

June 5, 2022

Salt And Light

*“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 (14). “You are **the light of the world**. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden. (15) Nor do men light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house. (16) Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven” (Matthew 5:13-16).*

These Scriptures constitute but a small portion of the famous Sermon on the Mount, a sermon preached by Jesus “the Master Teacher,” and which is recorded in Matthew, chapters five through seven. In this sermon Jesus set forth the character qualities which must be possessed by faithful citizens of “*the kingdom of God*,” and He also clearly delineated the principles of righteous conduct which must govern all who are determined to live in such a manner as to meet the approval of God. The aforementioned “character qualities” are briefly summed up on the beatitudes, recorded in Matt. 5:3-12. And immediately after listing the beatitudes, to His disciples, Jesus said “*You are the salt of the earth*,” and “*You are the light of the world*,” respectively.

What a great compliment! What a great honor! Two very descriptive metaphors — “*the salt of the earth*” and “*the light of the world*”— are herein used to describe the true followers of Jesus Christ. Yet what awesome responsibilities are undertaken by those who sincerely strive to measure up to what it really **means to be** “*the salt of the earth*” and “*the light of the world*!” In this article we shall consider each of these terms separately and then make certain observations as space permits.

“The Salt of The Earth”

Yes, to His disciples, Jesus said “*You are the salt of the earth*.” Salt has two outstanding qualities: (a) Salt preserves from corruption and (b) Salt flavors the food we eat, making it more pleasant and more palatable. With regards to salt being a preservative, we state that prior to the day of refrigeration it was common for farmers to slaughter hogs that had been raised for food. Once the animals were slain and cut up into the various parts (shoulders, hams, ribs, backbone, middling, etc.), these different “cuts” of meat were then treated with a generous portion of brine salt. The salt prevented the meat from spoiling; it was a “**must**” for those who wanted to preserve the meat. And, with regards to salt being a flavoring agent, we state that it has long been used to season the food we eat. It can change that which is bland and insipid to that which is delicious and appetizing.

Children of God, like actual salt, have a **preserving** influence upon the society of which they are a part. Remember ancient, wicked Sodom was so permeated with the

perversity of homosexuality and wickedness in general that God destroyed it with fire and brimstone from heaven (Gen. 19)! That city, wicked as it was, would have been spared if as many as ten righteous souls could have been found therein (Gen. 18:23-32)! Why, we ask, is America still standing? It is not primarily because we, as a people, are so heavily armed with modern sophisticated weapons! It is not because of the rulings passed by both houses of Congress and then signed into law by the President. As a nation, we continue to stand because there yet exists a sufficient number of righteous people so that God, lest He “*destroy the righteous with the wicked*” (Gen, 18:23) allows it to stand. Wicked people, living in comfort and faring sumptuously every day, owe a tremendous debt of gratitude to faithful Christians who, as “*salt*,” make society **worth** preserving!

And, like salt, children of God have a **seasoning** effect upon society. For example, what makes your day and renders your life on earth, for the most part, pleasant and rewarding? Is it the presence of those who kill, loot, rob, cripple, and destroy, or the presence of verbal abusers “*whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness*” (Rom. 3:14)? No, a thousand times no! To the contrary, what “*makes our day*” is the presence of those who love God, who love their neighbors as themselves (Matt. 25:35-40), who are quick to compliment and are there to encourage us when we become weary and fainthearted. Quite frankly, life on earth would be most unpleasant were it not for those who live in such a way as to be rightly called “*the salt of the earth.*”

But salt, to be effective, must come **into contact** with that which it is designed to preserve. Salt left in the box, and never applied to the meat, can not preserve meat. Followers of Christ are a people who are “*not of the world*” (John 17:14), but who reside “*in the world*” (John 17:11) so that they can exercise a positive influence on the world. God did not intend for us to be hermits or monks, separated from society in monasteries and convents. In short, we are “*in the world*,” and we must “*rub off*” **on** the world while refusing to let the world “*rub off*” on us.

Before leaving the “*salt*” metaphor, let us not lose sight of this sobering reminder: “*...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*” (Matt. 5:15). Yes, salt can lose its flavor. This often happened to the salt in Palestine when it was exposed to the soil, rain, or sun. Then it became “*good for nothing.*” In fact, it became a detriment, for, when “*thrown out*” upon the soil it harmed the fertility of the ground. But this is minor when compared to the **child of God** who loses his “*flavor*” by becoming unfaithful, or by returning to the ways of the world. Spiritually speaking, he becomes not only “*good for nothing*” but also a **detriment** to the cause of Christ!

The Light of the World

Light, like salt, also has two outstanding qualities: (a) It banishes the darkness, and (b) it gives direction. In view of the value of light, is it any wonder that the first command in all the Bible was “**let there be light**” (Gen. 1:3)? Is it any wonder that Jesus referred to Himself as “**the light of the world**” (John 8:12; John 9:5)?

Christians must let their light shine! They must let their light shine because of the Lord’s **command** (Matt. 5:16). They must let their light shine because of **what** they are, namely, they are “*children of light*” (I Thess. 5:5). They must let their light shine because, in so doing, they “*glorify*” God (Matt. 5:16).

But **how** do we let our light shine? Primarily, in three ways: (a) through our “*good works*,” Matt. 5:16, (b) through exemplary conduct (Phil. 2:15), and © by teaching the lost (Phil. 2:16). “*Good works*” are those works authorized by God and revealed in the sacred Scriptures (2 Tim. 3:16,17); they are not simply works of which man is the inventor, and which men have merely labeled “good.”

Light, by its very nature, is meant to “*shine*.” It is folly to “*light a lamp*” and then “*put it under a basket*” (Matt. 5:15), thereby negating the very purpose of the light. But what happens when a Christian becomes unfaithful? What happens when “*children of light*” begin conducting themselves like the “*sons of darkness*” (Eph. 5:8) they were before having, through gospel obedience, been “*delivered from the power of darkness*” (Col. 1:13)? In a nutshell, they have put their light “*under a basket*,” and have become darkness as opposed to light.

Observations

“Christianity is not acid which sours and destroys, but salt which preserves. It is not alkali which consumes and corrodes, but salt which saves from destruction” (C. E. Dorris, **Preceptor**, Dec. 1956). As “*salt*” we have an obligation to check (hold back) the moral corruption of the world. But as one writer observed, “the world would prefer that we were honey instead of salt.” Hence, there is the ever present temptation for some to live life “on the edge,” to be “borderline Christians,” seeking to co-exist with the “*enemies of the cross of Christ*,” even those who glory “*in their shame*,” and set “*their minds on earthly things*” (Phil. 3:18-19).

And, though it is a great honor to actually be “*the light of the world*,” we have to admit that multitudes have always “*loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil*” (John 3:19). People who practice evil hate the light because their deeds are “*exposed*” by the light (John 3:20). And this, too, poses an ever-present danger to “*children of light*.” It is an undeniable fact that most people, including Christians, like to be liked. While this is not wrong within itself, the craving to be accepted can provide a subtle temptation to “go along” with the things we ought to oppose with a passion. We see this every day when “Christian parents” allow their children to go to the prom, when “Christians” dress immodestly, and in general, conduct themselves in a way not unlike alien sinners who have never named the Name of Christ. We see it in the spiraling divorce rate among “Christians,” and the constant clamor on the part of some to tone down scriptural proclamations against sin and error lest those who love darkness rather than light become offended.

Conclusion:

It isn't easy being “*salt*” in a world of leaven. It isn't easy being “*light*” in a world of darkness. But the “upward way” has seldom, if ever, been the easy way. For that matter, it wasn't “easy” for our Lord to surrender His equality with the Father, come to the earth as a helpless baby, grow up in Nazareth, be subjected to the ridicule of the religious hierarchy, allow Himself to be nailed to a cross of torture, and then (though innocent of all sin) submit to a painful death befitting the worst of criminals. Compared to what **He** sacrificed for us, what Jesus requires of **us** is small indeed. And when **we** submit to **His** will, becoming both “*salt*” and “*light*,” we lead the way for others; we experience happiness in this life, and joyfully anticipate an eternity of happiness in that celestial city called heaven. Viewed in this light, we wonder why any same person would hesitate to obey Jesus and become all that He, **for our good**, requires of us!