

The Salt of the Earth

Matthew 5:13

The beatitudes describe the essential character of Christ's disciples. Last week we examined the attitude of the world toward believers. In Matthew 5: 13 - 16, Jesus lays out how the people of God can be influences of good throughout the world. Allow me to illustrate this principle with an example.

THE GREATEST SERMON EVER PREACHED

Edward Perronet was born in Kent, England, in 1726 and died 1792. He was a descendant of a distinguished French Huguenot (Presbyterian) family who had fled to Switzerland and later to England because of the religious persecution in France. Edward's father, a pastor in the State Church of England, was strongly sympathetic with the evangelical movement spearheaded by the Wesleys and George Whitefield. For a time, Perronet was a co-worker of John and Charles Wesley. John Wesley was always trying to get him to preach; but Perronet, though capable but 18 years younger, was somewhat in awe of Wesley, and always deferred to him. Any time John Wesley was present, Perronet felt Wesley should do the preaching. But John Wesley was not one to take "no" for an answer. So, one day, in the middle of a meeting, he simply announced, "Brother Perronet will now speak." Thinking quickly, Perronet stood before the large crowd and declared, "I will now deliver the greatest sermon ever preached on earth." You can imagine he got everyone's attention. He then read the Sermon on the Mount, and sat down.

Perronet is also known for his hymn "All Hail the Power" (of Jesus' name) was published. Many interesting accounts are said to have been associated with the use of this hymn. One of the most remarkable is a story told by E. P. Scott, a pioneer missionary to India. One day he was waylaid by a murderous band of tribesmen who were closing in on him with spears. On impulse the missionary took his violin out of his luggage and began to play and sing this hymn. When he reached the stanza "let every kindred, every tribe," he saw to his surprise every spear lowered and many of these tribesmen moved to tears. Scott spent the remaining years of his life preaching and ministering God's love and redemption to these people. God in His providence used a simple hymn as a means of introducing the gospel to a group of needy pagans.

History has recorded and the watching world has seen a lengthy list of service and accomplishments that God's people; motivated by His love, have been able to do. The very world that hates and vilifies Christians owes Christ and His people a great debt.

QUESTION - WHAT HAVE BEEN THE POSTIVE IMPACTS OF THE CHURCH ON THE WORLD?

- Cessation Of Cannibalism
- Care Of Widows / Orphans
- Care For Abandoned Babies
- Child Labor Laws
- Hospitals
- Humane Work Conditions - Earl Of Shaftesbury
- Just Systems Of Law And Order
- Orphanages
- Protection Of Oppressed
- Protection Of Women From Abuse & Neglect
- Slavery Abolished - William Wilberforce
- Suttee & Infant Sacrifice Ended
- Schools
- Soup Kitchens

To ancient Greeks and Romans, life was cheap. Infanticide—baby killing— was condoned and practiced for centuries without guilt or remorse and extolled by Greco-Roman mythologies. This ungodly practice was opposed by Christians, whose compassionate example eventually caused Roman emperors to outlaw it.

From the wellspring of Christian compassion, our Western civilization has drawn its inspiration, and its sense of duty, for feeding the hungry, giving drink to the thirsty, looking after the homeless, clothing the naked, tending the sick and visiting the prisoner. Missionaries and other Christians lived as if people mattered.

How Christianity Changed the World - Alvin J. Schmidt

What can we accomplish if our chief passion is an appetite for righteousness armed with purity of heart? In a world NOT marked by meekness or humility; where poverty of spirit is mocked and not exalted, and where we are encouraged "contra mundo" (against the world) to see persecution for being and doing the right things as a blessed state, how can we make a difference?

Jesus used a very simple and universal object to teach this profound truth.

A. THE NATURE OF GOD'S PEOPLE - SALT

Salt has many characteristics: whiteness, cubic crystalline structure, polarity, readily soluble in water and insoluble or only slightly soluble in most other liquids, odorless, ionic (polar charged) compound, melted or dissolved in water it is a conductor of electricity. So God's people have characteristics and Jesus has an object lesson for us.

1. By Presence - God has called us to live in this world, not in isolation. The very character of the beatitudes is the way God has called us to live in the world. Even though we are blessed when we are persecuted for the sake of righteousness, we are not poor, pitiful bullied victims who run off and lick our wounds and commiserate with each other.

Romans 8: 35 - 39 - Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written, for thy

sake we are killed all the day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter. Nay, ***in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us.*** For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

What are we called to do in these situations, knowing that there is a token of God's deep affection and blessing to us when we are persecuted for His sake? What is to be the relationship of Christians to society and the world?

1 Peter 2: 9, 10 - But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession, ***so that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light;*** for you once were not a people, but now you are the people of God; you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.

Even though they should be treated with contempt, yet they should really be blessings to the world, and the more so for their suffering.

By presence, we should also be IN the world but be distinct from us. Jesus sent us forth, not to be laid in a big heap, but continue fellowshipping AND going out to all of the earth.

2. By Permeation - Notice that they are not only to be salt to Canaan as the prophets of the old economy, but "of the earth" i.e. to the whole world. If salted in cold weather (so that the meat does not spoil while the salt has time to take effect), salted meat can last for years. It goes beyond the surface and permeates all of the tissue. Left to themselves, the apostles could NOT cover the entire world, but, like the mustard seed that grows, salt will penetrate and seep far beyond what simple rubbing can accomplish.

Nothing, if they were to work by force of arms and dint of sword; but, being to work silently as salt, one handful of that salt would diffuse its savour far and wide; would go a great way, and work insensibly and irresistibly as leaven. The doctrine of the gospel is as salt; it is penetrating, quick and powerful; it reaches the heart. It is cleansing, it is relishing, and preserves from putrefaction. An everlasting covenant is called a covenant of salt (Numbers 18: 19) and salt was required in all of the sacrifices (Leviticus 2: 13).

An Exposition, With Practical Observations, Of the Gospel According To St. Matthew - Matthew Henry

3. As A Seasoning

Job 6:6 - Can something tasteless be eaten without salt, or is there any taste in the white of an egg?

Christian saltiness is Christian character as depicted in the beatitudes, committed Christian discipleship exemplified in both word and deed.

Colossians 4: 6 - *Let your speech always be with grace, as though seasoned with salt*, so that you will know how you should respond to each person.

We are given the ability to be a relish if we are able and willing to be such. Paul reminds us here to be set apart and purified from all profane follies and corruptions but instead to be filled with spiritual grace to edify everyone who hears. This is a challenge to me. I need to remember this in my humor and discussion with everyone. We can leave dullness and ineffectual living as we abandon foolish and Godless ways. Christ transforms us by His grace to be this way!

2 Corinthians 2: 14 - 16 - But thanks be to God, who always leads us in triumph in Christ, and *manifests through us the sweet aroma of the knowledge of Him in every place*. For *we are a fragrance of Christ to God among those who are being saved* and among those who are perishing; to the one an aroma from death to death, to the other an aroma from life to life. And who is adequate for these things?

In 2 Corinthians 2, Paul makes an abrupt transition and looked above and beyond his troubles to praise and thank God. He turns from difficulties and focuses on the lofty privileges of his position in Christ, and regains a joyful perspective. Look at the phrase, "leads us in triumph in Christ". Paul takes the imagery of the official exalted Roman ceremony "the Triumph" where a victorious general was honored with a festive, ceremonial parade through the streets of Rome. You'll remember from previous descriptions that, along with the visual pagentry of the "the Triumph", there were hundreds of perfumed incense censers which combined with the fragrant flowers which were crushed by the feet of triumphant soldiers and powerful horses. Paul and WE can spread the knowledge of God, even in the midst of difficulty, as we give Him thanks and spread the knowledge of Him everywhere. Paul was also grateful for the privilege of being used as an influence for Christ wherever he went. Every believer is transformed and called by the Lord to be an influence for His gospel throughout the world.

May God enable us the joy and privilege of being a fragrance unto life!

4. As A Purification And Putrefaction Prevention

"You" - the church hinders that decay and is a powerful restraint as redeemed, regenerate and righteous people. Salt is an antiseptic; a substance that prevents and retards decay, and that is the emphasis Jesus has.

The disciples are to be a moral disinfectant in a world where moral standards are low, constantly changing, or non-existent.

The Gospel According To Saint Matthew - R. V. G. Tasker

The Christian is to function as the salt of the earth in a much more individual sense; by his / her life and character. If you are someone who commends righteous behavior and don't participate in the folly of this world, then it will not be surprising if you are NOT included in the lascivious behavior and conversation. The subject will change, or people may get very quiet as you come into the room.

On Friday night we had some friends around and spoke about the condition of the world and how much we mourn over the condition of things but that our ultimate hope was in God Himself.

Just as you are encouraged to gargle with salt water OR to use a saline solution to irrigate your sinuses, rinsing contact lenses, flushing wounds (but not direct pouring salt into a wound) OR cleaning that new pierced belly button, we are encouraged to be salty and display a purifying and cleansing nature:

Mark 9: 49 - 50 - For ***everyone will be salted with fire. Salt is good;*** but if the salt becomes unsalty, with what will you make it salty again? Have salt ***in*** yourselves, and be at peace with one another."

In saying this Jesus confirms that His work is a purifying work much like both fire and salt purify and refine. The sacrifice offered in the old economy is also salted and set apart in this way as are His people who are living sacrifices. (See *Leviticus 2: 13*)

N.B. Jesus does not just say *DO* salty things, but to have it *IN* ourselves. We cannot diffuse it to others if it is not an essential part of ourselves.

CLARIFICATION - Some believe that this passage is specifically calling the church to make pronouncements about political, economic and international affairs. However, the Church in the New Testament is not identified with any nation or nations (like Israel in the Old Testament). we never find the apostle Paul or any other apostle commenting upon the government of the Roman empire; you never find them sending up resolutions to the Imperial Court to do this or not to do that. Where we are as individuals in a society, we have the ability to influence we must work hard to do so. As an illustration, consider what we mentioned before concerning London. Based on the Great Awakening, England avoided the revolutions that France experienced and turned to great social reforms to address ills concerning their time. Once that era passed, the church turned from moral reform of individuals to seeking to impact politics, social and economic questions. The society became more decadent, immoral and lawless.

B. THE NATURE OF THE WORLD

The earth - left to itself, the world decays like rotten fish or meat - even with common grace, laws, and the home all of which can have a wholesome effect on community.

While God has displayed His power, creativity, sovereignty and might in all of creation, His people are designed to bring it to a new level and conspire against those who see it as only insipid (dull, bland, colorless). (*Refer to the supervisor in Yosu, Korea, "this is all very tedious"*) Yes, the world is putrefying. It can't stop itself from going bad. That Jesus makes a distinction is very plain; the world is polluted, foul, and offensive. It is fallen, sinful and bad. Its tendency is to evil and to wars.

With all of the education and elimination of God's Word increasingly from the public sphere have things gotten better? We have a multiplication of laws, regulations and social programs. Has this decreased our utilization of legal or illegal drugs to alter our consciousness? Do laws about firearms eliminate violence or murders? Does the proliferation of social safety net programs decrease the roles of those on public assistance? No! It is precisely because men and women are held captive by their own love of sin, themselves, and can be purchased at very low prices.

C. CONDITIONAL SALTINESS

After reminding the disciples about their calling to be salt, Jesus pronounces against them a heavy and dreadful judgment ***if*** they do not fulfill what their duty; what they were designed to do like salt is designed to flavor and preserve. The Gospel is so closely connected with a good conscience and devotion and holiness of life can be tolerated in the unsaved, but it is monstrous and detestable in His people.

For effectiveness the Christian must retain Christ-likeness, as salt must retain its saltiness.

Luke 14: 34, 35 - Therefore, salt is good; but if even salt has become tasteless, with what will it be seasoned? ***It is useless either for the soil or for the manure pile;*** it is thrown out. He who has ears to hear, let him hear

Notice that Jesus is very specific about the quality of this salt. Worthless salt could ruin a manure pile rendering your compost to no value and perhaps even endanger your garden!

Salt is both a preservative and a flavor enhancer. No doubt its use as a preservative is what Jesus had mostly in view here. Pure Salt is a very stable compound resistant to nearly every attack. When it's contaminated by mixture with impurities it becomes useless, even dangerous. Pure salt cannot lose its flavor or effectiveness, but the salt that is common in the Dead Sea area is contaminated with many other things like gypsum (think of seasoning your food with sheetrock). The very soluble sodium chloride could be washed out leaving a flat, stale or alkaline taste rendering it ineffective as a preservative or as a seasoning. The residue still looked like salt, and was doubtless still called salt, but it neither tasted nor acted like salt. It was just road dust. Such mineral salts were useful for little more than keeping footpaths free of vegetation.

If we lose our basic nature, our God-given usefulness, then we are unhelpful to the Kingdom and God's work in the world. His message is a harsh one, but one we need to hear. Living as Kingdom people in our time is crucial: crucial to our world and crucial to our discipleship. We are called to surrender all to Jesus if we are to be used for His work in the world.

Heartlight.Org Blog - Phil Ware

If you, who should season others, are yourselves unsavoury, void of spiritual life, relish, and vigour; if a Christian be so, especially if a minister be so, his condition is very sad for he is irrecoverable. Salt is a remedy for unsavoury meat, but there is no remedy for unsavoury salt.

An Exposition, With Practical Observations, Of the Gospel According To St. Matthew - Matthew Henry

If Christians become assimilated to non-Christians and contaminated by the impurities of the world, they lose their influence. The influence of Christians in and on society depends on their being distinct, not identical.

The glory of the gospel is that when the Church is absolutely different from the world, she invariably attracts it. It is then that the world is made to listen to her message, though it may hate it at first.

Studies In The Sermon On The Mount - Dr. D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones

If we as Christians are indistinguishable from non-Christians, we are useless. We might as well be discarded like salt-less salt, "thrown out and trodden under foot by men".

What a downcome from being saviours of society to supply materials for footpaths!

Commentary On The Synoptic Gospels - A. B. Bruce

Jesus saw many Pharisees and scribes, people who advocated a formal, legalistic religion in the place of the true religion proclaimed by the ancient prophets in the name of the Lord. Thus by and large the salt had lost its flavor in the religious life of Israel. That sort of salt cannot be restored. People who were trained in the knowledge of the truth but then hardened themselves against the exhortations of the Holy Spirit are not renewed to repentance.

D. THE CHALLENGE

It is Christian people who; enabled by God's grace with minds renewed by the Spirit and the Word, will be used of God to prevent an acceleration of our culture into the moral abyss that certainly awaits us. May God stir up the gift within us and make us such that we shall indeed be like the Son of God Himself and influence all who come in contact with us.

Ever so many people who never read the Bible are constantly reading us! If in our conduct we are untrue to our calling, our words will avail very little.

Worldly-mindedness or secularization is condemned by this verse and so is aloofness or isolationism. Salt is a blessing when it remains truly salt. Salt must be sprinkled over, better still, rubbed into, the meat.

When you are challenged by those who would, in order to discredit Christ and His Gospel, point out that the church is harmful, evil, motivated by desire for political power and greed, remind them of what God's people have done in a kind, gentle, and loving way.

SOURCES:

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- **The Message Of The Sermon On the Mount** - John R. W. Stott
- **The Truth - What Is It** - Blog - <http://poptop.hypermart.net/testep.htm>