

"The Salt of the Earth"

Matthew 5:13-16

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“13 Ye are the salt of the earth: but if the salt have lost his savour, wherewith shall it be salted? it is thenceforth good for nothing, but to be cast out, and to be trodden under foot of men. 14 Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on an hill cannot be hid. 15 Neither do men light a candle, and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick; and it giveth light unto all that are in the house. 16 Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.” (Mt 5:13-16)

The figure is one, but with some differences. I included verses 14-16 in order to cast light upon the meaning of the salt figure. In this famous sermon on the mount, Jesus is describing the character of the new man in Christ. This is the man who is formed by the Holy Spirit after the image of Christ; he is a new creation; he is a man whose eyes are opened; he is a man who is born again; He is a man who has been washed in regeneration, a man who has a new heart, and many other figures set forth in Scripture.

Every sacrifice was to be salted with salt, drawing upon the practice of the ancient world to eat bread and salt to seal a covenant. The sacrifices of the Lord were to be sealed with salt, thrown upon the sacrifices, every sacrifice in order to indicate that God’s covenant was certain and sure. The Lord Jesus takes this a step further and says that the new man is the salt of the world, indicating that the offerings of the world will be brought to Christ and will be acceptable to Him because of the New Covenant in the blood of Christ.

Similar is the figure the light of the world. Christians are light because the light has shined into their hearts. They do not have their own light, for they are as the moon and planets that reflect the light of the sun. There is only one light and there is only one salt, and that is the Gospel of Jesus Christ, and Christians are to be both salt and light and carry the Gospel to the ends of the world.

I would do three things this morning. I would like to comment on
1: Salt. 2: Salting yourself; 3: Salting the world.

I. The salt. There are two ideas that Christ combines here.

A. The idea of the covenant of salt, which in a figure means that the sacrifices are to be accepted because of the promises of God’s word. The salt means nothing in itself, just as the blood of bulls and goats and the sacrifices of meal and bread meant nothing in themselves.

1. It is always the promise of God that is at center in any sacrament of Scripture.

2. The fact that salt is used as a figure speaks of several things

a) Salt was distinct from the sacrifice: Israel was to be reminded that it was not the

sacrifice itself, but the covenant of salt, the promise of God that gave meaning to the sacrifice.

b) Salt is a curative and purifier. The salt in the oceans is the great purifier of the pollutions of the world and has an immense capacity for cleansing itself. It is not a fragile environment that we live in, but one well adapted to support an immense number of people. In like manner we are cleansed by the word and spirit.

c) Salt is a preservative: We are kept by the word and promises of God

d) Salt is a disinfectant and an antiseptic, neutralizing poisons and killing bacteria and viruses.

B. But there is more here in the words of Christ. The salt He speaks of is not within the experience of the modern world. Our salt is pure and does not lose its saltiness.

1. The salt used commonly in Palestine was not mined or evaporated from salty water. It was dug out of the marshes next to salt seas

2. The salt, which we know as sodium chloride, was only one of the ingredients of the substance that was used widely for all the purposes of salt that we have spoken of.

3. Albert Barnes wrote:

Salt have lost its savour That is, if it has become tasteless, or has lost its preserving properties. The salt used in this country is a chemical compound — chloride of sodium — and if the saltiness were lost, or it were to lose its savor, there would be nothing remaining. It enters into the very nature of the substance. In eastern countries, however, the salt used was impure, or mingled with vegetable or earthy substances, so that it might lose the whole of its saltiness, and a considerable quantity of earthy matter remain. This was good for nothing, except that it was used to place in paths, or walks, as we use gravel. This kind of salt is common still in that country. It is found in the earth in veins or layers, and when exposed to the sun and rain, loses its saltiness entirely. Maundrell says,

“I broke a piece of it, of which that part that was exposed to the rain, sun, and air, though it had the sparks and particles of salt, yet it had perfectly lost its savor. The inner part, which was connected to the rock, retained its savor, as I found by proof. So Dr. Thomson (The Land and the Book, vol. ii. pp. 43,44) says, “I have often seen just such salt, and the identical disposition of it that our Lord has mentioned. A merchant of Sidon having farmed of the government the revenue from the importation of salt, brought over an immense quantity from the marshes of Cyprus — enough, in fact, to supply the whole province for at least 20 years. This he had transferred to the mountains, to cheat the government out of some small percentage. Sixty-five houses in June — Lady Stanhope’s village were rented and filled with salt. These houses have merely earthen floors, and the salt next the ground, in a few years, entirely spoiled. I saw large quantities of it literally thrown into the street, to be trodden underfoot by people and beasts. It was ‘good for

nothing.’

“It should be stated in this connection that the salt used in this country is not manufactured by boiling clean salt water, nor quarried from mines, but is obtained from marshes along the seashore, as in Cyprus, or from salt lakes in the interior, which dry up in summer, as the one in the desert north of Palmyra, and the great lake of Jebbul, southeast of Aleppo.

“Maundrell, who visited the lake at Jebbul, tells us that he found salt there which had entirely ‘lost its savor,’ and the same abounds among the debris at Usdum, and in other localities of rocksalt at the south end of the Dead Sea. Indeed, it is a well-known fact that the salt of this country, when in contact with the ground, or exposed to rain and sun, does become insipid and useless. From the manner in which it is gathered, much earth and other impurities are necessarily collected with it. Not a little of it is so impure that it cannot be used at all, and such salt soon effloresces and turns to dust — not to fruitful soil, however. It is not only good for nothing itself, but it actually destroys all fertility wherever it is thrown; and this is the reason why it is cast into the street. There is a sort of verbal verisimilitude in the manner in which our Lord alludes to the act: ‘it is cast out’ and ‘trodden under foot;’ so troublesome is this corrupted salt, that it is carefully swept up, carried forth, and thrown into the street. There is no place about the house, yard, or garden where it can be tolerated. No man will allow it to be thrown on to his field, and the only place for it is the street, and there it is cast to be trodden underfoot of men.”

4. This is the salt that the disciples were compared to by the Lord. It completely takes away all idea of perfectionism, for as long as the salt retained some of the sodium chloride it could be effect to do what salt does. But it became worse than useless if it lost the saltiness.

5. "Salt" therefore has two meanings that concern us: it is the promise of the gospel which is always pure and cannot lose its saltiness; and it is also the church and the people of God who have this gospel in impurity and much infirmity, but still salt the earth just as the everyday salt used in Israel was useful for ordinary uses, unless the true salt had leached out of it.

II. I would now direct your attention to a parallel passage in Mark: Mr 9:50 “Salt is good: but if the salt have lost his saltness, wherewith will ye season it? Have salt in yourselves, and have peace one with another.” Have salt in yourselves. This would mean that we must let the word of Christ dwell in us richly if we are to be the salt of the earth. There is much impurity and non-saltiness in each of us; our only redeeming quality is that we have the promises of God.

A. We are called to receive the engrafted word which is able to save our souls:

1. This is the way Christ dwells in us: by His word and spirit; Jas 1:21 “Wherefore lay apart all filthiness and superfluity of naughtiness, and receive with meekness the engrafted word, which is able to save your souls.”

2. This is the way that we have salt in ourselves; our sacrifices are acceptable to God if they are in terms of the eternal promises and new testament in the blood of Christ. “Present your bodies

as living sacrifices, holy acceptable unto God which is your reasonable service.”

3. The salt works even in the midst of impurities, of which we have plenty.

B. Especially our speech is to be salted with the promises and oracles of God. Col. 4:6: “Let your speech be always with grace, seasoned with salt, that ye may know how ye ought to answer every man.” (Col 4:6).

C. Even the speech of the young can be pleasing and acceptable to God, as we read in Psalm 148: this is the result when the whole earth is salted with the Gospel of Jesus Christ:

“1 Praise ye the LORD. Praise ye the LORD from the heavens: praise him in the heights. 2 Praise ye him, all his angels: praise ye him, all his hosts. 3 Praise ye him, sun and moon: praise him, all ye stars of light. 4 Praise him, ye heavens of heavens, and ye waters that be above the heavens. 5 Let them praise the name of the LORD: for he commanded, and they were created. 6 He hath also stablished them for ever and ever: he hath made a decree which shall not pass. 7 Praise the LORD from the earth, ye dragons, and all deeps: 8 Fire, and hail; snow, and vapour; stormy wind fulfilling his word: 9 Mountains, and all hills; fruitful trees, and all cedars: 10 Beasts, and all cattle; creeping things, and flying fowl: 11 Kings of the earth, and all people; princes, and all judges of the earth: 12 Both young men, and maidens; old men, and children: 13 Let them praise the name of the LORD: for his name alone is excellent; his glory is above the earth and heaven. 14 He also exalteth the horn of his people, the praise of all his saints; even of the children of Israel, a people near unto him. Praise ye the LORD.” (Ps 148:1-14)

D. But beware: if the gospel is lost, all is lost. We are the least of all the people of the earth and we have no glory but in the cross of Christ; if we lose that we have lost everything and are not fit for anything but to be trodden underfoot. Make much of the Gospel.

III. A pointed application of this message of Christ, from the disciples and apostles themselves:

“6 When they therefore were come together, they asked of him, saying, Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel? 7 And he said unto them, It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in his own power. 8 But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth. 9 And when he had spoken these things, while they beheld, he was taken up; and a cloud received him out of their sight.” (Ac 1:6-9)

A. They seemed not to have heard anything that Christ had said thus far.

B. He corrects them about their mission:

1. The kingdom was sufficiently manifest at this time for them to do their work. The Holy Spirit would be given to them for this purpose. Vs. 4,5

2. The kingdom was not of this world; evidence: Jesus went away physically; the physical manifestation of the kingdom is in the hands of God alone.

3. They were to salt the earth: There would be a long age of witness before the manifestation of the kingdom and their eternal reward.

C. Oh, beloved, the reward will come and the journey will be ended, but for now we are to salt the earth. That is our mission.

1. We must not be deterred by our own infirmities, for the Gospel, not our goodness is the power of God unto salvation and the salting of the world.

2. We must labor to have salt in ourselves; to know and love the Scriptures. Paul said this Himself:

“24 Know ye not that they which run in a race run all, but one receiveth the prize? So run, that ye may obtain. 25 And every man that striveth for the mastery is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a corruptible crown; but we an incorruptible. 26 I therefore so run, not as uncertainly; so fight I, not as one that beateth the air: 27 But I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection: lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway.” (1Co 9:24-27)

3. How do we salt the earth? These verses say it all:

a) Col 3:16 Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord.

b) “And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him.” (Col 3:17)

4. In a special way, the apostles were sent to salt the earth, and their message still has its saltiness and power in the world. We have a much more humble role, but necessary, none the less, though it does not appear in the history books. The bible history is very narrow and conveys only a narrow stream; but the history of all the saints is given in a nutshell in the book of revelation:

“10 And I heard a loud voice saying in heaven, Now is come salvation, and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of his Christ: for the accuser of our brethren is cast down, which accused them before our God day and night. 11 And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of their testimony; and they loved not their lives unto the death.” (Re 12:10-11)

Amen and Amen
God bless you.