



Title: Never Swim Alone

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## Please Stand for the Gospel Reading which is from Matthew chapter 5

### Matthew 5:13–16 (NIV84)

“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 by men.

“You are the light of the world. A city 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 men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.

### Introduction to series

Glad to be here this morning. Pastor Verner is speaking at a special service with the police force downtown this morning.

This August Pastor Verner has been leading us on a journey as we reflect on the first verses of Matthew 5, especially Matthew 5:13-16.

In the first message, *Courage to Swim Against the Tide*, Pastor Verner highlighted that Jesus teaches those who would follow him, that the values of the kingdom he proclaims are not the same as the values others operate on, and that hasn't changed today.

If we are going to follow Jesus we are going to be swimming against the tide of culture, regardless of where we are, because when we proclaim Jesus as Lord, his ways will conflict with the other Lords that would assert themselves in our world.

We must decide if we are willing to follow Jesus knowing that we will face resistance.

### Matthew 5:11-12

Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you WHEN they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake. Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven...

Then last Sunday in his message, *Living for Jesus in a Secular World*, Pastor Verner covered a lot of ground but ended on how 'treating others the way we want to be treated' is the rule of life founded in the greatest commandments highlighted by Jesus.

### **Mark 12:30–31**

“You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and all your mind, and with all your strength.’ This is the first commandment. And the second is this: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no other commandment greater than these.”

When we love well and sincerely (and Verner did a good job of explaining that last week), that's what touches hearts.

### **So where do we go from here?**

What more do we say after ‘the greatest commandment’ and love? Is there more to say?

I think so, because I still have questions.

If Christians know the greatest commandment (and for the most part they do), then why is it that in our part of the world the church is leveled off or in decline while growing exponentially in other places?

Why is it in our city, it is not hard to find many people at one time had a faith in Jesus, but who now might not consider themselves Christians? How is it that if Jesus' gospel is so compelling, there are so many that don't really know much about it in our part of the world?

Maybe you are here this morning and you have walked away from faith at one point, or are here exploring your own questions, I'd love to talk with you later today to hear how these questions and what we will talk about resonates with you.

### **There is a key piece to this famous passage that we can easily overlook...**

#### **Matthew 5:14–16 (NIV84)**

14 “You are the light of the world. A city 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 men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.

When I learned this passage as a child the focus has always been on my light, and not trying to hide it. As the classic Sunday School song goes,

*“This little light of mine, I’m goanna let it shine... hide it under a bushel, NO! I’m goanna let it shine...”*

There was the piece in the middle I never paid much attention to though.

*A city on a hill cannot be hidden.*

What is the deal with the city. Why is Jesus talking about cities, is he mixing up his metaphors, did someone mishear him?

I think Jesus put this in here intentionally, and there are two reasons for doing it.

1. Cities in the ancient world were often on a hillside (it made them easier to defend).
  - That had an interesting effect, in ancient times that meant that you could see the city lights from afar. All the individual candles and torches in houses and in the streets sent a glow across the plains that could be seen for miles around.
  - **Story:** Growing up in the country (above Prince William) I could see the glow of the lights in the sky above Nackawic.
    - i. **Flying out of NYC, the glow of the lights of the US coast along the eastern seaboard**

2. To the Israelites, Jerusalem was the great city on a hill.

Jerusalem was where God’s temple was, and it was to be a place where God’s truth and light would shine out to all the nations of the world, teaching them who God was.

Isaiah 62:1–2 (NIV84)

For Zion's sake I will not keep silent, for Jerusalem's sake I will not remain quiet, till her righteousness shines out like the dawn, her salvation like a blazing torch. The nations will see your righteousness, and all kings your glory...

It is no longer the temple, it is no longer the great city that declares the goodness of God, Jesus would critique and say that the city had missed its mark. But he said he was instigating God's new kingdom and here is the kicker...

You are the city on a hill!

### The Linguistic Challenge

We have this struggle in English, which really can mess with things.

There is no difference between 'you' referring to one person, or 'you' to a group, unless you're a cowboy / cowgirl and say *y'all*.

This verse is not a you verse, it is a *y'all* verse.

Matthew 5:14–16 (NIV84)

14 "Y'all are the light of the world. A city 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 *y'all's* light shine before men, that they may see *y'all's* good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.

If I could say something God in Christ is instigating a kingdom, a new city and that is not something he does with each one of us alone, it is something he does with us together.

## JESUS CALLS US NOT TO LET OUR LIGHT SHINE ALONE, BUT TO SHINE TOGETHER.

It is not enough for us to be content to just say, I'm going to let my light shine in my spot. We should, but God is doing something bigger and calls us to be part of something bigger, he is establishing his rule in the world.

*I'm saddened and tired of hearing stories like this:  
I had a grandmother, grandfather, uncle (etc.) who was  
a great man of God, who really lived the gospel, but the  
church...*

*How many people have a 'but the church' story? But the  
church did this, said that, and hurt me, failed me, wasn't  
anything like what Jesus in the Bible is supposed to be  
toward me.*

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If we are going to 'swim against the tide' of culture, and witness to Christ's kingdom on earth, let our light shine, we cannot swim alone.

## So what do you do?

Jesus said:

### **John 13:35 (ESV)**

"By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."

This love is not an abstract idea, it is how we live together.

Last week, Pastor Verner read Romans 12:9

### **Romans 12:9–21 (NIV84)**

Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good. Be devoted to one another in brotherly love. Honor one another above yourselves. Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord. Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer. Share with God's people who are in need. Practice hospitality.

Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn. Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position. Do not be conceited.

Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everybody. If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: "It is mine to avenge; I will repay," says the Lord. On the contrary:

"If your enemy is hungry, feed him;

if he is thirsty, give him something to drink.  
In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head.”  
Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

- Are we devoted to one another?
- Are we honouring one another?
  - This stuff doesn't happen in 80 minutes on a Sunday?
  - While we have groups to facilitate deepening relationships, you can be part of a group and not get this.

But when you see it, you see Jesus.

- When I visit a senior that tells me how there are people from our church that visit her, help her although she's alone. I see the light of Jesus.
- When I hear of meals going to the sick, or to the husband of a dying woman whom we love at our church to show we care, I see Jesus.
- When I hear of people from the church gathering around someone struggling to pay their rent, I see Jesus.
- When I hear of people going weekly to visit people in jail that much of society has cast aside, because they need to know Jesus' love that comes through their presence, I see Jesus.

We want to be a church that *inspires people to passionately follow Jesus*. We may not always do it right, but sometimes we do. I was talking with someone just over a week ago, and they told me about how they missed our church.

### **What if we let the 'good deeds' of Matthew 5 shine in us:**

- Being quick to settle our differences with others and forgive (v. 21-26)
- A desire to protect and remain faithful in marriage (v.27-32)
- Integrity with our words, so that we would never even have to promise we told the truth because others knew what we said is trustworthy (v. 33-37)
- A heart that serves even those who oppress us, turning the other cheek, going the extra mile, even giving the coat on our backs (v. 38-42)
- Loving (not just in words) really loving our enemies. (v. 43-48)

If we not only became the people characterized by these things, the world might truly see the light of Jesus, because these are the characteristics of him.

- He was quick to settle grievances and forgive (v. 21-26)
- He is faithful to his covenant to his people (v.27-32)
- His words were true and trustworthy (v. 33-37)
- A heart that serves even those who oppress him, turning the other cheek, he let them take the coat on his back ( going the extra mile when they put a cross on his back (v. 38-42)
- Loving (not just in words) really loving our enemies. (v. 43-48)

### Closing Prayer

John 17:20–21 (NIV84)

“My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me.