

Let Your Light Shine

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[0 : 0 0] the reading this morning is from Matthew chapter 5 reading from verses 13 to 20 Matthew chapter 5 verses 13 to 20 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 put a light 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 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 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 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 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 this is the word of the lord well good morning St Silas my name is Martin Ayres I'm the senior pastor here thanks Katrina for reading if you could keep your bibles open at Matthew chapter 5 that would be a great help to me as we look at this if you're here as a guest our regular diet if you like as a church family

Sunday by Sunday is to work through books of the bible bit by bit and one of the reasons we do that is so that God sets the agenda and it's not just whatever comes into my mind in the week that we look at but it's it's letting God set the agenda in his word and so that we connect the kind of truths about God in the bible with the commands and implications of that as they're written in the bible we don't just sort of cherry pick the bits that we like so we we're in a series looking at this section of Matthew's gospel Matthew's account of Jesus life and at this point he's teaching what's sometimes called the sermon on the mount this long stretch of his teaching so let's turn to God now and ask for his help as we turn to his word that he would be with us and help us to hear him rightly let's pray we praise you heavenly father that your word is a lamp to our feet and a light for our path would you help us to pay close attention to your words and trust them to light the way of our lives for we ask in Jesus name amen there's a novel by Nick Hornby called how to be good and it's a story about a woman who in some ways is very good in the world's eyes if she was living in the west end of Glasgow we would think of her as a good person perhaps Katie is a doctor tick she's a wife a mum she's got left-wing political leanings she ticks a lot of boxes about being good and in her marriage she is the good one in fact there are problems at home because her husband Dave is sarcastic and selfish and he even writes a kind of grumpy column in the local rag he's kind of known for grumbling about everything he has it he goes out for a bad meal he writes about how terrible the restaurant is and that sort of thing but then because she feels she's the good one Katie is fed up in her marriage and she has an affair and she says that she wants a divorce then Dave starts meeting a spiritual guru called good news and he decides that his whole life has been changed by good news and his goodness catches Katie completely off guard suddenly he starts inviting homeless people to stay in their house one Sunday he gives away their Sunday lunch he even gives away their son's computer to someone who he thinks might need it more and it turns

Katie's world upside down now what's winding her up is that her husband is too good for her she was meant to be the good one in the marriage frustrated by his selfishness now she has the good Dave that she was complaining she wanted and it's making her the bad person she feels guilty Nick Hornby was writing about the problems today we're thinking well what does it really mean to be good in our real world today how good is good enough where does it stop I heard a guy on the radio this morning on the way in challenging us saying we we his view we all need to be willing to take in

refugees into our homes from the Calais jungle where they're where children are can you still be good if you don't do that are you good if you still drive a diesel car are you good if you have an SUV there are challenges aren't there what does it mean to be good perhaps more importantly today as we look at God's word today this portion why on earth would we want to be good if it's going to be costly like that is it not better is not win-win optimal position to be thought of as good by other people but actually still to be able to be quite selfish isn't that what we want well what does God say when Jesus talks about being good he uses this language of righteousness of being righteous to be righteous is to be approved of by

God to be good in God's eyes God is pure goodness and righteousness is doing what he approves of now we're picking up Matthew's gospel as I said after Jesus has begun his teaching ministry and his healing ministry crowds of flock to him and he's called people to turn back to God and be part of his new kingdom the kingdom of heaven and in chapter 5 verse 1 he goes up onto a mountainside he sits down to teach his disciples so these chapters are his manifesto for the citizens of his kingdom given what who he is how then should we live and the first thing we see is that the the righteousness of his kingdom people our goodness if we follow him is the hope for the world in fact it's Jesus great strategy to save the world is about the good behavior of his people so our first point a righteousness that lights up the world you can follow our points inside the notice sheet if you found that helpful first point a righteousness that lights up the world Jesus gives us three pictures of us as his people who we are and what he calls us to be salt light and a city let's pick them up again in verse 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 now the key thing there is that salt is distinctive it tastes distinctive and it was used as a preservative to preserve things it stops things getting rotten and you could think a bit like Christians out in the world in those kind of ways deliciously distinctive and keeping the world morally holding back a kind of rottenness in the world but the key thing is that Jesus is saying that our behavior should be distinctive and beneficial the finest fish and chips I've had in Scotland are from that the chippy in Troon if you've been there the wee hurry if you haven't been and you go to Troon just look for the long line of people through the town waiting and they're worth waiting for but just imagine ordering your finest fish and chips you get your chips they finally arrive and you grab a salt shaker and you put salt all over them and vinegar on them and you're anticipating that first chip you know that feeling and you put it in your mouth and you realize that what you've put all over them wasn't salt it was dust there was just dust in the salt shaker it would be immensely disappointing Jesus gives us that ludicrous picture there doesn't he of having salt that's not salty anymore it's kind of got mixed up with other stuff how useless it would be so in the same way he says be distinctive among the people around you don't just blend in and lose your saltiness for me that fits with his next picture the lamp again it's a ludicrous idea this is remember before street lights when when it got dark it was completely dark and your oil lamp might have been all you had it would have been a shallow bowl with oil in and a wick in the middle and you lit it and you put it on a stand to light up the home and Jesus says just imagine having your lamp your only lamp lighting it and then putting it on the floor and putting a basket on top it's a ludicrous picture in instead end of verse 15 you need the only light in the house to give light to everyone in the house so in both pictures Jesus is saying this is who you really are if you follow me you already are the salt of the earth the light of the world so be who you are when we live differently for him it's good for the world I wonder if the salt and light here reveal to us from Jesus

the two obvious dangers the traps we fall into as we seek to obey that those commands and the salt idea is that that sometimes we we go out into the world we spend lots of time with not yet believing friends classmates colleagues but actually we we're not distinctive we just blend in we lose our saltiness or the alternative that we hide away we we have a church community that is distinctive and loving and caring but actually nobody ever sees us because we spend all our time with each other and so Jesus calls us to something different to be out in the world deliciously distinctive from the world and the overriding goal of that is not actually to make the world a better place it's verse 16 verse 16 let your light shine before others that they may see your good deeds and glorify your father in heaven that they would see his people living differently and be attracted to him most fitting for that picture is verse 14 the picture of a city on a hill again we're thinking about a time before streetlights where on a cloudy night if you were camping in the middle east on a cloudy night and you wouldn't be able to see your right hand if it was right in front of your face in remote places like that a town built on a hill with torches around the city walls and lights in the homes through the

windows you would have been able to see a town like that on on provided it was it was it was on a hill um over a hundred miles away it's extraordinary how far away you could see that what the one lit up settlement for Jesus first hearers I wonder if they'd be thinking about Jerusalem itself because it was about four or five days walk from where they were hearing Jesus that day and they would travel to Jerusalem which was on a hill um for festivals at certain times of the year and I guess they would have been able to see it at least a day or two away from reaching it at night they would have seen the city on the hill and when you're in a remote place the city on a hill is the place you want to be it's the place of safety security warmth friendship and Jesus says in the same way his people are to be the city on a hill that draws in the hill that draws in the world as we live differently for him we attract the world to him now that's not the way that the pharisees the religious leaders thought about being good they thought that to be good required separation from the world

[13:23] Jesus strategy for his people to be righteous is get in amongst the world but be different to the people around you we're a sent people all of us not just our mission partners we are a sent people we go out from here sent back into the world to live lives that are deliciously distinctive I don't know what you think about that I think this is profoundly different to the way we often think about it if you're anything like me we tend to have an evangelistic strategy an outreach strategy that goes something like this people are not going to be interested in what I believe about Jesus if they think that I am weird so the best thing I can do for my non-christian friends is look as much like them as I can so they think hey Martin is really normal but then there's this weird thing the one weird thing is he says he's a Christian tell me about that I'd love to hear more about that Jesus evangelistic strategy is the world is in darkness you are the light shine your light in the world it's quite a thought isn't it that maybe if we weren't so scared to look a bit weird for Jesus our friends might actually be more attracted to him to be clear he doesn't mean weird in an unnecessary way just odd out of touch disengaged with the culture that kind of way you know wearing clothes that a non-christian would never wear telling jokes that nobody else would understand he doesn't mean that he means weird in a righteous way a way that God approves of involved in the lives of our friends loving them colleagues classmates engaged with them but living differently from them that's his hope for the world that for us as his followers are ascent people that light up the world and it draws people to him and I think we need to have confidence that when we are different for Jesus people are thinking about that that the people around you who know you are a Christian they are watching you they do think about the ways you do things differently it does have an impact living for him so what does that look like well we're going to see the specifics in the coming weeks we're going to see principles that guide our lives but before we get into the specifics Jesus tells us our second point this morning it's a righteousness that surpasses religion a righteousness that surpasses religion and we're just going to jump here to verse 20 because I think there's a very daunting unless in verse 20 I don't know if you noticed it have a look verse 20 Jesus says for I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law you you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven and today one of the barriers to us feeling the challenge of that is that when we hear Pharisee if you've been around church a bit you think scoundrel in our children's Bible you can always spot the Pharisees they're the ones with a bit of a sneer usually they look like they're muttering to each other at the time the Pharisees were the devout religious leaders in a deeply religious society calling on people to to be different for God as they wait for the Messiah to come they were too good to mix with the wrong people they were ultra conscientious about keeping the rules and Jesus says in verse 20 unless you're better at being good than one of those guys you can't be one of his guys you see that unless you're better at being good than those guys you can't you're not one of his guys and he's not talking here I don't

think about the gift of righteousness from God that covers our lives to save us he's talking to his followers about the goodness he's calling for inside us and in our lives the evidence that we belong to him that we trust him now we might find that challenge very difficult if you've been burnt before by the call to be righteous in church life maybe you've encountered a culture in church that's been very moralistic and you've you've not been impressed with it a kind of judgmental Christianity sometimes I've spoken to people who've given up on going to church and not just this church other churches as well and what you find sometimes when you hear people's story about that is that they were disappointed by by the behavior of the people in church they encountered the kind of self-righteousness a judgmentalism a pride and they didn't encounter authentic love so unpacking what Jesus means here by a righteousness that surpasses that of the Pharisees is very profitable

for us this morning folks when Jesus gives his how to be good manifesto who is he urging us to be different from in Matthew 5 to 7 I don't think I'd really grasp this until this week basically working on this sermon that in chapter 7 which I've read many times before in my Bible Jesus sets out a contrast between two ways to live there's a wide highway and it leads to destruction there's a narrow way that leads to life then he says there are two trees there are tree there's a tree that bears bad fruit and there's a tree that bears good fruit and then he says there are two houses there's a house that's built on rock and there's a house that's built on sand in chapter 7 instinctively I think we read those chapters or we hear that those stories and we think oh yeah I get it he's setting up a contrast between the religious and the non-religious we think oh yeah I know this two ways to live you've got the people in church on a Sunday and you've got the people in Tesco on a Sunday you've got the people in here and the world out there the people happy to identify as believing in God and the people who reject God but then you get into the sermon and I'm asking wouldn't it make much more sense if when Jesus sets out the two ways in chapter 7 he's describing two ways that have been the theme in his sermon so far and in chapters 5 and 6 the contrast is not between followers of Jesus and the irreligious it's between followers of Jesus and the religious in chapter 6 the people he calls us not to be like they are people who give their money to the poor they're people who fast they're people who pray in chapter 7 when you look at the two kinds of people being contrasted they both say Lord Lord they're both trees producing some kind of fruit Jesus is describing a kind of religious person to his followers and he holds them up in his sermon and he says don't be like them he warns us not to be like them last week as Jesus taught us about being blessed the blessed life he talked about how it will end in persecution he said blessed are you when people insult you persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me and I wonder did the disciples realize at this point that the opposition and persecution that would murder Jesus and hound his followers it wouldn't come first from the Romans it was going to come from the religious leaders it wasn't going to come from Herod it was going to come from the high priest it's a shock as it comes out in Jesus ministry by the time you get to chapter 9 and the Pharisees are saying this is demonic the power of this man the Pharisees had taken the Old Testament rules the Bible and they turned them into 613 rules carefully crafted over 300 things that you that you weren't to do over 200 things that you had to do and Jesus says to his followers unless your righteousness surpasses their righteousness you you're not part of my kingdom unless you're better at being good than those guys you're not one of his guys you're not going to shine as light in the world drawing others to know him so what does he mean by that that our righteousness has to surpass their righteousness we see that as we move back up the Bible reading so our third point about his righteousness is it's a righteousness that fulfills the scriptures so as Jesus faces hostility from religious leaders we might wonder is it is it because he's not under the Bible is he saying the Bible doesn't matter and they're reacting to that well no have a look at verse 18 he says 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 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 now when Jesus talks there about the law his first heroes would have known he means the Old Testament commands especially the first five books of the Bible so what is the relationship between Jesus commands and the law of God the Old Testament it's not one of abolition those things don't matter it's one of fulfillment the law is rooted in the moral character of God it told those people at that time how what it really meant to love God and love their neighbors at that time and Jesus upholds for us and for his new followers in the kingdom of heaven he upholds God's moral law he expounds for us what the spirit is of that law so as we get into the detail in the coming weeks in chapter five six times he starts a section with a phrase like the one in verse 21 you have heard that it was said and then verse 22 but I tell you if you look again at verse 31 he says it has been said and then in verse 32 but I tell you then verse 33 again you've heard that it was said to the people long ago and then verse 34 but I tell you what's he doing he's confronting the traditions of religion around him and he's showing people the true meaning the deeper meaning of the commands it's deeper because he internalizes the law of God so he takes the command do not murder and where people might think well I haven't killed anyone tick he internalizes it to say if you get angry with a brother or sister you have murdered them in your heart he takes the command not to commit adultery and he internalizes it and says you have broken that command with a lustful look you break it in your heart

compared with the Pharisees it's a deeper righteousness he's looking for it's the righteousness of the people he described last week his people who hunger and thirst for righteousness who are pure in heart because the Holy Spirit has changed their hearts now how can we have anything approaching this kind of righteousness he's describing well I think the key is discovering what Jesus means as he says in verse 17 if you just have a look at verse 17 he says do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets

[25 : 49] I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them what does he mean well certainly he has in view what he's about to teach his commands will fulfill all that the law was pointing to but he also mentions there the prophets as well as the law how will Jesus fulfill the prophets and the law well that's what Matthew's gospel is all about as we picture Jesus going into Jerusalem on a donkey and Matthew says this was to fulfill what was written through the prophet Zechariah see your king comes to you gentle and riding on a donkey on a colt the fall of a donkey and four days later picture Jesus on the Mount of Olives it's the opposite side of the valley to Jerusalem on the hill and he's waiting there with his followers and Judas steps forward and kisses him and Jesus says do what you came for friend and when the soldiers arrive to arrest Jesus he turns to his followers to get them to put their swords away and he says do you think I cannot call on my father and he will at once put at my disposal more than twelve legions of angels but how then would the scriptures be fulfilled that say it must happen in this way when Jesus speaks about fulfillment of the prophets almost always it's about his work for us not his commands to us as he heads to the cross to be the suffering servant that Isaiah promised who would take up our iniquities and bear our sin as he dies for us and knowing that reality invites us to revel in and rejoice in what he has done so that we want to be good for him

I think that's the key to understanding what Jesus means in verse 20 that we are to have a righteousness that surpasses that of the Pharisees the Pharisees did a lot of good things but ultimately you could say if you like that they thought righteousness was like a horizontal bar and that you had to be righteous enough to get over the bar to be approved of by God and when we hear Jesus say unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees you cannot be in my kingdom the Pharisee in us thinks goodness creeps he's raising the bar even higher how am I going to get over the bar and it's crushing but Jesus is saying our righteousness has to surpass that of the Pharisees not because we have to go above the bar but because it's about a completely different kind of righteousness over here through him that starts with coming to him and receiving the free gift of being a citizen of his kingdom so that then we revel in and rejoice in his grace to us and we hear his commands as from a king who we know loves us with a deep costly love if you think about the Pharisees view of righteousness what motivates you to get over the bar with that kind of religious mindset you're motivated by fear and by pride fear because you think if I don't do this God will condemn me pride maybe because you might think if I do these things I'm better than other people but when we come to the cross and we cross into Jesus' kingdom our motivation for being righteous is love love because we know he loved us first and we revel in and rejoice in the saving work that he has done his work moves us with a desire to walk with him so the hymn writer John Newton put it like this he said to see the law by Christ fulfilled to hear his pardoning voice changes a slave into a child and duty into choice so that day by day we're asking what have you got for me today Jesus as you keep me on your path of life and as we grow in making that our attitude towards Jesus and his commands we can stay salty among the people around us and we can shine as the light in the world and we can be the city on a hill that attracts people to him let's pray together to see the law by Christ fulfilled to hear his pardoning voice changes a slave into a child and duty into choice heavenly father you have made us to be the salt of the earth the light of the world as we come to your table now the lord's table would you be at work in us by your spirit and rejoicing in Jesus finished work as he fulfilled the law and the prophets would we be a people resolved to let your light shine so that the men and women and young people around us might see our good deeds and glorify you our father in heaven we ask for Jesus name's sake amen we ask for Jesus that the men we ask for Jesus let her to God and overcome let her pray we ask for Jesus God who is God this Lord and ground it and all so that the men and the men of the game let her go