

# Salt of the Earth; Light of the World

Matthew 5:1-16

Key Verse: 5:13-14

**“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 underfoot. You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden.”**

Jesus said, **“You are the salt of the earth,”** and **“You are the light of the world.”** This has deep meaning but in a word, Jesus is referring to influence. Influence occurs in different ways. People influence the world with their ideas. Some ideas last longer than others but ideas can have a powerful influence in the world. Ideas like evolution, relativity, and socialism are influencing the world today whether we like it or not. People influence the world with their work. By working hard, they acquire, achieve and finally influence others. Steve Jobs has influenced how we interact with technology. Mark Zuckerberg has influenced how we interact with people. Michael Jordan has influenced many young people around the world to play basketball.

Jesus’ disciples influence the world, not really by the strength of their own ideas or the quality of their labor, but mostly by the substance and fabric of their lives. Phil Vischer, the creator of the Christian video series “Veggie Tales” that has sold over 60 million copies worldwide, has said that the world does not learn about Christianity by watching Christian videos but by watching Christians. What do genuine Christians look like? Jesus teaches us in verses 3-12.

## **I. The Beatitudes (1-12)**

These verses begin the world famous Sermon on the Mount. This section is known as the Beatitudes. They contain some of Jesus' most well-known and loved teachings. When we allow these words from Jesus to form our inner attitude before God and man, we are blessed and are a blessing.

**First, blessed are the poor in spirit.** Look at verse 3. **“Blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”** Simply put, “blessed” means “happy”. But “blessed” here is more than the superficial happiness we might get from eating ice cream. It refers to the unique spiritual joy we have when we have a right relationship with God.

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Jesus said, “**Blessed are the poor in spirit...**” By worldly standards, being poor is never considered a blessing. The world says that those with a lot of money, food, friends, respect, etc... are blessed. Some of us have experienced material poverty. All of us have seen it. It always feels and looks bad. Yet there is one form of poverty that is good. Jesus said, “**Blessed are the poor in spirit...**” To be poor in spirit is to recognize and accept our complete helplessness before God. It is to be humble enough to come to God as we are. It is to seek God wholeheartedly and to put our full trust in him. Dr. Bill Thrasher shared with us that **prayer = helplessness + faith**. That is the essence of poor in spirit. We are blessed when we are poor in spirit because Jesus promises the kingdom of heaven to us. Jesus comes and rules in our hearts and lives. We enjoy peace and fellowship with Jesus. He changes our dead hopes to the hope of the kingdom of heaven.

**Second, blessed are those who mourn.** Look at verse 4. “**Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.**” The time of mourning is never associated with a time of blessing. Mourning is a time of sorrow and a time of loss. We mourn when a loved one passes from this life. We might mourn because of a broken relationship or because of a lost job or because of a failure. When we mourn over the events of life, we must not allow it to take root in our hearts. That will only make us bitter. Instead we must bring it to Jesus. Jesus promises that we will be comforted. We are blessed because we know Jesus better and better through the comfort he gives. We grow in character and hope. Moreover, with the comfort we receive from God, we can comfort others in their troubles. (2 Cor 1:4) This is how we can be salt and light in the world.

There is another kind of mourning that deserves special attention. It is the mourning over our sins that leads us to Jesus. 2 Corinthians 7:10 says, “**Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret, but worldly sorrow brings death.**” When we mourn over our sins and seek God's grace, Jesus will comfort us and restore us. Can you remember when you last mourned over your sins? Have you come to Jesus for his comfort? Acts 3:19 says, “**Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord....**”

**Third, blessed are the meek.** Let's read verse 5. “**Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.**” Meekness is not valued in the world. In the eyes of the world, to be meek is not blessed; it is dumb.

Yet Jesus said, “**Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.**” Meekness is usually misunderstood as only something passive. In fact, meekness is

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very active. Meekness is being humble and gentle and entrusting the results to God in any situation. King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon once built a ninety-foot golden image and required everyone to worship it. Three God-fearing friends named Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego quietly decided not to worship the image. The king warned them, **“If you do not worship it, you will be thrown immediately into a blazing furnace.”** Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego replied, **“O Nebuchadnezzar, we do not need to defend ourselves before you in this matter. If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God we serve is able to save us from it, and he will rescue us from your hand, O king. But even if he does not, we want you to know, O king, that we will not serve your gods or worship the image of gold you have set up.”** (Dan 3:16-18) They were humble and respectful before the king. They were also firm in their decision to honor God. They completely entrusted the outcome to God. Nebuchadnezzar was furious. He jacked up the furnace seven times hotter than usual and then threw them into it. But when the king looked into the furnace, he saw them walking around in the fire, unbound and unharmed. He also saw a fourth man, who had the form of the Son of God, with them. The king told them to come out of the fire. He declared that no one was to say anything bad about the God of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego. God saved the three friends when they entrusted the outcome of their decision of faith to him. By the way, the king also promoted them in Babylon. Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.

**Fourth, blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness.** Let’s read verse 6. **“Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.”** Hunger and thirst are very intense and powerful desires. They drive what we do. Proverbs 16:26 says, **“The appetite of laborers works for them; their hunger drives them on.”** Perhaps even more telling, King Solomon wrote, **“Everyone’s toil is for their mouth, yet their appetite is never satisfied.”** (Ecc. 6:7) Jesus tells us that we need the same intense desire for righteousness. **As hunger and thirst for food drive us to labor and toil, so hunger and thirst for righteousness must drive us to God.**

Hunger and thirst are also very necessary desires. We need food and water for our physical life. If we did not have hunger and thirst, we would die. **Hunger and thirst for righteousness is spiritually a life and death matter.** But often we misdirect our hunger and thirst for the wrong things. We use phrases like “power-hungry” or “thirsty for love.” We try to satisfy those longings with other things but that is like eating spiritual junk food. It gives momentary pleasure but it is very bad for you.

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To hunger and thirst for righteousness is simply to hunger and thirst for a right relationship with God. It is to hunger and thirst for holiness. When we hunger and thirst for other things, our appetite will never be satisfied. But when we hunger and thirst for righteousness, Jesus promises that we will be filled.

**Fifth, blessed are the merciful.** Let's read verse 7. **“Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy.”** This blessing is about how disciples of Jesus treat other people. But we must not look at this beatitude as merely a human operating principle. This mercy is divine mercy. Divine mercy is related to compassion, kindness and love expressed in action toward those who are helpless and wretched. Jesus often revealed this mercy. When a blind beggar cried out, **“Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me,”** people told him to be quiet. They assumed that Jesus did not have time to help yet another poor, blind beggar. But Jesus stopped, talked to him and restored his sight.

Divine mercy is also strongly related to the forgiveness of sins. Once, we were all dying in our sins. We lived to gratify our sinful cravings. We did whatever our sinful nature directed and became objects of wrath. Ephesians 2:4-5 say, **“But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions -- it is by grace you have been saved.”** By God's divine mercy, anyone who repents will receive the forgiveness of sins in Jesus.

God's mercy is very broad and deep. He brings the sun and the rain at the right time. He gives us food and breath in our lungs. He has also shown us specific mercies perhaps in a health crisis or time of failure. We must remember these times. Most of all, we must remember God's mercy in forgiving our sins. Then we can be merciful with divine mercy. We can show compassion to the helpless. We can forgive others as Jesus has forgiven us.

**Sixth, blessed are the pure in heart.** Let's read verse 8 together. **“Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.”** A pure heart is a wonderful blessing. Many sincere Christians struggle hard to purge the garbage from their hearts but it seems that the more they try, the more garbage accumulates. When reflecting on the condition of the human heart, the prophet Jeremiah lamented, **“The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it?”** (Jer. 17:9) There is only one person who can purify our hearts. His name is Jesus. 1 John 1:7 says, **“But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus purifies us from all sin.”**

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To have a pure heart, we must repent, surrender our lives to Jesus and allow him to purify our hearts.

**“Pure in heart”** is also used in the sense of singular devotion to God. Anything that comes between God and us is an idol. Idols make our hearts impure. But Psalm 119:9-11 say, **“How can a young person stay on the path of purity? By living according to your word. I seek you with all my heart; do not let me stray from your commands. I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you.”** We need deep Bible study and a lot of prayer to keep our hearts pure. Jesus promises that we will see God.

**Seventh, blessed are the peacemakers.** Let's read verse 9. **“Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God.”** Jesus, the Son of God, is the ultimate peacemaker. Isaiah calls Jesus the Prince of Peace. (Isa. 9:7) Jesus gives us peace with God and peace with one another through the forgiveness of sins. There is an able man who grew up in poverty in a war-torn country. Anger and hatred grew in his heart toward the enemies of his people. He went away to study at the university. Alcohol, women and worldly pleasures did not take away his unrest and anger. But he was befriended by a UBF missionary who shared Jesus with him. When Jesus came into his heart, the anger and hatred was turned to love. Jesus gave him peace with God. Jesus gave him peace with others, including those whom he had hated. He married the woman with whom he had fathered several children and became a responsible, loving man with peace and joy. Jesus is the Peacemaker.

We cannot ignore the role of the man's friend as a peacemaker. Like Jesus, he helped this man to have peace with God and to also make peace with others. When we follow Jesus' footsteps as a peacemaker, we are doing what Jesus did. Jesus promises peacemakers that they will be called sons of God.

**Eighth, blessed are those who are persecuted.** Something strange happens when we follow Jesus and are salt and light in the world. Look at verses 10-12. **“Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.”** Persecution comes. We do not look for persecution. It is inevitable for those who live by the Beatitudes. Persecution is painful but it is blessed. Jesus says that those who are persecuted for righteousness receive the kingdom of heaven and they will have a great reward in heaven.

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Heaven will be awesome! After studying Revelation 21-22 at our Easter Bible conference, I really want to be in heaven. In heaven we will be transformed and be with our Lord Jesus forever. In heaven, God will wipe away all of our tears. There will be no more suffering, pain or death and all things will be new in heaven. We will live forever with loving people. We will serve and reign with Jesus forever.

In light of the kingdom of heaven, we can go through persecution. Persecution is hard but lasts a moment. In the face of hardship and persecution, the apostle Paul said, **“For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen, since what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.”** (2 Cor 4:17-18)

## II. Salt and Light (13-16)

Let's read verses 13-14. **“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 underfoot. You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden.”** Jesus' disciples had been following him only for a short time. They were committed to Jesus but they did not actually know that much about him. They were not Bible scholars. They did not pray particularly well. They had never taken a mission trip or ever shared their life testimony. But Jesus did not say to them, “I hope you can be salt and light some day.” Jesus declared to his young disciples and anyone in the crowds, **“You are the salt of the earth. You are the light of the world.”**

Whether we have been following Jesus for twenty days or twenty years, Jesus says we are salt and light. Though people tend to talk about their life in terms of what they do -- bus driver, student, butcher, baker, candlestick maker -- we are not primarily those things. Jesus said, **“You are the salt of the earth. You are the light of the world.”** That's what we are. And the effect of our life is to be salty and to shine light.

Jesus gave us the Beatitudes for our spiritual growth. He also gave them so that we can be salt and light. When the Beatitudes form our inner character, we are salt and light. We are blessed and we are a blessing. We are a godly influence. When Christianity stops giving godly influence in the world, it stops being Christianity. It is good for nothing except to be thrown out and trampled underfoot. We must take our identity from Jesus - salt and light. This is true in every area of our life.

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We are salt and light in our families. In 1822, the son of a widowed mother in Scotland and his wife, went to South Africa as missionaries. He served as a pastor for forty-four years in South Africa until his death. He faithfully prayed for revival to come to South Africa. He served many people, including other missionaries in Africa, like David Livingstone. He was also salt and light to his children. He shared stories of spiritual revival every week with his family. He prayed for his children. Of his eleven children who reached adulthood, five of his six sons became pastors. Four of his five daughters married pastors. Ten grandchildren became pastors. Thirteen other grandchildren became missionaries. One of his sons was Andrew Murray whom God used to bring spiritual revival in South Africa. Some of you are familiar with Andrew Murray's many excellent Christian books. Many things have been written about him. But the salt and light of his parents extend well beyond their famous son. That is godly influence in the family.

We are salt and light in school and work. This is revealed in our work ethic, pursuit of excellence, honesty, motivation, honoring God first and foremost in the work and putting people ahead of accomplishments. Dr. Ben Carson is the head of pediatric neurosurgery at Johns Hopkins Hospital in Baltimore. He was the first African-American surgeon to head a department at a major research hospital. He pioneered many new surgical techniques. He was the first surgeon to successfully separate twins joined at the head. He is also a born-again, committed Christian. When asked about his work, he said, "The most important thing to me is taking your God-given talents and developing them to the utmost, so that you can be useful to your fellow man, period." He begins every day with prayer and reading from Proverbs and ends everyday by reading Proverbs or some other part of the Bible. He works very hard and is known for his honesty and integrity. He treats others with humility and respect. Miracles in the operating room have given him many opportunities to talk about his faith to other doctors and academics.

We cannot all be brain surgeons. But we can all be honest. We can all honor God in our studies and work. We can all work hard to become excellent, not for our own selfish sake, but to develop what God has given to us so that we can be useful to others and a blessing. We can all be mindful of the other people in class or work and put them ahead of ourselves. We can all be salt and light in school and work.

We are salt and light in campus ministry. Many UBF shepherds and missionaries have been salt and light for the last 50 years. Beautiful lives of sacrifice, prayer, Bible study and most of all, commitment to Jesus and to Jesus'

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people, have influenced many people, to also follow Jesus and live the same way. The world changes in 50 years but Jesus' words do not. We are still salt and light at the campus. We do this by teaching the Bible, praying for students, and opening our lives to serve them.

Look at verse 16. **“In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.”** As salt and light, we help people to glorify our Father in heaven. This is the result of an inner life formed in Jesus.

In this passage, Jesus has taught us how to be blessed and how to be a blessing. Moreover, Jesus said, **“You are the salt of the earth,”** and **“You are the light of the world.”** Let's pray to be truly blessed people. Let us be those who are poor in spirit, mourn, are meek, hunger and thirst for righteousness, are merciful, are pure in heart, peacemakers and persecuted for righteousness. When we are these things, we are also salt and light. We are a blessing. May God bless you and make you a blessing. Amen.