

THE SALT OF THE EARTH

Matthew 5:13

Intro: In the Beatitudes which our Lord gave in the Sermon on the Mount, and which are recorded for us in Matthew 5, He was describing *the character of a true believer*. This does not mean that we all exercise these characteristics to the same degree, but it does mean that you will find all of these to some degree in all of us who are truly saved. And the more we grow in the Lord, the greater will be the evidence of these characteristics in our lives.

Going down the Beatitudes again, a person who really knows the Lord realizes that in himself, or herself, he is spiritually bankrupt, completely without any quality that would commend him, or her, to God. He is alienated from God, a sinner by nature and often by choice, under divine judgment.

Consequently he grieves over his sin. He mourns because of all that he has done which has been displeasing to God. He is truly repentant, and he turns away from his sin. And this brings the blessing of God, as the second Beatitude tells us.

This produces meekness, humility. And at this point he begins to take on the character of our Lord. To talk of self-love, and self-esteem, and self-worth, is very distasteful to a child of God because he knows that he has nothing to boast about in Himself. What he glories in, is what he has in Christ.

But every child of God needs to grow so as to become a stronger Christian. And so the Lord spoke of hungering and thirsting after righteousness. A true Christian wants to learn more about his Bible so that he can become more like the Lord Jesus Christ.

The result of his spiritual growth is that he becomes merciful in his attitude toward others. This leads to greater purity of heart, and he becomes a peacemaker. He does not want to be out of fellowship with other Christians, nor does he even want to have any broken relationships with people who do not know the Lord. As we are instructed to do, he seeks to “live peaceably with all men” (Rom. 12:18).

However, in spite of all of the spiritual blessing and growth which he may experience, he learns from the first that the world is not concerned about

what is pleasing to God, and that in one way or another, and to differing degrees, he experiences persecution from the world. But he is even blessed in this because persecution, not only because he is suffering for Christ's sake, but because the persecution draws him even closer to the Lord, and makes him want to be more like the Lord. And he knows that in heaven he will experience even greater rewards for any persecution that he might have here on earth.

Now all that the Lord spoke about up to verse 13, which is our text for today, makes us "salt" and "light." But "salt" and "light" on a huge scale. We become "the salt of the earth," and "the light of the world." The ministry of the disciples was to begin in Israel with the Jews, but ultimately it was to expand to the whole earth, to the whole world!

But the Lord did not mean that they actually became "salt" and "light," but He meant that they would function as "salt" and as "light," and that their responsibility was aimed at the whole world. This did not mean that they would be able to go everywhere in the whole world, but it meant that wherever Christians were, whether in Israel, or in China, or in some Latin American country, or in Europe, or in the United States, we are all to consider ourselves to be "salt" and "light" to the people among whom we live and work, or even meet casually. We are to be to them as "salt" and as "light." Today we are thinking about "salt"; next week, the Lord willing, we will be thinking about what it means that we are "light."

So let us begin by asking a question we can all answer:

I. WHAT IS SALT?

The dictionary tells us that salt is sodium chloride, and that its most common usage is for seasoning our food. We all have it in our homes in what we call *a salt shaker*. If you go into a restaurant, you will usually find sugar and salt and pepper on the table. People put salt on their food to make it taste better. Its form is white granules, and it is very difficult to distinguish it in its looks from sugar. I am sure that we all understand what salt is.

Salt has other uses, but I believe that the Lord was focusing on this one use of salt, seasoning food, because He went on to talk about it "savour." We could use the word *flavor*. But we will come to that in a moment.

But now let us go on to another question:

II. WHY DID THE LORD SAY, “YE ARE THE SALT OF THE EARTH”?

The Lord was using this word as what we call, *a metaphor*. By this I mean that He was saying that *what salt is to food, we are to the message that we are trying to get to the people of the world..* He was telling His disciples that in their ministry to others, they would always be related to, and a part of, the message that they were giving to others.

The Lord brought that out in what He said to His disciples just before He ascended back to heaven. He told them,

But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth (Acts 1:8).

Notice those words, “and ye shall be witnesses unto me.” He did not say that they would just *give a witness*, but that they would “be witnesses”! They were to be living examples of the message that they were giving.

People don’t really want to hear the Gospel. They are satisfied the way they are, and they don’t believe that they need God, or Jesus Christ. They don’t want us to talk to them about salvation. And they won’t listen until God does something to wake them up to their need.

Now the Lord could have sent angels with the Gospel, and they could have preached it to the people of the world. But He didn’t send angels with the Gospel except on very rare occasions. Or He could have placed a Bible in the hands of every person in the world, and there have been people who have been saved just reading the Bible. But the Lord didn’t decide to work that way. Or, the Lord could Himself have spoken from heaven, and He did that on certain occasions, but that is not the main way that He has chosen to get the Gospel to the people of the world. *What He has done is to send people who have been saved with the message of the Gospel, to tell people who aren’t saved how they can be saved. The most powerful way for the Gospel to be presented is when one person who knows the Lord, tells other people, either individually or in groups, how they can be saved.*

I want you to see what an amazing statement this is, “Ye are the salt of the earth.”

If we go back to the first Beatitude and remember what the Lord said about us there, we learned that by nature we are “the poor in spirit,” utterly unacceptable to God because of our sins, hopeless and helpless, lost,

condemned, spiritually dead and thoroughly corrupted before God by our sin. The only influence we could have on others was to encourage them to keep on living their lives without God, without Christ, without the Bible, and without salvation. But by the miracle of His grace, He has so transformed us so as to make us “salt,” not just to a few people, but to all “the earth”! Who would ever have thought that we, sinners saved by grace, would have such an honored and exalted position. Think about those words: “Ye are the salt of the earth.” God has chosen to work through His people to make the Gospel, and all that is involved in the Gospel, something that people would want to eat.

Let me give you a couple of verses, one from the Old Testament, and one from the New Testament, which illustrate this.

David, the Psalmist, wrote on one occasion:

O taste and see that the LORD is good: blessed is the man that trusteth in him (Psa. 34:8).

Don't you wish that everyone would only “taste” of the Lord, and find out how wonderful He is, how “good”? Once they “taste” of Him, learning of Him and trusting Him, they will never find anyone else who is as wonderful as He is, and certainly no one who is better than He is. When many of those who were only disciples in name, turned and walked no more with Him, our Lord asked His true disciples, “Will ye also go away?” (John 6: 67). Peter responded for all of them when he said,

68 Then Simon Peter answered him, Lord, to whom shall we go? thou hast the words of eternal life.

69 And we believe and are sure that thou art that Christ, the Son of the living God (John 6:68-69).

You will never meet another person who can do for you what the Lord Jesus Christ can, and will, do.

The other couple of verses, a NT verse, that I want to give you, come from the pen of the Apostle Peter. They are found in 1 Pet. 2:2-3:

2 As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby:

3 If so be ye have tasted that the Lord is gracious.

There it is again: “Tasted.” If we could only get people to *taste* the goodness and grace of God in Christ.

I said I would give you two verses, let me add just two more. They are found in John 6:53-54:

53 Then Jesus said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink his blood, ye

have no life in you.

54 Whoso eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, hath eternal life; and I will raise him up at the last day.

This is one way our Lord described what it means to trust Him as Savior. We spiritually, and genuinely, feed upon Him.

But the big question is, How can we get people to taste and see how good the Lord is?

Well, we can't. God has to do that. But one way that He has chosen to work is by making us "salt" on the Gospel. And what does it mean to be "salt"? We have just learned in the Beatitudes. If we are the kind of people whom the Lord described in the Beatitudes, even though most of the world will revile us and persecute us for our faith, yet God will use us by the very lives we live to enable others to see what it means to be a Christian. How will the Lord use us to get people to "taste" of the Gospel? It will be when our lives show how the Gospel has transformed our lives. Have you ever heard a person say who had become a Christian, what brought them to Christ, and have them answer something like this? "I saw what I wanted in the life of a Christian. I didn't know what it was, but I learned that it was Christ. And I trusted in Him, and He saved me." Let me repeat: This is not something that you and I do, but one way, a major way, in which God uses His people to bring them to Christ.

Oh, how we need to concentrate on what the Lord said in the Beatitudes until they are descriptive of us! How different things could be in the world today if every Christian were what we might call, *a Beatitude Christian!*

But now I want to point out what the Lord said in the following words which I hope will make all of us "sit up and take notice." The Lord spoke of those times when:

III. THE SALT LOSES ITS SAVOUR?

Savour means *flavor*. I understand that pure salt can never lose its savour, and yet I am told that the salt which was used in Palestine was not pure salt, and that often it did have the sodium chloride washed out of it. The Greek verb which the Lord used for salt losing its savour, is $\mu\omega\rho\alpha\iota\nu\omega$. It speaks of "salt that has lost its strength and flavor" (Thayer, p. 420). It is salt which has become "flat and tasteless" (*Ibid.*). And when this happens, as our Lord said, "it is good for nothing, but to be cast out, and to be trodden under foot of men."

But let me take the case of pure salt. Was the Lord saying here that there is something which can happen to His people who are “the salt of the earth” that never happens to pure salt? He surely was saying that we can lose our savour. And then He said, in effect, “When my people lose their savour, their flavor, what will the people of the earth do?”

But let me ask: *How can this happen?*

It happens when we as the people of God forget the truth that the Lord was teaching in the Beatitudes. We forget that we are only sinners saved by grace. It may have been a long time since we have shed a tear over our sins. We begin to pattern our lives after the world instead of seeking to be like the Lord Jesus Christ. We become proud instead of seeking to be humble. We don't read our Bibles as much as we used to. We are not really hungering to be like our dear Savior. We don't love the Lord like we used to love Him. We envy sinners instead of showing mercy toward them. We buy the lie that is circulating around our country now that character does not matter instead of seeking to be pure in heart. We get along fine in the world because nobody can tell by the way we live that we belong to the Lord Jesus Christ.

What does the Lord say about those who lose their savour?

“It is thenceforth good for nothing, but to be cast out, and to be trodden under foot of men.” “Good for nothing.” Is that the Lord's evaluation of any of us today because we have forgotten the Beatitudes, and can no longer be called, *a Beatitude Christian?*

We console ourselves that we still believe the Bible to be the Word of God. And we still believe in the Deity of Christ. And we believe that the only salvation there is, is in Christ. But do we believe that “if any man be in Christ, he is a new creation: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new” (2 Cor. 5:17).

Do you and I want to be “salt” in this terrible world in which we are living? If so, there is only one way, and that is that we need to be walking in daily fellowship with the Lord in the kind of a life which has been set before us by the Lord in the Beatitudes. The church has gone mad after entertainment. We are trying to do the Lord's work in the world's way, and that makes the church “good for nothing.” But even where we sing the old hymns and concentrate on the ministry of the Bible as the Word of God, let us be careful that in our pride about what we are doing, or in our

willingness to be hearers of the Word, but not doers of the Word, we have lost, or are losing our savour, so that our lives are not demonstrating by God's grace, what it means to be saved, to be a child of God, and to be strangers and foreigners here because we are citizens of heaven.

Concl: Yesterday when we were taking our Carolyn to the airport for her flight back to Orlando, we were following a car which had a special license plate which had this spelled out on it. The letter "B" follow by the letters S-U-M. And then the letter "1." And so when you read it, it said, "Be some one." I don't know what the person who made that up had in mind, but I had been thinking about my text for today, and it struck a response with me. I'm not concerned about being somebody famous so that everyone knows who I am. But I am concerned about being "the salt of the earth." And I believe that most of you are, too. Let's take stock of our own lives today. Go back and read over the Beatitudes, and ask yourself, as I will ask myself, "Are these descriptive of me, or, at least, of what I really want to be before the Lord?" Maybe we haven't been walking as close to the Lord as we think we have. It might be that some changes need to be made in our lives. The people around us will only be able to see in us how wonderful the Lord is, when we are showing by our lives that we really love Him, and that the one thing that we want to do more than anything else is to be pleasing to the Lord.

May God help us to be "salt" in our generation, trusting Him to use us to cause others to see their need of Christ and of God.