

Northwest Community Evangelical Free Church

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Sermon manuscript

Sermon Series: Life, the Jesus Way
(Studies in the Sermon on the Mount)

The Disciple's Beautiful Calling

(Matthew 5:11-16)

Study #3

Introduction: Leaving a wake...

If I say "9/11", images of airplanes and towers, chaos and dust, suffering and loss, will flood your mind. Just hear "9/11" and you'll think of the event and the impact that event has had on our national life over the last fifteen years.

The results of that one act of terror have been far-reaching and long-lasting. And like a speedboat pulling a skier, 9/11 has left a wake in its path. It has changed so much about the way we live and think and even about how we approach life and view our world.

Events leave behind a wake. People can leave wakes behind them, too.

One of the enduring stories of September 11, 2001, is of a twenty four year old man who was working on the 104th floor of the South Tower as an employee of a trading company when the plane hit.¹

In the immediate confusion following the attack, **Welles Crowther** made his way down some stairs, below the floors that had been hit.

Then, instead of continuing down to safety, Crowther spent the rest of his life making trip after trip back up the stairs, taking wounded victims to safety.

One of those he escorted down the stairs was Ling Young. Ms. Young was in shock and was blinded by the blood covering her glasses. She heard a man's calm voice. It was Welles Crowther telling her and others: "I found the stairs. Follow me." She followed and was saved.

Crowther personally rescued several people on that day. The New York Fire Department credited him with five saves (others say he saved as many as twelve) and the Department posthumously made him an honorary member of the NYFD (the only time it has ever done that).

Welles Crowther left a wake behind him. He made a difference. His life had impact.

Important events - like 9/11 -leave a wake in our lives. And important people also leave wakes. You could easily name the events and the people who have made a difference in your life. They have left a wake.

You'll never forget them. You are different because of them.

This morning, Jesus lays out a mouth-watering vision before every one of who are following Him. He says that we can leave a wake of influence behind us that will forever mark our friends for God.

Review...

Last Sunday morning you and I explored the Beatitudes.

We heard Jesus pronounce blessing on His disciples who were poor in spirit and who mourn, who have an appetite for righteousness, who are gentle and merciful, and who are pure in heart peacemakers.²

¹ Welles' story is chronicled in a book, [The Red Bandanna: A life, a choice, a legacy](#), by Tom Rinaldi. He was also praised in a speech by President Obama.

² The manifestation of certain moral qualities that look like the Beatitudes doesn't at all mean that a person is a Christian. Jesus is talking to His disciples and is lining out for them what characteristics were to mark them as subjects of His kingdom as they lived for Him.

It will all be worth it to develop character that counts because Jesus promised rewards that are out of this world to those who develop this kind of character.

Jesus' final Beatitude spoke to the persecuted.

[5:10] “Blessed are those who have been persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”

His next words expand on and clarify those words, but they are not the conclusion to the Beatitudes. They mark the beginning of a whole new section.

Listen now to what is one of the least intuitive statements Jesus ever makes. All of the Beatitudes are counter-intuitive. This one is off the charts, exactly the opposite of what we would expect Him to say.

The Disciple's Calling re: PERSECUTION (vv. 11-12)

The Faces of Persecution (v. 11)

[5:11] “Blessed are you when people insult you and persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of Me.”

The Beatitudes (vv. 3-10) were addressed generally. **“Blessed are those who...”** Here, He gets pointed and personal. **“Blessed are YOU...”** when you are persecuted.

Persecution, defined

Persecution can take any of a dozen different forms. It can range from the social slight to murder and everything in between. Persecuted people may suffer loss of income, imprisonment, a fractured family, or alienation from friends.

Here, Jesus focuses on being spoken against. Insulted. Falsely accused of wrongdoing. And persecution in this and every other form has been the experience of God's people from the beginning.

Persecution, through biblical history

Adam's and Eve's son, Abel, was persecuted - murdered - by his brother, Cain. The young David was persecuted by the evil King Saul. Elijah was persecuted by King Ahab and his wife, Jezebel. The prophet Daniel was persecuted by the magicians who served King Darius.

Read through Hebrews 11 and you'll find the record of men and women who suffered for their faithfulness.³

And what had been the experience of God's people through the ages continued to be the experience of Jesus' disciples. He knew it would be and He told them about it in advance.

Persecution, against Jesus followers

If they persecuted Jesus...

On the night before He died, He told them, **“If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you.”** (John 15:18-20). Jesus was certainly persecuted, and His people have certainly been persecuted, too.⁴

The first followers of Jesus suffered for following Him. The book of Acts and general history tells us that all of the apostles were martyred.

Jesus' people were opposed nearly everywhere they went so that the Apostle Paul could honestly write, **[2 Timothy 3:12] Indeed, all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.**

In parts of our world today, Paul's prophetic words have never rung truer.⁵

³ Especially see Hebrews 11:345-38, but the whole chapter is inspiring. I encourage you to read it!

⁴ Taken together, **“persecuted for the sake of righteousness”** (v. 10) equates to persecuted **“because of Me.”** (v. 11)

⁵ And not only in our own Day. Foxes' Book of Martyrs, written in 1563 by John Fox, chronicles the persecution of Christians from apostolic times until his own day. Emphasis is placed on the sufferings of Protestants in England.

Persecution NOW

Around here, we regularly talk about and pray for our persecuted brothers and sisters in Jesus.

In the Middle East, in much of the Far East, in some areas of Africa, and Central and South America, our family is suffering.

I stay abreast of what is happening to persecuted Christians by reading reports from Voice of the Martyrs. I would encourage you to check them out online (www.persecution.com). VOM and other groups will inform you, direct you how to pray, and let you know how to provide help to people who are suffering exactly what Jesus predicted here in Matthew 5.⁶

And just to be clear, these people who are being persecuted are not suffering because they believe in Jesus. They are suffering for being outspoken disciples of Jesus.

Persecution HERE

Just as there is persecution going on *now*, elsewhere, I think it is likely that insults and opposition may very well become more and more common *here*.

Our broader American culture - which is looking more and more like Babylon - is less and less friendly to faith in Jesus. Going forward, opposition may well be the order of the day for you and me.

It may be tempting to retaliate when and if we are opposed for following Jesus. Don't retaliate.

Instead, do what Jesus did when He Himself was opposed.

According to the Apostle Peter (who was there and watched Him do it), this was Jesus, opposed: **[1 Peter 2:23] While being reviled, He did not revile in return, while suffering, He uttered no threats, but kept entrusting Himself to Him who judges righteously.**

Christian owners of businesses that try to maintain biblical distinctives may be insulted and sued. Churches and schools seeking to operate by New Testament guidelines may be opposed. There may even be interference in the family life of those who desire to follow Christ.

Retaliation is not the way to go. Neither is despair. Jesus has already told us that we who follow Him and are persecuted are **"blessed."** He now tells us that, far from despairing, we are to **"rejoice"** and we are to **"be glad"**! And that, for two reasons.

First, rejoice because your reward in heaven is great.

Now before we go any farther today, I want to settle one matter in your mind. I want to convince you that God is a rewarder and that seeking reward from God is a very, very good thing.

Reasons for Rejoicing (v. 12a)

[5:12a] "Rejoice and be glad, for your reward in heaven is great..."

Reward as a motivator? Yes!

The New Testament gives us a good number of perfectly legitimate motivators for serving God and for doing right.

- We obey God out of gratitude for the grace He has lavished on us.
- We obey God to honor and bring glory to Him.
- We obey God to bless others.
- We obey God to avoid the avoidable consequences of misbehavior.

⁶ No blessings are pronounced on those who suffer for wrongdoing. Peter even mentions this when he writes, **[1 Peter 2:20] For what credit is there if, when you sin and are harshly treated, you endure it with patience? But if when you do what is right and suffer for it you patiently endure it, this finds favor with God.**

⁷ **"Be glad"** is a rather weak translation for a word that is typically rendered **"Exult!"**

But then, along with all of these, the New Testament writers don't want us to miss that God is a great rewarder. He has promised us great reward for obedience and a desire for these rewards God wants to give us for obedience is a reasonable reason for obedience.⁸

So, is it right to do what is right because you know that God will reward you? Yes!⁹

The "middle six" Beatitudes promise reward in the life to come to those who mourn, are gentle, who hunger and thirst for righteousness, who are merciful and pure in heart, and who make peace.

The Apostle Paul looked forward to the reward of a "***crown of righteousness***" (2 Timothy 4:8) for having lived in light of Jesus' return. James promised a "***crown of life***" (James 1:12) for faithfully bearing up under trials.

All of these words about reward tell us that whatever we are experiencing now is not the full story. There is more to the story than what we can see here and now.

Even when we are opposed for following Jesus, there is more going on than what meets the eye. That's the background to what we read here in Matthew 5.

REJOICE! Persecution brings a reward

[5:12a] "Rejoice and be glad, for your reward in heaven is great..."

Careful.

⁸ See Hebrews 11:6 - And without faith it is impossible to please God. For the one who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who seek Him.

⁹ Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 2:8:4 "... because the eye of our mind is too blind to be moved solely by the beauty of the good, our most merciful Father out of his great kindness has willed to attract us by sweetness of rewards to love and seek after him."

We don't rejoice THAT we are being persecuted. Persecution is always something to be grieved. Persecution says something terrible about the persecutors themselves, and the abuse of people is always to be mourned - even if it our own abuse.

We rejoice *because* our reward in heaven is great. God will reward us *then* and *there* for anything and everything we've suffered for following Jesus *here* and *now*.

Of course we rejoice that we are going to heaven. But that's not what Jesus is talking about here. We are going to heaven because we were eternally saved by God's amazing grace when we believed in the Lord Jesus Christ. Here, He says to rejoice because in heaven we will receive a great reward.

And just what is that reward? I don't know. And the not knowing makes the reward all the more enticing!

It will likely involve joy and wonder to an unimaginable degree. It will involve "***an eternal weight of glory***" (2 Corinthians 4:17) far beyond all comparison.

It is what is implied in the idea of "***inheritance***", something that Jesus has already mentioned in the Beatitudes. (Matthew 5:5)

Now, we'll visit the idea of inheritance repeatedly during our time in the Sermon on the Mount. It's a big theme, both here and throughout the New Testament.

But in a nutshell, when the New Testament authors speak of a believer's "***inheritance***" they are often referring, not to the gift of eternal life we receive when we place our trust in Jesus, but to a reward that comes our way in the future, for faithfulness here and now.¹⁰

It'll be a reward given by Jesus to those persecuted for His sake. So rejoice.

¹⁰ See 1 Corinthians 6:9; 15:50; Galatians 5:21; Ephesians 5:5; Colossians 3:23-24; Hebrews 9:15; 12:23; 1 Peter 1:3-4.

Jesus also says that we should rejoice because our persecution shows us to be walking with others who have walked with God.

REJOICE! Persecution puts you in good company (v. 12b)

[5:12b] "...for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you."

The Old Testament prophets were often persecuted for their faithfulness to God. Disciples will be persecuted for their faithfulness to Jesus.

When we are treated like Jeremiah and Isaiah and Daniel were treated, we prove our discipleship. Persecution validates that our following is genuine. So, rejoice when you're persecuted. You're in great company!

Faithful disciples leave wakes behind them, just like God's faithful always have. That's part of our calling and we are to never back away from following Jesus out of fear of being opposed or oppressed.

As He expands on the theme of our calling, Jesus next gives us two word pictures that define how we are to engage with the people He so desperately loves and who may oppose us.

The word pictures are of salt and light.

The Disciple's Calling re: IMPACT (vv. 13-16)

The Functions of Salt, Light

Salt

Salt was an important and pricy commodity in the ancient world. Countries with good supplies of salt sometimes used salt as currency. Wars were fought over salt.

In Jesus' day, as in our own, salt had many uses. It was used... as a preservative, to keep meats from spoiling; to flavor food and to keep foods from being insipid;

to "salt" the fields of defeated enemies, thereby keeping those fields from ever producing a crop; medically, as an antiseptic; in some Old Testament sacrifices; in limited measure, as a fertilizer. and, of course, salt creates thirst.

It didn't back then (and it doesn't today) take much salt to make a big difference in whatever it is placed. The presence of even a little bit of salt is instantly apparent.

Jesus' second image is that of light.

Light

If we need salt, we are even more desperate for light. Light illumines a dark room and exposes what's in it. Light shines on a dark path, allowing us to travel.

I had reason to greatly appreciate light when I was in Wyoming. My son, Ben, and I split off from Zach on the last night we were on the trail. Zach, along with our traveling buddy, a guy named Christian, from Minneapolis we met on the trail, would hike about twenty miles to where Zach's car was parked while Ben and I hiked about ten miles to a closer trailhead. (This was to get me off the trail so that I could eat and drink.) Zach would then drive to come get us.

We separated right after a late afternoon dinner and each group planned to hike for a couple of hours to get a head start on the final day's hike.

It was a good plan. Unfortunately, Ben and I couldn't find a place to camp. We saw no suitable camping spot to pitch tents. Everything was too rocky, too steep, nothing meadowy.

So, we kept on walking. The sun set and we put on headlamps. We hiked through the night with our headlamps lighting the way (while calling out, "*Hey there, bear. Here we come.*") We would have been up a creek without a paddle without our headlamps.

Since that night hike, I have a new and much deeper appreciation for the psalmist's words:

***[Psalm 119:105] Your word is a lamp to my feet,
And a light to my path."***

We take light for granted today. But in the days - that is, nights - before the light bulb, the world was a dark place. Light was then, as it is now, highly valued.

When speaking of the impact His disciples would have on a needy world, the wake they would leave behind, Jesus said that we would be salt and that we would be light.

Disciples, as Salt, Light

Small, but heroic salt...

[13a] You are the salt of the earth

A world in need of salt

With those words, Jesus lets us know that the earth, the world in which we live, is in need of salt.

Salt is a preservative. It keeps food from decay and rot. There are seasons of optimism about culture and society's direction. But the general trajectory of society is not promising. It needs preserving.¹¹

Salt can be used as an antiseptic to staunch a wound's bleeding and to prevent infection. Our world is hurting and bleeding. Healing is the need of the hour.

Salt enhances flavor in food. People all around us - and we, ourselves - look all over for things to spice up our lives, to bring us joy.

Salt creates thirst. We are thirsty for so many things.

¹¹ This, from D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones "Any optimism with regard to our world is not only thoroughly unscriptural. It has been falsified by [the unsentimental record of] history."

Jesus' response to a world in need of salt is to provide it with salty people. You are the salt of the earth.

God's provision: Salty people

You will be a preserving, protecting, healing force in your world as you walk with Jesus. You will model spice for life as you find and as you exhibit joy in Jesus. You will, as salt, create a hunger and a thirst for God in the lives of your friends.

So, Jesus' first word picture was of salt. His second tells us that we are light. And our world is dark and needs light.

LIGHT *and lights...*

[14a] You are the light of the world.¹²

A world in need of light

When I say that the world is dark, I'm not angry and I'm not going to engage in an kind of bashing. It's painful to see the dark darkness in our world. It's easier to ignore the darkness.

But sometimes we need to see it and to say out loud that the darkness of sex trafficking and slavery, ISIS and other groups committed to terrorism, racial tension and increasing violence in our cities - including San Antonio is real.¹³

The world is in darkness and that's why Jesus, the LIGHT of the world, came to earth. He aims His flashlight into the darkness, exposes the darkness, and then, as the LIGHT, points us to God.

¹² ***[Philippians 2:14] Do all things without grumbling and complaining [15] so that you will prove yourselves to be blameless and innocent children of God above reproach in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you appear as lights in the world.***

¹³ I have been listening to Dan Carlin's podcasts (Hard Core History), which, while terribly raw, highlight both the ugliness of war and injustice and the fact that both are the constants of the human story.

When He was in the world, He was the LIGHT. John's Gospel explicitly says that. (John 1:1-13) And now, in His physical absence, He has appointed "lights" -you and me - to shine.

God's provision: Shining people

It is only by relationship with God that we become light. Paul wrote that before we came to know the Lord, we were "**darkness.**" Now, though, we are "**light in the Lord.**" (Ephesians 5:8)

You and I are Jesus' solution to the problem of darkness. We are to do what light does. Shine in the darkness. Expose what is in the darkness. Point the way to safety for people who are lost in the dark.

Disciples of Jesus are exactly the light that a dark world needs. Jesus is the sun; we are the moon. We reflect and shine His light.

So. You are salt and you are light. In Jesus, this defines you. This is your identity.

But Jesus has more to say to us than the simple affirmation of who we are. We must step up to the plate, accept the challenge of our identity, and be salty. Shine.

BE Salty, Shine

You, creating a thirst for the living God!

[5:13] "You are the salt of the earth; but if the salt has become tasteless, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled under foot by men."

Unsalty salt?

When you buy salt today, it won't go "tasteless." The salt available in our stores is pure sodium chloride and sodium chloride, by definition, is "salty."

But the salt available in Jesus' day was not all sodium chloride. It was often a mixture of salt and gypsum. When people would get to the bottom of their salt barrel, all that was left was that gypsum and they would say, "*This salt has become tasteless.*"

That "salt" didn't preserve meat, didn't help with healing, didn't savor food. It was worthless for the purpose for which the salt had been bought. People would throw that worthless salt out.

Jesus took that well known experience of everyone He was talking to and issued a warning. The warning was not, "*Be sure that you are salt.*" The warning was, "*Be salty!*"

A disciple who is not "salty" for Jesus is as useless as tasteless salt. He's not fulfilling the purpose for which he was saved. She is not living up to her identity.¹⁴

So here is Jesus' word to us, today. Be salty.

You, the salt of the earth for Jesus

It doesn't take very much salt to make a big difference in a meal. Just a pinch will do it. And it doesn't take more than you, or you and a friend or two, being salty together, to make a huge difference in someone's life for Jesus.

Helping someone improve English skills by serving as a teacher or a welcomer in our upcoming ESL classes is being salty. Talk with Jennifer Robison if you'd like to know how you could help out.

There are hundreds of children in the foster care system who would be greatly helped and even healed by someone offering to bring them in to their home. That's salty. If you want information about fostering or adoption, talk with Emilee Babiak.

¹⁴ See Luke 14, a passage where Jesus lays out the requirements for discipleship (much as here). He says much the same thing there as here, about salt. (vv. 34-35)

Men and women who are homeless are deeply encouraged by visits from caring people. Such visits can be the salt that whets their appetite for God. Talk with James Stopher to find out about helping with Bread and Water.

Christmas is coming (yes, it's almost time to start thinking about December!) and getting involved with Operation Christmas Child (Nicole Johnson) or Project Angel Tree (Jennifer Robison) will provide salt to the soul of a needy child.

Encuentro is making great strides in reaching out to Spanish speakers. Talk with Manuel Abarca to learn how to "Se salada para Jesus" (be salty for Jesus).

And if you're interested in learning how to be salty with friends, there is an opportunity coming up soon that will help.

"Out Of The Saltshaker" is a seven week course we're going to offer, right after church on Sundays, beginning October 2,¹⁵ that will equip you to know and share the life-changing message of Jesus in a relevant, natural way. (Sign-ups in the foyer today.)

Jesus wants to use you to bring healing to someone who is hurting, wants you to savor with joy the life of someone who has lost hope, wants you to create a thirst for God in the heart of someone who is lost.

He'll use you, to bring light, too, if you'll shine.

You, light it up for the living God!

[5:14] "You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden;¹⁶ [15] nor does anyone light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house."

¹⁵ With thanks to Rebecca Manley Pippert for the title, from her book of the same name, Inter-Varsity Press, 1979.

¹⁶ City set on a hill - messianic picture of Zion/Jerusalem where the nations are streaming to it because of God's blessings on it. Isaiah 2:2-5.

The silliness of light-hiding

Light-hiding is such a silly thing. Who would ever think of doing what Jesus makes fun of? Light a lamp on a dark night and then cover it. Nobody would do that.

It would negate the purpose of having lit the lamp and would prevent the light from doing what it was, by nature, designed to do: SHINE!

The silliness of painting all of our light bulbs black makes us think of disciples of Jesus who don't shine. And if it is possible that we might not be salty, it is just as possible that we, who are lights, might not shine.

The point of Jesus' words are that we might, tragically, hide our light under a bushel.¹⁷

We might hang only with other Christians. We might not open our eyes to the needs of our friends, open our hearts to their brokenness, open our mouths to tell them what God has done for us.

And if we do that we would be as useless to our friends as a headlamp with no light bulb on a midnight hike in the wilderness.

On the other hand, we might choose to shine.

The glory of lighting someone's way

[5:16] Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven."

¹⁷ "Flight into the invisible is a denial of the call. A community of Jesus which seeks to hide itself has ceased to follow Him." (Bonhoeffer, The Cost of Discipleship)

Conclusion:

On September 11, 2001, Welles Crowther became light to a blinded Ling Young. She couldn't see and he became her eyes as he led her to safety.

What a picture of the power of loving light in a dark world.

Today, Jesus challenges all of us to accept the idea that lots of people we know are stuck in a doomed tower? It's dark in there and they aren't sure how to make it out.

That's when you show up and point the way. It's not that you're somehow better than they are. It's just that you're not blinded anymore. You're not in shock. You know Jesus.

So you lead your friend out of the darkness into the light.

You lovingly tell him what Jesus means to you. And if I can mix metaphors (Jesus did, so I guess I can, too...), your words and your life will be like salt to a tasteless meal. Your kindness and your gracious ways will bring healing to your friend's soul. Your friend will begin to thirst for the relationship with God you have.

Your Jesus-following life will create a wake and that wake will point someone to God.