

Title: “Salt”

Text: Matthew 5:13

Key Word: Characteristics

Proposition: Every follower of Christ can be more salty by revealing these biblical characteristics of salty Christians.

Good morning everyone. We’re glad you chose to worship God with us today. “A Peanuts cartoon, showed Peppermint Patty talking to Charlie Brown. She said, “Guess what, Chuck. The first day of school and I got sent to the principal’s office. It was your fault, Chuck.” He said, “My fault? How could it be my fault? Why do you say everything is my fault?” She said, “You’re my friend, aren’t you, Chuck? You should have been a better influence on me.”

While Peppermint Patty was seeking to pass the buck, she was in a very real sense right. We do have an influence on our friends. We can be a good influence or a bad influence. Jesus spoke to a crowd sitting on a mountain side. Jesus describes how his followers are to live. Matthew records this message beginning at the fifth chapter. At the thirteenth verse Jesus said, “*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.*” In other words he is saying that my followers influence the world in a positive way.

The word “influence” means the power of persons or things to affect others seen only in its effects. Influence can be used as a refusal to comply with the status quo. Influence is exerted to change things in society. It could be a way to influence our world for Jesus Christ. Let’s ask ourselves: “Are we powerless to change our

world?” No. Is the quest for social and personal change hopeless before we begin? No. Can radiant followers of Christ exert some influence for God? Absolutely! The Living Christ gives us the power and the authority to make our world a better place. We are world changers!

It seems to me that there is a spirit of negativity around today. It has a firm grip on some folks, paralyzing them from the life that God intends for them. They throw their hands up in dismay. Society is rotten to the core, they say. Everything is hopeless; there is no hope but the return of Jesus Christ. Some people even go so far as to say that people are rubbish. But people are not rubbish.

All human beings are made in the image of God. Yes, they are fallen, but the image of God has not been destroyed. Are they capable of doing no good? The Christian faith teaches that every human being has been tainted by the fall. However that does not mean that we're incapable of doing any good. John Wesley would say that because of God's grace even those who are not Christians are capable of good. Jesus himself said that although you are evil you are able to do good things and give good gifts to your children. Yes, we believe in the fall. We believe that when Jesus Christ comes again he is going to put things right. If you develop a Christian mind you don't concentrate exclusively on the fall of man and the return of Christ. The Christian mind thinks in terms of God's complete purpose, which includes the creation, the fall and salvation offered through Jesus, and His return.

So, if we're pessimistic about what is going on in the world today, if we believe that human beings are totally incapable of any good what so ever, I challenge you to prayerfully consider God's power to change any area of life. It's ludicrous to say Christians can have no influence in society and upon individual lives. It's biblically and historically mistaken. Christian churches had an enormous influence on society down its long and checked history.

Over the years the name of Jesus has had a tremendous influence upon the world. Look at the life and influence of Jesus of Nazareth, the Christ. Throughout history and you will see that He and His message always produce great changes in human beings and in nations. Wherever His teachings and influence have gone, the holiness of marriage, women's rights and voice in society have been acknowledged; schools and universities of higher learning have been established; laws to protect children have been made; slavery has been abolished; and a multitude of other changes have been made for the good of mankind. Not to mention changes within individual lives.

Throughout the history of our nation leaders within the federal, state, local governments have publicly stated that they are born-again Christians. CEOs of our largest corporations, university professors, bestselling authors like John Grisham, country music stars like Randy Travis-on and on the list goes have influenced our nation with their Christ-centered witness.

Christ and his church have had an enormous influence. Think of the greater impact we would make if we would even be more committed to adding “salt” to our world.

Let’s put away our doubt and negative attitude along with a blind hopefulness as if we thought the Kingdom has arrived. Let’s be real, without the salt of Christians in the world we would be worse off than we are today. On the other hand, there is much seasoning to be done before the return of Christ. We are not powerless. Laziness, doubt, and plain disobedience to the call of Christ can only prevent us from living into our destiny to be salt.

Jesus teaches us about our privilege as Christ-followers in our world. He reveals the difference between Christians and pre-Christians, between the church and the world, and he emphasizes the influence that Christians have on their unbelieving world. The distinction between the two is clear. The world, he says, is like rotting meat. But you are to be the world's salt. He goes on to say that the world is like a dark night, but you are to be the world's light.

So what are the characteristics of “salty” Christ-followers? **First, Christ-followers are to be a positive force in the world.** Salt is a positive quality in the world. When table salt is on the table we’re thankful that it is there. When it is absent then we realize that something is missing. We use the phrase, “that person is worth there salt,” in reference to their positive force in the work place.

Radiant followers of Christ are a positive force within the world. They are not harmless, nobodies. They are positive, strong, and sharp. Sometimes they are liked other times disliked. Some love them or hate them. Some may fight with them or against them, but one can't ignore them. Jesus was like that and so are His people.

Next, Christ-followers give taste to whatever they touch. Salt adds flavor to everything it touches. Any dinner would be bland without salt. Without this presence life loses its flavor. Jesus ranks himself and those who are his followers as necessities of life.

The story is told of a new Christian who shares with a Christian friend who influenced her greatly. She listed about a dozen qualities she found “tasty” in the life of this older Christian. She wrote: “You know when we met; I began to discover a new vulnerability, warmth, and a lack of pretense that impressed me. I saw in you a thriving spirit. I could tell you were a growing person and I liked that. I saw you had strong self-esteem, not based on the fluff of self-help books, but on something a whole lot deeper. I saw that you lived by convictions and priorities and not just by convenience, selfish pleasure, and financial gain. And I had never met anyone like that before.

I felt a depth of love and concern as you listened to me and didn't judge me. You tried to understand me, you sympathized and you celebrated with me, you demonstrated kindness and generosity - and not just to me, but to other people, as well.

And you stood for something. You were willing to go against the grain of society and follow what you believed to be true, no matter what people said, and no matter how much it cost you. And for those reasons and a whole host of others, I found myself really wanting what you had. Now that I've become a Christian, I wanted to write to tell you I'm grateful beyond words for how you lived out your Christian life in front of me." Radiant Christ-followers flavor every life they touch

How do Christ-followers "salt" the earth? Simply put...be Christ-like in all you do. How?

Be Christ-like in the power of prayer. Before Jesus chose his disciples he prayed. (Lk 6:12) Before Jesus performed miracles he prayed. Before Jesus was arrested he prayed in the garden. Jesus influenced others because he prayed. Jesus assured his followers: *"Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours."* (Mark 11:24)

Friends there have been times when I have been in prayer with others asking the Lord to touch others. As we prayed each person was filled with God's presence. I have heard men pleading for forgiveness. I have heard mothers crying out to God for their sick children or their wayward child. I have prayed with men seeking employment. I have rejoiced with others in prayers answered. On each occasion, I have thought that if this is as close to heaven as I ever get in this life, I don't want to leave. I would rather be seeking God's face with others than attending an OSU football game. I would prefer to dine with Jesus than to dine with the president of the

United States. I have never known such peace, such joy, such power as in the presence of the Lord among God's people crying out to him in prayer. I have seen lives changed because of such openness, vulnerability, and honest expression before the Lord.

Before a Bible was written, God's people prayed. Before the first preacher was ordained at Pentecost, before a choir was formed, a group of people distinguished themselves from their neighbors by calling out to the Lord. You see they believed, I believe, that when God's people call out to Him He doesn't turn a deaf ear. He listens! He responds! He Acts! The most "salty" Christians are praying Christians.

Be Christ-like in the power of truth. Many believe in the power of the truth of the gospel. We love to say, *"I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ. It is the power of God unto salvation to everyone who believes."* (Romans 1:16) We are convinced of the power behind the message of Christ to bring positive change in those who respond and believe in Him. But it isn't only the gospel that is powerful. All God's truth is powerful. God's truth of whatever kind is much more powerful than the devil's lies. The Christian believes that truth is stronger than lies and God is stronger than the devil. Paul wrote, *"For we cannot do anything against the truth, but only for the truth."* (2 Cor. 13:8) Solzhenitsyn says, "One word of truth outweighs the whole world." Truth is much more powerful than bombs and tanks and weapons. Just as we need pastors and prophets to defend the truth of the gospel, so we need ethical defenders in social action to argue the truth and the goodness of the moral law of God. We need

more Christian thinkers who will use their minds for Jesus Christ, who will speak and write and broadcast and televise in order to communicate a Christian perspective and influence public opinion. Truth influences for the good of all.

Be Christ-like in the power of example. Truth is powerful when it's argued. It's more powerful when it's lived out. People need not only to understand the argument. They need to see the benefits of the argument with their own eyes. Jesus said, *"They see your good works, and they give glory to your Father in heaven."* Most people won't come right out and say it, but you'd better believe they're thinking it. They're not interested in committing their lives to Christ unless they observe attractive and consistent patterns of living in the Christians they know. Joe Aldrich, author of the book *Life-Style Evangelism*, put it like this: "Christians are to be good news before they share the good news." There is power in example.

Be Christ-like in the power of community. There is great influence in the power of a committed minority. One scholar noted, "We should not underestimate the significance of the small group of people who have a vision of a just and gentle world. The quality of a whole culture may be changed when two percent of its people have a new vision."

That was the way of Jesus. He began with a small group of only 12 dedicated people. Within a few years, Roman officials complained they were turning the world upside down. Every great movement begins as a small ripple in a pond growing ever larger in its scope of influence. There is a great need for radiating Christ-followers

committed to one another, committed to the vision, committed to Christ, who will pray together, think together, grow together, and serve the community together.

Be Christ-like by striving to be a preventive force in the world. Salt prevents decay. It preserves. It stands up against all forms of corruptness and impurity.

Christ-followers are like that too. Without the presence of those who are Christ-like civilizations do not climb upward, but go backward. No nation, no community is made safe by its natural resources, its geographical position, its political or educational system, economic power, its standing army, navy, or air force. It is only safe by the character of its people.

I want you to notice what Jesus says and does not say, He does not say, “You all **can** be the salt of the earth.” Nor does he say, “You all **should** be the salt of the earth.” Jesus says “You **are** the salt of the earth” and in the Greek it is literally “You and you alone are the salt of the earth.” To be salt, we do not have to be spectacular; To be salt, we do not have to be sensational; To be salt, and we do not have to be successful; (by the world’s standards.) To be salt, we just have to season our little corner of the world.