

The Sermon on the Mount

The Salt of the Earth

Matthew 5:13

Introduction

Last week we completed our series on the Beatitudes in Matthew Chapter 5, which is part of the larger teaching of Jesus' famous Sermon on the Mount. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus outlines the character traits that reflect Kingdom Living.

Warren Wiersbe calls the first twelve verses of Matthew 5, BE-Attitudes. Many people ask what they must DO to inherit eternal life, probably, because we are often more task-oriented than relationship-oriented. Jesus taught that to BE is more essential than to DO.

When He finished his teaching on the Beatitudes, Jesus said to the disciples, "You are the salt of the earth." In verse 13, Jesus says, "You are the salt of the earth; but if the salt loses its flavor, how shall it be seasoned? It is then good for nothing but to be thrown out and trampled underfoot by men. (Mat 5:13 NKJV)

In our modern society here in the Western world, that statement probably means very little to most of us. But to the followers of Jesus, it had profound implications. We use salt as a seasoning. We sprinkle salt on our food to give it a little extra taste. We use enormous quantities of salt on highways and sidewalks to melt the ice and snow during the winter.

But in some parts of the ancient world, salt was more valuable than gold itself and used as a medium of exchange and the basis of barter. You probably remember learning about the famous "salt routes" across Asia and the Middle East in History class. Caravans used camels, donkeys, and mules to transport tons of salt across hundreds of miles of rugged terrain. In those days, salt was a necessity for survival. It was essential to sustaining life itself.

Jesus uses salt as an illustration of how He envisioned his disciples would impact their world. It was a teaching that would significantly affect them. Salt is vital to your health, especially in a hot arid climate, because it helps maintain proper body metabolism. When heat is intense, or the humidity is high, the body loses a massive amount of moisture which causes dehydration.

Sodium deficiency causes weakness and a loss of physical strength. Normal life processes are compromised, and death can occur unless you replenish your salt and water levels. Salt tablets are often made available to miners, factory workers, and others who work in confined spaces of high heat. Without salt, they wouldn't be able to perform their jobs properly.

In Jesus' day, people didn't have the benefit of electric fans and air conditioning to protect them from the fierce heat. They needed salt just to survive. Jesus wanted

his disciples to realize that they were that important to their world. He wanted them to be His seasoning to bring hope and salvation to every person.

I. Salt Penetrates

Salt has excellent penetrating quality. That's why it melts snow so quickly. Just a touch of salt in a cup of water makes the whole cup taste salty. Jesus wanted His disciples to penetrate society with the health and strength of God. They were to saturate their culture with the joy and hope of heaven.

It is the followers of Christ who keep the nation and the world healthy and stable. Unfortunately, too many believers today will not commit to reach out and penetrate their world with the gospel message. Many believers have succumbed to the world's message that Christians should just keep their religion to themselves. Jesus calls us to teach the world about true fellowship and relationship.

When Jesus sent the twelve into the mainstream of their world, he was injecting salt into society. He told them, "I send you out to the lost sheep of the house of Israel" and "as the Father has sent me into the world, so send I you." Jesus wanted his disciples to penetrate every part of their world. They were to be different and yet still saturate the world with the message of good news! Jesus calls us to that same kind of service today. Jesus sends us into similar kinds of situations to contribute to the strength and health of our world.

But to have a penetrating effect, salt must be applied. We must be willing to give ourselves for the good of others. To do that, you must be prepared to invest your life sacrificially for the sake of others. If you choose to be an ardent follower of Christ, you need to count the cost.

Salt loses its distinct identity and separateness as it penetrates and performs its function. It is a difficult concept for many Christians in our society to grasp. Jesus said we are to live in this world, yet we are not to be of the world. The source of our power is the unique presence of Jesus released by the Holy Spirit.

Our relationship with Jesus is what makes us salt to our world. There are two chemical elements that combine to form salt; sodium and chloride. Salt is the essential compound formed when these two elements are combined. Like sodium and chloride, our humanity combines with Christ's divinity when we choose to follow Jesus. Our spirit joins with the Holy Spirit to become a considerable force for good in every society. That's what Christ is telling his disciples. Our work and words testify that our way of life is not just ours, but God's and ours combined. That's why Jesus said, "The words which I speak and the work which I do; is not just mine, but is also the Father's.

We are not in society, just working for God. Nor are we just in the world, working for men. We are actively and energetically working in the world WITH God and WITH men. It's a profound principle capable of altering and energizing the whole

process of our life of faith in Christ. We don't just use our talents and abilities to help God out.

Our fellowship with Christ makes our presence in this world an active witness that strengthens and heals our society. It is Christ living in me and loving the world through me that changes our world. It is Christ within me that strengthens me to be an effective witness. It is His Holy Spirit who fills me with confidence and boldness. It is His wisdom that guides me. It is His compassion, His integrity, His justice, His love, His faithfulness, His righteousness, His peace, His fruits, and His character that finds its expression in my character and empowers me to make an impact on my world. As Christians, we are the visible expression of the invisible God! We are Christ to our world!

A better world can only come about by better men and women. Our Christian life must be more than just a philosophy of life; it must be salt that penetrates our society. Christlikeness must be a very part of our nature! As the salt of the earth, we are a source of health to our world. But salt is not only a penetrating agent, but it is also a preservative.

II. Salt Preserves

In Jesus' day, people used large quantities of salt to preserve food. It was essential to their survival. Jesus says to His disciples, "You are to be the preservative that keeps the world from corruption and decay." What a purpose!

Regardless of how great or even Godly the foundations of a society are, it will eventually falter and fail if evil forces are allowed to work against it. History has taught us that lesson!

Salt loses its vitality when it becomes diluted. The tragedy for a believer or any church is when their witness and commitment become diluted. Interfering foreign elements can corrupt and keep the properties of salt from bonding together. When we allow sin to enter our life, it prevents us from uniting with Christ. Sin corrupts our witness. Only when we repent of our sins can we unite Christ to provide health and healing to those around us. Without apology, we must accept the Bible as God's unique, inspired, and divine revelation.

You must trust the Bible to be real and accurate. It must become the standard that guides our behavior and personal conduct. We cannot compromise our faith or ignore the teaching of the Word of God. We must be bold enough to advocate for morality, decency, integrity, and holiness. That message causes us to be a preservative that repels corruptness and sustain health.

Jesus teaches us that our lifestyle and conduct must deter those around us from practicing evil. Incredibly, one person with God's help can be a majority when our motives are sincere and straightforward. As we become saturated with the truth of scripture, the Bible becomes more than just a good book of moral teachings. When we listen to God as He speaks to us through the pages of His Word, it

becomes our very nature to transmit His life and help to others. Of course, we are not immune to the difficulties of life. If we entangle ourselves in the sin and decay around us, we can't disengage from it without divine help. Thankfully, when we ask God to save us and help us, He does!

Our testimony of God's saving power becomes the seasoning that draws people to Christ and convinces them to "taste and see that the Lord is good." When we choose to follow Christ, the Holy Spirit empowers us to be the seasoning that attracts others to God. Through our witness, God's Word can penetrate the hearts of others and reveal His goodness, mercy, and forgiveness. That doesn't mean God wants you to go barging into people's lives and circumstances. But it does mean that we allow our presence to season the life of others and be God's agent of hope and peace to lift them out of discouragement and failure.

Jesus calls upon us to put our minds and bodies to work, sharing the benefits and blessings of God with others. That's the real Christian service. Christianity may be in the minority in a world that's roaring down the road to self-destruction. But it doesn't take much to be God's flavoring, and we can certainly do our best to flash the warning signs and point out a better way! If we do that, at least some will be warned. Some will realize the error of their ways and turn around.

Are your friends better because of your life and example? Do you bring them closer to Jesus through your actions and behavior? As Christians, our mission is to penetrate and preserve the health and strength of our world. All it takes is a dash of salt to season a whole area.

You may be the only Christian in your workplace, but God has placed you there as His seasoning. You are the salt God has chosen to use as His seasoning in your neighborhood. Christ is counting on you to preserve Christian values and the principles of God's Word in your daily living.

III. Salt Flavors

Jesus sends us to reach out with inspiration and flavoring to the blandness that seems to be all around us. When we share words of God's hope and salvation with someone, it flavors a person's life with confidence and promise.

Salt has a way of making even drab and boring foods taste better. Without salt in their barley bread or roasted wheat cakes, the diet of the disciples would have been pretty unbearable and monotonous. Most Americans don't appreciate the terrific value of salt because we have a varied diet at our fingertips at all times. But in third-world countries, it isn't uncommon to have a diet of rice for breakfast, rice for lunch, and rice for supper, or cornmeal in the morning, cornmeal at noon, and cornmeal in the evening. The only thing that can give any flavor to a diet like that is seasoning. It's why salt was so precious and needed in the simple lifestyle of the people of Jesus' day. It made mere survival at least bearable.

Jesus knew all about this. He lived and grew up among the ordinary people of Palestine. He knew the harsh realities of trying to make a living from the barren ground of that desert region. Jesus was in touch with his world. He says to his disciples, "You are to be the ones who make life bearable. You must flavor your world with hope and faith. You must be the one to bring a zest and tang to whatever challenges you are called upon to face. You must inject inspiration and enthusiasm into the lives you touch.

Conclusion

The church is supposed to be salt in this earth. We are the ones who must introduce the elements of hope and vitality and faith and joy into life. So many people today are living out their lives in quiet desperation. They are lonely and fearful, and bored.

This time of isolation in our country has allowed us to examine how we live and what are the things of real value in our lives. Some people have finally realized they lack true purpose and a sense of real usefulness and fulfillment. As Christians, it is our calling to be the spice that will make life bearable for them.

One thing we know for certain is that "God is not *the author* of confusion but of peace." (1 Corinthians 14:33 NKJV)

James writes in Chapter 3, "For where envy and self-seeking *exist*, confusion and every evil thing *are* there." (James 3:16 NKJV)

Jesus said in John 10:10, "The thief does not come except to steal, and to kill, and to destroy. I have come that they may have life and that they may have *it more abundantly*." (John 10:10 NKJV)

Reunite your spirit with the Holy Spirit and let the peace of Christ rule in your heart. Transition and change don't have to be the end of things. These present situations are an opportunity to refocus and start dreaming again. It's our opportunity to get a fresh new vision of what God wants us to accomplish as His disciples.

There are several ways we can be an inspiration to others during this time of world crisis:

1. Be an Encourager (Not criticism)
2. Be positive and optimistic (Not negative or argumentative)
3. Learn to comfort people and give them hope.
4. Tell people you appreciate them.
5. Be friendly. Don't be afraid to take the first step.
6. Develop a sense of humor, and don't forget to laugh!
7. Be empathetic. Learn to share the joys and pain of life with others.

Salt is not extravagant. It isn't spectacular. It is useful and straightforward, and it has many unique and healing qualities.

Only rarely does God call upon us to do something dramatic. Most of the time, He simply asks us to silently and sincerely serve Him and those around us. Honest work, inspiring hope, good cheer, a helping hand, a warm heart, a loving smile, a word of encouragement, a friendly wave, that's the kind of seasoning that this life needs, especially now!

That's the kind of Christianity the world needs to see. Because of you, it's possible someone with a broken heart or a shattered dream, who has lost hope, will be healed. A person's life may be changed, all because you reached out to become the salt of the earth.