

## SALT OF THE EARTH

<sup>13</sup> *“You are the salt of the earth; but if the salt loses its flavor, how shall it be seasoned? It is then good for nothing but to be thrown out and trampled underfoot by men.*

Salt is a common household ingredient. We might not think too much of its importance today. But in the ancient world salt was very important, and expensive. In the Roman world, for example, sometimes soldiers were paid with salt, or were given a *salarium*, which is a salary to buy salt. And this is where the phrase comes from when we say a person is “not worth his salt.” A person is not worth his wages.

Today, salt still has many uses, the most common for us is, we use it for adding flavor to food to make it more enjoyable.

But Jesus’ reference to believers being the salt of the earth is primarily a reference to salt being used as a preservative. If you have raw meat or fish that you do not want to go bad, you pack it in rock salt to preserve it.

Not to sound too overly simplistic, but when you preserve something, you make it last a long time. In that way salt becomes a symbol for permanence and longevity.

## PRESERVATION

When God told the Levites they were going to live off of the tithes of the people, he told them that it was their perpetual due. *It is a covenant of salt forever before the LORD for you and for your offspring with you. Num 18:19*

In Lev. 2:13, God commanded that all the grain offerings be seasoned with salt. *You shall not let the salt of the covenant with your God be missing from your grain offering; with all your offerings you shall offer salt.*

In 2 Chron. 13:5 God referred to His covenant with David as a covenant of salt, precisely for this reason, that it in an everlasting covenant, saying - *Ought you not to know that the LORD God of Israel gave the kingship over Israel **forever** to David and his sons by a covenant of salt?*

Likewise, if you wanted to signify your loyalty in the ancient world, then you do so with salt.

In Ezra 4, the men of Persia wrote to King Artaxerxes that the Jews were rebuilding the city of Jerusalem. And because these Persians were loyal to the King they didn't want things to happen without his permission, or in rebellion to him – which would have been a dishonor to him. So they said, *“Because we have taken an oath of loyalty to the palace, it is not right for us to see the king's dishonor; therefore we sent and informed the king.”*

But what the passage literally says is *“Because we have eaten the salt of the palace it is not right for us to see the king's dishonor.”*

Salt was also one of the ingredients added to the incense that was to be burned on the altar of incense, which signified the prayers of God's people. Aaron's sons were to offer incense every morning and evening as a perpetual offering.

Thus, because salt is a preserving agent, we are reminded to continually pray to God.

But salt is also a purifying agent, and so we are reminded to keep our lives pure so as to not prevent our prayers from ascending to God.

## PURITY

Using salt as a purifier, “the prophet Elisha used salt to heal a spring of water that had been corrupted. The salt, and a bit of a miracle, removed the impurities found in it (2 Kings 2:20-21).

The prophet Ezekiel makes reference to the practice of rubbing a newborn baby with salt after washing her with water. It is thought that this was possibly to prevent infection (Ezek. 16:4).”<sup>1</sup>

Jesus uses salt as a metaphor for spiritual purity in Mark 9 when he said:

*And if your foot causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life lame than with two feet to be thrown into hell. And if your eye causes you to sin, tear it out. It is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye than with two eyes to be thrown into hell, ‘where their worm does not die and the fire is not quenched.’ For everyone will be salted with fire. Salt is good, but if the salt has lost its saltiness, how will you make it salty again? Have salt in yourselves, and be at peace with one another.”*

To have salt in yourself, is to keep yourself pure. You are to preserve yourself from the corrupting influence of sin. You have been purified, cleansed and salted, and set apart for

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<sup>1</sup> Rhett Dodson, “Salt,”

[https://tabletalkmagazine.com/article/2022/08/salt/#:~:text=The%20prophet%20Elisha%20employed%20salt,possibly%20to%20prevent%20infection%20\(Ezek.](https://tabletalkmagazine.com/article/2022/08/salt/#:~:text=The%20prophet%20Elisha%20employed%20salt,possibly%20to%20prevent%20infection%20(Ezek.)

righteousness. You have been made a holy vessel, and your prayers are to ascend to the Lord as pure offerings.

So, if your foot causes you to sin, cut it off. If your eye causes you to sin, pluck it out. It is better to persecute yourselves for the sake of your purity, and thus preserve your soul, rather than lose your saltiness and be destroyed in hell.

Jesus said, *“Everyone will be salted with fire.”* Salt is solid fire. It burns. And that is how we know that it has retained its purifying and preserving qualities. Because salt burns like fire.

## DON'T BE A MORON

But if the salt loses its saltiness, if salt loses its ability to purify and preserve, it is no longer good for anything, but to be thrown away and trampled under the foot of men.

Now the word that is used to describe the salt losing its saltiness is related to the word for **‘moron.’** It means elsewhere to make one foolish. Thus we should literally hear Jesus say,

*“You are the salt of the earth, but if the salt is a moron, if the salt becomes foolish, how shall it be seasoned?”*

At the end of the sermon on the mount, Jesus uses another image of being foolish, which sheds light on what he means here.

He says: *“But everyone who hears these sayings of mine, and does not do them, will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand: and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on the house; and it fell. And great was its fall.”*

Just as the foolish builders refused to build their house on the rock of Christ’s word, to hear them and to do them, and were

thus destroyed, so too those whose salt has become foolish, will be thrown away and trampled under the foot of men.<sup>2</sup>

Therefore, Jesus is saying that by living according to his sayings, specifically in the sermon on the mount, we are the salt of the earth. We preserve the earth and its people from the corrupting influences of sin. And we purifying the world, like salt, making it clean, sanctifying it to God's service, and useable to the people of the Earth.

And then finally salt is used for flavor. We want people to taste and see that God is good, then let us be the salt of the earth, restoring the flavor of God's goodness to it.

Now this leads to the next saying:

## LIGHT OF THE WORLD

Jesus then says, *"You are the Light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do they light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven."*

I think the Prophet Isaiah, specifically chapter 42, is where the two ideas of the light of the world and God receiving glory come together in the OT. Here in Isaiah 42, God the Father is speaking to the Son, and he tells him:

*I will give you as a covenant for the people,  
     **a light for the nations,**  
<sup>7</sup> to open the eyes that are blind,*

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<sup>2</sup> Pennington, The Sermon on the Mount and Human Flourishing, n. 72, pg 161-162

*to bring out the prisoners from the dungeon,  
from the prison those who sit in darkness.*

Then comes the second part about God receiving glory.

*<sup>8</sup>I am the LORD; that is my name;  
my glory I give to no other,  
nor my praise to carved idols.*

*<sup>9</sup>Behold, the former things have come to pass,  
and new things I now declare;  
before they spring forth  
I tell you of them.”*

So in Isaiah 42 God is giving the servant of the Lord as a covenant to the people and a light to the nations. He will open their eyes, and bring them out of their dungeon and prison of darkness.

Isaiah 51 likewise says

*“Listen to Me, My people;  
And give ear to Me, O My nation:  
For law will proceed from Me,*

What law is that? That is the teachings of Christ, especially the sermon on the mount.

*And I will make My justice rest  
As a light of the peoples.*

*<sup>5</sup>My righteousness is near,  
My salvation has gone forth,*

God’s justice, or righteousness will be the light of the world. And what is God’s justice or righteousness? It is the Gospel of the

kingdom of Christ brought into the world through Christ, in his life, teaching, death, resurrection, and ascension to the right hand of God and the pouring out of the Holy Spirit.

By proclaiming the Gospel of Christ the world is brought out of its prison of darkness of sin and alienation from God. Christ's word and command are powerful and liberating.

And if we continue to read in Isaiah, and we get to chp. 53, we find that the Servant of the Lord, who is the original light of the world, brings his light into the world through suffering and dying for the people. And so it is the church's primary duty to proclaim the righteousness of God in the death of His servant. This is the light of the world. It's the Gospel of Christ. That is basically what the whole second half of Isaiah's prophecy is all about.

And just as Jesus suffered death at the hands of the people he came to save, so too will his disciples follow in his same path. We are also the light of the world who will shine in the darkness. We also will give sight to the blind, and deliver prisoners from the pit when we shine the light of Christ upon them. But the darkness will fight against the light, but God will reveal his glory through the suffering church, because the darkness can never overcome the light.

Persecution and suffering did not prevent Jesus Christ from proclaiming and expanding the kingdom. In fact, the secret power of the kingdom of God, is persecution. The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church.

And so, Jesus tells his disciples "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and give glory to your

father in heaven, He is referring to the good deeds that Christ teaches them, primarily in the sermon on the mount, but also elsewhere. Which of course presumes the good deed of preaching the Good News. For it is only when men are saved that God writes his law on our hearts to make us walk in the way of his commands. And here is where God receives the most glory.

Therefore, Christ's disciples are to not let the threat of persecution silence them and prevent them from preaching the gospel, or by living according to it. Christ has purified them to live pure lives. And they are to make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey all things that Christ has commanded.

In this way, We are the Salt of the Earth, and the Light of the world. We ought to be ready to carry our cross with Jesus by doing good and preaching the good news to those who have been given over to the darkness of sin. Telling them there is another way to live. You do not have to live according to the way of death. Christ made a way out of death and sin, you can choose the way of life. And when we preach and live this way, we will purify and lighten the world. And this is precisely how the early church did it, and we are not going to succeed in converting the world again apart from this.

## DIDACHE

There is an early church document dated somewhere between 70 to 100 AD. It is called the **Didache**. Didache means, Teaching. And the Didache is supposedly a collection of teachings of the 12



apostles, and it is a church manual for Christian living. The full name of it is:

## **TEACHING OF THE LORD TO THE NATIONS THROUGH THE TWELVE APOSTLES**

Besides the Bible, it is the earliest collection of writings from the time of the disciples that we have about what it looks like to live as a Christian in the world. And this teaching begins by setting side by side the two ways of life and death. Now I want to conclude my sermon today reading a lengthy portion of it to you, because these are the teachings that the early church used to convert a dark pagan world to the light of Christ. And I believe that by adhering to these teachings in our own lives, and by teaching them, is precisely how the Church today is going to convert our dark world also. And simply notice how much of the sermon on the mount is quoted herein:

1 There are two ways, one of life and one of death; and between the two ways there is a great difference.

<sup>2</sup>Now, this is the way of life: "First, you must love God who made you, and second, your neighbor as yourself."<sup>473</sup> And whatever you want people to refrain from doing to you, you must not do to them.<sup>474</sup>

<sup>3</sup>What these maxims teach is this: "Bless those who curse you," and "pray for your enemies." Moreover, fast "for those who persecute you." For "what credit is it to you if you love those who love you? Is that not the way the heathen act?" But "you must love those who hate you,"<sup>475</sup> and then you will make no enemies.

<sup>4</sup>"Abstain from carnal passions."<sup>476</sup>

If someone strikes you "on the right cheek, turn to him the other too, and you will be perfect."<sup>477</sup>

If someone "forces you to go one mile with him, go along with him for two"; if someone robs you "of your overcoat, give him your suit as well."<sup>478</sup> If someone deprives you of "your property, do not ask for it back."<sup>479</sup> (You could not get it back anyway!)

<sup>5</sup>"Give to everybody who begs from you, and ask for no return."<sup>480</sup> For the Father wants his own gifts to be universally shared.

Happy is the man who gives as the commandment bids him, for he is guiltless! But alas for the man who receives! If he receives because he is in need, he will be guiltless. But if he is not in need he will have to stand trial why he received and for what purpose. He will be thrown [172](#)into prison and have his action investigated; and "he will not get out until he has paid back the last cent."<sup>481</sup> <sup>6</sup> Indeed, there is a further saying that relates to this: "Let your donation sweat in your hands until you know to whom to give it."<sup>482</sup>

2 The second commandment of the Teaching: <sup>2</sup>"Do not murder; do not commit adultery"; do not corrupt boys; do not fornicate; "do not steal"; do not practice magic; do not go in for sorcery; do not murder a child by abortion or kill a new-born infant. "Do not covet your neighbor's property; <sup>3</sup>do not commit perjury; do not bear false witness";<sup>483</sup> do not slander; do not bear grudges. <sup>4</sup>Do not be double-minded or double-tongued, for a double tongue is "a deadly snare."<sup>484</sup>

<sup>5</sup>Your words shall not be dishonest or hollow, but substantiated by action. <sup>6</sup> Do not be greedy or extortionate or hypocritical or malicious or arrogant. Do not plot against your neighbor. <sup>7</sup> Do not hate anybody; but reprove some, pray for others, and still others love more than your own life.

3 My child, flee from all wickedness and from everything of that sort. <sup>2</sup>Do not be irritable, for anger leads to murder. Do not be jealous or contentious or impetuous, for all this breeds murder.

<sup>3</sup>My child, do not be lustful, for lust leads to fornication. Do not use foul language or leer, for all this breeds adultery.

<sup>4</sup>My child, do not be a diviner, for that leads to idolatry. Do not be an enchanter or an astrologer or a magician. Moreover, have no wish to observe or heed such practices, for all this breeds idolatry.

<sup>5</sup>My child, do not be a liar, for lying leads to theft. Do not be covetous or vain, for all this breeds thievery.

<sup>6</sup>My child, do not be a grumbler, for grumbling leads to blasphemy. Do not be stubborn or evil-minded, for all this breeds blasphemy.

<sup>7</sup>But be humble since "the humble will inherit the earth."<sup>485</sup> <sup>8</sup> Be patient, merciful, harmless, quiet, and good; and always "have respect for the teaching"<sup>486</sup> you have been given. Do not put on airs or give yourself up to presumptuousness. Do not associate with the high and mighty; but be with the upright and humble. Accept whatever happens to you as good, in the realization that nothing occurs apart from God.

4 My child, day and night "you should remember him who preaches God's word to you,"<sup>487</sup> and honor him as you would the Lord. For where the Lord's nature is discussed, there the Lord is.

<sup>2</sup>Every day you should seek the company of saints to enjoy their refreshing conversation.

<sup>3</sup>You must not start a schism, but reconcile those at strife. "Your judgments must be fair."<sup>488</sup>

You must not play favorites when reproofing transgressions. <sup>4</sup>You must not be of two minds about your decision.<sup>489</sup>

<sup>5</sup>Do not be one who holds his hand out to take, but shuts it when it comes to giving.

<sup>6</sup>If your labor has brought you earnings, pay a ransom for your sins.

<sup>7</sup>Do not hesitate to give and do not give with a bad grace; for you will discover who He is that pays you back a reward with a good grace.

<sup>8</sup>Do not turn your back on the needy, but share everything with your brother and call nothing your own. For if you have what is eternal in common, how much more should you have what is transient!

<sup>9</sup>Do not neglect your responsibility<sup>490</sup> to your son or your daughter, but from their youth you shall teach them to revere God.

<sup>10</sup>Do not be harsh in giving orders to your slaves and slave girls. They hope in the same God as you, and the result may be that they cease to revere the God over you both. For when he comes to call us, he will not respect our station, but will call those whom the Spirit has made ready. <sup>11</sup>You slaves, for your part, must obey your masters with reverence and fear, as if they represented God.

<sup>12</sup>You must hate all hypocrisy and everything which fails to please the Lord. <sup>13</sup>You must not forsake "the Lord's commandments,"

but "observe" the ones you have been given, "neither adding nor

subtracting anything."<sup>491</sup> <sup>14</sup>At the church meeting you must confess your sins, and not approach prayer with a bad conscience. That is the way of life.

**5** But the way of death is this: First of all, it is wicked and thoroughly blasphemous: murders, adulteries, lusts, fornications, thefts, idolatries, magic arts, sorceries, robberies, false witness, hypocrisies, duplicity, deceit, arrogance, malice, stubbornness, greediness, filthy talk, jealousy, audacity, haughtiness, boastfulness.<sup>492</sup>

<sup>2</sup>Those who persecute good people, who hate truth, who love lies, who are ignorant of the reward of uprightness, who do not "abide by goodness"<sup>493</sup> or justice, and are on the alert not for goodness but for evil: gentleness and patience are remote from them. "They love vanity,"<sup>494</sup> "look for profit,"<sup>495</sup> have no pity for the poor, do not exert themselves for the oppressed, ignore their Maker, "murder children,"<sup>496</sup> corrupt God's image, turn their backs on the needy, oppress the afflicted, defend the rich, unjustly condemn the poor, and are thoroughly wicked. My children, may you be saved from all this!

**6** See "that no one leads you astray"<sup>497</sup> from this way of the teaching, since such a one's teaching is godless.

<sup>2</sup>If you can bear the Lord's full yoke, you will be perfect. But if you cannot, then do what you can.

**16** Guard your lives. Keep your menorah's (lamps) burning, and ever prepared, for the hour is not known.

<sup>2</sup> Gather together frequently, pursuing that which will benefit your souls, otherwise the entire time of your faith will be nearly worthless if you have not persevered to the end.

And there is much more that I chose not to read. But you get the point. You are the salt of the earth, You are the light of the world. *Whoever therefore breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches men so, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever does and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven,* and your salt will retain its saltiness, and your light will shine, and the world will see your good deeds, and give glory to your father in Heaven. May God grant us his grace to do so.

In the name of the Father...Amen.