

## “The People of God’s World” (Part 2)

### Matthew 5: 13-20

13 You are the salt of the earth. But what good is salt if it has lost its flavor? Can you make it salty again? It will be thrown out and trampled underfoot as worthless. 14 You are the light of the world—like a city on a hilltop that cannot be hidden. 15 No one lights a lamp and then puts it under a basket. Instead, a lamp is placed on a stand, where it gives light to everyone in the house. 16 In the same way, let your good deeds shine out for all to see, so that everyone will praise your heavenly Father.

17 Don’t misunderstand why I have come. I did not come to abolish the law of Moses or the writings of the prophets. No, I came to accomplish their purpose. 18 I tell you the truth, until heaven and earth disappear, not even the smallest detail of God’s law will disappear until its purpose is achieved. 19 So if you ignore the least commandment and teach others to do the same, you will be called the least in the Kingdom of Heaven. But anyone who obeys God’s laws and teaches them will be called great in the Kingdom of Heaven.

20 But I warn you—unless your righteousness is better than the righteousness of the teachers of religious law and the Pharisees, you will never enter the Kingdom of Heaven!

**The Message Version:** Let me tell you why you are here. You’re here to be salt-seasoning that brings out the God-flavors of this earth. If you lose your saltiness, how will people taste godliness? You’ve lost your usefulness and will end up in the garbage.

“Here’s another way to put it: You’re here to be light, bringing out the God-colors in the world. God is not a secret to be kept. We’re going public with this, as public as a city on a hill. If I make you light-bearers, you don’t think I’m going to hide you under a bucket, do you? I’m putting you on a light stand. Now that I’ve put you there on a hilltop, on a light stand---shine! Keep open house; be generous with your lives. By opening up to others, you’ll prompt people to open up with God, this generous Father in heaven.

Don’t suppose for a minute that I have come to demolish the Scriptures—either God’s Law or the Prophets. I’m not here to demolish but to complete. I am going to put it all together, pull it all together in a vast panorama. God’s Law is more real and lasting than the stars in the sky and the ground at your feet. Long after stars burn out and the earth wears out, God’s Law will be alive and working.

Trivialize even the smallest item in God’s Law and you will only have trivialized yourself. But take it seriously, show the way for others, and you will find honor in the kingdom. Unless you do far better than the Pharisees in the matters of right living, you won’t know the first thing about entering the kingdom.

Salt water is pretty useless.

Sure, it plays a critical role in the delicate balance of the global ecosystem, but, apart from that, for the average Joe, salt water is just regular water's annoying cousin where whales and sharks live. Apart from nursing the occasional sore throat or putting together a stellar fish tank, what good is salt water? Think about it. You can't drink the stuff, you can't water the lawn with it, and it feels so weird after swimming around in it that, if you're normal, you immediately jump in the shower to remove it. Useless.

Enter modern technology. Today it's getting easier and easier to transform salt water, with its limited usefulness, into fresh water -- the kind that we humans really, really need. The process is called "desalination," and it's taking off around the world, especially in areas where potable water can be hard to come by.

Take Singapore, for example. Not too many years ago the country opened a desalination plant that can produce 36 million U.S. gallons of fresh water every day by pulling it straight from the ocean -- that's more than 10 percent of the country's supply. Through a simple, but powerful, process, places like Singapore are able to remove the salt, rendering water that was of little use into water that helps people survive. This is important, I want you to remember it for later.

But I want to make one thing clear. Salt is salt. One of the big sellers in specialty food stores is sea salt. Trace amounts of minerals found in seawater persist in the salt after the water has evaporated, and are reputed to have extra health benefits.

The doctors of the Mayo Clinic disagree. For the most part, sea salt is sodium chloride, just like salt dug from a mine or manufactured in a laboratory. The quantity of other minerals is negligible. Some claim sea salt is lower in sodium than regular salt. While it's true that a teaspoon of sea salt has slightly less sodium than a teaspoon of regular salt, that's only because its grains are bigger. That means less salt fits into your teaspoon. Grind sea salt as fine as the other stuff, and there's no difference.

Like kosher salt, sea salt generally isn't iodized -- it doesn't have iodine added to it. Use sea salt exclusively, and avoid other foods with naturally-occurring iodine, and you could end up with a goiter (which is the reason iodine was added to salt in the first place). Salt is salt, wherever it comes from: which is pretty much what Jesus is saying. The good news is the same, no matter which disciples happen to be seasoning the

neighborhood. --For more on the alleged health benefits of sea salt, see: [mayoclinic.com/health/sea-salt/AN01142](http://mayoclinic.com/health/sea-salt/AN01142). Retrieved August 12, 2013. **[NOTE 1]**

While desalination, like what is happening at the Singapore plant is a *good* thing when it comes to water, Jesus tells us that it's *a really bad thing* when it comes to his people. In the middle of his Sermon on the Mount Jesus looks out over his followers and proclaims, "You are the salt of the earth, but if salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything except to be thrown out and trampled under people's feet" (v. 13).

Those are tough words, but in order to understand them, we need to grasp them from a first-century perspective. While salt *in water* is largely a pain for us humans, salt *minus the water* has long been a blessing for us humans. It's proved so valuable

because of its many uses that it has. In history, it's been used as currency and fought for in wars. Salt could be used to cure and store meats, disinfect wounds and make food, pottery and more. And although it's tempting to isolate one of its usages as the central meaning behind the metaphor Jesus used, to do so would be to oversimplify.

For most people today, salt is a seasoning, its use ... a matter of personal taste (balanced against the doctors' warnings to avoid sodium). But that's only because refrigeration and canning technology have made its historic use -- as a food preservative -- obsolete. In the centuries before refrigeration and canning, a modest supply of salt in the pantry vastly expanded the range of foods that could find their way onto the family dinner table, year-round.

That's why salt caravans -- hauling sacks of the stuff from mine to marketplace -- were among the earliest commercial enterprises. Armies have marched to secure supplies of it for their countries. Sometimes it has even been used as an alternate currency. **[NOTE 2]**

If hearing the word "salt" calls to mind only a saltshaker, or the tasty little crystals that adhere to pretzels, Jesus' metaphorical use of it may seem somewhat trivial. But from His perspective, "You are the salt of the earth" refers to a valuable commodity indeed.

Salt, in general, was loved not for just *one* of its uses but because it had *so many* uses. It was an unexpected blessing in a thousand ways. Jesus' point is that those who belong to him, who live under His reign and rule in this world, are just like salt. When it's out of the water, it's incredibly useful and surprisingly valuable. Not because we can enhance a great steak with it but because we can make the kingdom of God known.

We have the ability to tell people about God's world through the way we admit our faults, the way we cling to Christ, love our enemies, feed the needy, strive to keep our promises and so much more -- which Jesus goes on to outline later in his "sermon on the mount." Members of God's world, those who have been chosen by grace and brought to life in his love, have a surprising usefulness in this hurting world when we respond to that grace by walking in love. (That's right, that's part of our missions statement)!

**[NOTE 3]** Therefore, while we can cheer the process of "desalination" for seawater, we should be on the lookout and fight against that same process when it comes to us, God's "salty" people. After all, when a few gallons of water from the ocean lose their salt, you get something great. But when followers of Jesus lose their saltiness, the world misses out on experiencing the kingdom and we lose out on the joys of being a blessing.

Remember Jesus talked about the people of God's World, the people of God's kingdom being salt and light. If you lose your saltiness you cease to be a light as well as losing your saltiness. As long as there is electricity and daylight, it can be easy to take light for granted. But try to find your tree stand in the dark without a light. You run in to prickles, branches, and the likelihood of tripping goes up exponentially. At night, without electricity, you are reminded how important light is. You may also be reminded how difficult life is, in the darkness. I was walking very quietly to my tree stand on one

dark morning about ten years ago when a deer snorted, (they blow air out their nose violently and it makes a very loud airy whistle) and it was so close to me that I felt the air move. It scared me so bad I screamed. It was a manly scream, but I screamed, nonetheless. You can't see danger coming when it's dark, you can't see sticks and rocks that might trip you up. You need light to shine in the darkness to show you the way, to keep you from getting tripped up. That's what we are, says Jesus, if we are His disciples. If you are a Jesus-follower then you are a light to the world, unless you hide under a proverbial bushel basket, give in to fear, and hide out in your home. If we are Jesus followers, then we must remain salty and let our lives be a light that points to Jesus; a light that helps people to keep from stumbling and running into hurtful things.

To be a witness for God is to be a living sign of God's presence in the world. What we live, is more important than what we say, because the right way of living always leads to the right way of speaking. When we forgive our neighbors from our hearts, our hearts will speak forgiving words. When we are grateful, we will speak grateful words, and when we are hopeful and joyful, we will speak hopeful and joyful words.

When our words come too soon and we are not yet living what we are saying, we easily give double messages. Giving double messages -- one with our words and another with our actions -- makes us hypocrites. May our lives give us the right words and may our words lead us to the right life. --Henri J. M. Nouwen, *Bread for the Journey: A Daybook of Wisdom and Faith*, entry for June 20 (HarperCollins, 2009)

**[NOTE 4]** So, how can we spot a de-salted Christian? Well, if it's anything like the desalination process currently employed in places like Singapore, then there are three things to look for. *First, be careful with the chemicals.* According to the experts, the first step in becoming salt-less is a brush with some nasty chemicals that latch on to the salty minerals, weigh them down and make them easier to catch later in the process.

A similar, chemical onslaught happens for Christians, coming in the form of cultural distractions. That is, the worldview and attitudes of this world cloud our minds and confuse our focus. That's not to say that the world and culture are evil and that we should all run for the hills, making our own clothes, churning our own butter and canceling our Netflix subscriptions.

But there's a difference between having the renewed mind amid culture called for by Paul in Romans 12 and having largely the *same* mind as the culture -- unflinchingly embracing the same pursuits and priorities as everyone else. The chemicals found in unflinchingly following the flow of the world, weigh us down and set us up for being caught in the next stage which is called osmosis.

*Second, watch for osmosis.* With the essence of its saltiness weighed down by chemical invaders, the desalination process moves to *osmosis*, a stage in which water is run through a series of membranes and filters and the once-agile minerals are now easily trapped. For the follower of Jesus Christ, this is what we'd call temptation.

With our mind clouded and our heart divided, we're much more susceptible to getting sinfully snagged by some stupid temptation:

- We let our eyes linger or our trash talk flow.

- We flirt with anger in a dangerous world.
- We toy with tragedy in a tragic world.
- We eyeball idolatry in an idolatrous world.

We float through the filter of life in this messed up world, warped by the chemicals of self-indulgence and self-righteousness, and before we know it, we've been snagged by it. We're stuck in it. But the end result is not soft, purified water. It's a salt-less Christian whose once-surprising usefulness, in being countercultural for the common good, has been seriously compromised, yea even rendered useless!

*Third, don't lose your cool.* Of course when desalinating water, one also has the option of skipping the two-step process of chemicals and osmosis and doing things the old-fashioned, quick and dirty way with heat. The one-step, thermal process of removing salt involves bringing the salty water to a boil. The boiling water produces steam, which condenses as pure water.

A very common way for followers of Jesus Christ *to lose their salt is by quickly losing their cool (boiling over)*. When the pressure mounts in life, when the crises emerge out of nowhere or tempers flare, it's far too easy to flip out. Blindsided by brokenness, we react with brokenness, and before we know it, rather than being the people of God's world -- people who flavor, challenge and preserve godly values and present a godly presence -- we're just like everyone else, in the people's world.

[NOTE 5] All this is to say that desalination happens! And what's good for the water is bad for us Christians. So, let's be careful; let's fight against that which would run us through the ringer and rob us of our usefulness and purpose as people of God's world. But let's not stop there. Let's end by answering the rhetorical question at the heart of Jesus' speech on salt. In verse 13 he asks, "... if salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored?" (v. 13) The truth is that none of us ever truly *stays* salty. The point of the Sermon on the Mount -- with its high call to be salt and light, to be a blessed peacemaker, to be slow to anger, to be low on lust and high on love -- was twofold. Yes, it was to show us the pattern for living in God's world -- what often is called the "kingdom of God" -- but also to demonstrate how to live under the gracious rule of God in Christ Jesus.

Those who seek to follow the spiritual life are like salt in the world. Salt crystals cannot give flavor to food unless they dissolve. If we dissolve the salt in a pot, it disappears but it does not cease to exist. Indeed, it can then give flavor to thousands of grains of rice. It is the same with us. If we are not melted in the fire of love and spirit, if we do not sacrifice ourselves completely, then we cannot pass on to even a single soul the blissful experience of the spiritual life. --Sadhu Sundar Singh, *Wisdom of the Sadhu* (Plough, 2000).

It is important for us to realize our need for God's rule, to understand how in every command the depth of our brokenness and our *lack* of saltiness is revealed. Why? So that we might live in a state of not just *being* salt in this world but *receiving* it from Christ. And how does that happen? By hearing the gospel, by receiving His words of pardon, by feasting on His body and blood, by connecting with His people and drawing life in his word. That's how. [NOTE 6]

For those who are feeling particularly un-salty today, the good news is that there is a "re-salination process," so to speak. His name is Jesus. He has a well of forgiveness, grace, and mercy that is yours, a free gift, for you to receive. Through it you are relentlessly restored into someone who can beautifully bring the goods of the kingdom to a world that is in short supply.

Yes, saltwater is pretty useless. Thank God for desalination. But salty Christians are incredibly important and surprisingly valuable. Salty Christians are the people of God's world. [NOTE 7]

So, what are you going to do about it? Please make the time to think and pray and ask God, if there aren't some ways that your life has lost some saltiness lately. Ask the Lord to reveal to any ways that you might be hiding your light? Then please write down something today. Put on paper what you might do to recover some of your saltiness or light shining properties. As we take our place in God's world, let's be alert for chemicals, filters and heat. But if we happen to fail and lose our flavor, we know that Christ can quickly restore it. Don't be afraid to bow your head and confess to the Lord where you're failing and ask Him to fill you one again with His Holy Spirit. Then by the power of the Holy Spirit within you change what's wrong and be a light once again. Let your light shine and let your life preserve and flavor the lives of the people you come into contact with. Let's pray ... Amen.

**Sermon Notes for “The People of God’s World (part 2)”**  
**based on Matthew 5: 13-20 given at Doster Community Church**  
**November 5, 2023**

- I. While desalination is a good thing when it comes to water, Jesus tells us that it is a really bad thing when it comes to His people. It makes us as useless as a light under a bushel basket.
- II. Salt had many uses in Bible times. It was a preservative, a spice, and was used as a trading commodity and for religious ceremonies. Salt draws the bacteria-causing moisture out of foods, drying them and making it possible to store meat without refrigeration for extended periods of time.
- III. By our saltiness we tell people about God’s World through the way we admit our faults, cling to Christ, love our enemies, feed the needy, strive to keep our promises and much more.
- IV. How do you know if you are a “de-salted Christian”?
  - a. Be careful of how much you let culture/chemicals (the world) influence your thoughts and actions.
  - b. Be careful of the filters and membranes of a clouded heart or divided love. We must watch out for temptation and implement our plan to deal with it.
  - c. Third don’t lose your cool and boil over. Don’t let the busyness of life take away your love, your peace, your grace or mercy.
- V. What’s good for water is bad for Jesus-followers. So, let’s be careful; let’s fight against that which would run us through the ringer and rob us of our usefulness and purpose as people of God’s world.
- VI. For those feeling particularly “un-salty” today, the good news is that there is a “re-salination process”! His name is Jesus. He is full of forgiveness, grace and mercy.
- VII. So, what are you going to do about it. How is your life going to be different now? Please, make the time to evaluate if you might have lost some of your saltiness lately or hidden your light. And then write down what you are going to do, to “re-salinate”. How are you going to put this into action?