

SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSON FOR THE MONTH OF JULY 2012

The Church: You are the Salt of the Earth!

(Matthew 5:13)

Sunday, July 1, 2012

The Sermon on the Mount was not given to provide guidelines to an unbelieving world; it was given to provide a description on the character of ideal kingdom citizens. When Jesus said, “you are the salt of the earth,” He was speaking specifically to His disciples, those who were characterized by the virtues set forth in the verses we commonly call the “Beatitudes” – (*Matthew 5:3-9*). The Beatitudes are not beautiful pious platitudes; they constitute a vivid description of the characteristics of ideal citizens of the Kingdom of God.

Those who possess these spiritual characteristics will provoke a response from others around them. People who are ill-disposed toward God and His way of life will respond with persecution toward sincere followers of Jesus Christ (*Matthew 5:10-11*). Ideal Kingdom citizens will have a wholesome effect on those who are well-disposed toward God by serving as the salt of the earth and the light of the world (*Matthew 5:13-16*). In *Matthew 5:10-16*, our Lord describes the negative and the positive responses of the unbelieving world toward His disciples. Jesus says, “Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness sake.” Then He says, “Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake.” To be persecuted means to endure suffering for Christ, to be mocked, ridiculed, criticized, ostracized; to be treated with hostility.

Notice here, that there are three major kinds of persecution mentioned by Christ in the passage:

- **Being reviled: verbally abused, insulted, mocked and scolded.**
- **Persecuted: (as I told you) hurt, ostracized, attacked, tortured and treated with hostility.**
- **Having all manner of evil spoken against you: Slandered, cursed, and lied about.**

Who are the persecuted? Well, the person who lives and speaks for righteousness and is reacted against; also, the person who lives and speaks for Christ and is reviled, persecuted, and spoken against. Persecution is a

paradox. It reveals that the true nature of the world is evil. Think about it: the person who lives and speaks for righteousness is opposed and persecuted. That seems strange! The person who cares and works for the true love, justice, and salvation of the world is actually fought against. The world jumps on the wrong people.

Believers shall suffer persecution because they are not of this world. They are called out of the world. They are in the world, but they are not of the world. They are separated from the behavior of the world. Therefore, the world reacts against them.

Sunday, July 8, 2012

Jesus told us when that happens to “*rejoice and be exceedingly glad: for great is your reward in heaven.*” No retaliation; no pride; no spiritually superiority. Jesus says be joyful and triumphant. Keep on rejoicing – accept it with gladness and exultation.

Now listen, these persecuted people are who Jesus is calling the “salt of the earth.” Jesus was a master communicator. He used common experiences and objects to communicate great truths about God, and about people and about various roles and responsibilities. Salt was one common yet very significant metaphor Jesus used to describe the nature and function of His church. People living close to the sea could obtain plenty of salt, but people living inland often had to trade or exchange for it. Part of a Roman soldier’s pay was given to him in salt, and it was called solarium. From this Latin word comes our word salary. You can understand why salt was considered valuable.

It was considered valuable because of its distinctiveness. Salt is distinctively different from the thing upon which it is put. By nature and by purpose, it is different. Its purpose is to penetrate and change the very taste. Jesus expects His church to function as salt in the earth: to penetrate and change the very taste of the earth.

Sunday, July 15, 2012

I. As salt, the church is very valuable. The church’s character is like salt. The church is called and designed to be the salt of the earth. The church is valuable to the heart of God and to the living Christ for the carrying forward of the work He began during His earthly ministry. As

salt, the church is also valuable to the community and to the world. Few people in the world want to live in a community where the influence of the church was not felt. Look at the difference the church makes in your community.

Sunday, July 22, 2012

II. As salt, the church is essential to the world's well being. Jesus used this metaphor to describe the church's simple but essential function in the community. Salt performed a number of unique and significant functions.

- A. Salt was used to enhance the flavor and seasoning of food. When foods, especially vegetables tasted flat and were in need of seasoning, more salt was the remedy. I know because of health reasons, most of us refrain now from the use of salt, but most of us wish we could have a little bit more. Also, a certain amount of salt is necessary for the health of the human body. The ideal Christian and the ideal Congregation will bring beauty, fragrance, and flavor to the life of the community that will be wholesome and helpful.
- B. Salt can be used as an antiseptic. It is a cleansing agent that served the same function as peroxide or alcohol. When the church is functioning, as it should, it will perform a cleansing and antiseptic function in the community.
- C. Salt is still used as a preserver from decay. When the church is truly the church, it will preserve the moral, spiritual and cultural life of the community from decline and decay.
- D. Salt is still a silent but positive force. Salt does not make a great outward display and does not blow a trumpet concerning its presence. Salt simply and silently performs its function. It is a decisive and positive force. That's the way Jesus wants His church to be.

Sunday, July 29, 2012

III. A warning concerning possible calamity. Jesus points out the possibility of salt losing its saltiness. When this happens, it is of absolutely no value. It is dumped on the roadway where it cannot harm crops and will be crushed by traffic. Let me sound forth a warning here. Jesus is not talking about losing your salvation. Jesus used this powerful illustration to

warn His disciples against the peril of losing their Christian witness and their Christian influence.

- A. Salt could lose its saltiness by isolation. When you separate the grains of salt from each other, they lose their saltiness. The same is true of the church, when we separate ourselves from the fellowship of believers and walk either in disobedience or in indifference and non-involvement.
- B. Salt can lose its saltiness by contaminating contact with other substances. If some other substance is mixed with salt, it will lose its saltiness and will be unable to perform its unique function. Believers are thus put on guard against letting attitudes and ambitions enter their hearts that would contaminate their lives, destroying their influence and preventing them from being the follower of Christ they should be.

If we are to retain our true saltiness and perform our true ministry, we must stay close to the attitudes expressed in the Beatitudes and let Jesus be the Lord of our lives. We are the salt that should create a thirst in the hearts of unbelievers – Jesus says, “You are the salt of the earth!”