

Salt of the Earth
Sunday, February 9, 2020 at The First Congregational Church of
Marshalltown, Iowa

Scripture: Matthew 5:13 (NKJV)

¹³“You are the salt of the earth; but if the salt loses its flavor, how shall it be seasoned? It is then good for nothing but to be thrown out and trampled underfoot by men.

Introduction:

The phrase, "salt of the earth" is one of those biblical phrases so famous that people who never read the Bible are familiar with it. It depicts good, kind responsible people who make good neighbors. There's another well known phrase in the same passage; good for nothing. Found 22 times in the Old Testament alone, "good for nothing" describes people who are disrespectful, dishonorable, dishonest and not to be trusted. Here's some thoughts about being salt, and about being good for nothing.

Salt is the influence of the Holy Spirit on a worshipping community

One place in Scripture in which salt symbolizes matters spiritual and moral is Leviticus 2:13 “And every offering of your grain offering you shall season with salt, you shall not allow the salt of the covenant of your God to be lacking from your grain offering. With all your offerings you shall offer salt.” Salt belonged with the Old Testament grain offerings as a symbol of fidelity, and the image, I believe, carried into the cultural understanding of salt. Newborn babies, before they were swaddled, were rubbed with salt.

Salt, in the days of Jesus, was produced by a process of evaporation by the Dead Sea, a body of water that is dense with salt. There was an outer layer, that was dirty with impurities, but that would be shaved off and thrown out onto the road and the rest harvested. The phrase "lost its savour", or "lost its saltiness" is based on a verb that means to play the fool, or to act foolishly. The idea is that a person of faith who acts

foolishly is to act contrary to what you are meant to be, a person who is faithful in an unfaithful world.

Like many other symbolic words or phrases in Scripture, discovering the meaning involves looking where it is used elsewhere.

Colossians 4:6 describes wisdom demonstrated by graciousness. “Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer everyone.” Salt, here, involves the speech of a person who uses social interactions for more than mere conversation, he uses it to help invest in the life of the other person; being it encouragement or insight or simply the power of positive attention. In Mark 9:49-50 Jesus said, “For everyone will be salted with fire. Salt is good; but if salt has lost its saltiness, how can you season it? Have salt in yourselves, and be at peace with one another.” So here we see that working toward peace in our relationships is another aspect of being salt. There are numerous other examples, these are just a couple.

Here are a few random comments regarding application.

We become like whom we worship, but how we speak and treat other people also has an impact. What we say and do affects who we are becoming, and we are a process in this life. We are always on the way to becoming someone. On the other side of the coin, we should rejoice, because Christ is known to take impure "good for nothings" and makes something out of them.

Conclusion

The phrase "salt of the earth" involves the image of salt, with lots of cultural meaning. To be salt involves fidelity in worship, gracious in speech that invests in the life of the other person, and to work to maintain and improve relationships when possible. To lose one's savor is to become foolish and good for nothing, but again, Christ, happily is known for making something out of good for nothings.

Theme: Jesus called us to be the salt of the earth.

Object: Several samples of food, one salted and another unsalted. (crackers and popcorn, for example)

Scripture:

"You are the salt of the earth. But what good is salt if it has lost its flavor? Can you make it salty again? It will be thrown out and trampled underfoot as worthless." Matthew 5:13 (NLT)

Have you ever been in a grocery store when, as you did your shopping, they offered samples of different food items to try? They do this to entice you to buy those items. If the samples didn't taste good, you probably wouldn't buy any, would you? This morning we are going to do a taste test. You will taste two different samples of a food item, and you will tell which one you liked the best.

The first taste test is crackers. We have two saucers with one cracker on each saucer. Johnny, taste a cracker from each saucer and tell me which one you liked best. (Hopefully, Johnny will pick the salted cracker!) The cracker that Johnny liked best is actually called a saltine. Why do you think it is called a saltine? You are right, it is because it has salt sprinkled on top. The other cracker doesn't have salt. Do you know what else it doesn't have? Taste! The cracker really needs the salt to give it a good flavor.

I'm sure you all knew that many foods taste much better with a little salt. It doesn't take much. In fact, when you are cooking, a recipe often calls for "a pinch of salt." Not much, just a pinch, but that little pinch of salt makes a big difference in the flavor.

In our Bible lesson today, Jesus said to his disciples, "You are the salt of the earth." What do you think that means? I think Jesus means that he wants us to improve the quality of life of those we meet each day. How can we do that? We can do that by introducing them to Jesus and by showing them that having Jesus in our life is like having salt on our food. Everything is better when we have Jesus in our life.

There is a lot of hatred and bitterness in our world today. If you and I will show the love of Jesus in all that we do, we can be the salt of the earth like Jesus called us to be. Just a pinch of salt can do much to reduce bitterness and bring peace to our world.

Heavenly Father, our prayer is that we may be the salt of the earth by showing the love of Jesus in all that we do. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

