

Salt And Light  
Matthew 5:1-16  
Key Verse: 5:13a,14a

by Sarah Barry

"You are the salt of the earth. You are the light of the world."(13-16)

We are beginning a new year and a new decade, 2011. In this new year, I want to grow in my relationship with God through deeper Bible study and prayer. I want to know Jesus better; I want to have loving relationships that encourage and build up others. I want to participate in what God is doing to make his people a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. I want to be salt and light in the place where I live, so that God may be glorified. For these things I need Jesus' help and his presence in me.

Jesus began his ministry in a dark corner of a small country. Matthew quoted Isaiah: "The people living in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of the shadow of death a light has dawned. Jesus is the great light. He came, preaching, 'Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near.' (Mt 4:16-17) When people heard Jesus preaching, they began to repent. People living in the darkness of sin and despair could see the Great Light. Jesus announced the kingdom of heaven and he brought it with him. He healed the sick and cast out demons and brought God's love and life to the hopeless.

Read Matthew 5:1-2. "Now when he saw the crowds, he went up on a mountainside and sat down. His disciples came to him and he began to teach them." Jesus raised disciples. They were fishermen and tax collectors and students and working men. There were women, too, who followed him and learned from him. He did not teach them techniques of how to preach or how to lead a ministry. He shared with them himself, his own mind and heart. He wanted to change the world through them, one heart at a time. So he went up on a mountainside and his disciples came to him. He taught them the Sermon on the Mount, beginning with the Beatitudes. It is a description of Jesus' own character and his personal life principles. Jesus himself is salt and light. He wants his disciples to be salt and light in the world. Salt is hidden and works quietly to give flavor and to preserve. On the contrary, Light should be seen by everyone. Light dispels darkness. Jesus says to us too, "You are the salt of the earth...You are the light of the world.

Fifty years ago, in Korea, in 1961, when the UBF ministry began, the people, especially young students, were living in darkness. It was the darkness of fatalism and poverty. It was the darkness that seeps into the heart when hope goes out. Koreans had endured 45 years of subjugation under Japan, a devastating internecine war, and the forced division of their country.

Our hearts went out to these young people, but we had no way to help them. Relief goods poured in from America to help those who were hungry and cold and sick. But material things could not heal broken hearts or cure fatalism or bring light and hope into the darkness. But God gave us his book, the Bible. Many students were drawn to Bible study because they wanted to learn English. But when they studied the Bible, God spoke to their hearts. The people living in darkness saw a great light. The Creator God sent Immanuel Jesus to be with us. He is the Wonderful Counselor. He gave us the Bible to lead us into truth. When we opened our hearts to God and to his word, he led us out of darkness into his light. During these 50 years we have learned that the Bible is God's word. It is indeed a lamp for our feet and a light for our path. These young people went to the ends of the earth to be the salt of the earth. He began to teach them, saying, "Blessed are the poor in spirit." To be "blessed" is more than to just be happy. To be blessed means to be touched by God's love and grace in such a way as to be deeply satisfied, to have real peace. The first and last Blessing is "for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." (3,10) To have the kingdom of heaven is to have everything.

First, Read verse 3. "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." Jesus gave up heaven for our sakes. He emptied himself (Php 2). He was poor in spirit. And he was filled. He was filled with God's love. He was filled with God's Spirit. The kingdom was and is his.

We are "poor in spirit" when we know our helpless state. To be poor in spirit means to know that we are sinners who need God. To be poor in spirit means to have a learning mind. It means to be thankful, for I have nothing that has

not been given me. We are like the little children who Jesus invited to come to him. He said, "Let the children come, for to such belongs the kingdom of heaven. (Mat 19) The kingdom of heaven is ours because he gives it to us. (Lk 12:32) When the king rules within, we can be the salt of the earth and the light of the world.

Second, "Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted." Jesus wept over Jerusalem (Lk 19:41-44). He wept at the tomb of Lazarus. He weeps because of my sins. (Ge 6) When sinners repent, Jesus is comforted. (Lk 15) when I repent, I am comforted by his love and forgiveness. "Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret, but worldly sorrow brings death." (2Co 7:10) Sometimes we grieve because we have lost something--a parent, a child, a spouse, a job, a friend, or because we have failed in something. If we bring our grief to God, we are comforted and we can grow in depth and in character. If we do not bring this grief to God, we can become bitter and angry. If we do not repent, or if we hold on to our grief we become salt that has lost its saltiness. When we mourn, Jesus is our comfort.

Third, Read verse 5. "Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth." The Bible says (Num 12:3) that Moses was very meek, more meek than anyone on the face of the earth." When problems arose or his leadership was challenged, he did not fight with people. He prayed and waited on God. Meekness is waiting on God instead of defending ourselves. Isaac (Gen 26) is an example of meekness. He obeyed God and stayed in the land of the Philistines. He kept on giving up his wells and digging new ones. He accepted God's word, "Do not be afraid." And he won. He inherited the land.

Jesus showed his meekness when he was arrested, tried and crucified. He was led like a lamb to the slaughter. He promised his disciples, "The meek will inherit the earth." Victory belongs, not to the abrasive fighter, but to the meek man who waits on God. Salty Christians have the inner strength to wait in humble patience and trust God. Jesus is our meekness.

Fourth, "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled." Righteousness is a right relationship with God. Paul longed for this. He said, "I want to know Christ." (Php 3:8-9) It is to long to be cleansed from sin and set free of its power. It is to long to know Jesus. God does not take sin lightly. Jesus' death was an atoning sacrifice for my sins and yours and for the sins of the world. God made him sin who knew no sin so that we might be made the righteousness of God. Jesus is God, but he longed to be with his Father in the heavenly kingdom. When he bore in his body the sins of the world, he felt the pain of separation from God. He cried out from the cross, "My God, why have you forsaken me."

To hunger and thirst for righteousness also means to long for a just world, to hate oppression and injustice. Jesus came to testify to the truth. Everyone on the side of truth listens to him. To hunger and thirst for righteousness is to long to know and live by the truth. I grew up in the segregated South. When I studied the Bible I realized the injustice of that society. When we study the Bible we learn that God created and loves all people. We can stand on the side of truth when Immanuel Jesus dwells in us. Jesus is our righteousness. Those who hunger and thirst for righteousness will be filled.

Fifth, Read verse 7. "Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy." To show mercy means to forgive. We can forgive because we are forgiven. (Lk 6:27-36) Jesus said, "Be merciful as your Father in heaven is merciful. He sends rain and sunshine to both the just and unjust." God who forgives our sins is merciful. We are forgiven sinners; we cannot withhold mercy and forgiveness from others. Jesus forgave and he taught his disciples to forgive. He prayed from the cross, "Father, forgive them, for they don't know what they are doing." Jesus' mercy is like a boundless ocean. His love is higher than the skies and wider than the whole world. Salty Christians are those who have been forgiven by Jesus and who forgive others. Salty Christians are blessed because they have received Jesus' mercy and are forgiven. So they can show mercy. Our world desperately needs the salt and light of justice, mercy and forgiveness.

Jesus' actions underscored his teachings. Once some men dragged a woman caught in the act of adultery into the temple court and asked Jesus to pass judgment on her. Jesus did not condemn her. He sent her away with a new direction: "Go and leave your life of sin." (Jn 8:11) Jesus' mercy is not cheap. He could show her mercy because he would take her place on the cross and die for her sins. Jesus is the fountainhead of mercy.

Sixth, Read verse 8. "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God." This Beatitude promises that the pure in heart can see God. What are the things that make the heart impure? Holding on the grudges, entertaining lustful thoughts, holding on to hatred, refusing to face our sins and honestly repent--these things make our hearts impure. Jesus said in Mark 7:20-23: "What comes out of a man is what makes him 'unclean.' For from within, out of men's hearts, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, greed, malice, deceit, lewdness, envy, slander,

arrogance and folly. All these evils come from inside and make a man "unclean." We soon find that it is impossible to keep our hearts pure. How can sinful people be pure in heart? We cannot purify our hearts by self-discipline. No matter how hard I try, I fail. We can be made pure only by the blood of Jesus. Then we must hide God's word in our hearts. (Jn15:3)The Holy Spirit comes to dwell in hearts purified by the blood of Christ.

Seventh, Read verse 9. Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God." Jesus is the Prince of Peace. He came and died and rose so that we might have peace with God. When we have peace with God, we can have peace with one another. Rom 5:1 says, "Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ." When we were slaves to sin and enemies of God we had no peace. Jesus died to reconcile us to God and to make us instruments of reconciliation--peacemakers. (2Cor 5:18-19) The gospel is God's instrument of peace. It is through the gospel of Jesus that I have peace in my heart. Peaceful hearts ruled by Jesus add up to a peaceful world. World peace starts with heart peace, one heart at a time.

When I was in college the Korean War began. We sent soldiers, some of them my high school classmates. I met Jesus in my sophomore year and found real peace for the first time. I realized that peace is not won by war. It cannot be made by education. It comes only when Jesus comes into one's heart. It is still true. Peace will come in the mid east when Muslims and Jews meet at the foot of Jesus' cross, and Christians become salt and light in the world. Jesus is our peace.

The Eight Beatitude is in verse 10. Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. The blessing that goes with the first and last Beatitude is the same: "for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." Jesus was persecuted for righteousness' sake. He died so that I might be forgiven. He was wounded for my transgressions and pierced for my iniquities. The kingdom is his. And because I belong to him, the kingdom is mine. To have the kingdom is to have everything. I do not need to be anxious about the future. Jesus is our shepherd who leads us though the valley of the shadow of death. He is the kingdom of heaven.

Salt

Jesus said, "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. Jesus' disciples must be salty. Salt preserves and prevents corruption; it makes tasteless food tasty. Salty Christians are those who do not compromise with the world or accept its standards. They may be laughed at, and/or persecuted, but their influence is felt. Those who lose their saltiness by compromising with the values and morals of society are worse than useless. When Jesus dwells in our hearts we can be the salt of the earth. People changed by Jesus can change the world. William Wilberforce was a member of the British Parliament who became a Christian. He realized that slavery was wrong. He fought in the halls of government until slave trade was abolished in England. God used him to make a more just society. Men and women who, for Jesus' sake, care about the vulnerable people of society are salt.

In every area of society there are Jesus' people who are have the salt of the gospel in their hearts and lives. They have welcomed Jesus into their hearts. There are salty doctors and nurses who, instead of focusing on making money, respect life and have compassion for the weak and vulnerable of society. There are teachers who not only find a way to tell the truth about the Creator God, but also show God's love and compassion to broken and hurting students. There are business men who have Immanuel Jesus dwelling in their hearts. Therefore, they are people of honesty and integrity. There are factory workers, professors, people who clean the streets and pick up garbage who do their job before God; young people who keep their relationships pure; students who study for the glory of God--these are the salt of our world. What they do may be unnoticed, but God is using them to change his world. In addition to this, Jesus' disciples share the word of God with anyone ; we can feed the hungry, clothe the naked, to invite in strangers in, to take care of the sick and visit and encourage those in prison. As we are led by the Spirit of Jesus we can see what he wants us to do and ask him for strength to do it--and be salt and light.

Light

Jesus said, "You are the light of the world." In 1John he says, "God is light; in him there is no darkness at all if we claim to have fellowship with him yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live by the truth but if we walk in the light as he is in the light we have fellowship with one another and the blood of Jesus his son purifies us from all sin." God wants his people to shine the light of his truth and love into the world. Our Puritan forefathers wanted America to be an exemplary Christian nation, like a city on a hill, giving God's light to the whole world. May God fulfill in this land the original purpose of our forefathers. As we study the Bible and come to Jesus day by day we can be salt

and light. May God help us to let our light shine before men so that they may see our good deeds and give praise and glory to our Father in heaven. We can be salt and give light when Jesus is in us. May the Father, Son and Holy Spirit come and indwell each of us today so that throughout 2011 we may be salt and light, and God's people in the world may be a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.