

Lite Salt©

Matthew 5:13-16
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In this continuation of Jesus sermon on the mount, he now tells the people – God’s children – that they are the “Salt of the Earth” and the Light of the World.”

Why would Jesus use that term – the salt of the earth? Let’s talk a minute about the uses of salt. What are ways we use salt?

- Meat Curing & Pickling Salts
- Deer lick or salts blocks for the cattle (When we worked in the hay fields on blistering hot Oklahoma summer days dad would give the hay hands salt tablets.)
- Water Softening
- Pool Salt
- Snow and Ice Melters
- Epsom Salts (I love soaking in the hot tub with Epsom salts to draw out toxins)

Jesus says disciples (those who follow him, who want to learn to be like him and do what he teaches) are the salt of the earth. I read that back in ancient days, salt was so precious and hard to come by that people actually went to war over it. It was brought in caravans and was very valuable. It was a symbol of purity. It was used to preservation.

Salt, of course, is used to give flavor in food. I remember one of the first baking lessons my mom taught me. We were making brownies and she said, “now we want to put in just a tiny bit of salt.” I thought that was crazy to put salt in something sweet but she told me it would bring out the flavor, even though it was a dessert.

So, if Jesus’ followers are to be like salt, we must put flavor in life (no fuddy duddy Christianity in this! William Barclay tells in his commentary on Matthew this story of how people used to look at Christians who were serious and pious:

“Even after Constantine had made Christianity the religion of the Roman Empire, there came to the throne another emperor called Julian, who wished to put the clock back and to bring back the old gods. His complaint, as the playwright Henrik Ibsen puts it, was:

'Have you looked at these Christians closely? Hollow-eyed, pale-cheeked, flat-breasted all; they brood their lives away, unspurred by ambition: the sun shines for them, but they do not see it: the earth offers them its fullness, but they desire it not; all their desire is to renounce and to suffer that they may come to die.'

As Julian saw it, Christianity took the vividness out of life.

The American judge, Oliver Wendell Holmes once said: *'I might have entered the ministry if certain clergymen I knew had not looked and acted so much like undertakers.'*

Robert Louis Stevenson once entered in his diary, as if he was recording an extraordinary phenomenon: *'I have been to Church today, and I am not depressed.'*

As Christians, we should be portraying the joy that is in us because we are followers of the one sent by God to give joy and love and grace and forgiveness and abundant life to all! We should be showing peace and love and fun – holy laughter to a world that is confused about what is fun and what is enjoyment.

We, as Christians, are the ones who can show calm in the midst of the storms of life because of the one whom we know has it under control; we can show a deep peace and joy even in grief because we know death is not the end.

We, as the salt of the earth can add that flavor to all around us.

But, Jesus added, if salt loses its saltiness, what good is it? It will be thrown out and trampled upon.

How can salt lose its flavor? Does that happen? Is it when some of the elements are somehow made less or taken out?

What is Lite-salt? Is it less salty? Does it have added elements that make it not purely salt? Has it lost its flavor? (I did read that it is 50% less sodium. So, I wonder if it's lost some of its saltiness?)

Barclay wrote that in Jesus' day people used to put salt under their cooking stove/oven to draw the heat? As it got old, it lost its effectiveness and had to be thrown out. Probably swept out of the door where people would then trample on it as they walked in and out.

I read that there was a time when Jews, and then Christians, had a practice of having someone who had gone astray from the faith/church but wanted to come back, to lie down at the entrance of the church and have people trample on them saying they had lost their saltiness.

(I think that might not be the way to get some of our inactive people back to church! We probably don't want to add that practice into our strategic plan for growth, do you think?)

So, to be the salt of the earth, as Christians, must mean that we are to be vital, flavorful, to add genuine life and love for the faith, to show what it means to be a disciple – to demonstrate how truly joyful it is to be a Christian.

But then, Jesus goes on to add a second part. You are the light of the world ... a light that should not be hidden but should shine for all to see.

What does it mean to be the light of the world? Where does our light come from?

What is your favorite part of the Christmas Eve service? I love the symbolism on Christmas Eve as we light candles directly from the Christ candle and then pass the light on from candle to candle, person to person until there are many little lights illuminating the room. But all those lights are lit because of the Christ candle.

As Christians, we shine, not because of our own inner light, but because our inner light comes from the Light of the World himself – from Jesus who said in another place in the gospels that he is the Light of the World.

It's like a radiant bride who is especially radiant because of being loved so much by her beloved. We are radiant because we are loved so much by our beloved Jesus. He wants us to shine for him.

What do lights do?

- A light illumines the room or the space it is in. Have you seen that commercial, advertising some vitamin or medicine for the health of our eyes? It shows a candle that is lit, 10 miles away. A woman is looking in that distance and all the lights go off and she can see the glow of the single candle in the dark. (I'd like to try it and see if that could be true).

But we are to be lights that glow, even in the distance, and give guidance in the dark.

- Light can warn of danger that might not be seen if it weren't for the light (like the light from a lighthouse helping ships to be safe from danger, or a light from a flashlight or candle when the power goes off, so you don't bump into the wall or furniture.)

Jesus said our light should not be kept secret or hidden. It is meant to be seen. If we just look at our faith as a personal, private matter, we are hiding our light – the light of Christ – and we are not pointing others to the joy we know in God's love. We risk the danger, also, of looking like those sober, serious Christians that turned off Julian and others and made them long for the old, pagan gods.

Jesus said that we are to let others see (by the light) our good works. (There are a couple of different Greek words that are translated as "good." Matthew uses "*kalos*", which doesn't just mean a simple good (as in "it's all good" but – meaning beautiful, captivating, attractive).

These are beautiful, attractive good works that we do for the sake of the ministry, beautiful good works that are not to give us credit, but these are good, captivating works that point to God, and give God all the glory; that make others want the same joy we have with God.

We, those who are little lights, who are lit by the Light of the world, can be beacons that guide others to the eternal Light.

So, you salty disciples who are shining with light ... what do you get when you cross the Light of the World and The Salt of the Earth?

Lite-Salt, of course. But this is not a diluted down impure version of salt or light. This is the real deal – salty to the fullest, genuine authentic, flavorful, adding zest to the life of a Christian, full of light that shines the way straight to the arms of the Light of the World – the Savior whom we follow – Jesus, our Lord.

Be salt and be light. Let your good and beautiful works shine for others to see. Because you belong to him.