

Salt of the Earth

by Dwight Pentecost

As believers, we are called to be both salt and light, creating an appetite for righteousness and pointing men to the Lord Jesus Christ.

Duration: 30:11

Scripture: Matthew 5:13-15, Matthew 5:17-20, Mark 10:46-52, Philippians 2:14-16

Topics: "Beatitudes"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher discusses the concept of Christians being the salt and light of the world, as mentioned in Matthew 5:13-20. He explains that just as salt creates an appetite and light attracts to its source, Christians are called to communicate the truth of God and show others the way to Jesus Christ. The preacher emphasizes the importance of a transformed life and the communication of the gospel in creating a thirst and desire for what Christ can offer. He references Philippians 2:14-16, where the Apostle Paul encourages believers to shine as lights in a crooked generation, holding forth the word of life.

Transcript

Please take your Bibles for the scripture reading and turn to the Gospel of Matthew 5. Follow along, if you will, please, verses 13 through 20. Ye are the salt of the earth, but if the salt have lost its savor, with what shall it be salting? It is thereafter good for nothing, but to be cast out, and to be trodden under foot of men. Ye are the light of the world.

A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do men light a lamp, and put it under a bushel, but on a lampstand, and it giveth light unto all that are in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven.

Think not that I am come to destroy the law or the prophets. I am not come to destroy, but to fulfill. For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no way pass from the law, till all be fulfilled.

Whosoever therefore shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven. But whosoever shall do and teach them, the same shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven. For I say unto you, that except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven.

We thank God for his promise. So shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth. It shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which he pleased, and it shall prosper in the thing whereunto he did send it.

Perhaps the commonest words ever heard around the dinner table are the words, Please pass the salt. Salt is an essential ingredient of all food and water. It is necessary to sustain life.

And if there is not the proper balance of salt in the system, there will be an undesirable physical disturbance. Too much salt is as dangerous as too little salt. The salt has played an important part in the thinking of men from time immemorial, because they have recognized its great importance.

It is often added to food to make food palatable. And Job recognized this. For in Job chapter 6 and verse 6, Job asked, Can that which is unsavory be eaten without salt? Is there any taste in the white of an egg? Job recognized that food was made palatable by the addition of salt.

In the religious ceremonies which God enjoined upon the nation Israel, salt was to play an important part. When I turn into the second chapter of the book of Leviticus, where God gave instruction concerning the offerings which the Israelites were to offer to Him, read in verse 13, And every oblation of thy meal offering shalt thou season with salt, neither shalt thou allow the salt of the covenant of thy God to be lacking from thy meal offering. With all thine offerings thou shalt offer salt.

Salt was considered so essential that if salt were omitted from the sacrifice, it was viewed as an incomplete and therefore unacceptable sacrifice. Among the ancient peoples it was true, even as it continues to be true in the Arab world today, that to eat salt or to eat food was a pledge of friendship. To the present day, an Arab who receives even his most bitter enemy into his home, if they eat together, considers that one under his protection and care.

So to partake of salt or to eat food, which were synonymous thoughts, was to bind in friendship. In 2 Chronicles chapter 13 and verse 5, God speaks of a covenant of salt which He made with David before days when it was possible to finalize a legal document by having it notarized, sealed. Individuals would confirm an agreement and constitute it as legally binding by eating salt or eating food together.

And two businessmen entering into a business arrangement would exchange morsels of food and they were said to have been bound together by a covenant of salt. The Roman army was frequently paid in salt and salt became a medium of exchange. And if a soldier were derelict in his duty, he was said to be not worth his salt.

And when our Lord said, "'Ye are the salt of the earth,' He was speaking of that which was very important to those His listeners. "'Ye are the salt of the earth.'" In the early days of our country, before days of refrigeration, the traveler depended on salted meat to provide for his journey. Whether preserved in salt brine or preserved by rubbing the meat with salt, many of our forebears trekked across the prairies with salt meat to sustain them.

We have come to look upon salt as a preservative, which in truth it is, and have applied that to this scripture as though our Lord were teaching that those who come to know Him personally and received His gift of salvation have become the preservatives of this earth. But such is not a biblical concept, for God is not interested in preserving this mass of corruption. It is under divine judgment.

And God has not put believers into the world to try to remove the corruption of the world or preserve the world in its corruption. Such is a misuse of our Lord's figure. This physical body depends on the proper intake of water.

Without a proper intake, dehydration will result. The ultimate end of dehydration is death. How true this is for one traveling through desert wastelands where the body fluids could evaporate without realizing it.

Dehydration could take place that would produce a stupor that would lead to death. And it is the primary function of salt to create a thirst so that there should be a proper intake of liquids to maintain the physical balance in this body. It is the function of salt to create thirst.

We recognize this today. For one working under a blazing Texas sky in mid-August may protect himself by taking salt tablets. And the salt can arrest dehydration and provide for the proper consumption of water that this body should not be weakened by dehydration.

It is the function of salt to create a thirst. There is a very vital thought in that which our Lord is presenting when he says to those hanging on his words, Ye are the salt of the earth. For our Lord earlier in this chapter in verse 6 said, Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled.

And in verse 20 our Lord says, Except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no wise enter into the kingdom of heaven. Entrance into the kingdom depends on righteousness. And righteousness comes in response to an appetite for righteousness.

And where there is no appetite, there will be no cry. And where there is no cry, there is no righteousness. This is illustrated so clearly in that record given to us in the 10th chapter of Mark's Gospel, where our Lord coming to Jericho was met by a blind man by the name of Bartimaeus who was sitting by the wayside begging.

And when he heard that Jesus of Nazareth was passing by, he cried out and said, Jesus, thou Son of David, have mercy on me. Now it would seem perfectly obvious to anyone what that man's need was and what he was asking for when he said, have mercy on me. And our Lord did not immediately respond to what was an obvious need.

But rather our Lord addressed a question to him recorded in Mark 10.51, What wilt thou that I should do unto thee? What do you want? Christ's ministry was a response to a recognition of a need. And until Bartimaeus recognized that he was blind and had a need, a physical sight, there was nothing our Lord could or would do for him. Blind Bartimaeus may well have concluded since he was blind that all men are blind as well.

And until he recognized that blindness was an abnormal state, there would be nothing for which he would plead with the Lord. He must recognize his need. Or to put it another way, he must have an appetite for that which is alien to him.

Until he knows that other men see while he is in blindness, his response would only be, Lord, give me a few mites or perhaps a penny or two. What wilt thou that I should do unto thee? And the blind man summoned to him, Lord, that I may receive my sight. There was a recognition of a need.

And that recognition of his need created a desire for that which he did not have. And that desire caused Bartimaeus to put his petition into words, and he asked for a specific thing. He asked for sight.

And until his need was recognized, there would be no petition. And until there was a petition, there would be no blessing. In the spiritual realm, the same is true.

Until a man knows that there is such a thing as salvation, he will never recognize that he is lost. Until he knows that there is such a thing as the holiness of God, he will never recognize his unholiness. Until he knows that God is merciful and gracious, he will never turn to God to receive the benefits of God's grace and mercy.

There must be an appetite created in that one for what is available which he is lacking before he comes to the one who can provide that which is lacking in his life. Salt that has lost its saltiness is only sand. And a tablet of compressed sand may look like a salt tablet, but it will never create thirst and will never prevent dehydration in this physical body.

And until a man's life and until a man's words evidence the transforming power of the gospel of Jesus Christ, he is saltless salt. And God has placed his children in this world to condemn the world so that by a transformed life and by the communication of the truth of God through words, an appetite for what God can and will do for a man might be created in the life of that man who is lost. In order to convey this truth, our Lord uses a second figure that supplements this verse.

In verse 14, he said, He are the light of the world, as it is the nature of salt to create an appetite. It is the nature of light to communicate itself, to shine. There is no such thing as self-contained light.

It is the nature of light to shine. And light attracts to the source of light. It is one thing to tell a man he is lost.

That is to be salt. It is quite another thing to show a man how that need that he recognizes can be met. It is the property of salt to cut, to hurt, to wound.

And it is the property of light to attract to itself. And if a man who does not know the grace of God nor the salvation of God's grace is to come to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ, he needs both the ministry of salt and the ministry of light. He needs the conviction that your life and your words bring to him.

But to convict a man is not to save a man. And not until you point that one who has been convicted to the Lord Jesus Christ can his need be met. It is alas too often true that many of God's children consider themselves to be God's irritants.

And after they've done the irritating, the convicting work, they fail to appoint men to the Lord Jesus Christ who is the water of life, who is the well of salvation, who is the Savior, who can meet their need. In our Lord's day, multitudes of villages and towns and cities were built on the tops of hills or mountains, breeze was available to them there. And a town located on top of a hill was more readily defensible from any adversary who had to climb the steeps to get to the inhabited area.

And a traveler, traveling as dust fell, could discern on the hilltop ahead the presence of a village because it is the nature of light to shine, and that city could not be hid. And that city revealed its presence and attracted the wayfarers to the refuge and safety of its walls. God has made his children to be light.

He has made them to communicate the truth that God has revealed to them so that they might not only be sought to convict and to create a thirst and a desire for what Christ can give, but to show men the way to the Lord Jesus Christ who can meet that need. It is this thought that the Apostle Paul has in mind when he writes in Philippians 2, in verse 14 to 16, "...do all things without murmurings and disputings, that ye may be blameless and harmless, the sons of God, without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and distorted generation, among whom ye shine as lights in the world, holding forth the word of life." And in that last phrase, "...holding forth the word of life," Christ shows how light shines. There's a relationship between the light and the word.

And a believer lets his light shine by communicating the word of God to men who are in darkness. We see this principle illustrated clearly in the first chapter of John's Gospel. And the Apostle introduces us to John the Baptist in verse 6, a man sent from God whose name was John, that is, the Baptist.

The saint came for a witness, to bear witness of the light that all men through him might believe. He was not that light, but was sent to bear witness of that light. John pictures John the Baptist as a mirror.

The Lord Jesus Christ is the source of light, and the source of life. And that which Jesus Christ is, is to be communicated to men who are in darkness and need his light. But the one in need, and the one who can meet that need, were brought together through John.

John was a mirror, a witness. He was a light, if you please. And that light that he had received was communicated to John, through John, to those who were in darkness so that those who were in darkness came to the light.

John to his generation was salt. You read his ministry in Matthew chapter 3, and he condemned the godlessness and unrighteousness of that generation. He warned them of judgment to come upon them because of their sinfulness.

He was salt. But John was also light, for he did not preach a condemnatory message that left men without hope. But when he had done his work as salt, he revealed the Lord Jesus Christ to them that they might come to his light.

That is the ministry that Christ said will characterize those who belong to him. They will create an appetite, a hunger and a thirst, in the lives of those whom they touch for the Lord Jesus Christ. Then when that appetite by life, by word, is created, they will show men the way to the one who can satisfy the thirst that the word of God has created in them.

There is a principle that we have affirmed over and over again, and I affirm it once more. A believer will never win the world to Jesus Christ by being like the world. In so doing, he has made himself savorless salt.

He's not salt at all. He's sand. Until the whirling can see in your life and hear from your lips the truth as it is in Christ, no appetite for Christ will ever be created in him.

Until you evidence to the world that you have found something in Christ that is utterly foreign and strange to him, there will be no appetite for what you have. It is my conviction that we see so little men turning to Jesus Christ today because so many of God's children have become savorless salt. And until there is a transformation of life that conforms to Jesus Christ, we have no light to give to man.

The cult of acceptability has made us savorless salt, and our light has been put under a bushel measure. This semester, Seminary admitted a blind student. He is a stranger to our campus, does not know his way around.

And I've noticed that as he goes from classroom to classroom or from dorm to dining room, he goes with his hand on the arm of a fellow student. He is blind, but that student is his light. And if that student doesn't know where he is going, doesn't know the way, the blind will never reach his destination.

We live in the midst of a world that is blinded by sin, a world that does not recognize its need. But God has ordained that you should be salt to show them their need and create an appetite for what has satisfied you and that you should be light in order that in the light that comes from the One who is the light of the world, men might find their way to Him and have that spiritual hunger and thirst satisfied. Be like the world or be like Christ.

You can't be both. We pray, our Father, that the Spirit of God may be pleased to use this portion of the Word to reveal our responsibility to men. In Jesus' name we pray.

Amen.

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