

***“The power of the Gospel” Matthew 5:13-16 (5/18/25)***

Today, as we think about the upcoming Memorial Day, I want to talk about the power of the Gospel. After I lived in the United States, Memorial Day gives different and more personal insights to me. When I lived in South Korea as a child, through books and history classes, I learned that lots of United States soldiers helped and sacrificed for Korea. But now that I live here, I have met people who actually fought in the Korean War. And those people who served in Korea even before I was born. I have heard their stories in person, and their stories deeply touched my heart.

When I think of Memorial Day here in the United States, I think of Korea, too. In Christian words, I would describe South Korea as a “Country of grace.” I am not sure if South Korea is now sharing grace with the world, but I do believe South Korea has received so much grace and help from other countries.

[Slide 1] One of the most significant events most recently happened in South Korean history was the Korean War. This war was from 1950 to 1953. Sixteen countries sent soldiers to fight for South Korea, and five more countries gave medical help. Including the Soviet Union and China, who supported North Korea, over 24 countries got involved. It was one of the largest international wars fought in one country.

The country that helped South Korea the most was the United States. South Korea had about 1.3 million soldiers, but the United States sent around 1.8 million. In fact, more United States soldiers fought for Korea's freedom than South Korean soldiers. About 34,000 United States soldiers died in Korea. The war was technically not over now, but because of the sacrifice of so many young United States soldiers, South Korea was able to keep its freedom.

[Slide 2] After the war, South Korea was very poor. South Korea was even poorer than North Korea. South Korea could not use the electricity if North Korea did not send electricity to South Korea. When I tell older United States women that South Korean people did laundry in rivers in the 1960s, they find it hard to believe. I have heard stories from pastors' wives who immigrated here in the 1960s, and they did not know how to use a washing machine at first. [Slide 3] Even after the war, the U.S. kept helping South Korea, and that support helped South Korea grow and become what it is today. Now, South Korea has developed and has a strong culture that is popular around the world.

Sometimes, when I say good things about the U.S., people tell me their opinions. They say the U.S. helped South Korea because of the Cold War and their own benefits. They say the United States needed South Korea to grow stronger than

North Korea. They argued there were reasons why the United States helped South Korea a lot.

But honestly, I do not know much about politics. What I do know is this: United States people died in Korea, and many people in this country gave their time, money, and support to help South Korea. While I live in the United States, I have met people who served in the Korean War and helped South Korea. When I hear their stories, I can see they truly wanted to help Korea with their love and warm hearts.

I always remember that United States soldiers shed their blood in Korea, and because of the taxes you paid to help South Korea, I am here today, and my children are here today. I want to say thank you from the deep in my heart.

Before the Korean War, Korea received another great gift from the United States. It was the Gospel. Korea has a special Christian history. Christianity did not come into Korea through colonization or force. Some Koreans became Christians in China and Japan, and they brought the faith back to Korea. However, it is still true that missionaries contributed to growing the church in Korea.

At first, Christianity was not welcomed in Korea because Christianity produced many conflicts with Confucian culture, which was the country's

philosophy at that time. So, Christians were persecuted in Korea because they did not worship Ancestor spirits. Later then, when Korea began to open up to Western cultures, the government allowed missionaries to come to help with education and healthcare. In 1885, two United States missionaries officially came to Korea.

Through these missionaries and others who followed, the Gospel spread out to Korea. And the Gospel changed Korea. Nobles and slaves reconciled together. Women got the chance to learn. Many Korean leaders came from churches. Later, when Korea was colonized by Japan, many people who fought for Korea's independence were Christians—especially Methodists.

The Gospel has real power. It is able to make impossible things possible. It changed the whole country of Korea and gave people strength in every hard time. But if the Gospel is so powerful, why do we still have so much conflict in our world? I think it is because our faith is weak, and Christians lost their identity.

Today's Bible Scripture is from Jesus' Sermon on the Mount. Matthew chapters 5-7 are one of the most important parts of the Bible. This sermon of Jesus has a core teaching of faith. In today's Scripture, Jesus said to the people, "You are the salt of the earth. You are the light of the world." He did not say, "Try to become salt and light, or you should become salt and light." He said, "You are the salt and

light of the world.”

When Jesus said this, He was not talking to strong believers or apostles. Jesus did not talk to people who could die for Jesus. He did not talk to apostles who had the power of the Holy Spirit to heal the sick. The Bible says He was talking to a crowd, people who came to see who Jesus was. But even to them, Jesus said, “You are salt and light.”

Jesus clearly said, “You are salt and light.” We need to believe that. But sometimes, it is hard to believe that I am the salt and light of the world. Even I, as a pastor, look at myself and wonder, “Am I really salt and light?” I often feel like I am not good enough to say that about myself.

So, how can we be salt and light? How can people who have little and weak faith be salt and light? We can be the salt and light of the world because Jesus is with us. Jesus, who is the true salt and light, is with us. God is with us. That is the Gospel. Because of the Gospel, we can be salt and light. Because Jesus is in us, we are the salt and light of the world.

This is the power of the Gospel. Even someone with little faith can still carry the power of the Gospel. When Jesus came into my life, I started to see my weakness and decided to follow Him. When Jesus came into my family, we realized that our

real problem was not outside. We realized that we did not love each other well. When Jesus came to Korea, missionaries had the courage and strength to worship God in the land of persecution. This power of the Gospel, which brings a little but the most difficult change, changed a person and restored families, and this power of the Gospel helped the whole country grow. This is the power of the Gospel.

Do you believe that we are the salt and light of the world? No matter what others say, if we believe in Jesus, then we are. Not because we are great people or we did many great works, but because Jesus is with us. I hope that this week, the light of Jesus will shine through us. And I hope, through that light and the power of the Gospel, many people come to know our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.