obedience to him. The only “righteousness” suggested by the dark-

ness is self-determined and self-made. How, then, in this world of darkness do we let our lights shine for Jesus?

It seems like an impossible task. The old spiritual says, “This little light of mine, I’m gonna let it shine.” The song puts forth no time limit, no expected results, and no real strategy. It just tells us to let our lights—our lives—shine for Jesus. What if no one seems to notice? “I’m gonna let it shine.” May our lives and our churches be the cities on hills that become beacons of hope in our dark and lost world.

B. Prayer

Lord God, we are stunned and transfixed by the brilliant light you offer through your Son, Jesus. Through your grace and your Spirit, may our lights blaze in this dark world and cause people to give all glory to you and you alone. We pray in the name of Jesus. Amen.

C. Thought to Remember

Live in a way that draws others to Jesus.

INVOLVEMENT LEARNING

Enhance your lesson with [NIV Bible Student](#)

Into the Lesson

Before class, find examples of each type of ad below. Begin class by writing the following advertising strategies on the board:

Pathos—an attempt to make the customer feel something, an emotional appeal.

Logos—an attempt to convince the customer that buying the product makes sense, a logical appeal.

Ethos—an attempt to convince the customer that the company is trustworthy, an ethical appeal.

As you display the ads, ask the class to identify the techniques used. For example, a *pathos* ad might show happy people using the product. *Logos* appeals might show statistics to demonstrate the value of a product. *Ethos* ads might feature celebrity endorsements or customers being told that more people trust this product than another brand.

Discuss whether the advertising is factually true or whether the claims made can be proven. Do people really believe these ads? If not, why do they

seem to have an effect?

Alternative. Distribute copies of the “Big Claims, Outrageous Promises” activity from the reproducible page, which you can download. Have students work in groups to unscramble brand names associated with advertising slogans.

After either activity say, “Some ads fairly represent their products. Yet many ads use words to manipulate emotions, create false images, and imply impossible promises. Jesus demanded that those who follow him be real. He taught his disciples how to live as authentic children of God.”

Into the Word

Divide students into two groups. Give each group a poster, markers, and one of these assignments (you prepare): *World-Changer Group*—Create an ad for a “world-changing believer,” based on [Matthew 5:13–16](#). Include a drawing and characteristics of such a person based on the descriptions in the lesson text. *Different Church Group*—Create an ad for a “different kind of church,” based on [Matthew 5:17–20](#). Include a drawing and characteristics of such a church, drawn from the descriptions in the lesson text.

Encourage them to paraphrase characteristics from the text rather than simply repeating the words there. For example, the *World-Changer Group* might

describe a believer with phrases such as “creator of spiritual thirst,” “reflection of the Father,” “a beacon of hope in a dark world,” etc. The *Different Church Group* might describe the church as “what you have been looking for,” “doing what you know is right,” “passing values to the next generation,” “humble service,” “more action and less talk,” etc.

After the ads are done, have the groups share and explain their posters. Point out any missed characteristics by referring to the commentary.

Alternative. Turn this art project into a brainstorming/discussion activity. Read sections of the text as divided above and have the group look for the characteristics of a believer and of a church found there.

Lead into the final segment of the lesson by saying, “In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus taught what an authentic follower of his would look like. Let’s look within to see what we need to do to more closely follow Jesus’ teaching.”

Into Life

To end class, hand a salt packet and a small candle to each class member. As they hold these objects, have them reflect on their own behavior: “Do I truly ‘salt’ my world, preserving goodness and making people thirst for God? Am I a visible light for God wherever I go?”

Alternative. Distribute copies of the “Pass the Salt, Turn on the Light” activity from the reproducible page. Have students evaluate their “saltiness” or “luminosity” with the metaphors found there.