Mt. Olivet Baptist Church

Bible Study Handout

What Now?

Date: November 4, 2026 Scripture: Matthew 5:13–16 (NKJV)

Central Claim: We cannot control everything that happens in the White House, but we are accountable for how we live out the calling Christ has given us.

Introduction: Our Responsibility Beyond Election Day

Elections matter because the decisions made by those in authority affect individuals, families, communities, and the nation. For African Americans, the history of slavery, segregation, and the struggle for voting rights reminds us that civic participation should never be taken lightly. Generations before us endured discrimination, intimidation, and injustice while struggling to secure rights that should never have been denied.

Voting is both a right and a responsibility. Yet our responsibility as followers of Jesus Christ extends beyond Election Day. Whether an election brings encouragement or disappointment, God remains sovereign. His authority does not depend upon who occupies the White House, controls Congress, or holds any other political office.

God is omnipresent (present everywhere), omniscient (all-knowing), and omnipotent (all-powerful). No earthly authority exceeds His power, and nothing escapes His knowledge. Galatians 6:7 reminds us that human conduct carries consequences and that God is not indifferent to how people live and treat one another. This passage is not a prediction of any particular election outcome, but it reminds us that our actions matter before God.

The election has passed, but the church's calling remains. The question is no longer simply what our political leaders will do next. We must also ask what God expects of us.

Understanding the Biblical Context

Matthew 5:13–16 is part of the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5–7). Jesus teaches His disciples in the presence of the crowds, explaining the character and conduct expected of those who belong to God's kingdom.

Immediately before describing His disciples as salt and light, Jesus presents the Beatitudes (Matthew 5:3–12). He speaks of humility, mercy, righteousness, purity of heart, peacemaking, and faithfulness amid persecution.

This order is significant. Jesus describes the character of kingdom people before explaining their influence upon the world. Our public witness should grow out of our relationship with Christ and reflect the values He teaches.

Jesus then uses two familiar images—salt and light—to explain the identity, responsibility, and purpose of His followers.

These images lead us to three important truths.

POINT I: Remember Who We Are (Matthew 5:13–14)

Key Scripture: Matthew 5:13–14 (NKJV)

Jesus declares that His disciples are the salt of the earth and the light of the world. These statements establish their identity. He does not begin by describing what they might become someday; He tells them who they are as His followers.

The Greek pronoun translated “you” is plural and emphatic. Jesus addresses His disciples collectively, not merely a select group of religious leaders. The responsibility of being salt and light belongs to the entire community of believers.

Before giving these declarations, Jesus describes the character of His followers through the Beatitudes. Those who belong to His kingdom should demonstrate humility, mercy, righteousness, purity of heart, and a commitment to peace.

This reminds us that Christian influence must be grounded in Christian character. We cannot become so concerned about influencing society that we neglect the qualities that should distinguish us as followers of Jesus Christ.

Our political convictions may be important, but they must never replace our identity in Christ. We should be able to disagree with others without abandoning compassion, humility, and respect.

The original disciples lived under Roman authority. They did not control the government, yet Jesus still declared them salt and light. Their identity did not depend upon political power or influence.

Neither does ours.

Being salt and light does not mean that Christians are superior to others. The Beatitudes begin with poverty of spirit and emphasize mercy rather than arrogance. Our calling is to reflect the character of Jesus, not to look down upon those who believe or live differently.

Supporting Scripture: Philippians 2:3–5; Colossians 3:12–14.

Biblical Illustration: Daniel and his companions lived under Babylonian authority, yet they remained committed to honoring God (Daniel 1:8–21). They did not control the surrounding government, but they maintained their identity and convictions. Their example demonstrates that faithfulness to God does not depend upon favorable political circumstances.

Key Lesson: Our identity as followers of Jesus Christ must shape our attitudes, conversations, relationships, and responses to the world around us. Before asking what others should do, we must remember who Christ has called us to be.

Personal Reflection:

1. Is my Christian character more recognizable than my political identity?
2. How do my words and actions demonstrate the humility, mercy, and peacemaking spirit Jesus describes?
3. Are there situations in which my political preferences influence my treatment of others more than my relationship with Christ?

POINT II: Recognize Our Responsibility (Matthew 5:13–15)

Key Scripture: Matthew 5:13–15 (NKJV)

Christian identity carries responsibility. Jesus does not call His disciples salt and light merely to give them something to celebrate. Both images describe a purpose that should make a meaningful difference in the world.

Salt was valuable in the ancient world for several purposes, including seasoning and preserving food. Although interpreters discuss which function Jesus primarily intended, the central point is clear: salt has a purpose connected to its distinctive qualities.

Jesus warns about salt losing its flavor. Similarly, Christians must guard against claiming an identity that is not reflected in their conduct.

Christian distinctiveness does not require isolation from society. Instead, believers are called to engage the world while demonstrating the character of Christ.

We cannot profess justice while remaining indifferent to injustice, proclaim mercy while refusing to show mercy, or speak of loving our neighbors while allowing prejudice to determine whom we will love.

Our moral responsibility must reflect the whole witness of Scripture.

Christians sometimes become so focused on one moral issue that they neglect other biblical responsibilities. Scripture addresses the value of human life, justice for the oppressed, care for the poor, honesty in leadership, concern for strangers, and the dignity of others.

Micah 6:8 teaches that God requires His people to do justly, love mercy, and walk humbly with Him.

These responsibilities belong together. Scripture should challenge our political convictions rather than merely confirm what we already believe.

Jesus also describes a city on a hill and a lamp placed upon a lampstand. Light is intended to illuminate its surroundings rather than remain hidden.

Likewise, our Christian faith should be visible through courage, compassion, conviction, and faithful action.

The United States is not the kingdom of God. Although Christianity has influenced American history, no earthly nation is identical with God's kingdom. The church's calling cannot be fulfilled simply through religious language, political declarations, or favorable election outcomes.

James 2:14–17 reminds us that genuine faith expresses itself through action. Religious words alone are insufficient when people are experiencing real needs.

Our responsibility also includes praying for those in authority. In 1 Timothy 2:1–2, Paul instructs believers to pray for all people, including kings and others who govern.

We should pray for leaders whether or not we supported them politically. Prayer does not require approving every decision they make.

We can pray for our leaders without approving everything they do. And we can hold our leaders accountable without ceasing to pray for them.

Prayer should encourage faithful action rather than become a substitute for it. We ought to pray for justice while practicing justice and pray for peace while becoming peacemakers.

Supporting Scripture: Micah 6:8; James 2:14–17; 1 Timothy 2:1–2.

Biblical Illustration: In the parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25–37), Jesus describes a man who demonstrates love for his neighbor through practical compassion. The Samaritan does not merely express concern for the injured man. He responds to his needs, provides assistance, and takes responsibility for his care. Jesus concludes by instructing His listener to go and do likewise.

Key Lesson: Being salt and light requires more than professing faith. Our beliefs should become evident through our concern for others, our commitment to justice, our willingness to serve, and our response to the needs around us.

Personal Reflection:

1. Does my Christian faith make a meaningful difference beyond the walls of the church?
2. Am I willing to allow Scripture to challenge my political preferences and personal convictions?
3. How can I demonstrate greater responsibility through prayer, service, and concern for my community?

POINT III: Reveal Whose We Are (Matthew 5:16)

Key Scripture: Matthew 5:16 (NKJV)

Jesus concludes this portion of His teaching by explaining the ultimate purpose of the disciples' witness: others should see their good works and glorify their Father in heaven.

The purpose of Christian witness is not personal recognition but the glory of God.

Jesus does not instruct His disciples to perform good works so that others will admire them. Their actions should direct attention beyond themselves toward their heavenly Father.

This principle applies to individual believers and congregations.

A church should desire to have a good reputation within its community, but that reputation should grow out of faithful ministry rather than become the primary objective of ministry.

The question is not simply whether people recognize the name of our church, but whether they associate that name with compassion, integrity, service, and genuine concern for others.

In Matthew 5:16, Jesus encourages visible good works. Yet in Matthew 6:1, He warns against practicing righteousness merely to receive human admiration.

These teachings are not contradictory.

In Matthew 5, the purpose of visible good works is God's glory. In Matthew 6, Jesus warns against seeking human praise as the reward for religious activity.

The issue is not visibility. The issue is motivation.

We must examine not only what we do, but why we do it. There is nothing wrong with receiving appreciation for faithful service, but recognition should never become the primary reason we serve.

Our responsibility as followers of Christ does not rise and fall with election outcomes.

We should vote, remain informed, pray for our leaders, and hold those in authority accountable. But our calling extends beyond the ballot box.

We must not become so focused on what others should be doing that we neglect the opportunities God has placed before us.

Those opportunities may include encouraging someone who is discouraged, helping a family experiencing financial hardship, speaking against mistreatment, or responding compassionately to someone in need.

Galatians 6:9–10 encourages believers not to grow weary while doing good. Our faithfulness is not measured only by immediate or visible results. We are called to continue serving even when the work is difficult and progress seems slow.

Supporting Scripture: Matthew 6:1–4; Galatians 6:9–10; Colossians 3:17.

Biblical Illustration: In Acts 9:36–42, Dorcas (Tabitha) was known for her good works and charitable deeds. Following her death, widows showed Peter the garments she had made. Her faithful service had touched lives in practical and meaningful ways. Her example reminds us that our witness can be demonstrated through ordinary acts of compassion that leave a lasting testimony.

Key Lesson: The ultimate purpose of our Christian witness is not personal recognition, public influence, or political power. Our lives should reflect the character of Jesus Christ and direct others toward the glory of God.

Personal Reflection:

1. Are my acts of service motivated primarily by love for God and others or by a desire for recognition?
2. What do people associate with my Christian witness and the ministry of our church?
3. What opportunities has God placed before me to demonstrate His love through practical action?

Conclusion: Living as Salt and Light Beyond Election Day

The church's assignment is not determined by who holds political office. It is determined by the One who called us.

Political leadership matters, and the decisions of those in authority have real consequences. But Christian responsibility does not begin or end with an election.

Jesus calls His followers to remain faithful in every season.

We must remember who we are, recognizing that our identity is rooted in Christ rather than political affiliation.

We must recognize our responsibility, understanding that our faith should make a meaningful difference in the world.

And we must reveal whose we are, allowing our good works to direct attention toward our Father in heaven.

We cannot control everything that happens in Washington, but we are accountable for how we live out the calling Christ has given us.

We may not be able to change every circumstance, but we must not allow the things we cannot change to keep us from doing what we can.

The question remains: Now that we know who we are, what are we going to do about it?

Our answer should be demonstrated not merely through what we say, but through how we live.

Personal Application: This Week's Challenge

During the coming week, intentionally practice the three responsibilities emphasized in this lesson.

1. Remember Who You Are. Before responding to a political disagreement, difficult conversation, or frustrating situation, consider whether your words and attitudes reflect the character of Jesus Christ.

2. Recognize Your Responsibility. Identify one person or situation where you can demonstrate practical compassion, encouragement, or assistance. Take meaningful action rather than merely expressing concern.

3. Reveal Whose You Are. Perform an act of kindness or service without seeking recognition. Let your motivation be love for God and others, trusting that your actions can point people toward Him.

At the end of the week, reflect on how your conduct demonstrated your Christian identity and where you still need to grow.

Final Thought

Our calling does not change when political leadership changes.

We may not control every circumstance around us, but we are responsible for how we respond to the opportunities God places before us.

Jesus has already told us who we are. He has called us to be salt and light, and He has revealed the purpose of our witness: that others may see our good works and glorify our Father in heaven.

May our answer to the question “What Now?” be found not merely in what we say, but in how we live.

Scriptures for Further Study

Scripture	Focus
Matthew 5:3–16	The Beatitudes and the identity and responsibility of salt and light
Daniel 1:8–21	Maintaining faithfulness while living under foreign authority
Philippians 2:3–5	Humility and the attitude of Christ
Micah 6:6–8	Justice, mercy, and humility
Luke 10:25–37	Demonstrating love through practical compassion
James 2:14–17	Genuine faith expressed through action
1 Timothy 2:1–4	Praying for leaders and those in authority

Matthew 6:1–4	Serving God without seeking human praise
Acts 9:36–42	Dorcas and the witness of compassionate service
Galatians 6:7–10	Accountability, perseverance, and doing good