



## You are the Salt of the Earth

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**Christians are to be different than others.** Do you feel different than others? In most cases we do not enjoy it when we do. We seek to assimilate and fit in. but when Jesus describes his followers He accounts for what makes us different. The characteristics of the beatitudes (**Matt. 5:1-12**) that we have been studying describe the counter cultural Christian and the obvious response of the world around him. In the last beatitude Jesus said... *10 Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, For theirs is the kingdom of heaven. 11 "Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake. 12 Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you. (Matthew 5:10-12)*

a. His statement is passive in its approach as it describes what the world does **to** the Christian. But then Jesus turns to consider the positive side of what the Christian is to do **for** the world.

b. What Jesus teaches here is consistent with the principle given to Abram before: *"I will bless you ... you will be a blessing."* (**Gen. 12:2**) God uses people to bless other people. Christians are blessed so that they can positively influence the world around them. *"If we fail in this we fail in a fundamental role that God intends for us."* (Tack Chumbley)

**I. The Distinctive Influence of the Christian on the World:** Read **Matthew 5:13-16** – *“You are the salt of the earth; but if the salt loses its flavor, 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 lampstand, 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.*

**A. Some Evident Points:** I want to focus on the words of verse 13 today, but when we view these words as a whole there are a few necessary implications:

- ***The Christian Influences the World.*** Christianity is meant to be public. Not in the self-seeking manner of the Pharisees who did what they did for the praise of men (Jesus condemns that in this very sermon). But Christianity is designed to have a definite positive influence upon the world. Our lives, if lived correctly, will impact those around us. This should not surprise us. Who has influenced human society and history more than Jesus Christ?
- Some people will respond favorably and be saved; others will ridicule and persecute us. Paul writes...**2 Corinthians 2:14-16** – *“Now thanks be to God who always leads us in triumph in Christ, and through us diffuses the fragrance of His knowledge in every place. 15 For we are to God the fragrance of Christ among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing. 16 To the one we are the aroma of death leading to death, and to the other the aroma of life leading to life..”* In either case our lives have profound effects, and even persecution is not to alter our function in the world. We *“are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God’s own possession, that [we] may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called [us] out of darkness into His marvelous light”* (**1 Peter 2:9**).
- ***The world needs to be changed for the better.*** The presupposition on which Jesus bases His teaching is the ever increasing darkness and corruption of the world around us.
  - **2 Tim 3:12-13** – *Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution. 13 But evil men and impostors will grow worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived.* Scripture reveals to us that this world is getting worse and worse, and there is no inherent remedy to the moral decay without the gospel.
  - The evil world needs the moral influence of Christians. As God’s people we can make a difference. But Jesus is not advocating a social gospel approach that is so popular today. The

influence that Jesus says is evident is the product of the lifestyle He just described – A moral life of meekness, sacrifice, and a thirst for God’s righteous judgments. God’s *social reform* is through personal righteousness, not political movements or government policy. Who is your hope?

- ***Our ability to influence the world for good is dependent on our sanctification from it.*** Any positive, intended effect that we have on the world around us is based on our distinctiveness from the world, not our assimilation to it. By definition, an influence must be different from that which it influences. Both salt and light are unlike that which influence. Both salt and light do not lose their distinctive nature or character in the process. Christians therefore must be different from the world they are called to influence. **John 17:15-17** – *15 I do not pray that You should take them out of the world, but that You should keep them from the evil one. 16 They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. 17 Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth.*
- ***The purpose of this public influence is to glorify God, not self.*** We must have influence on others so that others will be brought to praise God. It ought to be evident in the way we live that the source of our morality is not self, but God.

**II. “You are the salt of the earth”** – Jesus uses a familiar item to describe the power of influence in the life of the Christian. **Why does Jesus compare the Christian to salt?**

A. Salt is one of the most basic necessities of life. Sodium is involved in muscle contraction, including heartbeats; in our nerve impulses, in the digestion of protein, regulates the exchange of water between our cells. Without salt the human body goes into convulsions, paralysis and even death.

B. Salt has always been valuable in human society, often much more so than it is today. During a period of ancient Greek history it was called *theon*, which means divine. The Romans held that, except for the sun, nothing was more valuable than salt. Often Roman soldiers were paid in salt, and it was from that practice that the expression “**not worth his salt**” originated. In numerous ways Jesus’ hearers—whether Greek, Roman, or Jewish—would have understood salt of the earth to represent a valuable commodity. Though most could not have understood His full meaning, **they knew He was saying that His followers were to have an extremely important function in the world.** Whatever else it may have represented, salt always stood for that which was of high value and importance.

**III. The important qualities of Salt:** Jesus’ words demand interpretation. He does not give much detail. There are several qualities of salt that have been suggested as the spiritual basis of Jesus’ words in

Matt. 5. All of them point back to the general importance of salt.

A. Some point to the **color** of salt. It is white suggesting purity. So Christians are to remain pure in an impure world. Their influence is to help purify the world around them. **James 1:27** – *27 Pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their trouble, and to keep oneself unspotted from the world.*

B. Some focus on the **sting** of salt as it is put in a wound. Some interpreters believe that Jesus meant to teach that Christians are to sting the world by pricking its conscience and making it uncomfortable in the presence of God's truth. A gospel that does not confront sin and make sinners uncomfortable is not the gospel of Christ. Apostolic preaching brought people to conviction of sin and was a call to repentance.

C. Others point out that salt **creates thirst**, as it increases the body's craving for water. So God's people are to live in such a way as to create a spiritual thirst in others and then attempt to lead them to the Water of life. A person may see our peace in a trying circumstance, or our confidence in what we believe, and thereby be persuaded to try our faith. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness. This has merit but doesn't seem to be the best interpretation here.

D. Others emphasize the **flavor** of salt. It makes food taste better and thus makes it more attractive and palatable. (*Can anyone eat popcorn or eggs without some salt?*). So Christians are to live in such a way that they add flavor to the world and make it more palatable. Although the previous considerations have merit, the context seems to point in this direction. Jesus speaks about salt losing its "savor", not its color or sting. But to whom do we make the world more palatable?

E. It seems that the best emphasis here may be on the **preserving power of salt**. The influence of the Christian is designed to preserve the decaying earth. This is not about Environmentalism or efforts to save the planet. The concept is spiritual, as the decay and corruption are spiritual, moral and inward. We noticed earlier that the biblical picture of the world system is that it is continually worsening and decaying. Salt does not so much make a rotten piece of meat good as it prevents good meat from going bad or from getting worse.

1. God stands ready to bring judgment upon all sin. The righteousness of the Christian and his effective prayers give savor to the world and make the world more palatable **to God**, and thus forestall His judgment.

- God was willing to spare the immoral cities of Sodom and Gomorrah for the sake of Abraham and just 10 righteous ones.
- It seems that God was willing to forestall the immediate judgment of Israel at Sinai because of the influence and intercession of Moses.

F. **Making it last....** Have you ever considered the place of salt in the worship and covenant of God's people in the O.T. It seems that it points toward salt as a preserving agent intended to make the effects of the sacrifice and the covenant eternal or perpetual. **Leviticus 2:13** – *13 And every offering of your grain offering you shall season with salt; you shall not allow the salt of the covenant of your God to be lacking from your grain offering. With all your offerings you shall offer salt.* Why would God command salt to be added to the sacrifices?

1. In the O.T. salt was the opposite of leaven (which the Israelites were to remove). Leaven corrupted; salt preserved. Leaven was impurity; salt was purity.

2. As a preserving agent, salt represented the eternal and irrevocable nature of the covenant of God. So that covenants that were meaningful and long-lasting were called "**covenants of salt**".

- **2 Chron, 13:5** calls God's eternal covenant with David a "*covenant of salt.*"
- **Numbers 18:19** – *19 "All the heave offerings of the holy things, which the children of Israel offer to the LORD, I have given to you and your sons and daughters with you as an ordinance forever; it is a covenant of salt forever before the LORD with you and your descendants with you."*

**IV. The power of our influence – "You are the salt of the earth"** – the "**you**" here is emphatic – *you and you alone* are the preserving influence in the world. If we are not influencing the world for good, who will? How do we do this?

A. **The power of our influence is in the contact.** Salt does not impact what it does not touch. Although we are not to fellowship the worldly in their sins, we must make contact to make a difference. If you are not close enough to your neighbor to invite them for coffee, you probably aren't close enough to be an effective influence in their lives.

B. **The power of our influence is in the truth of God's word.** Paul warned Timothy of those who would have no regard for the truth, depart from the faith and give heed to seducing spirits (doctrines). He

instructed Timothy to instruct the brethren in the nourishing words of faith and of the “good doctrine” (1 Tim. 4:6). “These things command and teach” (4:11)

C. **The power of our influence is in our obedient conduct.** He also told Timothy to be an example to those that believe in conduct, love, spirit, and purity (4:12) **1 Tim 4:15-16** -15 *Meditate on these things; give yourself entirely to them, that your progress may be evident to all.* 16 *Take heed to yourself and to the doctrine. Continue in them, for in doing this you will save both yourself and those who hear you.*

a. One of the most effective ways we retard the corruption of the world in fulfilling our duty toward our family. Nothing will preserve the next generation of God’s people more than faithful parents. We must teach our children. Who else will do it? Which leads us to consider Jesus’ own rhetorical question here:

**V. “But if the salt loses its flavor, how shall it be seasoned? It is then good for nothing but to be thrown out and trampled underfoot by men.”**

A. Physical salt can become contaminated and thus useless for its original purpose. Jesus describes this condition as **“the salt loses its flavor”** (savor). Salt has lost its power to influence as it should.

1. In ancient times this was a common problem. Salt was mined from the earth, and was not always pure (no means of chemical purification, etc.). When it became tainted with other chemicals, it lost its ability to season, preserve, and disinfect. In such cases it would be thrown out of the door and into the street.

B. The problem here is **“worldliness”**. When Christians fail to be distinctive they fail in their “most fundamental responsibility”.

1. There are several pertinent applications we could make to specific moral issues: dancing, wearing immodest clothing, social drinking, gambling, etc. Such questionable activities definitely do affect our influence for good, and it is naive to think otherwise.

- But worldliness is more. It is a life lived in comfortable conformity to the world around, that does not disturb its surrounding. One writer said *“If by concessions made to the world the salt has been leached out of us, leaving only a residue of worldly respectability, fine buildings, congenial social circles and empty rituals, we, too, have become utterly worthless!”*

- **John said...** *Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. 16 For all that is in the world – the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life – is not of the Father but is of the world. 17 And the world is passing away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever. (1 John 2:15-17)*

**Conclusion: How salty are you? The power of influence is an enormous responsibility. We need to make the right applications. It goes far beyond what we do in our assemblies.** As important as it is for Christians to worship God according to His will, we must remember that most lost men will not be made to glorify God because we eat the Lord's supper every Sunday or don't use mechanical instruments. They may indeed be moved to exalt God by the quiet love with which we bear one another, by our self-control in the face of great provocation, by our calm assurance in the presence of tragedy, and our firm refusal to be drawn into a world of mindless lusts. If we have gained the victory over a worldly system of pride and carnality it will surely show, and God, not ourselves, will be glorified.

The Christians in Fort Myers regularly study together, pray together, and encourage one another in our walk with the Lord. We would be delighted to have you join us in these endeavors!