

## “The Salty Disciple?”—Matthew 5:13

The text for this sermon, the theme of which is, “The Salty Disciple?”, is Matthew 5:13 → *You are the salt of the earth, but if salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything except to be thrown out and trampled under people’s feet.* This is the text.

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ Jesus:

Do you salt your food before you taste it? Many people cannot experience the taste of foods without some kind of seasoning, the most common of which is salt and pepper. The dependence upon salt is so prevalent that nearly every processed food product has salt in it. Salt is so common in our households that we may think of it as a rather lowly commodity. As necessary as salt is in our lives, including our bodies which contain about eight ounces of salt, too much salt can be detrimental as well. Just talk to a person who has to cut down or cut out their salt intake and you will hear of his frustration with food being so tasteless.

Salt is a compound chemical, a blend of sodium and chlorine. Sodium is a metal so unstable that it bursts into flame when exposed to water. Chlorine is a **deadly** gas. Yet when these two substances are

combined, they are very essential to life. Salt is also a very stable compound, difficult to break down. It is rather fitting that Jesus would describe discipleship by using salt as an object lesson as He does in our text.

During His Sermon on the Mount Jesus spoke about the Church and the impact upon the world which should be made by Christians—those belonging to Christ. Using the example of salt could produce many applications for the expression of our relationship with Christ as His Church in the world as we live out the daily vocations of our lives.

For instance, salt's seasoning quality applies in the sense that we have the privilege of "seasoning" others with the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the only hope for removing the "bitterness" of sin in the hearts of people. The only way for people who are lost in their sinfulness to experience the benefits of the Person & Work of Jesus Christ is for Christians to proclaim Christ to them in some way. Without Christians the world will not know Jesus. It is in this regard that Paul commands us Christians in Colossians 4:5-6 to *walk in wisdom toward outsiders* (that is, people outside of the Church; unbelievers), *making the best use of the time. **Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer each person.***

However, salt as a seasoning agent does something else to a person when he eats it—it makes him thirsty. Businesses recognize the

powerful impact of this seasoning quality when bars or pubs provide free pretzels or nuts to their customers. Why? So that they'll buy more drinks. In the end, it's more profitable. Ever notice how movie theaters seem to over-salt their popcorn to the point of making your lips parched? Why? So that you'll buy larger drinks or some candy to offset the saltiness. In the end, it's more profitable. This same principle could apply to our lives of discipleship. Jesus' application reinforces the purpose of making people "thirsty" for His atoning work for the forgiveness of their sins by our words and actions. In other words, we are to "season" people with the Law, praying that the Holy Spirit makes them thirsty for forgiveness of sins and then "season" them with the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Jesus reinforced this analogy by describing His Church as *the light of the world* immediately following our text (cf. Matthew 5:14-16). As "lights" in a world filled with the darkness of sin we are to let the light of the Good News of Jesus Christ shine through our actions so that others may see our good works and give glory to our Father in heaven by believing in Jesus. In a sense, these works will also make others "thirsty" for the Gospel when they see us acting and talking differently than the world in which we live. When they wonder and ask about why we do and say what we do and say, it provides opportunity for us to "season" them with gracious Word of forgiveness of sins through faith in Jesus alone.

Notice Jesus also included a warning in our text: *But if salt has lost*

*its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored?* This is a very curious question. Rhetorically, the obvious answer is: “It can’t be restored!” But how can salt lose its taste? It is such a stable compound that it usually carries its taste into that into which it is mixed. How could it possibly lose its *saltiness*?

Jesus’ question is not intended to be an analysis of the stability of salt but rather a revelation of the danger of becoming an ineffective disciple of Christ in the world. If salt loses its taste, it loses its usefulness, and thus loses its impact. Actually, His point is rather obvious: If His Church fails to keep its identity and purpose in clear focus it will lose its usefulness and effectiveness in “seasoning” the world with the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Their witness will simply be *thrown out and trampled under people’s feet* because it has become so “diluted” that it looks no different than the world, filled with compromise, falsehood, selfish-ambition and deception. Just as salt eventually loses its tasteful impact in other substances when it gets diluted so that you cannot even recognize its presence, so a Christian can become spiritually tasteless when so deluded by the world, the devil and his own sinful nature.

This is a spiritually dangerous situation for the ones so deluded as well as for the ones who are taught their delusions. Referring to false teachers (that is, those who have lost their “saltiness”) God says in 2 Peter 2:20 → *If, after they have escaped the defilements of the world*

*through the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled in them and overcome, the last state has become worse for them than the first.*

How could such a thing happen to Christ's disciples? It happens when they become deluded in the world to such an extent that they've lost their "tasteful" impact upon others. Think about it. As you function in the world would others be able to tell by your behavior that you belong to Christ? When at the store, sporting events, work, family gatherings and so forth, would those around you be able to tell that you are a disciple of Jesus by the words and attitudes you express? Do your words and actions make others wonder "what makes you tick" the way you do . . . and not just because you're so weird? Faithfulness to Christ in your daily vocations, conversations and relationships can make people "thirsty" for more information. If they ask you about it, you have the opportunity to "season" them with the Gospel of Jesus Christ. When the world does not see different behaviors, attitudes and words in Christians then "tastelessness" has set in.

John 17:14-17 records Jesus' prayer to His Father for us on the night before He died on the cross: *I have given them **Your word**, and the world has hated them because they are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. I do not ask that You take them out of the world, but that **You keep them from the evil one** . . . Sanctify them in the truth; **Your***

**word is truth.** Notice Jesus' desire is that we stay in this world as those sanctified by His Word. *Sanctify* means "to set apart for specific purpose." Christians have been set apart by God's Word of truth for the purpose of "seasoning" the world with that same Word of truth.

However, while you are in this world you will have to deal with the presence of the devil who is constantly working to make you spiritually tasteless in the world. Thus you are constantly being attacked as he tempts you to "dilute" the truth of God's Word and exchange it for a "deluded" perspective which may even sound partially "right." His attacks also include accusations which strive to "dilute" your faith in such a manner that you have a "deluded" perspective of yourself and believe that you are "tasteless" and without hope. This is satanic delusions at its finest.

Even in the midst of such temptations and attacks Jesus still states with confidence about you: *You are the salt of the earth!* Take heart! Jesus states what you are with such confidence because He has sanctified you in the truth of God's Word **which He fulfilled on your behalf!** He has sanctified you in the truth of God's Word according to which He has died and rose again so as to win the victory over the power of sin and the devil **for you!** In that forgiveness of sins . . . under the power of His Holy Spirit . . . sanctified by the truth of God's Word He

declares: *You **are** the salt of the earth . . . you **are** the light of the world*  
He doesn't say "You should be . . ." or "Try to be . . ." or "You might be  
the salt of the earth and the light of the world." *You **are**!*

He declares the impact which His Church has upon the world with confidence because He has done the work for us. We simple be whom He has made us to be as His disciples, His Church in the world, as we fulfill our daily vocations of life. Any efforts to "dilute" our confession of faith by the deluding temptations of satan have been thwarted once and for all by His suffering, death and resurrection! Thus, we remain *the salt of the earth* by continuing daily in His means of grace—the Word of truth, Baptism, the Lord's Supper, and Absolution—as dispensed by His Church gathered together in worship. It is here that we are empowered as we are in the world to be protected from the evil one as *the salt of the earth*.

1 John 4:4 says: *Little children, you are from God and have overcome those who do not believe in Christ, for He Who is in you (that is, Jesus) is greater than he who is in the world (that is, the devil). You **are** seasoning others with the Gospel of Jesus, making them thirsty for Him by your behavior. Why? Because of Christ in you. Even those times when our seasoning is rather "bitter" because we show our sinfulness we also have opportunity to show humble repentance and faith in Christ. Your "taste" and "seasoning" is based totally and completely on Christ*

in you, the hope of salvation. Amen.

*Everyone who has been born of God overcomes the world.*

*And this is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith.*

*Who is it that overcomes the world*

*except the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?*

(1 John 5:4-5)

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