

You Are the Salt of the Earth  
Matthew 5:13-20  
February 5, 2017

*“You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled by men. You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven. Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. I tell you the truth, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished. Anyone who breaks one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever practices and teaches these commands will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. For I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven.”*

In Scripture, God gives his people various names. He calls them sheep, children, little ones, etc. In today's Gospel reading, Jesus tells us we are to be salt. By calling us salt, Jesus is calling on us to make a change in the world.

The 12 verses immediately preceding our text are called the Beatitudes. In those verses, Jesus tells us what it takes to be the salt of the world. It requires humility, sorrow over our sin, meekness, a hunger for righteousness, a merciful spirit, a pure heart, a desire to be at and promote peace, and the patience to endure persecution. If we possess these qualities, we will make a difference in the world around us. We will be salty Christians.

To get a good handle on the idea of being salty Christians, we need to understand the importance of salt in the culture of Jesus' day. Today, we buy salt for pennies a box, but there was a time when salt and gold were traded for equal value. Roman soldiers were sometimes paid in salt. The better the soldier the more salt he received. That's where we get the expression about someone being “worth his salt.”

The salt of ancient times was different from our chemical salt. Ancient salt was mined and, as the text tells us, it could lose its saltiness. When that happened, the salt was of no value. When salt became neutral, it was literally spread on the roads to prevent weeds and grass from growing in the road.

The implication in the reading is that, if we lose our saltiness, we are of no more value than salt that has gone flat. Unless a Christian is a salty Christian, he or she is of no value for promoting the kingdom of God. That's a scary thought.

As Christians, our foremost desire in life should be to be useful to God – to be part of God's will being done on earth as it is in heaven. To learn how to be useful to God, let's

examine how to bring the qualities of salt into our Christian lives. In other words, let's learn how to be salty Christians.

### **Preserving quality**

Salt can prevent rot and decay. Salt is rubbed into meat to preserve it. The cities of Sodom and Gomorrah could have been saved by the preserving quality of just ten righteous people.

I believe that this is the condition of the United States. As our country grows more worldly and more corrupt, I believe that the only thing standing between us and God's judgment is the preserving quality of the prayers of salty Christians. This nation was founded on the righteous principles of God's Word. If American Christians don't function as the salt God intends for us to be, this great nation will not last.

### **Penetrating quality**

Salt is a very aggressing substance. It penetrates, it infiltrates everything it touches. We Christians are meant to penetrate our society. We are called to infiltrate the world around us. In the book of Acts, we hear how the early Christians even used adversity to infiltrate the world.

*On that day a great persecution broke out against the church at Jerusalem, and all except the apostles were scattered throughout Judea and Samaria. Those who had been scattered preached the word wherever they went. Philip went down to a city in Samaria and proclaimed the Christ there. When the crowds heard Philip and saw the miraculous signs he did, they all paid close attention to what he said* (Ac 8:1, 4-6 NIV).

The church was never intended to hide in a corner – afraid it might offend someone. The church is supposed to be an active force in this world. Jesus said: *“I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven”* (Mt 16:18-19 NIV).

### **Purifying quality**

Salt has a cleansing effect. In 2 Kings, Elisha purified the waters of Jericho with salt. In ancient times, newborn babies were washed in salt to clean them and to add firmness to their skin. In the past, salt has been used to cleanse wounds. Did you ever gargle with salt water to ease a sore throat?

Salty Christians have a purifying effect on the world. People tend to change their behavior and their language when they know they are in the company of salty Christians. If you feel the mood of a group of people change when you enter the room, don't be insulted or offended. Instead, be thankful that your light is having an impact of the world.

God intends for the lives of his people to be radically different. Paul writes: *Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God – his is your spiritual act of worship. Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind* (Ro 12:1-2 NIV).

### **Pleasing quality**

Salt improves the flavor of many foods. It blends with the food and enhances the taste. In my opinion, there are some foods, like popcorn, that aren't worth eating without salt.

This is how it should be with Christians. We should be enhancing the flavor of the world around us. As salt, we should be living in such a way as to bring out the best in the people we come in contact with. Jesus brought out the best in the people around him. We can do the same if we follow the advice of Scripture: *Whatever happens, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the Gospel of Christ* (Php 1:27 NIV).

### **Poisoning quality**

Salt kills some things. Have you ever poured salt on a slug? Pour salt on your lawn and it will kill the grass. Put too much salt in your body and it will kill you. In the book of Judges, Abimelech captured a city and sowed salt over the ground to prevent it from being used to grow crops.

When the salt of Christianity is sown in lives, homes, and communities of the world, some things die. We can make an impact on the world simply by the fact that Christianity is pure poison to sin. When we become salty Christians, things like fighting, hatred, loose living, gossiping, and a host of other sins are put to death in the name of Jesus.

### **Promoting quality**

Just as salt produces a thirst for water, our lives as Christians should produce in the people we meet a thirst for Jesus. When we live as Christians should live, we will act right, talk right, walk right. We will strive for Christian attitudes, Christian morals, Christian relationships. The people around us should look at our lives and have a desire, a thirst, to have what we have.

Jesus said: *Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him* (Jn 7:38 NIV). When we become salty Christians, the living water of Christ will not only flow from within us, it will also splash all over the people around us. Jesus doesn't want us to keep his living water to ourselves. He wants us to soak the world with it.

Have you ever thought about the difference between a thermometer and a thermostat? A thermometer tells you the temperature. A thermostat changes the temperature. We are called to be thermostats not thermometers.

We are not here to reflect the condition of this world. We are here to change the condition of this world. We are here to create change not to be changed. The world needs the light of Christ in order to see its sinful ways. The world needs salty Christians to penetrate it, purify it, and preserve it. God help us all to be salty Christians.