

Seek the Good of Our Neighbourhood

Matthew 5:16

You're listening to a sermon from Darabin Presbyterian Church. Visit us online for more resources or to get in touch. So yes, the Bible reading is Matthew chapter 5, starting in verse 1. And it'll be up here on the screen behind me.

I think you can find a link in the welcome card, or hopefully you've got a Bible in front of you and you can open it up. So Matthew chapter 5. Now when Jesus saw the crowds, he went up on a mountainside and sat down. His disciples came to him and he began to teach them.

He said, Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted. Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled. Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy. Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.

Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God. Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me.

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

You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden. 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. In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven. Hello again.

It'd be great if you could have your Bibles open at Matthew 5. There is a sermon outline if you'd like to scan the QR code. That should take you to the welcome card. We have just recently updated our QR code, so hopefully that one's working okay.

Yeah, good. We got a thumbs up from the tech team. It's all good.

You might also find it helpful. I mean, I enjoyed putting this together. You might enjoy it.

I don't know, but I enjoyed making it. A little handout that summarizes kind of everything we've done for five weeks. So our mission statement, our four core values, and the key verses that we've kind of looked at associated with each one, and like a list of the resources that I've recommended.

So I've printed out some copies of those down the corner there. You can grab one of those on the way out if you'd find that helpful to keep thinking about this mission and these values. Great.

Let's pray as we come to think about God's Word. Father God, we thank you that we can gather here today and sit at the feet of the Lord Jesus to hear his teachings, to learn from him as we continue to draw closer to him and learn what it means to be his followers. Thank you for this sermon series and be with us now as we think about what it means to seek the good of our neighborhood.

Amen. Let's start today with a quote. You may have heard it before.

Preach the gospel at all times and if necessary, use words. This saying is attributed to Saint Francis of Assisi, who lived around 800 years ago. And he was famous for living a life of poverty and establishing the Franciscan religious order.

He's known for his generosity, his service of the poor. And this quote seems to align with that. And it even seems to fit nicely with our key verse today.

Matthew 5 verse 16. In the same way, let your light shine before others so that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven. And perhaps this quote challenges those who might think that our deeds have nothing to do with sharing the gospel.

You know, those kind of aggressive type Christians who beat people over the head with the message of Jesus and don't care how they do it because the ends justify the means. Or those hypocritical Christians who tell others to repent and live good lives, yet they fail to do so themselves. It prompts us to see the importance of deeds in how we relate to the world.

But it may surprise you to learn that there's actually zero evidence that Saint Francis ever said these words. In fact, one of his biographers said that he was known to be a passionate preacher. He would travel from village to village preaching the gospel, teaching the Bible.

But there's an even bigger problem with this quote. I don't know if you've noticed it, but it seems to suggest that words are an optional extra when it comes to evangelism. It suggests that mission is primarily about doing good deeds in the community.

Yet evangelism by definition is sharing the good news about Jesus. How can deeds on their own communicate a message? So why then is this quote so popular? Well, perhaps because it does correct those who think that deeds are completely irrelevant, you know, that they're unimportant. But perhaps it's also because deeds are less likely to offend than words are.

Perhaps this quote might help some people to feel like they can just keep their heads down, their mouths shut, and feel like they're doing a good job just by being nice. But that's not how it's meant to be. You know, as we come to think about our fourth and final core value, this is, it's so important that we straighten this out in our minds.

Today we're thinking about, seek the good of our neighborhood, and we need to be clear on what that looks like. Is it about words? Is it about deeds? Or is it about both? So to help with this, I want to unpack Matthew 5, verses 13 to 16, and present some ideas on how it is that

words and deeds actually fit together in our mission as Christians, and in our mission as a church. So here's my big idea.

I'm just going to put it up there, right at the start, so you know where we're going. Christians shine Christ's light in gospel-shaped deeds, backed by gospel-shaped words, so that the world might see and glorify our Father. Let me say it again.

Christians shine Christ's light in gospel-shaped deeds, backed by gospel-shaped words, so that the world might see and glorify our Father. I know it's a bit long, maybe a bit clunky, but hey, we'll unpack it. And really, this is what Jesus is getting at in Matthew 5. And so today we need to consider the source of our good deeds, and we need to consider the purpose of our good deeds.

Let's start with the source, which is our first main point. Deeds of light made possible by Jesus. In Matthew 5, Jesus kicks off perhaps his most famous speech, the Sermon on the Mount.

And for three chapters in our Bible, he presents his vision for what it looks like to live in the kingdom of God. He starts in verse 3. Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. And he goes on.

Blessed are the mourners, the meek, the merciful, the peacemakers. He's describing the heart posture that kingdom people are to have. And then in verses 13 to 16, he builds on this with some metaphors to indicate what it looks like to give expression to these heart postures.

He describes kingdom living that is light and salty. That's right, light and salty. I know that sounds like a pack of chips, or a bowl of popcorn, or maybe like a teeny tiny sailor.

But it really is describing Christians. Jesus says that we are salt, we are light. These metaphors reveal how it is that we make an impact on the world.

We just have a look at verse 13 to begin with. 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.

So even back in the times of Jesus, salt was an important commodity. It was certainly used to improve flavor. And so in one sense, Christians should be living lives that bring flavor to the Christian message.

But salt was also used as a preservative. In the days before refrigeration, meat was preserved by adding salt. This would prevent it from decaying.

So Christians should be living lives that fight against decay. Perhaps that's moral decay in society. We can preserve social cohesion, uphold the cause of the oppressed, support things that we think are good care for those in need.

It could also be spiritual decay. Help people to see that there's actually a better way to live, that there's a way to be safe from God's judgment, to connect with him. So salt is about being distinctive, but also having a beneficial impact on those around us.

There's also a really fascinating link to the temple practices of the Jewish people. Listen to Leviticus chapter 2, which gives instructions on how they were to prepare grain for offering in the fire at the altar. This is verse 13, I read it out.

Season all your grain offerings with salt. Do not leave the salt of the covenant of your God out of your grain offerings. Add salt to all your offerings.

Salt is linked to a covenantal relationship with God. Perhaps this is because salt doesn't actually burn up in a fire, it remains, and that could symbolize the unbreakable nature of God's promises of his covenant with his people. In any case, salt is not just about being distinctive or preservative, but also somehow symbolizes God's faithfulness.

We'll come back to this idea later on. The other metaphor, which is the one we're really going to focus on today, is that Christians are the light of the world. Have a look at verses 14 and 15.

You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden. 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. So, light helps people to see. We know that, don't we? It's how light works.

It can help people to navigate. It can bring protection. It reveals the truth.

Christians are to live lives like a city on a hill. That means we're not to be hidden away. We're meant to be seen, we're meant to be noticed.

Also, in the ancient world, a city on a hill at night time would have been visible to all. Remember, they didn't have streetlights throughout the countryside. Its light would have shone out from its lofty perch.

I remember as a kid that when we used to travel from the country down to Melbourne at night time, as we kind of came out through the hills, we'd see the bright lights of Melbourne. And so, in my mind, as a kid, lights and the city were associated. Well, in a similar way, lights and Christians should be associated.

Now, Jesus expands on the metaphor by saying that we should be like a lamp. The thing about the purpose of a lamp is to bring light. Like, that's literally its job.

You don't light up a lamp and put it under a bowl. You put it on a stand and then it can benefit everybody. So, just picture a first century Jewish home, probably just one room that everyone lived in and got the lamp on the stand, and it gives light to everyone so they can do their jobs, get about with what they need to do, but also they can see each other.

They can relate to one another. These metaphors are pretty straightforward. We're supposed to live light and salty lives that benefit others.

And do you notice that we are the salt of the earth? Now, I don't think that means that we are the salt that comes from the earth, like the earth produces us. Rather, we are to be salt to the earth. We are salt from God that is given to the earth to do the work of preservation.

It's the same with the light. We are a light to the world. We're not the light that comes from the world.

We're the light to the world. And so, that actually assumes something about the world, doesn't it? That the world is dark and the world is decaying. And so, we need light and salt.

That's a massive task, isn't it? I mean, how can we do that? Well, we need to consider the source. The deeds that we are called to do, they are only possible in union with Jesus, who brings the light of salvation. In John chapter 8, verse 12, Jesus says this, you might know these words, I am the light of the world.

Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life. Jesus is a light to the world. And he shines into this fallen world that's shrouded by darkness.

He reveals moral truth, the nature of godly living. He reveals how to escape sin and death and how to step into the light and come to know God. This is about salvation.

In fact, it's about salvation through God's covenant. Remember I mentioned earlier, there's a link between salt and covenant. Well, there's also a link between light and covenant.

For example, the prophet Isaiah lived 700 years before Jesus. He was given prophecies about a suffering servant who would come to restore Israel. His prophecies were about Jesus.

Let me read out just one section, Isaiah 42, verses 6 and 7. I, the Lord, have called you in righteousness. I will take hold of your hand. I will keep you and will make you to be a covenant for the people.

And a light for the Gentiles. To open eyes that are blind, to free captives from prison, and to release from the dungeon those who sit in darkness. I also recommend you check out Isaiah 49.

It's in the outline as well. Here are two key points. The first is that light is related to salvation and true life.

And the second is that as the promised suffering servant, Jesus is a covenant for the people. In other words, Jesus is the embodiment of God's covenantal promises. He is the life-giving light of the world that secures salvation and brings people into relationship with their Heavenly Father.

So it links back to Leviticus 2, doesn't it? The salt of the covenant. To Jesus' first listeners, they would have actually associated light and salt with covenantal ideas. So then for us to be salt and light, we first need to be members of the covenant, which is another way of saying we need to be united to Jesus by faith.

Because you know, in our natural state, we're all fallen sinners. We're subject to death and decay. No matter how clever or insightful or moral we might think we are, we're ultimately clouded by darkness.

We don't see as clearly as we think we do. We don't know how to live well in the world that God has made. This is true of all of us.

And so Jesus came into the world to bring the light, to reveal the true life that is possible. But He also came to reveal the sin and decay within our hearts, which prevents us from living well. Jesus lived the perfect life, not just as a model, but so He could be our substitute.

As He died on the cross, He was enveloped by darkness. The light of the world was snuffed out. He did this for us.

But then three days later on that first Easter morning, a dawn unto everlasting life took place. The light of the world was rekindled. Jesus rose again.

And so today, anyone, anyone who trusts that Jesus has lived for them and died for them and risen for them can receive the light of Jesus and be renewed. That includes forgiveness, forgiveness of everything we've ever done. But also means that the darkness, the cloud is lifted from our minds, from our hearts.

So that we can live God's way, we can actually begin to please our Heavenly Father. We can walk in the light of life. Now, if that sounds good to you, if that sounds like, hey, that might be a good idea, I'd like to give that a go.

Well, then I invite you to take the offer. You could do it today. You can just repent and believe, which is a way of saying, turn away from the way you've been living.

Put your trust in Jesus and live for Him, follow Him. And you'll know the transforming power of His light. And you'll come to know true life.

Now, if you do know Jesus, then celebrate the truth that you can now shine forth as a light to the world, because you are connected to Jesus by faith, who is the ultimate light of the world. In fact, it's in union with Him, it's being connected to Jesus by faith, that all of our core values here at DPC are possible. So we're going to review them along with our key verses.

Number one, we pursue delight in God. This only occurs if we're connected to Jesus by faith, like a branch that's connected to a vine. And then we get the goodness of John 15, verse 11.

Jesus says, I've told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete. Number two, we embrace loving community. When united to Christ, we receive the love and acceptance that we need so that we can be secure in ourselves, in God's love, and secure to embrace others.

That's how we can live out... Sorry, there you go. That's how we can live out Romans 12, verse 10. Be devoted to one another in love, honour one another above yourselves.

Number three, we grow in Christ together. When we're connected to Jesus, we can grow spiritually together into Him. This is summed up in Ephesians 4, verse 16.

From Him, the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love as each part does its work. Sorry, I'm jumping ahead. And now we have our fourth value.

We seek the good of our neighbourhood. Again, this only occurs if we are united to Jesus by faith, since He's the true light. If we do it in our own power, for our own glory, then we actually fail to be the light of the world.

And so that's the source of our good deeds. Let's now think about the purpose of our good deeds. These are deeds of light that spotlight the Father.

It's made super clear in Jesus' words in verse 16 of Matthew 5, have a look. In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven. Just as a city on a hill or a lamp on a stand is meant to be visible, so too, our deeds should be visible.

But not so that we get the glory, it's so that God gets the glory. And so that requires two things. First, our actions need to be in line with who God is.

And second, our actions need to be backed up by words, so that people know who to give glory to. Let's begin with this idea, actions that reveal a loving Father in heaven, worthy of glory. If the goal is that people see something of God in our deeds, then they should be deeds that are in line with the character of God.

That makes sense. So here are some core qualities of God. Luke 6 verse 36, be merciful just as your Father is merciful.

Ephesians 5, 1 to 2, follow God's example, therefore, as dearly loved children and walk in the way of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God. Colossians 3 verse 13, bear with one another and forgive one another. If any of you has a grievance against someone, forgive as the Lord forgave you.

God shows mercy, love, forgiveness. And so our good deeds should be shaped by these qualities too. And this is why Christians have done such good throughout history.

Did you know that modern day universities are a Christian idea? And that universal education is backed by Christians. We believe that there's a rational God and he invites people to be lifelong learners. Education is important.

Did you know that hospitals are a Christian idea? All people are precious. You know, sickness is not a sign that God has cursed them, he should just leave them to die. Rather, we should care for people who are unwell.

We should value everybody. Our good deeds can reflect the heart of God for the oppressed and for the needy. We can seek justice.

So things we can do, we might decide to protest, to write to politicians, to resist those who are unjust, but we do need to get the balance right. You see, we're not here to establish a moral society by force, are we? We're not here to have the church punish the wicked. Our first priority is to show love and mercy and then we leave judgment to God.

This will reveal that there is a loving Father in heaven who calls people to himself. Yet, despite our best efforts, people will at times resist us. They will call our loving deeds unloving because they just have a different moral framework to us.

They will demand that our mercy goes further so that we condone things that God actually calls wrong. This is challenging because what defines good deeds is not that other people think they are good, but that God thinks they are good. We're not here to make people happy as such and just be nice.

We are here to shine forth the light of Christ, which will ultimately make people happy if they come to him. And so, when we are opposed, we need to keep revealing the merciful character of God. In fact, we can remember what Jesus says in Matthew 5 verses 11 and 12, just before our key verses.

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

Yet even this is part of our witnessing to Christ. Because one day the world will see that we were indeed a light. Just listen to 1 Peter chapter 2 verse 12.

Live such good lives among the pagans that though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us. On the last day, in the end, they will see. So, we can be like salt in the world where the church remains.

We remain to show people that God is faithful to his promises. We won't be burnt up. The church will persevere to the end and God will be praised.

But for people to truly glorify God, our actions need to not only be in line with who God is, they also need to be backed up by words so they know who to give glory to. Here's our next idea. Gospel-shaped deeds backed by gospel-shaped words.

And I think this is where we start to see the problem with the quote that we began with. Preach the gospel at all times and, if necessary, use words. You cannot preach the gospel without words.

If we leave it to mere actions, then people may very well get the wrong idea, right? Let's say an unbeliever sees someone they know to be a Christian and they're stopping to give some money to a homeless person, sit and have a conversation with them. Now, the Christian might do that because they believe this homeless person bears the image of God, is worthy of care and dignity, and, hey, God's been undeservedly kind to them in Christ, so they ought to be kind to this person. That may be all their motivations for these good deeds.

But without any words, without any context, the unbeliever might think that being a Christian is about charity and doing hard things. And so they might think the way to be

saved is through doing good works. Or imagine someone at work is falling behind on their case files and a Christian colleague offers to stay behind to help them finish.

Because the Christian's thinking, hey, I know that I often fall behind, I stuff up, I need help, and God has been so merciful to me. I want to be merciful to this co-worker. Possibly without any words, without any context, the unbeliever might give glory to the Christian.

They might say, you're such a good person, thank you. So not only must our deeds be gospel-shaped so they reflect the Father, they must be gospel-shaped words in there somewhere too so that people know who to give glory to. Now, there's actually no simple formula for this.

And we don't want to come across as like rigid or awkward, kind of like I now have to download a little Christian message, a disclaimer every time I do something. But there can be simple ways that we can slip God into the conversation. Point the glory to Him, not us.

A year or so after I became a Christian, some of my uni classmates said to me, hey Adam, you don't swear, do you? What a great opportunity to explain how God had helped me to change, to grow, to overcome my vulgar teenage language. But instead I said something like, I have a big enough vocabulary that I don't need to swear. Wow, all glory be to me, Lord Thesaurus.

What could I have said? Well, perhaps, yeah, I used to swear a lot, but God has been really kind to me, He's done some work in my heart. So I have better words to use. I want to honour Him and I want to honour other people.

Do you see that we don't need to provide a four-step gospel presentation? We don't need a big sign on our back that says, good deeds delivered in the name of God. But we can bring God into our conversations, perhaps like just seasoning a bit of salt. In fact, that's what Paul gets at in Colossians 4 verses 5 and 6. Be wise in the way you act toward outsiders.

Make the most of every opportunity. Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone. So we can admit that we are flawed, but forgiven.

We can admit that we have a higher purpose in life. We can admit that, hey, I'm actually not that good. No one's good but God.

We can admit that we have a higher purpose in life.

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