

The Parable of Salt

*Matt. 5:13; Mark 9:49,50;
Luke 14:34,35*



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Scripture Reading: Matt. 5:1-13; Mark 9:49-50; Luke 14:34-35.

⇒ Salt; such a simple substance common to all in this age of plenty, and so it might be wondered at, why would the Messiah compare those who are the “blessed” in his “sermon on the mount” to a such substance as this? There are many good reasons why salt was chosen to represent the character of those who are so blessed. This lesson will examine those spiritual reasons as well as the history of salt, both biblical and historical, to frame a conclusion.

⇒ **Salt, the great preservative:** Since ancient times salt has been used as a food preservative, some say even before written language. Before the age of refrigeration, canning and other preservative chemicals, salt was the primary product for preservation in the food trade. Because salt was not easily attained in the ancient world (and

even through the nineteenth century) it had a high value and was even used as an equivalent for currency. Its preservative qualities for basic survival were esteemed an essential for life, again, a principle that is so easily lost in this age of modern convenience. Nevertheless, we must look to the origin’s of salt as a life necessity to more greatly appreciate the meaning of the Lord’s parable.

◆ Bro. Carter remarks:

“The fishermen among Christ’s hearers knew how quickly their harvest of the sea corrupted unless taken to the pickling vats of Bethsaida. All his listeners knew that in the warm atmosphere of their land any dead thing quickly became tainted and perished. In what way, then, were the ‘blessed’ like unto salt?” (Parables of the Messiah, p. 9).

◆ In eleventh century north Africa, empires were built upon the salt trade where it attained to an equivalent

value of gold and was traded as such once per once. Even as late as the American Civil War, the Union Army planned specific military campaigns to capture salt supplies and so deprive the south of the much needed food preservative for the confederate army. Other such historical accounts abound where soldiers were paid in salt or with vouchers for purchasing salt.

◆ It was not until the early 1800s that man finally began to understand the way salt works as a preservative. Salt has antibacterial properties, thus inhibiting bacterial growth that spoils food. How this works is that the salt absorbs moisture right through the cell walls of the food, depriving bacteria of the moist environment it requires to survive, and hence, the bacteria is destroyed. The same principle works as a deterrent to molds and yeast, so preventing fermentation and decay. How are such qualities to be understood in a spiritual context? We will examine this and Bro. Carter’s question under the headings to follow.

⇒ **The use of salt in the Law of Moses:** The provisions of the Mosaic Law required the use of salt for seasoning in all meat offerings unto Yahweh.

“And 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; cp. Num. 18:19).



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- ◆ Salt, as already observed, has preservative qualities preventing the decay of mortal flesh. The spiritual implications of this arrangement must not only relate to the Word of God alone (as a mode of instruction), but the Word of God in its individual manifestation upon a believer of Yahweh's Truth, an active preservative influence in day-to-day life. In other words, the act of salting the meat offering under the Law was representative of the life of the believer being seasoned, or preserved, by the mental and moral influence of the Word made effective by the Everlasting Covenant (promises to Abraham, Isaac and Israel). Thus, every offering seasoned with salt was a token of the covenant and represented complete dedication to Yahweh, even a lively hope of good things to come made complete through the Word (**2 Tim. 3:15-17**). As the seasoned offering would be consumed by fire upon the altar, it's acceptance also represented an eventual change of nature from this corruptible to incorruptible for those who have come out of great tribulation.

- ◆ This principle underscores the Lord's use of salt as recorded in Mark.

"For 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" (Mar 9:49-50).

- ◆ The preservative qualities of the Word will be revealed without a doubt at the judgment seat of Christ. Some offerers in Yahweh's house will not have had salt in themselves, or will have lacked a real manifestation of the Word, being mere pretenders in their (lip) service to Yahweh. Others will have been sufficiently prepared who armored themselves with the Word of God, cutting off corrupting influences in their lives (**Mark 9:43-48**) and laying up in store the hope of eternal life (**Matt. 6:19-21**). Those who are approved will have seasoned their life with a heavenly preservative, and will have, to the best of their abilities, striven to rise above the things of the earth that do so easily corrupt a man (**Col. 4:5-6; Mark 7:15; Hag. 2:11-14**).

⇒ **Salting the Earth:** One practice in ancient times that seems strange by today's standards was salting the land of a conquered enemy.

"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" (Jdg. 9:45).

- ◆ The object of such a practice was to make useless the ground for the production of food. Wells also were stopped up with salt rendering them unfit for drinking. "Starting in the 19th century, various texts claim that the Roman general Scipio Aemilianus Africanus plowed over and sowed the city of Carthage with salt after defeating it in the Third Punic War (146 BC), sacking it, and forcing the survivors into slavery" (*Wikipedia—Salting the Earth*). From a spiritual standpoint salt used in this manner can be seen as a deterrent to the flesh—the enemy. The flesh, being "earthy" is rendered unproductive by the salt of the Word. The lust of the flesh, the diabolos, or deceiver (the influence of the law of sin and death in our members—**Rom. 7:22-25**), is cut off and put to death when its corrupting influences are drawn away by the salt (the Law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus—**Rom. 8:1-2**).

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⇒ **The Sermon on the Mount:** We will now consider the “blessed” from Matthew 5:1-11 and how these characteristics might be connected with the characteristics of salt. There are eight categories of blessings. The first seven blessings are all specific to the character of the individual. The eighth blessing has to do with maintaining those characteristics under the trials and tribulations of this life which together *will preserve a believer* for a place in the coming Kingdom of God. Jesus outlined basic godly characteristics that the believer is to develop and this draws a great contrast between how false Christianity views these sayings as opposed to how the true believer should understand them. The blessing is not to a person that manifests any one of these characteristics alone, but to one who develops all of them.

◆ **Characteristics of a true servant of God**

- i. Blessed are the poor in spirit - Humility is not sadness, depression, or false humility for appearance sake, but humbling oneself before the Word of God whereby our “spirit” is ruled (**James 2:5; I Tim. 4:6, 11-16; 2 Tim. 2:15; Isa. 57:15** [contrite = “to crush”]; **Isa. 66:2; Psa. 34:18; 40:17; 51:17; James 4:10** [contrast **Matt. 23:10-13**]).
- ii. Blessed are they that mourn - Again, not merely relating to natural emotion or depression on account of this world, but identifying those who mourn for Zion, waiting for the consolation of the Kingdom of God (**John 16:20-22; Isa. 30:18-19; 61:1-3; 66:10-13; Lam. 1:1-5**).
- iii. Blessed are the meek - “Meek” does not mean “weak” but refers to one who is teachable (**Psa. 25:9; Matt. 11:29; Gal. 6:1; Eph. 4:2; 2 Tim. 2:25; I Peter 3:4; Titus 3:2; Num. 12:3; Psa. 37:11; Isa. 50:4-5; Heb. 5:7-8; I Tim. 3:1-5**).
- iv. Blessed are they which hunger and thirst after righteousness - We must maintain a “taste” for the things of the Spirit by the salt of the Word. The World’s delicacies are ruinous to the appreciation of Yahweh's feast of spiritual things (**Psa. 63:1; Psa. 42:1-2; Psa. 84:2; Isa. 49:10; Isa. 55:1-2; Dan. 1:8; Psa. 1:1-2; Esther 1:5; Matt. 6:33; John 6:35; I Peter 2:2; 4:34; Rev. 2:17; Rev. 19:9; Psa. 119:103; 19:7-10; 27:4**).
- v. Blessed are the merciful - Every servant of Yahweh needs to often recall the mercy shown unto us and to manifest that mercy to others without respect of persons (**Psa. 18:24-27; Isa. 58:6-11; Prov. 19:17; Psa. 41:1; Micah 6:8** [mercy connected with righteousness]; **Matt. 12:7; 9:12-13** [quoted from Hosea 6:6]).
- vi. Blessed are the pure in heart - [“for they shall see God” - a Hebrewism for Joy]. A pure life can only come from a pure heart, just as good fruit from a sound tree. This implies a heart imbued with sound doctrine and one whose judgment is made pure through the Word (**I Tim. 1:3-5; 2 Tim. 2:22; Job 11:4; Psa. 19:8-9; Psa. 73:1-3; I Peter 1:22; Psa. 15:1-2; 2 Cor. 7:1; Psa. 11:7; Heb. 12:2; I John 3:2-3; Matt. 5:48; James 3:2**).
- vii. Blessed are the peacemakers - These are the children of God through the covenant of peace in Christ (**Eph. 2:11-22**) only made possible by the love of Yahweh, coupled with a love for Yahweh. It is this agape love that “builds the house” founded upon the Christ—the repairer of the breach (**James 3:16-17; Psa. 133:1-3; I Cor. 14:33; 2 Cor. 13:11; Phil 2:1-3; Heb. 12:14**). A peacemaker is one skilful with the Word and submissive to its tenets, whose works are counted to them for righteousness and whose spiritual lamp is filled and is burning brightly (**Ps. 106:23; Ex. 32:11-14; Pr. 6:23; I Cor. 11:3; Eph. 5:22-25**).

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◆ The Results of which are to be maintained under trial.

viii. Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness sake and reviled by evil men - First it must be established what persecution is. "Persecuted" from the Greek *dioko*, means to be pursued, followed after, given to suffer. One is not persecuted by defying the authorities through civil disobedience, for example, just to reap their due punishment. To be persecuted as a true believer in the Covenants of Promise is to be relentlessly or belligerently sought against for one's beliefs.

- Persecution against the household has come in many forms. The blessing, however, is to those who by faith persevere and come through the fire, having their characters refined by their fiery trial. Several notable individuals in the Bible have been persecuted by those without the household of God. (**Daniel 3; I Peter 1:7; Daniel 6; Est. 3:1-6; I Peter 3:12-18; 2 Thes. 1:3-12; Acts 14:22; Rev. 2:10; 6:9-11**)
- Historically, however, the most personally painful persecution for members of the household has come from within the body from those who have sought the preeminence at the cost of the Truth. (**Isa. 51:7-8; Isa. 66:5; Matt. 10:22; Matt. 23:27-39; I Peter 3:16; Jude 14-17; 2 Tim. 1:15; 2 Cor. 11:12-15, 26-28; Heb. 12:1-11**).
- Through such fiery trials the faithful have passed or will pass through, each according to his or her need for refinement as judged by the refiner of all vessels of the house (**2 Tim. 2:20; Mal. 3:2-3**). The salt, being a representation of Truth in manifestation, has or will preserve them through these trials. In turn, the true believer manifesting the Truth acts as a preservative to corrupting influences in the ecclesia. The key in this principle is that we must each individually strive for the Truth and against error. This is not a pleasant task, but consider the alternative:

"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." (Matt. 5:13).

- A servant of Yahweh once salted with the Truth, therefore, must in turn contend for it and preserve it at all cost (**Jude 1:3**). The Truth becomes to him or her a precious hope for life everlasting, a salve of Truth against all corruptions and errors, even the Hope of Israel (**Josh. 24:15; Rev. 3:18**). Not to take up the sword of the spirit would be for the truth (the salt as it were) to hold no preserving value in the believer. It would be a creed, a declaration, but lacking any manifestation and thus a possession of no eternal worth.
- William Tyndale, who was persecuted for translating the Bible into English, appreciated the con-



