

Salt, Make Use of It
Matthew 5:13-14

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Almost 90 years ago, by an act of Congress, President Woodrow Wilson proclaimed the second Sunday in May as Mother's Day.

He established the day as a time for "*public expression of our love and reverence for the mothers of our country.*"

All of us are products of a mother. Everything that you needed to know, somewhere along the line, a mother probably taught you most of it.

Our world is full of mothers, but we have only one mother who's special, who should be special, and who must always be special. There's no one like our mother and no one can take the place of our mother.

Even though most of us have had the experience of being around some good mothers, we sometimes forget just how blessed we are.

I love Calvin and Hobbes. For those of you not familiar with this comic strip, Calvin is a seven year terror and Hobbes is his stuffed tiger that is actually alive to him.

Anyway, in one of the comic strips on Mother's Day, Calvin is standing by his mother's bed saying, "*Hey, Mom! Wake up. I made you a Mother's Day card.*"

His mother, looking pleased, began reading the card out loud as Calvin stood there smiling. He was very proud of what he had written. This is what the card said:

*"I was going to buy a card with hearts of pink and red.
But then I thought, I'd rather spend the money on me instead.
It's awfully hard to buy things when one's allowance is so small.
So, I guess you're plenty lucky I got you anything at all.
Happy Mother's Day. There, I've said it, now I am done.
So how about getting out of bed and fixing breakfast for your son."*

Before Calvin, another man wrote about a poem about mothers. Proverbs 31 tells us how wonderful mothers are. The writer talks about this noble woman as if she were *"the salt of the earth."*

Many of us don't fully understand the meaning of these words. In Matthew 5:13, Jesus tells us that we're the salt of the earth, so what does that really mean?

To the average Christian, salt is just something that comes in a round blue box and hides itself on the shelf until it's needed, or it's found in little white packets.

In fact, if you've spent more than 20 minutes in church you've probably heard that phrase: *"you are the salt of the earth."* Now, this phrase means different things to different people.

A newscaster reporting on the devastation a tornado caused where hundreds were killed, and thousands were displaced said, *"these were salt of the earth kind of people. Hardworking, honest, Americans."*

My heart goes out to those people, but that's not what Jesus meant in any way, shape or form when He used the words *"You are the salt of the Earth."*

When Jesus said, *"You are the salt of the earth,"* He was speaking to anyone who accepts Him as Savior. It's one of the clearest declarations from Jesus to His followers.

Notice, He didn't say for us to become salt. He said we are salt. Once we accept Him into our lives, we're automatically the salt of the earth.

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The second part of the verse gives us insight into what being salt should mean: *"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."*

Jesus is saying that just being salty isn't enough. Because if we're just salt and not being salty, we're really good for nothing as Christians? So, the question is what do we do?

The answer lies in the way salt is used. Salt is a seasoning as well as a preservative. It seasons by adding taste and enhancing flavor. It preserves by cleansing and retarding spoilage.

In both cases, the salt has to be in contact with what it seeks to season and what it seeks to preserve before it can work.

Its power cannot be released unless it touches the food. Salt does no good sitting in those little packets or in a shaker.

Twenty years ago, E. Stanley Jones, a great writer and missionary, was asked to name the No. 1 problem in the church. His quick reply, "Irrelevance."

He believed that Christians were failing to show, in concrete ways and to tell in understandable terms, how the person of Christ is relevant to all of life in the 20th century.

Elton Trueblood, an influential Quaker teacher and writer, put it this way: *"It is hard to exaggerate the degree to which the modern church seems irrelevant to modern man."*

The number one way for Christians to be salt is for us to show Christ's relevance by living His relevance in every area of life.

We cannot accomplish this by talking only to ourselves, writing only for ourselves, and working only in the "safe" careers and professions.

Remember Jesus wasn't speaking to pastors and missionaries at a convention, He was speaking to lay people. He was challenging them to think strategically about the Kingdom of God and to act in ways to build it up.

We must be salt when it comes to public policy, in advertising, in the media, higher education, business, entertainment, the arts and sports.

If we keep Christ's relevance bottled up in the church, it's like keeping salt in the shaker. As we go and where we go, we need to show His relevance and the relevance of His word in every aspect of modern life.

It's not an option to be ashamed of; it's a scripture imperative! And for us to be obedient to this command takes penetration.

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Salt must penetrate the meat to preserve it; Christians must penetrate the world in the key areas of our culture if we want to preserve it.

Penetration doesn't mean standing outside and lobbing hand grenades of criticism over the wall. It's not about being reactionary and negative.

It's about being inside through competence and talent, with God's help and the discernment of the Holy Spirit, offering scripturally based alternatives to those things that are corrupting and evil.

We need to understand that real Christian penetration of the world is not easy. Boycotting a movie is much easier than creating, producing and selling *"The Chronicles of Narnia."*

Protesting an abortion clinic is much less time intensive than working at a Woman's Choice Resource Center.

I understand. It's difficult to be a Tim Tebow. A committed Christian whose parents are missionaries to the Philippines.

In one interview, when a reporter asked him if he ever felt any pressure before Championship games, he said, *"Pressure, this isn't pressure. Pressure is sharing the Love of Christ in a country where little children go to bed hungry every night."* That's salt.

When Christians criticize and complain but offer no alternatives, the world rolls its eye, snickers and moves on. It is only when we offer *"a more excellent way"* that we command or deserve attention.

Dr. Ray Pritchard, a Bible Scholar and the senior pastor of Calvary Memorial Church in Oak Park, Illinois said, *"Being the salt of the earth means acting as a purifying agent to hinder the spread of evil. We who follow Jesus Christ are to be a "moral disinfectant" slowing the spread of evil. We are to be the conscience of the community, speaking out for what is true and right."*

To do this we must be in the community. We must be part of the community. We can't be much of a moral disinfectant from afar.

It does little good to talk about how evil the world is, how evil the media or the political community is, or how horrible music has become.

Sitting in the pews, or at home, wringing our hands about the decay and evil in the world without offering positive, godly alternatives isn't being SALT.

What Paul advised the Roman Christians in Romans 12:9-19 is a picture of salt being used exactly as Jesus intended in the world.

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Today is Mother's Day. I remember baking with my mother growing up. Tollhouse cookies, carrot cake, and more.

If you look at the recipes for any of those things, they all call for salt. Even if you're making 2 or 3 dozen cookies or a big cake it's like ½ a teaspoon. Just a tiny ingredient. But here's the point. If you leave the salt out it doesn't taste good.

Jesus says, "*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.*"

If salt loses its flavor, if salt loses its ability to purify or preserve, there's no difference in it and sand.

I struggled with this point because salt doesn't lose its flavor, or its saltiness. But it can become useless.

It's useless if it always remains in the shaker or packet. It's useless if it's not fulfilling its purpose. It's good for nothing.

There are two major bodies of water in the land where Jesus walked. One is the Sea of Galilee, a beautiful lake 13 miles long and 7½ miles wide filled with fish and surrounded by lush foliage.

The other is the Dead Sea, 50 miles long and 11 miles wide. The shoreline is 1300 feet below sea level. Seven million tons of water evaporate from the Dead Sea every day.

The salt content of the water of the Dead Sea ranges from 26-35%, making it 10 times saltier than all the oceans of the world. There's no seaweed or plants of any kind in or around the water.

There're no fish or any kind of swimming, squirming creatures living in or near the water. As a matter of fact, what you see on the shores of the Sea are white crystals of salt covering everything.

According to extreme science.com, when fish accidentally swim into the waters from one of the several freshwater streams that feed the sea, they're killed instantly.

Their bodies are quickly coated with a layer of salt crystals and tossed onto the shore by the wind and the waves.

Both the Sea of Galilee and the Dead Sea are fed by the Jordan River. There's only one difference between these two bodies of water, only one thing that causes the Sea of Galilee to be beautiful and alive while the Dead Sea is barren and lifeless.

The Sea of Galilee has an outlet; the Dead Sea does not! Water flows through the Sea of Galilee. Water flows into the Dead Sea, but not out!

There're no outlets for the water of life to flow. So, all the salt and minerals stagnate in this huge lifeless body of water.

Jesus doesn't tell us we ought to be the salt of the earth, or we should be the salt of the earth. He says, "You ARE the salt of the earth."

If our influence doesn't flow through the church and out into the world it's useless. It's no longer good for anything.

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Conclusion

Just like our mothers would use salt to make things better, Jesus' life has added salt to ours to make us better.

Jesus didn't enter our lives for us to just congregate. He entered our lives so it can flow out into all the earth. If we forget that, we become more like sand than salt.

And churches that forget this truth become more like the Dead Sea than the Sea of Galilee. It doesn't take a lot of salt for the recipe, but if it's not there it you can tell.

We're the ½ teaspoon of salt that adds Jesus' essential flavor and purity to the world in which we live.

And whether you build buildings, work in an office, or are a stay-at-home mother, you have no idea how far your influence will flow.

Let me tell you about Byron Ballard. He never progressed beyond the minor leagues as a baseball pitcher.

But, because he was a solid, hard-working teammate, he was able to witness to Dave Dravecky while they were playing in Amarillo, Texas.

Dave accepted Christ and went on to become an outstanding major league pitcher who was a powerful influence for good in the highest levels of baseball and continues to minister to many today.

Byron used his skills and abilities to penetrate the professional baseball community. He performed at his own personal peak, and after he had earned the right to witness, he effectively presented the Gospel message.

Byron didn't make it to the major leagues, but his influence did. Byron Ballard is the salt of the earth just like our mothers.

Thomas Edison said, "I did not have my mother long, but she cast over me an influence which has lasted all my life. The good effects of her early training I can never lose. If it had not been for her appreciation and her faith in me at a critical time in my experience, I should never likely have become an inventor. I was always a careless boy, and with a mother of different mental caliber, I should have turned out badly. But her firmness, her sweetness, her goodness, were potent powers to keep me in the right path. My mother was the making of me. The memory of her will always be a blessing to me."

What a loving tribute to a blessed mother. Proverbs 31:28, *"Her children arise and call her blessed; her husband also, and he praises her."*

We are where we are right now because we had a mother who loved us!