

Called to Be the Salt of the Earth

Matthew 5:13-16

"A Peanuts cartoon, showed Peppermint Patty talking to Charlie Brown. She said, "Guess what, Chuck. The first day of school and I got sent to the principal's office. It was your fault, Chuck." He said, "My fault? How could it be my fault? Why do you say everything is my fault?" She said, "You're my friend, aren't you, Chuck? You should have been a better influence on me."

While Peppermint Patty was seeking to pass the buck, she was in a very real sense right. We should be a good influence on our friends. We certainly do have an influence, for good or for bad."

This is part of the greatest sermon ever preached, "The Sermon on the Mount" preached by the Lord Himself. The theme of that great sermon was how people of the kingdom of heaven are to live.

Jesus was saying, "Those who are My disciples should affect the world in a positive way by the way in which they live." This morning we will deal with believers "Called to Be the Salt of the Earth".

In Matthew 5:13-16, we read, "You are the salt of the earth; but if the salt loses its flavour, how shall it be seasoned? It is then good for nothing but to be thrown out and trampled underfoot by men." (14) "You are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden. (15) Nor do they light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a lamp stand, and it gives light to all who are in the house. (16) Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven."

Jesus gives us no explicit explanation of the word pictures of salt and light that he uses in these verses, unlike the Parable of the Sower in chapter thirteen, where he tells us exactly what he wants us to understand. Here the reader is left to come to an understanding of these images on the basis of how these things are used in the world around them. We must then seek to understand "What Is It That We Are To Understand About Salt And How Are Christian's Like Salt?"

First, Christians Like Salt Are Of Infinite Value.

Jesus said to his followers "You are the salt of the earth."

Jesus is saying, "You, all of you are the salt of the earth." Jesus refers to his handful of basically uneducated disciples and referred to them as the salt of the earth. What great dignity Jesus bestows on his followers. What a great compliment! Because salt was a necessity of life in ancient times and thus great value was attached to it. Salt was so important that it was sometimes used for money. The Roman soldiers of Jesus' day were at times paid with it. In

fact, our word "salary" comes from the Latin word *salarium* which referred to the payments to the soldiers with salt.

We still use the phrase saying that someone either is, or is not, "worth their salt." We don't think much about salt because we can get as much of it in pure form as we want. It is just that little bottle with holes in the top on the table. But when you are completely dependent on salt to preserve your food, and when it is so valuable that it is used in the place of money, you get a completely different perspective on salt.

Because we live in a part of the world where we have an abundance of food we don't understand the monotony of the diet of those who lived in Jesus' day and for most of those who live in third world countries even today.

In a great portion of the world rice is the common food, three times a day. In large parts of Africa today the subsistence food is mealie meal, at every meal. In fact the Swahili word corn/mealie meal is "posha" meaning daily ration – mealie/corn meal given to workers.

In Job 6:6 the Bible says, "Can flavourless food be eaten without salt?" For this one reason alone salt is indispensable.
Christians Like Salt Are Of Infinite Value and...

Second, Christians Like Salt Act As A Preservative.

Salt was important for survival, because it was the only way they had to preserve meat. Obviously, they were not as privileged as we are with refrigeration, so salt became very important in their ability to preserve their food. The salt was rubbed into the meat before it was stored. Salt was to arrest or at to hinder the process of decay, so too Christians are given the task of arresting the decay of our world.

Through the Holy Spirit in us, is a 'preservative'.

2 Thes 2:7 "The mystery of Lawlessness is already at work; only he who restrains will do so until He is taken out of the way."

Christianity has in fact had a profound positive effect on the world. The most dramatic impact of Christianity on the world is that it has attached new value to human life. Prior to Christianity infanticide, and abandonment of children was a common practice. Hospitals as we now know them began through influence of Christianity. The Red Cross was started by an evangelical Christian.

Christian's continue to have a positive benefit on our world. As a moral antiseptic, Christians keep the corruption of society at bay by opposing moral decay by their lives and their words.

But there is a horrifying new trend today. George Barna's, the church statistician, says that research shows that, "... the average Christian in the

average church is almost indistinguishable from the rest of society. The fundamental moral and ethical difference that Christ can make in how we live is missing. When Christians cheat in business, or lie, steal, and cheat on their spouses at the same statistical level as those who say they are not Christians - something is horribly wrong."

If we as Christians lose the qualities of Christ likeness that make us distinct and become like the society around us, we no longer have a positive impact. We become a hindrance instead of a preservative.

According to Scripture, one day prior to our Lord's return the Church will be removed from this world, and when Christians are finally removed from the world scene, all Hell literally breaks loose.

Christians Like Salt Act As A Preservative and ...

Third, Christians Like Salt Are to Promote Thirst.

In arid climate and athletic competition it is used to promote thirst. Christians are to make Christ attractive and desirable.

In Titus 2:9 the Apostle Paul tells Christian servants that they must act in such a way "that they may adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour in all things." "adorn" is the Greek word that we get the word cosmetics from and is used to describe the arrangements of jewels in a manner to set off their full beauty - the idea is here is that Christian servants (any Christian for that matter) have the power through their exemplary behaviour to make the Christian life and faith beautiful to those outside.

Whenever we as Christians are introduced into a setting, whether is social or work related, the unbelievers should see evidence of the difference that Jesus Christ makes in our lives. They should be able to look at us and say, "I don't know what they have but I want it."

Christians Like Salt Should Promote Thirst and...

Fourth, Christians Like Salt Can Lose Their Usefulness. (v. 13b)

Jesus says that if the salt loses its flavour, (v. 13b) "... It is then good for nothing but to be thrown out and trampled underfoot by men."

Technically speaking, salt cannot lose its saltiness; sodium chloride is a stable compound. But in the part of the world where Jesus lived, salt was collected from around the Dead Sea where the crystals were often contaminated with other minerals. These crystallized formations were full of impurities, and since the actual salt was more soluble than the impurities, the rain could wash out the salt, which made what was left of little worth since it lost its saltiness. When this happened, the salt was thrown out, since it was no longer of any value either as a preservative or for flavouring.

When the salt was leached out it still looked like salt, but it lost its taste. The essential difference can be leached out of a Christian's life by the constant flow

of the world's values through our lives.

When Mahatma Gandhi was the spiritual leader of India, he was asked by some missionaries, "What is the greatest hindrance to Christianity in India?" His reply was, "Christians."

"The peculiar property of salt is that even though it may have lost its pungency, it still retains one very devastating potency. This rare and remarkable material can still ... Destroy plant life on the land.... the same principle applies in the case of the Christian. Either our lives or counting for good and for God or they are making an impact for evil and the enemy.... The way we live, the things we say the attitudes we entertain, the life style we adopt... are continuously producing either positive or negative results in society.... Our lives, whether we are aware or not either count for God or against Him. There simply is no middle ground."

Fifth, Christians Like Salt Must Have Contact To Have An Influence!

As we have already noted, the Christian is to be a preserving force in the world wherever God has placed them. But the salt never did any good when it was sitting on a shelf some place and the meat was some-where else. To be effective, the salt had to be rubbed into the meat. In a similar way Christian's are to allow God use them wherever he has placed them.

Whenever the church becomes a salt warehouse, it has missed out on the lesson that salt must make contact to have an effect.

Conclusion

I want you to notice what Jesus says and does not say, He does not say, "You all can be the salt of the earth." Nor does he say, "You all should be the salt of the earth." Jesus says "You are the salt of the earth" and in the Greek it is literally "You and you alone are the salt of the earth."

To be salt, we do not have to be spectacular

to be salt, we do not have to be sensational

to be salt, we do not have to be successful

(by the world's standards)

To be salt, we just have to affect our little corner of the world.