

FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH OF VILLA RICA, PCA

THE SALT OF THE EARTH

By

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Text Matt. 5:13 13 “You are the salt of the earth; but if the salt has become tasteless, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled under foot by men.

The beatitudes delineate Christian character. This is not a character that comes about through native endowment, cultural influence, education or even religious training. It comes about through the miracle of the new birth. It is only by the grace of God that any person can manifest the marks of the new man in Christ.

This whole subject of the new birth is a rather mysterious matter. I had the privilege of seeing both my third grandson and my first granddaughter born. I want to tell you, those are profoundly moving experiences. To see a new life be born is humbling. Not one of us can explain how all of the cells and tissues join together and grow to produce a human being, or for that matter, any other creature that God has made. If we could do that, then we could create new life forms.

Now if we can't explain how God can make a baby that becomes a man, how much less can we explain how God can create a new heart with a capability to transform that man into a heavenly person who can sit in the heavenlies with God?

That is precisely what the new birth does. We are told that very thing in Ephesians 2. Paul says that we were all dead in our trespasses and sins and that we walked just like other men of the world according to the course of this world.

Turn with me to **Ephesians 2:3-10 3Among them we too all formerly lived in the lusts of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest. 4But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, 5even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), 6and raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, 7so that in the ages to come He might show the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. 8For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; 9not as a result of works, so that no one may boast. 10For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them.**

Beloved, I can't explain how God does that any more than I can tell you how he forms a human being in the womb of a woman and endows that person with the ability to think and talk and laugh and cry and learn to do all sorts of things with his hands and the body God gave him. But we know it is just as real as that physical birth of the newborn baby. And the Christian character of this spiritual person exerts an influence in the world, which Christ likens to salt and light. Today we will talk about the salt influence of this new man in Christ.

I. The Needed Salt Influence

A. Christ likens the Christian to salt in society because the Christian influence is spiritually to the world what salt is to the physical world.

What is salt used for in this world? I believe we can say that salt primarily is a purifier, a preservative. The book of Exodus tells about the perfumes that God ordered Moses to make to be used as incense and as anointing oil. Both the incense, which was used on the golden altar in the Tent of Meeting and the anointing oil, were to be emblematic of the fragrance of Christ as our Savior. Our prayers are made acceptable to God through the high Priestly work of Jesus Christ in offering up Himself as a sacrifice for sins.

In making the incense God told Moses that it would be salted, pure. Quite obviously God is using the word "salted" to refer to its purity and holiness. It could not be used in the worship of God unless it was. Christians have an anointing that has a heavenly fragrance.

The first Protestant missionary to Japan during his service in the land of the rising Sun was brought into touch with members of the royal house of that country. During one of his furloughs in England some members of the Emperor's family who were touring Europe visited him in his apartment. They chatted for perhaps an hour and then left. Later in the day another group from Japan called. "Oh," one of them exclaimed, "You have been entertaining royalty here today." "What makes you think so?" the missionary asked. "Why, there is a perfume manufactured in our country for the exclusive use of the royal family. No one else is allowed to use it, and its fragrant odor is in evidence in this apartment, so that we can tell you have had members of the royal house to visit you here."

Should not we, who are members of the royal family of Heaven, leave behind fragrance that bespeaks the sweet savor of Christ the King of glory?

Christ taught that every person needed to engage in self examination and that if he found sin being caused by some part of the body that it would be best to cut off that part of the body rather than be cast into hell. He closed his admonition by saying **for everyone will be salted with fire**. So there again salt is used as the purifying agent.

He said, **Have salt in yourselves**, meaning, have this sense of righteousness and purity, which sanitizes and purifies your mind and heart.

Salt is rubbed into meat to prevent its decay and putrefaction. We put salt in water and gargle with it to act as an antiseptic. Even so the Christian is in the world as salt.

It has been estimated that if the oceans were dried up it would yield 4 1/2 million cubic miles of rock salt, enough to form a continent 14 1/2 times the bulk of the entire continent of Europe. I am sure that God put all that salt in the oceans to maintain purity in a way that we perhaps have not yet understood. And now Christ tells us that we are the salt of the earth.

B. Salt is not only a purifier and preservative, it adds flavor to the food we eat. The Christian provides an influence for God in the world that makes life taste good. Life without the gospel and the influence of those transformed by the gospel is insipid and tasteless. We can see that as boredom and cynicism overtakes men of the world in their pursuit of pleasure, entertainment and amusement. Sinful indulgence leaves the soul empty and unhappy. The zest of life will sooner or later be lost without the gospel. Men without Christ come to the end of life and find it a tasteless juiceless experience. There may be pleasure in sin for a season but at the end it leaves the soul alone, afraid, ashamed. Sin when it is finished brings forth death.

We live in a day when the writers, philosophers and men in general believe that life is advancing, developing, improving, and evolving into something better. The idea is that man is supposed to have risen from a beast-like primate into his present superior form and intellect. Men want to believe and do believe that through science and technology this world will be transformed into a utopian place. Education is the key that is supposed to pave the way for the better world,

with wars abolished and men managing the environment and ecology and economy in such a way that life will be much better. Things under this notion will get superior to this present crime ridden, drug addicted, and violence-prone, terrorist world. It is just a matter of time. But both the Bible and human history refute that notion.

The trouble with the world is sin in the human heart. It began with the fall in the garden and soon afterward Cain killed his brother Abel. Sin reached such proportions that God destroyed the world with a flood and started all over. But sin is rampant again. As in the days of Noah, the wickedness of man is great on the earth.

Man left to himself degenerates into ever-greater sin and wickedness. The world needs the salt Christ speaks of in this text. We are the salt of the earth, which acts as God's means of purifying society, of preserving it from its natural tendency to be corrupt and wicked.

How does this happen? When the spiritual man is living his faith it has that effect on others. The Christian man is a righteous man, a praying man, a loving person, a forgiving person, a peacemaker, a holy influence. When he walks into a room where there is foul language or cursing, the atmosphere changes. People who rub shoulders with Christians are influenced by them. A righteous standard is lifted up. There appears a stand for Biblical righteousness and it has a purifying effect in the world.

Donald Grey Barnhouse tells about a man who came to a mission station in Central China and asked to become a Christian. When he was questioned, he replied that he had never heard the gospel preached. He also said that he could not read. When he was asked how he knew about the gospel he said that he had seen it. Although his village was far removed from any preaching center, he explained, there lived a man who had long been known as a worthless opium addict and a lazy, good-for-nothing. The man had journeyed to a faraway town and had returned absolutely transformed; he uprooted the poppies in his garden, repaired his house, planted his crops, and provided for his family, as a decent man should. The former good-for-nothing said that the gospel of Christ had changed his life; his neighbor, hearing about it, came all the way to the mission station to become a Christian.

The gestures of the Christian life explained more simply and more potently than any arguments could have done. May we define our Christian life in this same way?

Don Shula, former Miami Dolphins coach is quoted as saying, "I don't know any other way to lead but by example." -- Marriage Partnership, Vol. 12, no. 3.

Indeed, the Bible advises us to follow the example of those who have gone before us, **Hebrews 12:1-3** ¹Therefore, since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us also lay aside every encumbrance and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, ²fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

³For consider Him who has endured such hostility by sinners against Himself, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.

II. Our Text Carries A Warning Matt. 5:13 "You are the salt of the earth; but if the salt has become tasteless, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled under foot by men.

A. Salt can lose its saltiness. Salt can be diluted so as to be impure. When the Christian mixes in with the world, when he adopts the mores and ways of the world and compromises with evil, then salt loses its saltiness. We know that can and does happen. When Christians cease to be in

the world but not of the world and instead become just like the world, the salt has lost its savor. Christ warns that when this happens there is no way to make it salt again. That special quality and taste of salt can be neutralized so that what looks like salt is no longer salt at all. It is good for nothing anymore. All you can do with it is throw it away and men trample it under their feet. So is the Christian who has so mingled himself with the world that you can't tell him apart from the world.

Every Christian needs to take to heart Christ's warning. The calling to be a Christian, to be Christ-like, is a miracle of God's grace. But that old man must be in subjection to the new man in Christ. That old sinful nature will try to assert himself and it is possible for the Christian to revert back to the world and identify with the world and lose his saltiness. In that case his witness is no longer that of salt but the same as the world. As far as the gospel is concerned he threw away his distinctiveness and his Christian testimony is good for nothing.

B. Every Christian has an influence. The blessing of being a Christian is not only that we have been forgiven our sins and have the assurance of heaven as our home when we pass from this present life, but we can make this world a better place. We can exert an influence for Christ and righteousness. We can have salt in ourselves and live righteously before God and men. That is our calling. That is our ministry. And were there enough Christians doing that we would see our world get better. I believe that we can hope to see that.

I believe the mission of the Church is to take the gospel to other men. As other men are born again into this righteous Kingdom the world will be a far better place to live and raise our children.

Let us resolve to be a blessing by living out the faith God has given to us. Let us ask God to make us a blessing.

If you have not come to Christ for the salvation he freely offers, come to him today. Let this new life begin in you this very day. Tell him you desire to repent of your sins and ask him to save you today. He will come in and sup with you if you will invite him to be your Savior and Lord.

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