

The Salt of the Earth

“Ye are the salt of the earth: but if the salt have lost his savour, wherewith shall it be salted? it is thenceforth good for nothing, but to be cast out, and to be trodden under foot of men.”

—*Matthew 5:13*

to the Lord’s people and their consecrated walk in newness of life.

In the Bible, salt is used as a meaningful symbol in many and widely varying applications. In some cases, the word is used to point to that which is incorruptible and free from decay. In other scriptures, salt symbolizes that which is corruptible, or desolate. In our featured Scripture, Matthew has recorded Jesus’ statement wherein he used both illustrations of salt to emphasize important lessons concerning two very distinct characteristics of his followers.

Our opening Scripture is

taken from Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount. He had just finished teaching his followers many wonderful lessons called the Beatitudes. (vss. 3-12) Now he directed his listeners to the important characteristics of “salt” and how its unique qualities relate

Salt is known as a preserving and cleansing element, which keeps that which is good from decay or putrefaction. It also represents fidelity and other wholesome characteristics. Our Lord was pointing out that those of his followers who manifest these Christlike qualities are being faithful to their high calling, and he referred to them as the “salt of the earth.” They have been salted with the Truth, and they heed the instructions and commands of righteousness. The Apostle Paul said, “Let your speech be always with grace, seasoned with salt, that ye may know how ye ought to answer every man.”—Col. 4:6

In other applications, salt illustrates that which has become corrupt and barren. A worthy example concerns Lot and his wife as they were leaving Sodom and Gomorrah. From the scriptural account, we read, “His wife looked back from behind him, and she became a pillar of salt.” (Gen. 19:26) Our Lord later recalled this episode by saying, “Remember Lot’s wife.” (Luke 17:32) Jesus was pointing to those who have the wrong spirit and have become careless with their faith. They love the world and remain in sympathy with it and its worthless allurements that should have been left behind. Their salt has lost its savor, and thus they are become barren and desolate.

Salt and its Savor

The word “savor” indicates that which is pleasing to the senses of taste or smell. To be “unsavory” suggests not only the opposite effect on these senses, but also points symbolically to those who are morally offensive and disagreeable. In his letter to

Titus, Paul spoke of those in such a condition and said, "Rebuke them sharply, that they may be sound in the faith; Not giving heed to Jewish fables, and commandments of men, that turn from the truth. Unto the pure all things are pure: but unto them that are defiled and unbelieving is nothing pure; but even their mind and conscience is defiled. They profess that they know God; but in works they deny him, being abominable, and disobedient, and unto every good work reprobate."—Titus 1:13-16

Valuable lessons concerning the significance of salt and its applications concerning the Lord's people are also recorded in the Gospel of Luke, which provide further perspective and insight. From Luke's gospel, we read, "Whosoever he be of you that forsaketh not all that he hath, he cannot be my disciple. Salt is good: but if the salt have lost his savour, wherewith shall it be seasoned? It is neither fit for the land, nor yet for the dunghill; but men cast it out. He that hath ears to hear, let him hear."—Luke 14:33-35

Forsaking All Things

Luke included Jesus' statement that his disciples must forsake all things. This is vital among those who have given their lives in full consecration to the Heavenly Father and are striving to walk faithfully in the narrow way of sacrifice. They are admonished to deny themselves by giving up all earthly interests and pursuits and to walk even as Jesus walked, in newness of life.—Rom. 6:4

As clarification of this important point, we note Jesus' further reference: "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross,

and follow me. For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it. For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?”—Matt. 16:24-26

The Apostle Paul also explained, “There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus. ... That the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit. For they that are after the flesh do mind the things of the flesh; but they that are after the Spirit the things of the Spirit. For to be carnally minded is death; but to be spiritually minded is life and peace.”—Rom. 8:1,4-6

Salted with Fire

In Mark’s record of the significance of salt, Jesus said, “Every one shall be salted with fire, and every sacrifice shall be salted with salt. Salt is good: but if the salt have lost his saltness, wherewith will ye season it? Have salt in yourselves, and have peace one with another.”—Mark 9:49,50

In this scripture, Jesus brings to our attention the fact that his followers will be salted with fiery trials. Their faithfulness will be tested in proportion to the quality of the salt that was used in their sacrifices. Paul wrote, “Every man’s work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man’s work of what sort it is.” (I Cor. 3:13) The Apostle Peter also said, “That the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be

found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ.”—I Pet. 1:7

Salt upon the Earth

The chemical and physical properties of salt, or sodium chloride, demonstrate its fitness as a spiritual symbol. It is abundant in nature and is found in many parts of the earth. Vast underground deposits of rock salt have been found, some of which are several thousand feet thick. Also, the oceans of the world contain about 3.5 percent sodium chloride by weight. A cubic mile of seawater holds approximately 120 million tons of salt.

The Dead Sea is up to ten times more salty than ocean water, and has provided the nation of Israel with a readily available supply of salt through evaporation of the Dead Sea waters. There are also salt bearing hills in the southern region of the Dead Sea.

Salt and the Human Body

Virtually every cell in the human body contains salt, and it is therefore an essential nutrient. Humans, as well as all other animals, cannot live without it. Salt plays a crucial role in keeping our bodies functioning properly. When we do strenuous work or exercise, our bodies become very warm, and salt maintains the balance of fluids which carry oxygen and nutrients to all parts of our system. Our body adjusts the amount of salt we consume by making us thirsty when it needs to dilute the salt. A healthy body processes the right amount of salt it needs, and the kidneys dispose of any excess.

The two major components of salt are sodium and chloride. Each performs important functions

in maintaining a healthy body. Sodium enables the transmission of nerve impulses. It regulates the electrical charges that move in and out of the cells and control taste, smell, and other processes. It helps our muscles, including the heart, to contract.

Chloride, an electrolyte, is essential for the digestion process. It preserves the acid balance in our body and absorbs potassium. It also helps blood carry carbon dioxide from respiring tissues to the lungs. If there is an insufficient amount of salt in our body, we may experience muscular weakness and cramps, and our body cannot perform all its vital functions.

Peculiarities of Salt

Salt has the peculiar ability to lower the point at which water freezes. Under normal conditions, ice forms when the temperature of water reaches 32°F (0°C). If a 10% salt solution is added, the freezing point drops to 20°F (-6°C), and with a 20% solution it freezes at 2°F (-16°C).

Highway maintenance personnel take advantage of this peculiarity by sprinkling salt on icy roadways during the winter months. Salt lowers the freezing point of the ice, thus dissolving it into liquid water. The ice immediately around the grains of salt melts, and the melting spreads out from that point. If the temperature of the roadway, however, is lower than 15°F, the salt will have less effect. In that case, sand is sprinkled over the ice to provide better traction.

This peculiarity of salt is also used when making homemade ice cream. The temperature around the ice cream mixture must be lower than 32°F to

make the mixture freeze. Thus, salt is mixed with ice to create a brine, and the temperature can be lowered to around 0°F. The brine becomes cold enough to easily freeze the ice cream mixture.

A Food Additive

In ancient times, man learned that salt could be used to preserve food by retarding the growth of micro-organisms that cause spoilage. It also became very effective as the world's oldest food additive. This is confirmed by Job who said, "Can that which is unsavoury be eaten without salt?"—Job 6:6

Salt is still an important commodity in the modern food industry. It is used for the preservation of our foods and to make them both safe and palatable. Food technologists rely on salt to satisfy consumer preferences such as texture, appearance, and aroma. It has the remarkable ability to enhance certain flavors to make them taste better. It can also mask naturally bitter foods, such as chocolate, to make them more palatable. Evidence suggests that most people prefer the many and varied attributes that only salt can offer. Because of the desirable qualities of salt in the food we eat, a majority of people use too much in their daily diets. This can cause bloating, water retention, high blood pressure, and increased risk of serious conditions such as heart disease, stroke, kidney failure, and heart failure.

Salt Money

During ancient times, salt was used as a unit of exchange. In the early days of the Roman Empire, the price of salt was under strict control. Its cost could be increased to raise money for wars or other matters, or it could be lowered again to enable poor

people to afford this important part of their diet. At that time, Roman soldiers were given a ration of salt each day, but this practice was later replaced by an allowance of money. This was called their “salt money”—Latin: *salarium*—which is the basis for our English word “salary.”

To supply the expanding city of Rome with increasing amounts of salt, roads were built for its transport. Thus the Via Salaria, or “Salt Road,” was built leading from Rome to the Adriatic Sea, from which supplies of salt were taken. Other bodies of water were much closer to Rome than the Adriatic, but they did not have as good a supply, or quality, of salt. The Adriatic Sea had a higher salinity content because of its shallower water.

Salt and Fidelity

The Word of God provides interesting and important information relative to the use of salt. In the writings of Ezra the scribe, we read, “Now because we eat the salt of the palace and it is not fitting for us to witness king’s dishonor, therefore we send and inform the king.”—Ezra 4:14, *Revised Standard Version*

This statement was recorded at a time when salt was under the control of the monarchy, or the ruling powers of the elite. Thus, the thought of eating the “salt of the palace” was synonymous with receiving pay, accepting sustenance, or being in that person’s service. It was also a symbol of fidelity, friendship, and hospitality.

A Cleansing Agent

Salt was also used as a cleansing agent and as a disinfectant on newborn babies. When writing about

the abominations of Jerusalem, the Prophet Ezekiel used salt, or the lack thereof, as an illustration of God's condemnation upon his people. "As for your birth, on the day you were born your navel cord was not cut, nor were you washed with water for cleansing, nor were you rubbed with salt or even wrapped in cloths."—Ezek. 16:4, *Amplified Bible*

Desolating Effects

As a symbol of Moab's and Ammon's desolation, it is recorded, "Therefore as I live, saith the LORD Of hosts, the God of Israel, Surely Moab shall be as Sodom, and the children of Ammon as Gomorrah, even the breeding of nettles, and saltpits, and a perpetual desolation: the residue of my people shall spoil them, and the remnant of my people shall possess them."—Zeph. 2:9

In another illustration, we note that salt was also used as a desolating agent in military practice, by salting the earth of an enemy. This was an ancient custom whereby salt was strewn over a conquered city, or the land, to curse it and to make it barren. An example of this practice is recorded in Judges. "Abimelech, and the company that was with him, rushed forward and stood in the entering of the gate of the city [Shechem]: and the two other companies ran upon all the people that were in the fields, and slew them. And Abimelech fought against the city all that day; and he took the city, and slew the people that was therein, and beat down the city, and sowed it with salt."—Judg. 9:44,45

The Prophet Ezekiel records God's message concerning the waters of life that will be offered to the human creation under the administration of Christ's

kingdom. Also recorded are the judgments that will be placed upon those who disregard the blessings available to all. We read, “The miry places thereof and the marshes thereof shall not be healed; they shall be given to salt.”—Ezek. 47:11

The Tabernacle Services

Salt was used to make incense for the Tabernacle services, which had to be done exactly as shown to Moses in the Mount. The directions for the composition of the sweet spices, other ingredients, and their quantities are found in the scriptural records. “The LORD said to Moses, Take sweet spices, stacte, and onycha, and galbanum, sweet spices with pure frankincense (of each shall there be an equal part), and make an incense blended as by the perfumer, seasoned with salt, pure, and holy.”—Exod. 30:34, 35, *RSV*

It is noted that one of the ingredients of the incense was salt. This was significant because it pointed to the importance of fidelity, loyalty, and purity. More importantly, it foreshadowed the sweet-smelling savor of our prayers that ascend to our loving Heavenly Father. They are called sweet-smelling because they are well salted with fidelity. The scriptural record states, “When He had taken the book, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb, having each one a harp, and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints.”—Rev. 5:8, *New American Standard Bible*

Later, we read, “Another angel came and stood at the altar, holding a golden censer; and much incense was given to him, so that he might add it to

the prayers of all the saints on the golden altar which was before the throne. And the smoke of the incense, with the prayers of the saints, went up before God out of the angel's hand."—Rev. 8:3,4, *NASB*

Thus did the Apostle Paul admonish, "Be ye therefore followers of God, as dear children; And walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us, and hath given himself for us an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweetsmelling savour."—Eph. 5:1,2

The Salt of God's Covenant

From the early days of human creation, salt was widely known because of its freedom from corruption and decay. Even today, pure salt [though not iodized table salt, due to additives] is said to last indefinitely. It therefore well represents permanence, loyalty, and fidelity. These distinctive qualities made it a peculiar and fitting symbol and the accepted medium used in times past for the sealing of contracts and business arrangements. Salt was a chosen component of the ceremonial offerings and for the sealing of covenants. The preservative qualities of salt made it an excellent symbol of an enduring compact and indicated a pledge of fidelity.

God also used it to show that his covenants and promises would stand forever and that his Word is sure. Thus, God's instructions to Moses were, "Every oblation of thy meat offering shalt thou season with salt; neither shalt thou suffer the salt of the covenant of thy God to be lacking from thy meat offering: with all thine offerings thou shalt offer salt."—Lev. 2:13

The requirement of adding salt to the meat offerings stressed the importance of the fidelity, loyalty, and purity of God's covenant. We read further, "All the heave offerings of the holy things, which the children of Israel offer unto the LORD, have I given thee, and thy sons and thy daughters with thee, by a statute for ever: it is a covenant of salt for ever before the LORD unto thee and to thy seed with thee."—Num. 18:19

The Whole Creation at Peace

When Christ's kingdom is established over all the earth, the entire human family will rejoice in the salt of God's promises. The animal creation will eat "salted fodder," and be secure and living in peace and harmony with mankind in a restored Earth. Speaking of God's everlasting promise, Isaiah wrote, "Then He will give you rain for the seed which you will sow in the ground, and bread from the yield of the ground, and it will be rich and plenteous; on that day your livestock will graze in a roomy pasture. Also the oxen and the donkeys which work the ground will eat salted fodder, which has been winnowed with shovel and fork."—Isa. 30:23,24, *NASB*

There will be no more death, because the waters of life will be cleansed and made pure. In a prophetic picture of this time, we read, "The men of the city said unto Elisha, Behold, I pray thee, the situation of this city is pleasant, as my lord seeth: but the water is naught, and the ground barren. And he said, Bring me a new cruse, and put salt therein. And they brought it to him. And he went forth unto the spring of the waters, and cast the

salt in there, and said, Thus saith the Lord, I have healed these waters; there shall not be from thence any more death or barren land. So the waters were healed unto this day, according to the saying of Elisha which he spake.”—II Kings 2:19-22

The Salt of the Earth

In our featured scripture, Jesus proclaimed, “Ye are the salt of the earth.” Our Lord is the central figure in this reference, and the faithful members of the Christ will share in the salt’s preservative, cleansing, and healing qualities. Together, they will carry out the Heavenly Father’s ultimate plan and purpose to reconcile the sin-sick human family from the terrible results of sin and death.

When Christ’s kingdom of righteousness is established, the salt of God’s covenant will be manifest to all as true, faithful, and everlasting. This was long ago illustrated by King David and his sons, who represent Jesus and his body members as they then share in blessing all the families of the earth. “Ought ye not to know that the Lord God of Israel gave the kingdom over Israel to David for ever, even to him and to his sons by a covenant of salt?”—II Chron. 13:5 ■