

Walking Billboard for God

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[0 : 00] Amen, folks. Well, with that passage open in front of you, here's a job that is available up and down the UK. It does wonders for your step count. And depending on where you are in the UK, it could earn you between 12 and 18 pounds an hour. You ready for this? Who fancies a new challenge in life being a walking billboard?

I mean, who wouldn't want to walk around the streets of Yorkshire advertising Cherry Bakewell Brew? Just thought I'd put that there to intrigue you. But you'll know the kind of thing, I'm sure, if you think about it. Walking adverts, walking billboards. If you're a Christian here today, that's exactly what we're going to see Jesus say that we are. Walking adverts for the kingdom of God.

Now, if you've got Matthew chapter 5 there, we're in this series in Matthew's Gospel. We're at the portion called the Sermon on the Mount. We began it last week with Wayne. And I hope you had your dose of American enthusiasm. You're getting some Scottish accent today. But Wayne kicked us off in this portion of Matthew's Gospel, the Sermon on the Mount.

Really, it's a speech that is widely accepted to have fundamentally shaped Western morality for generations. And don't just take my word for it. Here is former US Congressman Daniel Webster. He said this, he said, The Sermon on the Mount cannot be a merely human production. This belief enters into the very depth of my conscience. The whole history of man proves it.

[1 : 39] From what I can tell, the guy wasn't a believer. But it's really interesting what he made of this sermon. And I think whoever you are here today, whatever you've brought in here, whatever you think about the God of the Bible, can I suggest that what he's saying there gives you a reason to listen to this.

Because really, this has impacted our society, what Jesus is saying here. And it touches on so many of the live issues in our culture right now. And so that's why this is worth a listen.

Let Jesus intrigue you with what he says here. But what we need to appreciate as we step into this, is that this isn't Jesus giving the world some ethical top tips.

Like some kind of first century Stacey Dooley on an episode of Sort Your Life Out. This is not what this is. Have a look at verse 1. Come with me and see it.

Others may be in earshot. But Jesus has his disciples in his sights. Do you see that? Verse 1, chapter 5. And in this sermon, he's teaching them what life inside the kingdom of God looks like.

[2 : 51] So this is what happens in a human heart when the king moves in. You want to think about it like that. This is what happens in a human heart when the king moves in. And who are Jesus' disciples at this point in time in Matthew's gospel?

They are a small, ragtag, unimpressive-looking bunch of newbies. And if we're to get the power of this today, we need to enter their world.

A religious world that's dominated by the Pharisees and the teachers of the law. Who both look the part and sound the part when it comes to godliness.

This is their world, okay? Because what the Pharisees and the teachers of the law have done is that they've taken the Ten Commandments that God gave to Moses to give to the people and the surrounding legislation that God had given his people in the Old Testament.

And what they've done is produced their own commentary on it. And they've created this whole spider web worth of rules and regulations that you need to keep to show that you're in the club.

[4 : 06] I love how Sinclair Ferguson sums this up. A little bit Scottish humour, but I think this makes the point. With some 248 regulations and 365 prohibitions to deal with, salvation was certainly for the professionals.

Do you like that? So if you're a country bumpkin disciple at this point in time, and this is what you're looking at religiously, so to speak, what do you think you are thinking?

You're probably feeling intimidated, aren't you? Add to that the fact that you've just heard Jesus. Do you just see in the immediate verses from verse 11? You've just heard Jesus tell you to expect persecution as you follow him.

And with that backdrop of intimidation and questions, have a look at the phrase that Jesus uses in this chapter at verse 13 and verse 15.

You've got to see this. This isn't a beat-up sermon from Jesus. Like some kind of boardroom encounter with Alan Sugar.

[5 : 16] What were you thinking? Who's responsible for the failure of this task? Why are you not better? Why did you do it like that? What a mess that you've made of things. This isn't a beat-up sermon from Jesus.

This is a chin-up sermon from Jesus. He doesn't say, you've got to see this, He doesn't say, go and be the salt of the earth. Or, one day, one day, you'll be the light of the world.

What does He say? See it there. He says, you are. You see it? So this is something that's already true of the disciples because of their faith in Him.

The logic of everything that follows is, be what I've made you to be. Be who you are.

That's a game changer for how you hear this sermon. And so with that backdrop, can I just say that there's two things that Jesus says to them in these verses that we need to hear.

[6 : 21] And then I want to give us one challenge and one encouragement. That sound okay? Two things Jesus says, one challenge, one encouragement. Here's the first thing, and this is verses 13 to 15.

Remember, Jesus speaking to the disciples, speaking to them. He's saying, firstly, you are a blessed people, don't doubt it. And that's the heart behind the two images that Jesus uses here. Do you see them? Salt and light. Light. Now you might hear those words and immediately your mind is off in a million different directions.

You're kind of a greyhound that's been released from the tracks and you're hunting that rabbit. Your mind is going in all sorts of places and you're playing this mental game of articulate, thinking salt, preserving, purifying, flavoursome, light, illuminating, attractive, healing.

And those things may well be there, but the question to ask with this stuff is always, what would the original readers have understood? Try the first one at verse 13, okay?

[7 : 30] Salt. They hear that word, and I'll put it to you likely, that they would have clicked that salt throughout the Old Testament was a symbol of the covenant relationship that existed between God and his people.

Yeah? And if that's the case, what is Jesus saying here? He's saying, even if the world hates you, even if the Pharisees and the teachers of the law persecute you, I want you to know that you are my called out people.

Right? I've got my heart on you. I've saved you out of the world. You are mine. Now, what an encouragement that must have been for the disciples if you're looking at this world and you're feeling intimidated.

You are the salt of the earth. And what is it about salt? Do you see that he draws attention to? He draws attention to its taste, which I think is a direct shot at the Pharisees, the religious pretenders of the day.

Jesus is saying of them, I know that they look like salt. I know that they sound like salt. But would you believe me that their inner lives tell a different story?

[8 : 54] And carry that logic on to the second image at verse 13. What is it? It's light. You see it? Now, it's a kind of double whammy here.

It's light, but he combines it with another image. I love how Jesus uses images and metaphors. It's great, isn't it? To help us picture it. What's the second one? It's a city on a hill.

Now, again, what would they have first thought of? Combining light and a city on a hill. More likely they would have thought of the city of Jerusalem.

And what was God's heart for the city? That the godliness of the people who live in the city, because they're infatuated with Yahweh, with the Lord, would act like a blazing beacon to the world, compelling the world to come in and see how good the Lord is.

And we're going to show you by the devotion of our lives how great and good this God is. How marvelous is the God who dwells in the city and the God who has called us his people.

[10:06] Come in and see. Isaiah 60, verse 3. Nations will come to your light and kings to the brightness of your dawn.

And so Jesus is saying to his disciples, as you live kingdom lives, as you embrace salt and light living, you are everything that Jerusalem was supposed to be but wasn't.

the church, through its good deeds, through its love for the Lord that just expresses itself publicly, is a light to the world.

And the question then that follows, I guess, is what are the good deeds that Jesus has in mind? Is he just throwing the net really wide and saying any good thing that you do is a worship to the Lord? I think he's a lot more specific than that because of what follows. What are the good deeds that Jesus has in mind? Here's the second thing that Jesus says and this is verses 17 to 20.

[11:19] You see a phony righteousness, don't buy it. And without a shadow of a doubt, we're back with our boys, the Pharisees again, who think that when it comes to the law, Jesus isn't taking it seriously enough.

In fact, all he's doing is lowering the bar to which Jesus says, I've not come to abolish the law, but rather, and see the word that he uses, not explain, not keep, but fulfill it.

Now that word means that we need to do a lot more work to try and understand what he's saying, right? It's a lot more holistic. Fulfill. In what ways has Jesus come to fulfill the law?

You ready for this? Can I give you three quick ways? Now we are skimming the slither of the top of the iceberg here, but go with me and we can run with this in growth groups during the week.

But it's really important for understanding the Old Testament. We can't understand the New without the Old. We can't understand the Old without the New. Do you know why that is? Because this is one story.

[12:38] Three quick things fulfill means. Number one, it means that Jesus is the one who it all points to. Every person, prophet, priest, king, every system, the sacrificial system for sin, every problem.

How can sinners stand to be right with a holy God? How can God be both loving and just? Every promise of a future, new heavens and a new earth where righteousness reigns.

You've heard that phrase, all roads lead to Rome. Well, can I just kind of spin on it a bit and say that all the Old Testament roads lead to the personal work of Jesus?

And see, when you understand that, you begin to read it differently. Right? Love a murder mystery novel. More watch them these days than read them, but the thing is with a murder mystery, you can only watch it twice, right?

You watch it all the way through first time, not knowing how it's going to end, how are all these tensions and puzzles and threads going to find their conclusion? And once you find the conclusion, you go back and you watch it again, but the thing is, because you know where it's all going, you begin to see, oh, that's what that was about.

[13:55] And that's what that was about. And that's how we understand the Old Testament. Jesus fulfills it. Right? Number two, Jesus is the one who perfectly keeps it.

So his life was one of perfect obedience to the law. And it wasn't begrudging obedience. It was a delight for Jesus to obey the law of his father.

The heart of the gospel is that Jesus lived the life we couldn't live. And we need in order to ascend the hill of the Lord. But by coming to him at the moment we believe in him, we are united to him and Jesus shares his perfect life with us.

he takes our sin and we are caught up in his perfect righteousness and obedience. He's come to fulfill it. He's come to live it out.

But number three, and this is maybe one you haven't thought about before, is that he shows us what obedience looks like. So if you're asking yourself, what does it mean for me to obey?

[15:14] If you're asking yourself, what is God the Spirit inside of me like a master sculptor? What is he chiseling away from my character? And what is he forming me into?

Whose likeness is he shaping me into? The answer is Jesus. Friends, the Pharisees think that Jesus is relaxing the law because he won't do it their way.

But have a look at verse 21. You need to jog on a wee bit here, right? 21, 27, and 31. And just take in the repeated refrain at the beginning of each section.

All right, give you a second. 21, 27, 31. What's the repeated refrain? you have heard it said.

Not you have read it written. Do you see that? Really important. So Jesus is helping his disciples see the real reason that the Pharisees have created all these rules and regulations.

[16 : 25] The real thing is going on here is that they are lowering the bar so that they can say that they've got over the bar.

Parents, do you find this? If you want to think about it like this, I'm a simple person, my mind works like this. This is what happens as a parent, the battle that you face every meal time.

Now, you put five bits of broccoli on the plate, and what does it turn into with the kids? A negotiation game, doesn't it? Won't negotiate with terrorists, but I'm being held to ransom around my own table by a five-year-old.

And you start, you say, if you eat all five, we're good, right? And they say, I'll eat one. And you're in a good mood, and you think, well, how about four, thinking they'll meet you in the middle, but no, no, no, they're hanging at one.

Yeah? And eventually this goes on for 20 minutes, and I'll let you figure out how it ends, but what's can we just agree what the lowest common denominator is?

[17 : 35] Can we just agree what the bare minimum is, so that I can say, and we can all say, that I've qualified? And Jesus is saying that's exactly what the Pharisees are doing with God's law, right?

And so much of the rest of the Sermon on the Mount is Jesus bringing out the law's true meaning, in contrast with the Pharisees' minimum standard interpretation of it.

I love Jen Wilkin, she puts it like this, but this helps. When it comes to obedience, Jesus is changing the question from how much can I get away with to how much can I get away from?

And you've got to come back over the next number of weeks as we just tease this out as we walk with Jesus through this sermon, which might be the clue to explaining the puzzle at verse 20. Were you thinking this?

Because I was thinking this all week. You there? Verse 20? Because in the face of it, Jesus is saying something like, unless your time for the 100-meter sprint is quicker than you saying boat, back in 28, or whenever he was quick, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven.

[18 : 59] Does it not read a bit like that? And you're thinking, what chance do I have? If the Pharisees can't make it, and these guys on the outside are squeaky clean, if they can't make it, what chance do I have?

Here's what's going on. I think according to Jesus, and just remember this, the Pharisees, despite all their, if I could put it like this, all their religious virtue signaling, they aren't lovers of God.

Do you know what they are according to Jesus? When you pull away the thinnest of veneers, all they are is lovers of self. God didn't love their actions, God loathed their actions, because it was all external and no internal.

And so what is Jesus saying will happen in the lives of his people through the power of the Spirit? Change.

Internal leading to external. Does that encourage you this morning? In my ordinary everyday life, we'll come back to this in a minute, that Jesus is changing me on the inside, the Spirit living inside of me is turning this heart of stone into a heart of flesh that actually longs to obey God and wants to obey God.

[20 : 24] Why? Because he's changed us internally. He will produce in us the Spirit through transformed hearts and obedience that truly pleases the Lord.

And so here, as we begin to bring the threads of this together, just think back to our walking billboards. Ignore Yorkshire Brew for a minute. Here's the challenge. Ready for this?

Here's the challenge. It's not to underplay the call to obedience. It's striking to see just how seriously Jesus takes obedience to his Father.

Now, theologians will often talk about the three dimensions of the law. And I thought about not doing this, but I think we need to do it. The three dimensions of the law. So if we're to understand as New Testament believers, how do we relate to the Old Testament law?

I think this might be helpful. So you have the three dimensions of it. People talk about the ceremonial part of the law, so the sacrifices, the temple, etc. All those things would find a fulfillment in the person and work of Jesus.

[21 : 35] So we don't need to go to a temple anymore to worship. So the kind of ceremonial part of it has been fulfilled in Christ. We've also got the civil law.

So laws governing Israel as a nation under God, so that's how they handle disputes, things like that. And so we're living at different times, we are not Israel in the land, kind of being fulfilled in Christ. And then you've got the moral, which is God's heart and his expressed character through the law. people. And it reveals his will for his people.

We just think about the moon. Why is the moon bright? Because the sun shines on it and the moon displays light to the world. It's kind of like that with God and his people. He calls us to reflect his holiness.

And so this is the thing, I take it, that God is writing on the hearts of his people. That longing to display his heart and his character that we see revealed here.

[22 : 43] You know, when it comes to obedience, I take it that is encouragement for us. I wonder if you've ever thought to yourself, does an act of obedience done in secret, does it even matter?

Does anybody see it? That old riddle of a tree falls in the forest, does it make any sound? It's kind of like that, isn't it? If I do something in secret, if I'm obedient in secret, but does anyone see?

Does anyone care? And I take it that this and what's going to come after this is going to show us that so much of this sermon is going to be about motivations and why we do what we do and whose praise are we living for.

And is it not a wonderful thought, before we get really specific, that the Spirit-inspired obedience out of overflowing love for Jesus is thrilling in the sight of God the Father.

And let's be encouraged by what Jesus says we will be called when we practice and teach these commands. Do you see the end of verse 19? great in the kingdom of heaven. So the challenge here, friends, is how seriously do we take obedience?

[24 : 02] And let that search you, that question, wherever God might be putting his finger on in your life, how seriously do we take this call to obedience? And here's the encouragement, and maybe just a little bit longer here to leave us in this encouraging place.

It's not to underrate the power of obedience. Because if you think about it, what Jesus says here is the opposite of what the world tells us.

Think about it. That faith is a private thing, keep it to yourself. You can believe what you want, but you can believe it over the hair. I'd say there's two reasons why we shouldn't be duped into thinking that.

First of all, it's the belief that everyone has a world view, right? That mine is, it's happened to be a Jesus shaped one and someone else's is maybe an agnostic one or an atheist driven one, but everybody's got a view on things.

The question really is, will it hold? Why do we believe what we believe? And ultimately, where does it get us if we keep on going? So let that encourage you when you live your life as a Christian in public, that you've got really good things to offer.

[25 : 15] Everybody's coming at this with a view of the world. You know, I've got a friend, Colin, who is a pastor in Gilmerton. He does this thing once a month. He goes, it's called Think and Drink, and he puts it out online and saying, I'm going to go to the Robins Nest pub.

Now, if you know that pub on the south side, you'll know it's a tasty place. I'm not talking about the food, right? Tasty place. But here's what he says, this is where the people in this community go. So he goes, I think it's every once, it's on a Thursday night, once a month, he goes and he sits in the corner, gets a drink, and he just waits to see who comes.

And it's this kind of idea that drives him to do it. He says, I've had some great conversations with people in our community, but why we believe what we believe. So he picks one subject for the evening, says, if you want to come and talk about it, buy a pint and we'll talk about it.

He says he loves it. But it's this kind of thing that drives him to do it. So that's one reason. But the second one that we shouldn't be duped into thinking is because of what Jesus says here.

Our world says faith is a private thing, keep it to yourself. Jesus says be your ordinary salt and light selves out in the open. It's the opposite to what the world says.

[26 : 28] And I think that is Jesus' slightly comical logic at verse 14. Come and have a look at it. I just hadn't really spent the time thinking about this image here.

This is how my brain works. Think about it like this. Imagine you light a birthday cake and you walk into a room full of people with that cake and you start singing happy birthday to you and no one else joins in.

And you think I'm in for a penny, in for a pound, I'll go for it again. Happy birthday to you and there's still puzzled faces everywhere and you stop and you say what's going on?

Why are you not joining in? And everybody says, well you've got a massive bowl over the top of the cake and we don't know what's happening. And you think, oh yeah.

And that's the kind of logic of Jesus. Here do you see what he's saying? He's saying you wouldn't, it doesn't make any sense to do that, to hide your light. you. So why would you?

[27 : 35] It's the very thing that works. Do you see that? It's the very thing that works. When you are salt and light in the world, in public, evangelistically, it's the very thing that's going to work.

The way that people see you love each other, and I can't quite figure it out. The way that people see that you've got opinions on human life and on end of life matters and beginning of life matters, and you're willing to take a stand on that and talk about that.

When you happily embrace a Christian sexual ethic, and the way that we see that you're different in the workplace, that you seem to tell the truth, you seem to just work when no one else is watching, when everyone else, the boss goes out, you go on BBC Sport.

The way that people look at you at work and perceive that you're a really dependable employee.

Can I be honest? Sometimes, and I wonder if you're like me, I'm tempted to think that those are exactly the kind of things that will put people off.

But Jesus says they're exactly the kind of things that will draw people in. You know, we had a few school parents around for dinner last month, and it came to that moment in the meal.

[28 : 58] people, they're non-believers, and I thought about it, and I thought, well, this is our house, we'll just do what we normally do, and I said, do you mind if we just stop, we always do this as a family's meal, we just stop at the beginning and say thank you to God, is that okay?

And it was a bit awkward, and we all had a laugh about it afterwards, but it was this passage that made me just go for it. Don't hide your light, right? don't hide, and is that not incredibly freeing in our world of silver bullets, and hot takes, and the next new thing, where newer is better, and where novelty attracts?

Is it not wonderfully liberating to hear Jesus tell his disciples that when it comes to evangelism, there ain't no school like the old school? You see it? what has been working well for 2,000 odd years in terms of drawing people to the beauty of Jesus.

It's everyday believers doing everyday things in everyday places in salt and light ways. Will I say that again? It's everyday believers doing everyday things in everyday places in salt and light ways, and saying there's something different about you.

I can't quite work it out, but there's something different about you. How are we going to make an impact on this city, on this area? It's by being distinct disciples who love the Lord our God with all our mind, soul, heart, and strength, and being a people who love our neighbour as ourselves.

[30 : 43] That's the way that we're going to make an impact in this city, in your workplace, in the student halls, in your digs, in the school playground, whatever it is, wherever God's got you, that is how you're going to make a difference for him.

Jesus says, do you see it? You are the light of the world, you are the salt of the earth, and this is the way it's always worked. And just as we close, I was reminded of this recently, I spoke to my friend Amy.

Amy came to stay with us a month or so ago. Amy used to be part of this church family, she graduated in the summer. Loved Amy, currently here, studied geography, if you get her in your mind. I remember speaking to Amy, she was telling me this story about her flat and about how towards the end of her tenancy she had this conversation with a letting agent.

And she said to the letting agent, I might know some people who might be interested in taking on the tenancy. party. And her words to me were, when I told them that they were Christian students, part of the CU, I didn't even get to finish the sentence before the estate agent said, we'd love to have them.

Isn't that cool? Because the letting agent thought about how Amy and her flatmates had just looked after this flat for two years. No world parties, no strangers sleeping over, no late payments, no hassle on the phone, all of this stuff, cleaning it up and leaving it in a better condition than when they found it.

[32 : 18] And the fact that there might be another round of these kind of students was the dream ticket. But as Amy was telling me this story, I thought to myself, what a wonderful reputation for Christian students to have in this city.

Yeah? And what a wonderful example of everyday, non-spectacular, faithfully obedient, salt and light living for Jesus.

People notice. And so Jesus says, salt and light. Walking adverts for the kingdom of God.

So friends, why don't we pray and let's just be quiet as we respond in our own hearts to what we've heard from God's word this morning.

And then I'll pray and we'll finish our time in response of singing together. Father. And so heavenly father, we thank you so much for sending your son.

[33 : 44] thank you and we'll thank you and we'll thank you and we'll thank you and we'll thank you and we'll thank you for the encouragement that if our faith is in your son, if we're trusting him for our salvation, if we're looking to him as our pattern for obedience, Lord, thank you that you promise us here that we are the salt of the earth, we are the light of the world.

And so Lord, I pray that that would hugely encourage us this morning. Father, I pray as well if there's areas today in our individual lives, Lord, that perhaps we are out of sync with your will, maybe in the way that we're living or the things that we're believing or the circles that we're dabbling in.

Lord, I pray that you would put people around us that can help us bring us back on track. Thank you for the call this morning to holiness, to obedience, to that devotion to you.

And so, Father, I pray that you'd be with us as we finish our time together this morning. Thank you for your word. Thank you that we have it in our own language. We can pick up, we can read, we can understand, and we can respond.

So, Lord, help us this morning, we pray. Thank you for our time together. Thank you for your word. Pray all of these things in Jesus' precious name. Amen. Amen.

[35 : 11] Thank you.