

## INTRODUCTION

How many times have you been eating with someone and said, "Pass the salt, please?" A physician I knew in Alabama used to jokingly tell young girls in our church, "If you go out on a date with a guy and he says, 'Pass the salt,' break up with him immediately, because he is headed for a heart-attack or a stroke!" He was kidding, but we know too much salt can be unhealthy for people who have hypertension. Sometimes people salt their food before they even taste it.

When the retail magnate, James Cash Penney interviewed a potential manager, he often invited them to share a meal with him. If the prospect salted his food before he tasted it, Penney mentally marked him off the list for a management position. He believed that any person who made an assumption without first testing it, did not have the makings for a good manager. So, if you're out on a job interview, be sure to taste your food before you salt it! In the verse we're going to study today, Jesus is telling each of us to "Pass the Salt, Please."

The words of Jesus found in Matthew 5-7 are called the Sermon on the Mount. He began this sermon with the seven pithy statements we call the Beatitudes. I taught on these "attitudes that ought to be" a couple of years ago in a series called, "Refresh: What to Do When Life Crashes." If you're interested you can obtain those messages on CD, or read the manuscripts online at [www.gabc.org](http://www.gabc.org).

Immediately after this introduction, Jesus employed two powerful word pictures, salt and light, to teach us how we are related to the world around us. We'll talk about salt in this message and light in the next. Next Sunday is Easter Sunday, and I don't know if you've noticed, but I don't preach a "special" Easter message, I just preach on what's next in my series. Some pastors preach a special Resurrection message every Easter and the people who only come once a year hear the same message on the resurrection over and over!

I love the way Jesus taught spiritual truth. He didn't use complicated, convoluted words and concepts. He talked about simple things like salt, light, birds, grass and flowers. Jesus said the Kingdom of God is so simple that even a little child can understand it and enter it. The theologians have made Christianity complicated. There is a funny parable that says, "Jesus came unto the region of the Theological Seminary and He asked the theologians saying, 'Who do men say that I, the Son of Man am?' And the theologians said, 'Thou art the ground of all being, of whom no positive attribute may be predicated. Thou are the ineffable, transcendent, ontological root of ultimate meaning which represents both existence and non-existence. Thou art the unity of oneness in a manner than neither confuses the personhood nor divides the substance of holy oneness.'" And Jesus said, 'Huh?'" If you didn't understand that, don't worry. The good news is you don't have to be a theologian to have a relationship with Jesus. You only have to be like a child.

Do you know what salt is? That's a good starting point. Let's see what Jesus said about salt in Matthew 5:13: "You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled by men." Jesus didn't say, "TRY to be salt," or "you SHOULD BE salt." He simply said, "You ARE the salt of the earth." Many people are asking what they should do as a Christian. But you'll never

know what to do until you realize who are in Christ. Being comes before doing in God's Kingdom. You are the salt of the earth, you are the light of the world.

According to the Salt Institute, there are over 14,000 different uses for salt. (We're not going to look at all of them!) As we examine this parable about salt, I want to give you five uses of salt, and then lay down beside each use what this means to those of us who are salty saints—followers of Jesus.

### **(1) SALT WAS USED AS CURRENCY IN JESUS' TIME**

In ancient times, salt was so valuable that Roman soldiers were paid with it. Our English word "salary" comes from the Latin word *salarium*, (*sal* = "salt"). Today we still say about a lazy person that "he's not worth his salt." One reason it was valuable back then was because pure salt was rare. Most salt was gathered from evaporation at the Dead Sea, and it was mixed with other minerals.

Salt was so valuable God directed the Jews to add it to every grain offering according to Leviticus 2:13. This verse also speaks of a covenant of salt that God has with His people.

My salt expert is our own Lanny Bridges, who is a chemist for Morton Salt in Grand Saline. I asked him to give me some facts about salt and he wrote: "There are more usages for salt than any substance on earth besides water. It is used in almost every facet of food, drug, agricultural, chemical and industrial uses. It is creation's second most useful substance. Salt is the only rock you can eat. Salt is formed in the shape of crystals, and like snowflakes, every crystal is uniquely different. The human body does not manufacture salt (though it is critical for bodily functions). It must be taken in."

We have much greater access to salt, so it's not as expensive as it used to be. I had heard that there was enough unmined salt in Grand Saline, Texas, where Lanny works, to supply the world's salt needs for next 2,000 years. I asked Lanny and he told me it wasn't true. There isn't enough salt there for the next 2,000 years, instead there's enough salt in Grand Saline to supply the world's needs for the next 10,000 years! The salt deposit there starts 200 feet below the ground, is 2 miles wide, and extends to a depth of 20,000 feet. He said it is as close to an infinite supply as one can imagine. Morton only mines down to the 900 foot level, and they produce table salt at a cost of only about \$100 per TON. So, because salt is so cheap, they have to depend on volume to make money. But since salt is used for over 14,000 purposes, tons and tons of salt are needed. Even though salt is inexpensive today, it is still valuable. The world can't live without it.

### **Personal Application: I can add value to my world**

So what does that mean to me personally? Jesus is telling me, like salt, I can add value to my world. Remember, salt was used for money, so Jesus was saying, "You are the salary, the fortune of your world." Just think about all the good that exists in our world because of the followers of Christ have been present as salt of the earth. Across the globe, there have been thousands of hospitals founded by Christians in the name of Jesus. We have Mother Frances hospital here in

Tyler and Baylor Medical Center in Dallas to name a couple. How many hospitals have been founded in the name of atheism? That would be zero.

Of the first 108 colleges started in America, 106 of them were founded for the purpose of a Christian education. These include Harvard, Yale, Princeton, William and Mary, and Brown. An original rule in the charter of Harvard from in 1636 states, "Let every student be plainly instructed and earnestly pressed to consider well, the main end of his life and studies is, to know God and Jesus Christ which is eternal life, John 17:3." Like salt, Christians have always added value to the world.

But this is also true of each of us individually. Like salt, Christians are much more plentiful than we were 2,000 years ago. It is estimated that one out of every three people alive are Christians, that's an estimated 2 billion people. But even though we are many, we are still valuable in the world. One of the greatest compliments God gives His children is found in Isaiah 43:4 where God says, "I love you because you are PRECIOUS in my sight." Salt is precious in a different way than a diamond is precious. A costly jewel is valuable because it can be admired and worn as jewelry, but salt is valuable because of what it *does*. In the same way, we aren't valuable as showcase saints, who are only to be admired. We only add value to our world as we get in touch with the world and DO something in the name of Jesus Christ. So, remember you are adding value to your world because God says you are precious in His sight.

## **(2) SALT WAS USED TO PRESERVE MEAT**

One of the main uses of salt during the time of Jesus was to keep fish and other meat from decaying. Up until about 100 years ago when refrigeration was invented, salting meat was the main way it was preserved. Jesus ministered by the Sea of Galilee and He knew salted fish would be dried and would be preserved in a state that would keep for months. When salt is applied to meat, a chemical reaction occurs which slows down and stops the natural decomposition process. To put it in a crude, but simple way, salt was used to stop the rot.

### **Personal Application: I can influence my culture to preserve moral decay**

The personal application here is clear. As a Christian, I can influence my culture to preserve moral decency. We are living in a culture that is getting more and more rotten as the years pass. Things that used to be considered obscene and profane are now accepted as the ordinary. I'll never forget as a young boy, hearing my dad tell me he was working at a movie theater in 1939 when the movie "Gone with the Wind" was first released. He said the first time the audience heard Rhett Butler say, "Frankly, my dear, I don't give a \*\*\*\*," that there was an audible gasp of horror from the audience that such a curse word would be uttered in a movie. I'd say we have come a LONG way since then. We live in a time when every kind of profanity and obscenity imaginable is spewed out for public consumption. We have lost a sense of common decency and respect for goodness.

One of our main jobs is to be a positive force for decency in our world. There is still some goodness in our culture, and it is our job to see that it is preserved. We must be the ones who stand up and say we aren't going to take, "One nation under God" from our pledge. We must be

the ones who stand up and say abortion is murder, and that the definition of marriage is one man married to one woman. If we don't do that, nobody else will. Martin Luther King was correct when he said that "the church is to be the conscience of a nation."

A few years ago, a popular comedian came to Tyler and performed at the Oil Palace. His act was so crude and sexually explicit that a couple from our church told me they had to get up after a few minutes and walk out. That wasn't easy to do, but they did it because they refused to sit there and listen to that mess. Later another couple who saw them walk out said, "When we saw you walking out, it gave us the courage to walk out as well." That's what it means to be salt.

Our role as salt in a rotting culture won't make us popular. We will be labeled as narrow-minded, Bible-thumping fanatics. But have you ever gotten salt in a wound? It irritates. Jesus didn't say we are the cinnamon of the earth or the sugar of the earth—we're salt and salt stings. Our job as the moral conscience of nation isn't always pleasant. In addition to being a preservative, salt is also an antiseptic—it cleans out wounds. We are living in a sick, failing culture where wrong is now called right and we keep sliding further and further away from God's Word. We need to pour some salt into the wound!

### **(3) SALT ADDS FLAVOR TO FOOD**

That's how most of us use salt today. I love to eat fresh sliced tomatoes, but I don't like them plain, I have to salt them. I put salt on food like baked potatoes, french fries, eggs, and one of my breakfast favorites—grits. Have you ever tried eating unsalted grits? YuCk! I wonder who the first cook was to discover that salt could spice up bland and tasteless food? It must have been thousands of years ago because Job 6:6, one of the oldest books in the Bible asks, "Is tasteless food eaten without salt, or is there flavor in the white of an egg?"

#### **Personal Application: I can make a noticeable difference in a bland world**

The personal application here is simple: I can make a noticeable difference in a bland world. It seems the terminal illness of our culture is boredom. People without Christ are so bored they have to look for the next extreme sport, the next thrill ride, the next high to try to satisfy their craving for something exciting. But compared to the unspeakable joy of the Christian life, the world is pretty bland. Jesus used Hebrew humor when He said the Pharisees were like the "blind leading the blind." Today, we have the bland leading the bland!

We should live the kind of lives that add zest and flavor to the world around us. We should spread joy and hope to a world that is desperately seeking some kind of meaning.

We don't have to go around bragging that we're Christians in order to make a difference, we simply have to BE salt in a tasteless world. Have you ever noticed what happens to salt when you shake it on food? It disappears. It dissolves into the food and becomes a part of it. I think that's a great lesson for us. When we are salt in a bland world, we give ourselves away and lose our lives for their sake. When we truly apply our lives to a sinful world, we've got to be willing to lose our lives for the sake of Christ. That's what Jesus meant when He said, "For whoever

wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me and for the gospel will save it." (Mark 8:35).

#### **(4) SALT CREATES THIRST**

Have you ever noticed when you eat salty food, it makes you thirsty? That's why they put so much salt on the popcorn at movie theaters, because they want you to buy one of those \$5 soft drinks.

#### **Personal Application: I can make others crave the Living Water by my lifestyle**

That leads us immediately to the obvious personal application: I can make others crave the Living Water by my lifestyle. We live in a world that is spiritually dry and thirsty. People are frantically looking for something to quench a thirst they can't even identify.

One day Jesus sat down at a well and spoke to a Samaritan woman whose life was a mess. He started a conversation with her by talking about water. Then He told her about Living Water. He said, "If you drink this water [pointing to the well] you'll get thirsty again. But when you drink Living Water, you'll never thirst again." She said, "Give me some of this living water!" And that Living Water changed her life.

In the same way, we're surrounded by people who are searching for something to quench their thirst. We are salt making them thirsty for the Living Water by the way we live and by the words we speak. Paul wrote, "Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer anyone." (Colossians 4:6)

Chuck Colson started Prison Fellowship after he spent time in jail for his role in Watergate. He wrote about a prisoner who was salty enough to make another prisoner thirst for the Living Water: "Roy was a holdup man, who was caught and sent to prison. While there, he came face to face with the claims of the Gospel and accepted Jesus Christ as his Savior. His life completely changed, he served the rest of his sentence in an exemplary manner and was released several years later. As he was leaving, the chaplain handed him a letter written by another prisoner. It said, 'I came to this place despising both preachers and the Bible. When you told me you were saved, I said to myself, 'There's another one taking the Gospel road just to get an early parole.' But Roy, I've been observing you for a couple of years, and your testimony has rung true. I kept track of you when you were in the yard exercising, or working in the shop, or eating your meals. You never made a slip. Now I'm a Christian, too, because I watched you! The Savior who saved you has saved me!'"

As people watch your life, does it make them want to drink of the Living Water? If you're a salty saint, you'll be making people thirsty!

#### **(5) SALT THAT ISN'T SALTY HAS LOST ITS PURPOSE**

After Jesus said, "You are the salt of the earth," He devoted two additional sentences talking about what happens if salt loses its saltiness. There's an interesting context to His words that will

help you understand His statement. In the time of Jesus, salt was not pure, it was mixed with different kinds of minerals, but all the minerals would be placed in a cloth sack. When a pot was boiling with soup or stew, the bag would be lowered into the pot and the salt crystals would dissolve into the food, but the other minerals wouldn't dissolve. A sack could be used over and over again, but each time it was less salty. Finally, after numerous dippings, the salt in the bag would be gone and all that was left was the residue of the other minerals that had been molded into a concrete-like substance used to pave walkways and roads. That's what Jesus meant when He spoke of salt losing its saltiness and being trampled on. Salt that isn't salty can't even be called salt.

Lanny Bridges has been asked many times, "What makes salt lose its saltiness?" The answer is that pure salt never loses its saltiness. The way salt can lose its flavor is when it becomes impure—mixed with other minerals. As Christians we face the possibility of losing our effectiveness when our lives become mixed up the attitudes and actions of the world.

### **Personal Application: I can penetrate the world in a positive way for Jesus**

The personal application is: I can penetrate the world in a positive way for Jesus. In order to maintain our saltiness, we must maintain our purity. That's when we will make a difference in the world around us. Do you really want to make a difference for Jesus' sake?

In the early years of Apple Computers, the founder, Steve Jobs, was trying to recruit John Sculley, then President of PepsiCo. Jobs issued this challenge to Sculley: Do you want to spend the rest of your life selling sugared water, or do you want a chance to change the world? It worked. If that's true for Apple Computers, it is a thousand times more true for those of us who are followers of Jesus Christ. Long after every iPod, iPhone, and computer has disintegrated to dust, our mission and our message will still be eternally important.

Salt is powerful, but it is absolutely worthless unless it's applied to food. It must come into contact with food to make a difference. So, let's get out of the shaker and let's let our lives touch the world and influence it for Christ. Now, when you're sprinkling salt on your food, moderation is the key. A little salt will make your tomato taste good, but too much salt will spoil it. But when it comes to applying our lives to a world that is both rotting and tasteless, we shouldn't be thinking about moderation. I want you shake the salt out in excess. Take the salt shaker and go wild! Do like that great theologian Chubby Checker said, "Shake it, shake it, shake it, baby!"

The world isn't the only bland thing around—many churches are the bland leading the bland, too. I was reading a blog by Pastor John Frye and he was decrying the fact that the 21<sup>st</sup> Evangelical church has become too dull and boring—we're afraid to live on the edge. He wrote: "Aaah, popular US American evangelicalism. No one gets too excited about the faith. The term 'extreme' must never be used of Jesus-followers. Evangelicalism has become an entertainment industry where God, Jesus, and the Bible are products and worship services are shows. If I'm in the market for a solemn, sacred spirituality, I can go to the Episcopal service. If I'm shopping for the latest feel good, spiritual high, I can buy a ticket to the charismatic service. If I just want 'the facts, Ma'am, just the facts,' I can go to a good Bible-teaching church. If I want Starbucks and brie, I can go to the emerging church. But whatever we do, we must live a 'balanced' life.

Balance is just a code word for bland. Bland is beautiful. Bland doesn't rock the boat. Bland can sing about 'the blood,' but can't or won't shed a drop for another person. But a whole generation of people is finding and following a first century Jew named Jesus. They are discovering this Rabbi whose words and ways whipped his culture into a frenzy is breathtakingly magnetic. Jesus offers a life like no one else or nothing else offers. The backwoods nobody from Nazareth is a man on fire, a dynamo of love and truth, a grenade with its pin pulled. The last thing Jesus was, was balanced." Well said! Will you get out of the shaker and into your world?

## CONCLUSION

The chemical composition of salt is Sodium Chloride (NaCl). Separately, these two elements are harmful. Pure sodium is dangerous, because if it touches water, it becomes caustic sodium hydroxide. Chlorine is a toxic gas that can damage the respiratory system. But through the miracle of His chemistry, God combined these two deadly elements to make something that is good for us. In the same way, there was a deadly component of my life before Jesus changed me. I was enslaved to a sinful nature that was dangerous and deadly. But through the chemistry of the cross, God took the righteousness of Jesus and used it to replace my sinfulness and He transformed me into something new and alive. Have you allowed Him to change the deadly nature of your sinfulness into the salt of His righteousness? Before Jesus, we were a force for death, but now, with Jesus, we are the salt of the earth—making a difference in the world.

If there was ever a time when salt is needed, it is now. We desperately need some salty saints of God who will get out of the shaker and be making a difference in this bland, rotten world. Throughout history God has raised up people to make a difference, and He is calling out a generation of salty saints to get out of the shaker in and make a difference for our Maker. Jesus said, "You ARE the salt of the earth." So, for Jesus' sake, will you pass the salt, please?

## OUTLINE

### (1) SALT WAS USED AS CURRENCY IN JESUS' TIME

Personal Application: I can add value to my world

### (2) SALT WAS USED TO PRESERVE MEAT

Personal Application: I can influence my culture to preserve moral decay

### (3) SALT ADDS FLAVOR TO FOOD

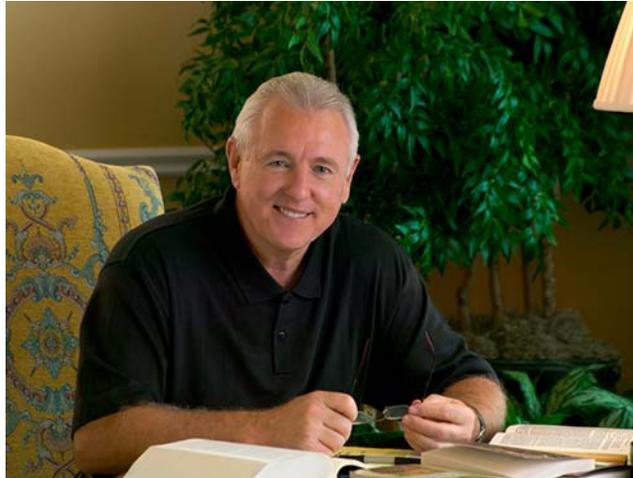
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### (5) SALT THAT ISN'T SALTY HAS LOST ITS PURPOSE

Personal Application: I can penetrate the world in a positive way for Jesus



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To put it in Texas terms, “You’re mighty welcome to use any and all of my ingredients; just make your own chili!”

For the Joy...  
Pastor David Dykes