

July 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2023  
[based on Matthew 5:13-17]

### PASS THE SALT!

We were in Myrtle Beach, maybe 35 years ago. The first morning of our vacation, we went to a restaurant, and I was really looking forward to an authentic, southern breakfast. We saw something on the menu that we had heard of before, "grits." I had been dreaming about a delicious breakfast – bacon, eggs, hash browns, toast and marmalade – all the things that I am not supposed to eat.

The server brought us back to the real world by placing a bowl of grits in front of us. I put a spoonful in my mouth, and I am not proud of my reaction. It tasted awful, and bland, like gritty glue. Someone told me to add some salt to it, and when I did, also adding in a bite of bacon, it tasted...I wouldn't say wonderful...but at least better. After that I realized the true value of salt! We don't know the importance of salt, until it's not there.

After delivering one of His powerful sermons, the Sermon on the Mount, also called "The Beatitudes", and in order to highlight their value of versatility, purpose, and the relationship of God's children to the world, Jesus said to his followers, "**You** are the salt of the earth." He further went on to say, "But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It's no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled by men."

Brothers and sisters, we were not called to be the '*sugar of the earth!*' It's much easier to spend our lives just making people happy, telling them what they want to hear - good things about themselves.

One preacher was told by a member of his congregation, that he had rubbed people the wrong way in his sermon. The preacher likened these people to how you rub a cat's fur. If the animal doesn't like being stroked in that direction, then it should turn around to get the true benefit of its master's love!

The question all of us must ask is, 'What kind of a salt am I?' Salt was talked about quite a bit in the Bible. When we think of salt, most of us probably think of it as simply a white granular food seasoning. In fact, only 6% of all salt manufactured, goes into food. Apparently, we use salt in more than 14,000 different ways, from the making of products as varied as plastic, paper, glass, polyester, rubber, and fertilizers, to household bleach, soap, detergents, and dyes etc. Salt is extremely important for the rearing and maintenance of all mammals, including humans. Iodine (commonly found in dietary salt) is an important micro-nutrient for humans, and a deficiency can cause a myriad of hormonal problems. For these reasons, it is a sought-after commodity.

Roman soldiers were sometimes paid in salt – this is where the word 'salary' comes from. Salt was used as a seasoning, a preservative, a disinfectant, a component of ceremonial offerings, and as a unit of exchange.

God used salt to make two important covenants - one with the Levites and other with the house of David. In Numbers 18:19, we read "All the holy contributions that the people of Israel present to the Lord, I give to you, and to your sons and daughters with you, as a perpetual due. It is a covenant of salt forever before the Lord for you and for your offspring with you."

2 Chronicles 13:5, says, "Ought you not to know that the Lord God of Israel gave the kingship over Israel forever to David and his sons by a covenant of salt?" Here, a covenant of salt suggests an agreement of enduring qualities. Salt is understood to be the preservative, suggesting endurance.

Coming back to our passage, where Jesus used salt as a metaphor to explain the relationship of his disciples to the world, Jesus said, "**You** are the salt of the earth." Let's pay attention to what Jesus is saying. He is not saying you **should** be the salt of the earth, or you **could** be the salt of the earth...He said, "you **are** the salt of the earth".

It is a fact, whether you know it or not, or even whether you like it or not, that by virtue of the acceptance of Jesus as your Lord and Saviour, you **became** the salt of the earth. The word "You" here in the Greek is plural, which means it applies to all believers and to the whole church.

When Jesus said you are the salt of the earth, he wanted His followers to exhibit the qualities that are found in natural salt. He wanted his disciples to *endure* in trials, to *preserve* the society, to *heal* the broken-hearted, to bring *flavour* to the people they encountered, and much, much more.

Without exception, we all are called to be the salt of the earth. Our only choice is what kind of salt we want to be. When Jesus spoke to His disciples, He affirmed the fact that, through their life style, they were to get involved in all aspects of life and make the world a better place.

As we know, salt is useless until it comes into contact with a substance with which it can interact. For example, you cannot enjoy saltless food just by looking at, and admiring, the salt in a salt shaker. Unless the salt comes out, and mixes with your food, it remains tasteless and flavour-less. Similarly, if Christians, who are called to be 'the salt of the earth,' remain in salt shakers (churches,) what impact can we have in society?

We can only be impactful when we go out and connect with people, sharing the message of the gospel in both practical and relevant ways. Jesus challenges us not to lose our saltiness. In other words, He wants us to be like fresh salt, and not like stale salt which has lost its saltiness and is of no purposeful use.

In God's sovereign providence, He gave several commandments and moral laws to the Israelites to obey, and conduct their daily affairs, matters of business and justice. Consider these commandments: 'Do not murder; do not commit adultery; do not steal; do not bear false witness; do not defraud; honour your father and mother', etc. God said that if the Israelites followed those commandments, they would be preserved as a nation, live in harmony and become prosperous, but if they violated them, they would reap the consequences.

It looks like, in the 21st century, we are repeating the same harvest as the ancient Israelites did in their rebellion against God. Unlike never-before, morality is rapidly declining in our times. Instead of following the moral laws of God, people are following their own vices and man-made philosophies. As a result, people are hurting others, and the hurting people are hurting others in turn. God is calling Christians to be the 'salt of the earth' and not to abdicate their responsibility, but instead, to take up their position and preserve this decaying society.

May I suggest a few things as we seek to be the salt of the earth?

Firstly, we cannot give from what we do not have. We can only give from what we have received from Christ. Therefore, it is imperative that we let God work in us, change us from the inside out, and empower us by His Holy Spirit to be effective witnesses in our communities and work places. One writer likened tired Christians to an Arctic river that is frozen at the mouth.

Secondly, as we go into the world, let's become *understanding* individuals so that folks will be willing to understand what we, in turn, have to share. We can begin this process right in our own neighbourhood. Find out who's new on your street and get to know them. If they are from another culture or religion, be interested in them. Ask questions to find out about their cultural values and religious beliefs. Befriend them...it may not be easy, but we at least need to give it a try. By doing so, we are obeying one of the greatest commandments of Jesus, "Love your neighbour as yourself."

Thirdly, "let your **words** be seasoned with salt." Colossians 4:6 says, "Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer each person." Where there is so much harshness and derogatory speech these days, Christians are called to be gracious and kind in their speech. Aim always to be an agent of healing and comfort through your words that are seasoned with salt.

Finally, do something practical to meet the needs of people. Needs can be overwhelming...our Helping Hands group can vouch for that. They realize they can't meet all needs, but they take steps to offer practical assistance where they can make a difference somewhere in God's world.

We have had members of our church, who not only have knit an unbelievable number of clothes and hats, but who have actually traveled to Kenya to assess the need, taken dozens of huge bags of clothing with them, and, in addition, ministered to the children and built relationships with the people there.

If we have eyes to see, and ears to hear, and have a compassionate heart, we can find people in need all around us. While we cannot meet all needs, we can certainly meet some of them.

In closing, let me ask you to reflect on exactly what kind of salt you are today. Are you locked in like the salt in the salt shaker?

My hope is that God will give us all a shake, so that we may sprinkle granules of honesty, reliability and kindness – you in your small corner, and I in mine.

AMEN