

SALT OF THE EARTH

Text Matthew 5:13

By: Thomas Beam

Can you imagine being one of the disciples sitting at the feet of Jesus as he begins to teach? I tell my students in the Elements of Bible Study class I teach that when they study the Word of God they need to learn the original intent of the author. I tell them about a television show by the name of 'Quantum Leap' where Scott Bacula would "leap" into a different time and instantly had to figure out where he was, what he did, who he was, etc. Studying the Word of God is very similar. It is important to know the author, the time the book was written, the time the book was written about, the audience, the context and to know what the author wanted you to know.

This post is about a small passage from one of Jesus' most famous teachings; the Sermon on the Mount. This sermon took place in a town called Capernaum during Jesus' first Galilean ministry; somewhere around the summer of AD 28. Jesus and His disciples, retreating from the multitudes, went up the mountain where they sat down and Jesus began to teach:

Blessed are the poor in spirit...,
Blessed are those who mourn...,
Blessed are the gentle....

After the Beatitudes Jesus tells them that their reward is in heaven (v.12) and then says "You are the salt of the earth." The salt of the earth. what does that mean? First let's see how salt played a part in the customs and manners of the time.

Salt was an essential item in first century Palestine. Being a hot climate with no refrigeration

it was a practical means of preserving food.

Salt, used as a symbol, is wide-spread throughout the Scriptures. Owing to its preservative quality salt was a sign of purity and incorruptability, especially among the Semitic people. As such, it served to confirm contracts and friendship. The covenant between Yahweh and Israel on Sinai is an example; being called a Covenant of Salt in Numbers 18:19.

This symbolism, taken together with its seasoning properties, is the foundation Jesus wanted to build when He said "you are the salt of the earth."

The characteristics of the Christian being the salt and light of the earth means his behavior and attitudes must embody wisdom, integrity, and purity.

Influence defined is the invisible force in ones personality that causes others to act. Christ says we are the salt of the earth. This statement is a clear implication the source of our influence is found in the persons we are. He said, You are the salt of the earth. He did not say you have salt. He did not say you dispense salt. Only as Christians are salt in their lives and character can they exercise the influence of salt in their community. None of us exert influence upon other people by our words if what we say is not backed up by who we are. It is the influence of our personality that will produce changes in others.

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The purity of our private lives has everything to do with the purity of our public influence. If Christians are to be the salt of the earth they must set an example. 1 Thessalonians 1:6-8 says:

"You also became imitators of us and of the Lord, having received the word in much tribulation with joy of the Holy Spirit, so that you became an example to all the believers in Macedonia and in Achaia. For the word of the Lord has sounded forth from you, not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place your faith toward God has gone forth, so that we have no need to say anything."

Paul was telling the Thessalonians that their behavior set an example and this example was not only for the benefit of believers but for the unbelievers as well.

We must hold ourselves to a high standard inwardly as well as outwardly. Paul tells the Corinthian church that they need to be above criticism (1 Cor. 8:10-13). He tells Timothy to be honorable (1 Tim. 6:1). Peter tells us to be beneficial to others (1 Pet. 2:11,12), and Paul tells the Philippians that they need to be beyond reproach (Phil. 2:15, 16). These are standards we must live by and we must live by them in speech, thought, conduct and action.

The presence of salt cannot be ignored. In Mark 9:50 and Luke 14:34 we are told that salt can

be a positive or negative influence. If present you cannot fail to recognize it. If absent we miss it. Where the salt of the earth is in the form of Christian influence people will be aware of it. It may not be welcome, but it will be recognized! It is important that Christians remain pure or they cannot exercise the positive power of Christian influence.

Christ said we are the salt of the earth. According to Thayers Greek-English Lexicon the term "earth," (Strong's 1093), is defined as the physical planet earth. So the context of the verse calls for a literal usage of the term telling us that we are to unloose our preserving power on the earth.

What does that mean to us? We are simply to exercise our Christian influence in the here and now, in the community in which we live, in the face of the needs that confront us. According to Titus 2:12 we are to deny ungodliness and worldly desires and to live sensibly, righteously and godly in the **present age**. We are not to withdraw from the world. Salt does its most effective work by direct contact. But remember, we must remain without blemish (James 1:27).

Salt has been a preservative throughout all the ages. Without the presence of those reflecting the character of Jesus Christ, civilization will self-destruct. Humankind does not become increasingly pure. On the contrary, we tend to become increasingly impure. The presence of Christians in society is absolutely necessary if that society is to be saved from disintegration.

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When Christ says that we are to be the salt of the earth He is telling us that we are to lend flavor to life. The tragedy of this sin ridden world; however, is that most people assume that we as Christians have no flavor. We are dull. We don't like to have any fun. They think that a sinful life, pride, lust, drugs, booze is life's flavor. They are blind to the joy and peace of leading a life for Christ. Their eyes need to be opened so they can discover the joy and radiance of following our Savior. So what can we do?

God is the only one who can open their eyes. We have no power to do that. But God uses us as His instruments to draw His elect to Jesus. Scriptures tell us that the elect are saved by the hearing of the word. We as Christians, are charged with the responsibility of being the salt of the earth, the responsibility to witness and preach the powerful gospel of Jesus Christ, the responsibility of adding flavor to life.

What happens when the salt loses its saltiness? That is the question Jesus asks in Mark 9:50 and Luke 14:34. In this text Jesus gives us a warning: salt can lose its saltiness! We can lose our Christian influence.

Salt, pure sodium chloride as we know it does not lose its saltiness. Salt is salt. But the Palestinians got their salt from the Dead Sea. It was mixed with other minerals that could affect its flavor. It was not pure and over time the flavor could leach out. When this happened it was

good for nothing. It was tossed out and spread along the trails like gravel.

Here's the thing. We can let the impurities of this world corrupt the purity of God's Word in our lives and the fruits of the Spirit that we are to bear will reflect that impurity. The disciples were given a solemn warning - we are given a solemn warning; to preserve our society or be pulverized by it.

Think back in history. What happened to the churches of Asia Minor, Antioch, Constantineople, or Alexandria? They lost their Christian influence. They were trodden underfoot by the Mohamadeans. By AD 640 the Nation of Islam dominated all the Eastern churches. Over the entrance of a Damascan mosque you can read a half-obliterated, faded inscription:

"Thy Kingdom, O Christ, is an Everlasting Kingdom."

Above this faded inscription in large bold letters the are words:

"THERE IS NO GOD BUT ALLAH AND MOHAMMED IS HIS PROPHET."

The salt lost its flavor. It became impure and could no longer preserve. As our influences mixes with the world we can dilute our purity through sin. The gospel of Christ becomes the gospel of man, and sin molds who God is in the minds of people who want to continue living in the world. Sin is trivelized to the point where people think they will go to heaven because God is a God

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of love. They refuse to believe that he is also a God of justice. When this happens we have sacrificed our Christian influence.

Is it possible to regain lost savor? To regain sacrificed influence? Of course it is. In 2 Kings 2:19-22 Elisha makes brackish water sweet with salt. We need to filter out the impurities. God has placed no obstacles in the way of a repentant sinner returning to the fountain of all power and purity, Jesus Christ.

In Mark 9:50 Jesus says, "have salt in yourselves." The work of the Word (Col. 3:16) and the Spirit (Gal. 5:22-23) produce godly character - Christian influence - enabling you to act again as a preservative to society. When our Christian influence has been sacrificed there is only one thing to do - REPENT - and return to your first love; trust in Jesus Christ. When this is done you will once more be the salt of the earth.

Thank you for reading this post. Please let me know what you think about this serious issue. How do you exert your Christian influence?



I need your help. I am the Chapel Clerk here at Mule Creek State Prison. We are blessed much by God for giving us a very good Chapel program. Included in this program we have a Christian library and we also hold classes on a regular basis. Some of the classes are taught by the Chaplain and others are taught by qualified

inmates.

We need books for our library and text books for our classes. The following is a wish list of books we would like to have:

Books for our library:

1. Zondervan Illustrated Bible Background Commentary of the New Testament. 4 softback volumes.
2. Systematic Theology of Charles Hodge, three volumes.
3. Christian Theology, Millard Erickson, one volume.
4. Complete Word Study Bible and Dictionary, edited by Spiros Zodhiates.
5. Eusebius' Ecclesiastical History. Published by Hendrickson Publishing.

Text Books:

1. Living by the Promises of God, Joel Beeke. (12 copies needed.)
2. The Priority of Worship, John MacArthur. (12 copies needed.)

Thank you for your consideration. If you are interested in helping please contact:

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