

Matthew 5:13 *You are the salt of the earth; but if the salt has become tasteless, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled under foot by men.*

INTRODUCTION: CREATING A THIRST

There is a popular saying, “You can lead a horse to water, but you can’t make him drink.”

Now as I try to lead my friend to “drink” of the “living water” of Jesus, I might be inclined to use this saying: “I’m leading him to the water, but I just can’t make him drink.” Truth is, making him drink is beyond my “pay grade” – that’s God’s business alone. It was Bill Bright, founder of Campus Crusade for Christ, who said so well: “Successful soul winning is sharing Jesus Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit and leaving the results to God.”

It is not my job to make my friend drink. But it is my role as a kingdom citizen to make my friend “thirsty” for Jesus. Salt creates thirst. And that is the heart of today’s passage. As the “salt of the earth” I am to create a thirst for God and specifically for His Son Jesus.

RECAP AND CONTEXT

Thus far in our “Kingdom Constitution” study of the Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount we have made our way through the “preamble,” which is the Beatitudes. The Beatitudes describe who we are as citizens of God’s heavenly kingdom by way of eight pithy statements of what brings true blessedness in life. We discovered that these are not characteristics which we must achieve, but rather characteristics of who we already are in Christ.

Martyn Lloyd Jones, in his book “Studies In The Sermon On The Mount,” emphasizes that a proper interpretation of the Sermon is to understand who we are in Christ before we examine how we are to live out our lives in the world. The teaching on this living out of our lives commences in Matthew 5:21, which we will get to in a few weeks. But until that verse, the Sermon still is helping us to understand who we are. We see that as Jesus says, “you are the salt of the earth ...” So we are still examining “who we are” as kingdom citizens. And we are SALT.

Context is always so important in examining a Biblical passage. And as we begin our thoughts on being “the salt of the earth” we should note that contextually speaking, this is effectively living out the Beatitudes. That is, we are “salt” when we empty ourselves of self, hunger for righteousness and are filled with it, and then demonstrate mercy, purity of heart and peacemaking. This righteous living will often produce some form of persecution, but that is just part of being “salt.”

OF GREAT VALUE

Salt historically has had a great value. Whereas our present day salt is inexpensively processed, it was not always so. There was a time when soldiers were sometimes paid in salt. Thus, when a soldier did not carry out his duties it was said of him, “he is not worth his salt.” This is where we get the common phrase that someone is “worth his salt,” meaning of value.

Thus salt is equated with value. So one of the implications of being “the salt of the earth” is being of great value to God in your world. The world may not recognize that value, but God does. Therefore, don’t think of salt as being an inexpensive seasoning – rather think of it as being a valuable commodity. That is who you are, Christian – of great value! And that value is for the world’s benefit, whether they realize it or not.

So far we have noted two key qualities of salt, both physically and spiritually. It (1) creates a thirst and it (2) is of great value. But there are more qualities to note.

AN ANTISEPTIC

IN addition, salt has great healing qualities, as an antiseptic. Canker sores can be healed by washing one’s mouth with salt water. Even though it stings, it is providing healing. And we know

the effect of swimming in salt water with sores on our body - again, there is a stinging sensation, and yet there is ultimately a balm of healing. Salt is an agent of healing.

So it is that Christians act as antiseptic healing to a spiritually sick world. You are not the healing agent, but the Holy Spirit within you is that agent. The mercy you show can heal guilt and shame. Your pure-hearted devotion to God can draw others to spiritual interest. And your peacemaking efforts can heal wounds of anger, resentment and pride. As we have already noted, the response can often be the opposite, resulting in persecution – but not always. Some will be drawn to the balm of the Spirit that we bring, and healing will result from the antiseptic of the “salt” which is your Christian character.

We know that the world is rotting with sinfulness. Left to its own devices, the world would self-destruct. We see this in the high divorce rate, high demise of nations throughout history, high criminal population and growing terrorist activity. We see it in our politicians, our parents, our employers, and our entertainment and sports celebrities. But most of all we see this sinfulness within our own self. Romans, chapter 3 reveals this pervasive sinfulness in sweeping statements such as *“There is none who does good, not even one.”* And into this world of sin God calls us as Christians to be salt, as spiritual antiseptic.

A PRESERVATIVE

The book of Jude tells us to *“contend earnestly for the faith.”* (Jude 3). Paul in his second letter to Timothy tells Timothy to *“guard, through the Holy Spirit who dwells in us, the treasure which has been entrusted to you.”* (2 Tim. 1:14) This “contending” and “guarding” is the function of salt. Just as salt, especially in the ancient world, was a preservative of food such as meat, we as spiritual salt are to preserve God’s holy treasure of the Church, the Bible and our precious faith.

When these influences of righteousness are gone, lawlessness will run rampant. When Paul writes to the Thessalonian church, he tells them of the coming “son of destruction” or Antichrist that will arise in the Day of the Lord. And Paul indicates that there is a “what” and a “he” that is restraining these events from taking place.

2 Thessalonians 2:6-7 *And you know what restrains him now, so that in his time he will be revealed. For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work; only he who now restrains will do so until he is taken out of the way.*

Most Bible commentators see this as speaking of the restraining of the Antichrist by the presence of the Holy Spirit and the Church and Christian influence in the world. In other words, as long as the Church is acting like preservative “salt” in the world, rampant lawlessness will be restrained. But when the Church and the indwelling Holy Spirit is taken out of the world at the event we call the “rapture,” the Antichrist and lawlessness will run wild, and the Great Tribulation will be in full swing.

Today it is the “salt” of Christians that is fighting to protect and preserve the rights of the unborn. It is the “salt” of Christians that is fighting to keep the definition of marriage as being between a man and a woman. It is the “salt” of Christians that is restraining the LGBTQ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer) lobby from gaining special status. It is the “salt” of the Christians that is praying for the peace and prosperity and preservation of Israel as a nation. It is the “salt” of Christians that is calling for integrity, honesty and transparency at all levels of leadership. It is the “salt” of Christians that is calling for true freedom of religion and the end to persecution of Christians around the world.

Ten years ago Dinesh D’Souza published his New York Times bestselling book, “What’s So Great About Christianity.” (Highly recommended!) In it he writes:

The Bible in Matthew 5:13-14 calls Christians to be the “salt of the earth” and the “light of the world.” Christians are called to make the world a better place. Today that means confronting the challenge of modern atheism and secularism. (preface, p. 15)

Later in the book he writes:

We know that evil is real, and we know that it is wrong. But if evil is real, then good must be real as well. How else would we know the difference between the two? Our ability to distinguish between good and evil, and to recognize these as real, means that there is a moral standard in the universe that provides the basis for this distinction. And what is the source of that moral standard if not God?

It is “God in us” as Christians that is the source of moral distinction between good and evil. And it is our character as kingdom citizens to be “the salt of the earth” in helping define and preserve that distinction. Without the positive and pervasive influence of Christianity in the world it would “go to hell in a hand basket.” When we individually stand up for good and right and integrity and honesty and truth we are helping to preserve our world from rot and decay, just as salt preserves meat from putrification.

ABOUT BECOMING TASTELESS

Chemically speaking, salt is sodium chloride, an ionic compound with the chemical formula NaCl, representing a 1:1 ration of sodium and chloride ions. It is a stable compound, meaning the sodium and chloride ions cannot easily be divided. Translation: salt cannot lose its saltiness, chemically speaking. If it is not salty, it is not sodium chloride.

So Jesus (who is an excellent chemical scientist) is using a metaphor that is a chemical impossibility to make a point. To be spiritual “salt” is to be distinct. It is to make a difference in my world, holding back the rampage of sin. But if I blend in to the world so as to be indistinct, I am rendered unsalty, or ineffective in the preservation of righteousness. I have hidden the Holy Spirit in me to the degree that He is no longer seen in me. In other words, I have rendered Jesus invisible or “tasteless.”

He is making the point of how tragic it would be for this to happen – but it can’t! – because being “salt” in the world is who I am as a Christian. To not be salt is not to be a Christian. To be a Christian is to be salt, just as to be one part sodium joined to one part chloride is to be salt. Or to say it spiritually, one kingdom citizen joined eternally with the Holy Spirit IS SALT – that is, will make a difference.

Just as we are to “*let our light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works*” (v. 16), so let your salt be salty in such a way as to make a distinction and difference in your world for good. Stand up for what is right. Never compromise your godly principles. Don’t allow your “salt” to become unsalty or ineffective. Don’t seek to “blend in” to the moral fabric of your world. Rather “stand out” in such a way to help others develop a “taste” for Jesus Christ.

SEASONED WITH SALT

In a previous lesson we have referenced this following verse from Colossians, chapter 4. But I close with it to again highlight the importance of being salt in everyday conversation and interaction. Seize the moment. Be “graciously salty”!

Colossians 4:5-6 *Conduct yourselves with wisdom toward outsiders, making the most of the opportunity, Let your speech always be with grace, as though seasoned with salt, so that you will know how you should respond to each person.*

SUMMARY

1. **BEING SALT = creating a thirst for Jesus**
2. **BEING SALT = being of great value to God in your world**
3. **BEING SALT = being antiseptic to a decaying and sinful world**
4. **BEING SALT = guarding and preserving righteousness**