

I. Salt of the Earth; Sunday, June 29, 2014 (Sunnyslope)

Psalm 19:14

May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be  
pleasing in your sight, O LORD, my Rock and my Redeemer.

- A. "Good morning, church!"
- B. In a week's time, my family will be going on something of an adventure together
  - 1. We'll be buckling ourselves into our little airplane and flying up over the Cascades...
  - 2. ...and onward to Moscow, Idaho
  - 3. And then the next day (weather permitting), we'll depart and head up over the Rockies onward to Missoula and eventually Great Falls, Montana
- C. We're very fortunate in this adventure to be able to visit with families we know in eastern Washington and Montana
  - 1. These folks live simple, honest, and real lives
    - a) They work hard; they earn their keep
    - b) They don't live extravagantly
    - c) They don't even yearn for extravagance
  - 2. They are what we might call "the salt of the earth"
    - a) Or "salt of the earth" type people
    - b) But what does that mean?
- D. The phrase "the salt of the earth" is a phrase that means "those of great worth and reliability"
  - 1. But it hints at a type of great worth and reliability of simple folks who work hard and are honest to their core

2. The phrase "the salt of the earth" derives from the Bible, from Matthew 5:13

Matthew 5:13a

You are the salt of the earth.

- a) In this passage, Christ in His Sermon on the Mount is telling the crowds assembled there...
  - b) ...that they are the salt of the earth
  - c) He meant it, I believe, as a complement...
  - d) ...but also as a warning
3. Although this is where the phrase originated, historically thereafter it has had several different meanings
    - a) The positive meaning of salt in the original phrase conflicts with many other uses of the word salt
    - b) It has also been used to express negative concepts
    - c) For example, in the Middle Ages, salt was spread on land to poison it, as a punishment to landowners who had transgressed against society in some way
  4. Given that Christ during the Sermon on the Mount was speaking to mostly the poor or working-class...
    - a) ...the word "salt" later became used to refer to the working-class
    - b) And this is where the very old phrases of "above the salt" and "worth their salt" came from
      - (1) "Above the salt" meaning the aristocracy
      - (2) And "worth their salt" meaning valued workers

II. In today's sermon, I'd like to explore Matthew 5:13 in greater detail and to ask the question: What is the salt of the earth?

A. Let's start by reading the whole of verse 13

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 underfoot.

1. There's the first sentence, wherein Christ is saying "you are salt"
  - a) And this begs the question: to whom was Christ referring?
  - b) His disciples?
  - c) The crowds?
  - d) Us today?
  - e) Everyone?
  - f) Who are the salt of the earth?
2. But after this short statement, what follows is a warning, which is the bulk of the verse
  - a) Salt can lose its saltiness
  - b) And if that happens, it cannot be made salty again
  - c) It becomes worthless, something to be discarded
3. Should this warning apply to us?
4. And if so, do we take its warning seriously?
5. Or do we usually overlook Christ's warning that we can become worthless, never capable of being returned to saltiness; useful for nothing, except to be thrown away?

B. To begin our systematic analysis of this verse, let's start with a focus on the first word: "You"

1. "You are the salt of the earth."
2. To whom is Jesus referring?
3. Jesus begins this section with the emphatic "You"
  - a) Given the stern warning that follows, it's critical we understand to whom Christ was referring
  - b) It is important to know who the "you" are and what salt is
    - (1) Is Jesus just addressing His immediate disciples as some think?
    - (2) Or is Jesus addressing the entire crowd of those who followed Him to the mount?
    - (3) Or as this sermon is recorded in Scripture, does it address someone else?
  - c) To answer this, let's go back to the Beatitudes
    - (1) Christ said, "Blessed are the poor in spirit"
    - (2) "Blessed are those who mourn"
    - (3) "Blessed are the meek"
    - (4) And so on
    - (5) He was being specific, talking about people who fulfill a category
  - d) But then in verse 11, Christ switches and uses the word "you"
    - (1) In doing so, He switches from categories to instead talking about all people who are followers of the Messiah

Matthew 5:11

Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me.

- (2) This use of the word "you" continues without break through the end of verse 16
- (3) So it seems most reasonable to say that the word "you" in verse 13 refers to everyone who is a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ
- (4) It seems best to interpret "you" as referring to all true disciples of Jesus of all ages who hear His words and put them into practice
- (5) Hopefully, then this includes all of us here this morning

C. Jesus here in His Sermon on the Mount says then that all Christians are the "salt of the earth," but what possible meanings could "salt" have?

- 1. Salt was used as money in the ancient world
  - a) In fact this is where we get the word "salary" from
  - b) Roman soldiers were paid in salt which could be traded for other goods
  - c) It was used as a seasoning for food
  - d) It was also mixed with dried dung to make a hot burning fuel
  - e) Salt is also necessary to sustain life
  - f) Salt acted as a preservative in a world that did not have refrigerators
    - (1) Meat which would spoil quickly in the heat was salt dried which could then be kept for long periods of time

(2) So it can be seen how valuable salt was in the ancient world

2. But just what connection to salt is Jesus comparing His disciples?
  - a) It is obvious that He considers them valuable to Him and His purposes for them
  - b) In this, most commentators would agree
  - c) But some might see the use of the Gospel of seasoning, a way to improve quality of life
  - d) If one held this view, then the goal of existence is to live "your best life now" and help others to have their best life now as well
  - e) I worry that this interpretation quickly points us toward the heresies of the Prosperity Gospel
  - f) This view of Christianity is immensely popular today
  - g) But it's not truth
  - h) The truth is that we are to suffer in this life, to toil, to submit to God, and to serve
3. Others look at the preservative qualities of salt and think the Christian disciples are to act to suppress evil in this world and assist in the application of God's common grace
  - a) In other words, our purpose is to prevent, reverse, or at least slow down the moral rot that is occurring in this world today
  - b) It is certain that this world is morally rotten

(1) It always has been

- (2) And I believe it always will be because humans are fallen creatures incapable of holiness apart from God
  - c) And it is Scriptural that God restrains the world from exercising this rottenness to its capacity or else humankind would have destroyed itself from the face of the earth already
  - d) It is also true that the Bible tells us to be decent, honest, and hardworking citizens
  - e) But again, this is not the thrust of the verse or even of the ministry of Jesus
  - f) Christianity is not a moral crusade against evil in our world
  - g) But instead it's a crusade against evil in ourselves
4. Another interesting interpretation was the mixing of salt with dung to make the fire burn hotter
- a) Those who hold to this idea would say that the disciples of Jesus were going out into a world that was very mixed up, and they were doing so as precious salt
  - b) The disciple of Jesus is to be in the world
  - c) The warning in this context is to be in the world but not get mixed up with it, lest one lose one's saltiness
- (1) The Northern Kingdom of Israel mixed up the worship of the true God with idols to the point that they no longer had a distinct identity

- (2) Because of this, the Assyrians trampled on the nation and carried it away into oblivion
  - d) This interpretation, that Jesus is referring to the practice of mixing salt with dung, at least gets closer to the Biblical idea of the distinctiveness the disciples of Jesus is to have
  - e) Another name for "distinctiveness" is "holiness"
  - f) This holiness has to be lived out in this world in such a way that it draws the attention of the world
  - g) Considering that Jesus follows this statement on salt with that of a city on a hill that cannot be hid, this idea is at least suggested here in context
  - h) We are not to live our lives in a sequestered monastery, apart from the troubles of this world
  - i) Rather, we are to live our faith out in the world, yet without becoming like the world
5. Another use of salt was that it was used in the Jewish sacrificial system to season the offering
- a) Could Jesus be emphasizing that Christian living is sacrificial?
  - b) In the sense of the persecution that the true disciple of Jesus were to be blessed with
  - c) This idea does have some merit here as well
  - d) Many Christians would glorify their savior by laying down their lives for the faith

- e) And even if we do not physically sacrifice our lives, we are called by Scripture to spiritually sacrifice

Romans 12:1-2

<sup>1</sup>Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship. <sup>2</sup>Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.

- D. So given all this, I think we have a few different ways to interpret "salt"
  - 1. Salt was used in the Jewish sacrificial system, and we are called to offer ourselves *sacrificially* to God
    - a) Meaning that we submit ourselves to God
    - b) We subjugate what we think is best for what God desires
    - c) Which means we should let go of our desires for what needs to be and accept what God establishes and maintains
    - d) Even if this is not what we think is best
    - e) We are called to humble ourselves
    - f) And not to worry
    - g) Not to be sacred of what might come if people do some things or don't do other things
    - h) Do no worry, for worrying will not add one more day to your life
    - i) Instead, God's will shalt come to pass
    - j) And we should desire His will to come to pass
    - k) Therefore, worry is distrust of God

- 1) Angst is distrust of God
- m) Anger and frustration is our placing of our own wills above God's will
2. Salt was a preservative, and it was used as an additive; in both cases to bring about a distinctive outcome that could not otherwise be achieved
  - a) Is it possible that because of our submission to God in *all* things...
  - b) ...that we will be the catalyst to bringing about a distinctive outcome that could not otherwise be achieved?
  - c) Isn't that really what we talk about and preach on every Sunday?
  - d) Being distinctive because of our faith in Christ
  - e) And that distinctiveness is at the heart of the fruit of the spirit
  - f) Our output, our contributions to the world
  - g) Both as a collective and as individuals
3. We have looked at several possible interpretations of what Jesus meant by calling the true Christian disciple the "salt of the earth"
4. We can be comforted by the fact that God considers us to be of great value
5. And we must be vigilant to maintain our submission to God
6. Amen