



Chapter 5

You and I live in an oftentimes noisy, distracted world. Social media, breaking news, endless entertainment, overcommitted schedules, and myriad other ingredients can form the perfect cocktail (non-alcoholic, of course) of chaos. Among such noise, it can be difficult to remember which voices are most worthy of our attention.

Icebreaker:

1. What kind of “noise” competes for your attention? How do you decide what’s most important to pay attention to and what’s not?

The first chapters of Matthew should point us to how, in a world of noise, Jesus (as Messiah and Son of God) is the most deserving voice of our undivided attention. The final verses of chapter 4 told us that Jesus performed a multitude of miracles as he traveled throughout Galilee. As you would expect, these captured the attention of the crowds, and allowed Jesus’s voice to stand out as they gathered around to hear Him “proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom” (Matt. 4:23).

Verses 1-12

As Jesus goes “up on the mountain” to teach His disciples and the crowds, we should be reminded of how Moses did something similar way back in the book of Exodus with the people of Israel at Mt. Sinai. Unlike Moses, though, Jesus isn’t merely communicating from God; rather, Jesus is communicating as God! Here begins the first part of the Sermon on the Mount, spanning chapters 5-7.

Jesus begins with nine shocking statements about people who are blessed in His kingdom. For a minute, pretend this isn’t a LifeGroup or Bible study...How would you answer these questions?

2. What does it mean in our society to be *blessed*?
3. How would you complete this statement: Blessed are the ____? In other words, who are the *blessed* people in our society?

Immediately, we should see that the values and perspectives of Jesus’s kingdom are radically out of step with our world’s. It’s not the healthy, the wealthy, the well educated, the successful business leaders, the proud parents, the happily married, the physically attractive, or any other similar category we might expect to qualify as *blessed*.

Verses 13-16

Reading on, we should not miss an essential element of Jesus’s words: they are being communicated to a group or community, not a bunch of individuals. Here, the disciples are called

to be like salt and like light. We too—as the Church—are called to be distinct and to make an observable difference in the world around us...and it's all for God's glory.

4. Perhaps you've heard that Christian faith should be kept private. How might the metaphors of salt and light challenge this idea?

Verses 17-48

After identifying who God's kingdom of people are (verses 3-12) and the difference God's kingdom community is to make (verses 13-16), Jesus is careful to correct any notion that He is somehow disregarding, negating, or otherwise violating the instructions and revelation from the Old Testament. To the contrary, Jesus, as God's Messiah, is fulfilling these and calling His kingdom community of people to align its life accordingly as well.

Jesus specifically addresses murder, adultery, divorce, oaths, retaliation, and the scope of love. In all, He points to the far more radical principle behind each command. God's Spirit-enabled community people, then, are called not only to avoid certain outward behaviors, but to be free even from the sinful roots fueling these behaviors.

5. In this section full of radical ideas, which command of Jesus do you find most radical, or difficult, to live out?

6. This section culminates in verses 43-48 with the idea that loving the lovable is completely unremarkable! What are one or two steps your group could take together to help each other love even the unlovable people in your life?

Tying the Bow

So, what does a "salty" and "light-casting" community look like? Suffice it to say that it's a community that practices Jesus's words, culminating with a love for our enemies. We're only part-way through the sermon and chances are good that it has already made you squirm a bit! As we move forward, it's important to remain oriented to the fact that, while demands are certainly being placed on us individually, Jesus's words are aimed at His kingdom community. In other words, we're in this together as we are being called to be like our King, who Himself, both required and...SPOILER ALERT!...became the perfect sacrifice.