

“Ye Are the Salt of the Earth”

Chapter 5 of the Gospel of Matthew begins as follows:

*And seeing the multitudes, He went up into a mountain; and when He was set, his disciples came unto Him; and He opened His mouth, and taught them, saying,”*

From this, it is sometimes concluded that this was something He was teaching to the Apostles and perhaps the multitudes as well. However, after having described the 9 categories of those whom He called blessed, and which are commonly referred to as the Beatitudes, He moved on to a few other “similitudes of the believer.” This started with verse 13 which is the topic of this paper, and which in the King James Version is translated as follows:

*“Ye are the salt of the earth; but if the salt have lost his savor, wherewith shall it be salted? It is thenceforth good for nothing but to be cast out, and to be trodden under foot of men.”*

Here it becomes evident that it is to the apostles only to whom He is speaking, at least here, because this is personal and specific to this select group and not to any multitude, for to many or to most of the multitude, this would not have been applicable.

But what does it mean to be “the salt of the earth”? This is a term I’ve heard many times. It has always applied to someone basically good natured, honest, hard working, and having a high measure of integrity. Perhaps the Apostles were all of these things, but they had to be far more than that, because that description lacks the vital element of Christian faith. All Christians should have these qualities, but there are many who are not in any way Christian, yet excel in this manner of behavior. Furthermore, how does salt get into this? It is spoken of as a similitude describing the Apostles, but how?

In order to find an answer, let's examine the qualities and purposes of salt from the earthly perspective. I count six physical characteristics or purposes of salt.

1. It's a preservative, that is, it prevents decay or corruption of many organic substances. It is found today, in nearly all processed foods to increase their shelf life, and to slow down or prevent bacterial growth as well as enzymatic degradation. Before refrigeration, canning and other forms of food preservation, adequate supplies of salt for this purpose alone were essential for survival.
2. Sprinkled appropriately on many foods, salt brings out their full flavor and results in a more tasty meal.
3. It causes thirst. Bars and restaurants serve salted nuts and potato chips or popcorn to induce thirst in order to sell more drinks.
4. It melts ice, thereby providing a means of restoring mobility to frozen objects and also to eliminate slipperiness of ice covered surfaces.
5. It is an essential mineral, which we cannot live without. Salt tablets are given to soldiers and athletes whenever profuse perspiration from rigorous activity is likely. Excessive perspiration without salt replacement can cause one to faint or even die, depending on the severity of its depletion. Our blood contains considerable salt. It is an essential outside coating for every cell. A healthy cell has potassium along the inside of the cell membranes and sodium along the outside. These two minerals form an electrical potential across the membrane, in effect giving life providing energy to the cell. This structure attests to its vitalness to life.
6. Salt was valued as much as gold in some cultures. From the earliest times up to quite recent history when vast underground deposits were discovered, salt has been a rare and much valued commodity in many parts of the world for the five reasons given above. Wars were fought over it, and vast trade routes across Europe and Asia were formed primarily to make it possible to transport it. The Chinese made little salt cakes and used them as currency. Salt was, and is still, a major barter item in some primitive cultures. Roman soldiers were often paid in

salt (salarium in Latin). From this we get the word salary. From this period we get the expression: “He is not worth his salt,” that is, his pay or salary.

Well, of course, Jesus was not considering these attributes of salt in the physical sense, but rather in a spiritual way, given the context of the message. He had taught the Apostles many things, and would continue to do so even after His death and resurrection. These were all in preparation for their life long missions to serve Him, and to be what He now proclaimed them to be, “the salt of the earth.” What did He mean by this? How were they to take on or utilize the characteristics of salt in the spiritual sense? Let’s look at each of the five qualities of salt in the context of the Apostles’ evolving inward characteristics as divinely implanted by their heavenly Teacher.

1. Salt preserves:

First they were given the Message of eternal spiritual preservation to spread across this corrupt and decaying world. The message that Jesus is the Savior, and that through faith in Him and in His shed blood, He would preserve them from corruption by giving them eternal life in heaven. Second, they themselves as salt of the earth were permanently preserved in an unyielding faith and potency as His messengers, persevering to the end. They devoted their entire lives to conveying the Good News of that eternally preserving condition we call salvation.

2. Salt flavors:

Having been so well taught by Jesus, and being filled with the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, they had the whole Word in their hearts. Therefore, as they preached the Gospel, they sprinkled it with the enhancing flavor of the words of Moses and the prophets, words that enriched and made the message more convincing and palatable to the Jews whom they evangelized. Isn’t it also true today when we hear a pastor or Bible teacher enhance the flavor of a New Testament message by sprinkling it with Old Testament wisdom? How much more savory is it to see how our wonderful God prepared His two volume Book as a single integrated message where His earlier delivered

truths have lost none of the “savor,” but simply add more supernatural flavor to all that is written in volume two.

3. Salt creates thirst:

Just as their Master had done, did not the Apostles invoke a thirst for the Word and for the promises it included? Wherever they went, thirst for the message followed them, and through the gifts of the Holy Spirit they were able to provide quenching words and deeds, which brought salvation to many souls.

4. Salt melts ice:

The heat and zealous passion of the Apostles, who were “the salt of the earth”, did indeed melt ice-like frozen hearts. In doing so they restored motion to those who were frozen, dead in sin, and led them safely up out of the slippery morass to where Jesus stood waiting to offer them eternal warmth, safety and salvation.

5. Salt is essential to life:

“For life of the flesh is in the blood” (Leviticus 17:11) and salt is an essential ingredient of the life-providing properties of blood. From the very beginning of time, God ordained that the taking of life through the shedding of blood, innocent blood, was the only way to atone for sin. Jesus was the Lamb of God who willingly shed His precious blood unto death because it was the only means by which mankind could ever be totally purged of sin. It is only through faith in that sacrifice that one can receive eternal life.

6. Salt had an intrinsic value like gold, because it was so scarce and essential to life. Therefore, in calling the apostles the salt of the earth, Jesus was giving them a very strong compliment, which they could value in the strictly earthly sense. But in the context of Scripture, this had even greater spiritual value, because their saltiness would be like “gold, tried in the fire.” Once they received the Holy Spirit and began ministering, they would, throughout the rest of their lives, be of the very greatest value in spreading the Gospel and bringing souls to Jesus for salvation. They along with Paul, an Apostle, who was specially tutored by Jesus, would write the entire New Testament, the

final portion of God's written message to us, by far the most precious document ever written.

Notice how verse 13 continues "*...but if the salt have lost his savour, wherewith shall it be salted? It is thence forth good for nothing, but to be cast out, and to be trodden under the foot of man.*"

To lose savor comes from the Greek word "moraine" meaning to become stupid or foolish. A reasonable interpretation of this portion of the verse could be that if the salt, that is the person so called, lost those qualities enumerated above, that is has become stupid or foolish in his application of them, of what use would he be? This situation is reminiscent of Jesus' parable of the sower, the second category (Matthew 13:20, 21) when the Word was received with joy and gladness, but because they were lacking sufficient roots, the message soon lost its savour. Also in the Gospel of John, chapter 15, Jesus uses the analogy of the vine to make a similar point. The branch which doesn't bare fruit is useless and, therefore, destroyed. It is also possible that even in this early point in His ministry, Jesus may have had in His mind the one "salt" who would loose "his savour," that is Judas, who would betray him

The Apostles, as salt of the earth, remained faithful adherents to each of the six properties of salt, as He foreknew that they would. They never wavered, but persevered with their mandate to the very end, when they too allowed their blood to be shed, rather than lose their savour by forsaking their faith and the cause for which Jesus had ordained them.

This calling by the physically living Man-Jesus was delivered personally and directly to the Apostles. But through His living Word, the Scripture, He was and is speaking to each and every one of His disciples. These are all the redeemed of God. Does this include you? Are you a disciple? Then you are called to be the "salt of the earth" and to follow as well as possible the example set by the Apostles.

One last point, and this is in regards to the value of salt as a barter item or as a commodity used as coinage. We are saved by grace through faith alone. With that having been secured, our most loving and generous Lord does not stop there in His generosity and offered opportunities. Having been saved, we most likely have intense gratitude, which we want to express. We can do this through our obedience, our fruitfulness, our prayers, our love, and our kindness towards others, along with our generosity with our time money and efforts toward the spreading of His Word. All of these expressions of gratitude, these evidences of faith, may be thought of as the coinage of the Kingdom. Through this coinage, which we send in advance, we can in effect, buy the rewards or crowns He makes available to His own. Jesus actually tells us to do this in Matthew 6:19 where He says *“Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon the earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt and where thieves break through and steal, but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth or rust corrupt, and where thieves do not break through or steal: for where your treasure is, there will be your heart also.”*

Isn't it incredible that simply through our sincere acts of gratitude, which He Himself enables us to express through the indwelling power of the Holy Spirit, we are able to prepare ourselves to be more effective “kings and priests” in His heavenly realm? I urge you; take advantage of this small window of opportunity you have remaining to “buy” as many crowns as you can. The market remains open only just so long, and then closes forever, which for many of us may be sooner than we may think.

If you are one of the redeemed, you have received the greatest gift any human being could ever receive. You are richer than the wealthiest monarch, or even more so than all the monarchs of the world put together. If you have a full appreciation of what it means to be part of God's family, then your heart must be full of gratitude and eagerness to be all He would have you be. If you are one of His, as were the Apostles, He has a purpose for you as He did for them. Your free

will allows you to choose to fulfill or ignore that purpose. Your decision in this matter may be a point of evidence regarding the actual validity of your presumption as to your saved status. I pray that you will pray earnestly for His guidance in this matter.