

## *Salty Christians*

Matthew 5:11-16

February 11, 2024

Please open your Bibles today to Matt 5. Our theme this year is the Great what? Jesus said, Go and make disciples of whom? All nations! I overheard a conversation recently that reminded me of the great commission. The first guy said, "I'm **Hungary!**" The second answered, "If you **Czech** the fridge maybe you'll find something." The other replied, "There is **Norway** I'll find anything in my fridge." "You really are **Russian** to get those puns out and they're a real **Spain** to put up with." "Really? I don't **Bolivia** you." "**Uganda** be kidding." "**Denmark** my words, you won't find better puns." "**Kenya** think of any more?" "No, **Iran** out of ideas, but if **Iraq** my brain, I might come up with more."

So we are to go to all nations and we found last week all ages as well. But remember, the Great Commission also includes the guy or gal at the next workstation, the family across the road, and each person on your team. How many of you shared Jesus with someone else this week, either with the banquet invitations, the calendars, the devotionals, the Focus on the family inserts or just a conversation? I'm praying for the day when everybody's hand will be in the air.

If you are able, please stand as we read Matt 5:11-16 "Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. 12 Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

13 "You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled by men. 14 "You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. 15 Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. 16 In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.

Say Salt. Thank God for salt! Salt is one of most important chemicals on earth and one of the most common since the oceans are filled with it. Salt has been used by people throughout history for many purposes and although it's fairly cheap today, at times it has been very valuable and wages for Roman soldiers were sometimes paid in salt. Our bodies are made up of about .4 percent salt which equals about 40 teaspoons in each of our bodies. In addition, each of us eats about 3/5 of a teaspoon of salt everyday on our popcorn and French fries, in our bacon and ham, and within the bread and other processed foods we consume. Our bodies need a certain amount of salt to survive, but most of us get too much which often leads to high blood pressure and other problems. One of my college roommates made his green beans look like Mt. McKinley, all white on top. I wonder how much blood pressure medicine he's on

today. Nevertheless, salt is a vital part of our existence and important to us in many ways.

What, then, did Jesus mean when He told His followers they were the salt of the earth? He didn't elaborate on the point, but the context of this passage gives us several clues. Let's look at some possibilities today.

First of all, whenever most people in our day and time hear the word salt, we think food. Salt is used as a seasoning that makes our steaks and eggs more tasty and thousands of years ago, Job asked in 6:6, "Is tasteless food eaten without salt, or is there flavor in the white of an egg?" The implied answer is no! Most recipes call for some quantity of salt: breads, crackers, meats, cookies, cakes, etc. I'd like to do a search on our church cookbook to see how many recipes use salt. Even some Old Testament sacrifices required the addition of salt and it was used in making covenants as well.

And so one of the applications of Jesus' statement is that His followers, you and me, are to flavor a world that is bland and tasteless. How do we do that? How can we be salty Christians? Certainly not by using salty language. Jesus speaks these words as a part of His Sermon on the Mount immediately after the Beatitudes, the attitudes that should be in us. As we act, think, and talk differently, as we treat people differently, we become salty. People should say, "There's something different about you." As we become more meek, merciful, peaceful, pure, comforting, and hungry for righteousness, the more salty we'll be. How refreshing it is to encounter people in the course of our day who are merciful instead of vengeful. Peaceful instead of combative. Pure instead of polluted. Every one who follows Jesus should likewise flavor the world around them by living out those qualities that characterized Jesus Himself. Some 2.4 billion people in the world call themselves Christians. That's more than 1 out of every 4. Supposedly over 60% of the US population is Christian. Imagine if 6 out of every 10 Americans and 1 out of every 4 people worldwide actually lived like Jesus! Imagine 2.4 billion Jesuses ! You're not responsible for all of them, just yourself. Are you salty?

Notice that Jesus didn't call us to be sugar. Sugar too is a seasoning but it just makes us feel good. Too much sugar can be even more damaging to the body causing problems with obesity as well as diabetes. Some of us probably know Christians who are sugary. They are almost sickening sweet. I'm afraid some of us are more sugar than salt. When we just attempt to make people feel good without helping them spiritually, we're just glazing over deep problems. We want people to like us so we always try to please others instead of trying to please Jesus. Sugar can help many things taste better, but we don't put sugar on our meats, or at least most don't. It will ruin the natural flavor. We don't use sugar on pasta or most vegetables. Salt, however, is a universal seasoning that enhances pretty much any food it is used on.

Jesus also didn't call us to be pepper. Say not pepper. We aren't to be harsh and negative. We probably all know Christians who are more Carolina Ghost pepper than salt. Although I can enjoy a little heat, most of us aren't fond of dishes that are too hot. A little goes a long, long way and can overpower the natural flavors even more quickly than sugar. Christians should never be known for being hotheaded or abrasive but rather joyfully subtle and salty.

One of the other uses for salt that was perhaps more widespread in Jesus' day is preservation. Say preserve. God has created this compound with amazing abilities to prevent deterioration. As a taxidermist, my dad used about 1000 pounds of salt every year. I remember deer season with a stack of 25 or 30 hides per evening that had been fleshed, had the meat removed. We'd then salt those hides before rolling them up and later shipping them to the tannery. Dad made it very clear that we were to get salt on every part of the hide. Roll out the edges, unfold any corners. Use too much rather than not enough because anywhere the salt didn't touch would rot. Sometimes people brought their hides in after they had started to rot and it wasn't pleasant. Ultimately it meant the hide was lost. The decay process had already begun and could not be reversed. Whenever we share the Gospel, it provides the means to save souls from eternal decay. We must get the gospel to every country and tribe and corner of this earth, as Jesus commanded.

Salt has been used to cure meat for thousands of years such as salt pork and jerky. Perhaps the best loved version is now country ham. Cucumbers, green beans, and other canned vegetables usually have a lot of salt in them to keep them from spoiling. Sugar, cinnamon, pepper, and most other seasonings have no preservative benefits. Only taste. Salt has both. What a gift!

This perhaps, is the prime application for Jesus followers. We are to salt our culture and our communities with Jesus. As we live like Jesus at work, at school, at Food Lion, or wherever else we are, it's going to not only help things taste better at those places, it will be a preserving influence. Imagine this community without Christians. There would be no Family Promise, no Alliance for Shelter, no Weekday Religious Education, no Food Pantries, no Night to Shine, and no Clothes Closet. There probably wouldn't be a hospital, rescue squad or any nursing homes for Christians are the ones who, applying Jesus' teachings started the first of all of these. Not to make money. The first hospitals, squads, and "old folks' homes" all cost money. Lots of it. That the church paid. We become salt by ministering to the people around us.

Atheists don't usually start orphanages and run soup kitchens. Many of our nurses and doctors, teachers and administrators, and etc would not be doing what they're doing because they were called to those jobs by God. Imagine what a community without any churches or Christians would look like. Talk about a drab and tasteless and dangerous world. You think an egg is tasteless without salt? Try a country. Imagine if there were

no check on evil. Not only would abortion be legal, there would be no limits on it whatsoever. There would be many fewer adoptions and foster homes. There would be no restrictions on drugs or alcohol. Beyond that, even many non-Christians are positively influenced by Christians and our examples. A world without Jesus' salty influence is exactly what will happen when all Christians are suddenly removed in the rapture. Evil, violence, corruption, and wickedness will proceed unchecked. Mega-rot on a global scale. You don't want to be around to see that.

As the percentage of Christians drops in our culture, the saltiness is also declining and we're seeing more and more evil influence in many ways. Legal protections that used to be in place for marriage, sexuality, the Sabbath and other God-ordained institutions have been removed by a culture that is becoming increasingly salt-less. I'm sure that as Jesus tastes the US today, we can hear Him say, "Needs more salt!" A quick examination of moral conditions illustrates this very clearly. Life without Jesus, a world without Jesus is very drab and distasteful. As less and less salt is being spread, more and more rot is occurring. The good thing is that, unlike my dad's deer hides, it can be reversed. Jesus can not only stop spiritual and moral decay, He can turn it around! He gives new life! But He's got to be shared! Our job is to get the salt into every corner of this world's hide. In fact, it seems we should look for, or smell for, those areas that are rotting the quickest and rush there. Perhaps we should see the world like a fresh pork loin, lying out in the hot summer sun, raging with the rot of sin. It stinks, it's repulsive, and it will go to waste. Our job is to keep it from happening. To stop or at least slow down the downward slide of rotting morality.

We are to be salt wherever we live and have influence: at our jobs as well as in our homes. Salt the teams and organizations we're a part of. Salt in government and education, in medicine and in industry. We need Christians in all places to preserve each part of the world. School boards and factories, law enforcement and health care. Classrooms and supermarkets. Construction and entertainment. I had the privilege of meeting David Blanton at the Outdoor Show this past week and I thanked him for his witness for Jesus on television. He's a hunter on Realtree Outdoors and he is unashamed to thank God and mention Jesus on the air. A few others do the same. As opposed to some who are negative influences. Thank God for athletes and entertainers who are being salt! Those actors who say, "I'm not going to do that scene," or "say those lines."

Brock Purdy, Quarterback of the 49ers joined Fellowship of Christian Athletes in High School and continues to give God the glory for all the success he's enjoying even as many KC players do. Tim Tebow wore John 3:16 on his face. Macey Smith from Strasburg High School, who just broke the basketball scoring record there, gave an incredible testimony on the court for Jesus Christ!! Kirk Cameron is very outspoken about his faith in Jesus. Because athletics and Hollywood are notoriously impure and filthy, how awesome to see individuals who unapologetically witness for Jesus and fulfill the Great Commission as they salt their surroundings. Slavery was outlawed in England

because William Wilberforce, a devout Christian who was in parliament, worked tirelessly to end it because of his Christian beliefs. Salt **your** world!

Salt has some other qualities that we can also apply spiritually. A few weeks ago, VDOT put salt on our roads and we spread it on our sidewalks. Why? It melts the ice. As we share Jesus' salt of love and grace, it melts cold hard hearts quicker than ice on a sidewalk. Jesus sandwiched this verse on one side with persecution and on other side with witnessing. People should be able to see through our reaction to persecutions and all of our lives that Jesus our Lord. The best way to witness is to live an obedient faithful life that makes others thirsty for the living water. We mentioned last week that salt makes us thirsty and if we live out the Beatitudes, if we share hope, love, joy, meaning, mercy, and grace, it will cause those around us to thirst for the living water of Jesus Christ.

Jesus also warned us about losing our saltiness. Say Don't lose. In His time, most salt came from the Dead Sea and it was seldom pure. It often had other impurities like gypsum mixed with it and over time the salt could leach out leaving the worthless minerals behind. At that point it was of no use except to throw on a footpath to kill the plants or to toss on a pile of manure. So Jesus warns us not to let that happen! Don't become contaminated by the world! Don't let world pollute or dilute you! We can also lose our saltiness by becoming apathetic and not witnessing. Do you know any Christians who aren't very salty anymore? Are you one of them? That's dangerous territory which relegates us only to be thrown out and trampled underfoot. Jesus was around sinners His whole life, but He never sinned and in Phil 2:15-16, Paul calls us to be "blameless and pure, children of God without fault in a crooked and depraved generation, in which you shine like stars in the universe 16 as you hold out the word of life." Let us be pure and let us hold out the Word of life fulfilling Jesus' great Commission without losing our saltiness!

Chemically, salt is a compound of two very different substances: sodium and chlorine. By itself, chlorine is deadly, but combined with sodium, it becomes beneficial in the ways we've already discussed. Although the analogy isn't perfect it helps us to understand perhaps how toxic we are without Christ, like chlorine without sodium. We're even worse with no redeemable qualities whatsoever. Without Jesus we're distasteful, even poisonous. And we are powerless to change ourselves. But the addition of Jesus changes everything. He alters our very nature and character and He empowers us to become useful, desirable, precious, and even delicious. If we're going to be salt, we must accept Jesus and be changed by Him as we are united with Him. We become a new creation. The old chlorine has gone, the new salt has come!

And so I ask you today, are you salting the world around you? Are you making it a better place in which to live with Jesus' love, mercy, joy, forgiveness and grace flowing through you? Are you being a preserving influence through Jesus' righteousness and

holiness in your part of the world? If so, keep doing what you're doing! But if you've lost your saltiness or need a recharge, ask Him for it. And if you've never accepted Jesus at all, do that today as we pray together.