

Having completed what is typically referred to as the beatitudes last week, we come to something of a transition in vv13-16—hitherto our Savior has been describing individual subjects of His kingdom, beginning with v13 He describes His people collectively or as a whole—He does so under two related descriptions—“you are the salt of the earth” (v13), and—“you are the light of the world” (v14)—in both of these verses the pronoun “you” is second person plural—which refers to a plurality of people—and in this case the collective people of God—or the church...

But to be more specific and a bit more technical—the pronoun in v13 and 14 is intensified—that is, in the original Greek the pronoun is doubled—literally we could translate the phrases—“you, I mean you are the salt of the earth”—“you, I mean you are the light of the world”—we could paraphrase them as—“you, and you only are the salt of the earth...you, and you only are the light of the world...”—the point is—the church is the only salt and light that the earth and world will ever know...

- I. The Metaphor Explained—byway of three simple questions
- II. The Metaphor Applied—byway of three summary lessons

- I. The Metaphor Explained—byway of three questions

- A. What is meant by “salt of the earth?”

1. There are, generally speaking, two primary uses of salt that our Savior had in mind in using this phrase— [1] flavoring, and [2] preserving...
2. Notice [1] salt flavors—that is, it makes something attractive or appealing—thus Christians are salt in that they adorn or render religion attractive...
3. Tit.2:9-10—“exhort bondservants to be obedient to their own masters, to be well pleasing in all things, not answering back, 10 not pilfering, but showing all good fidelity, that they may adorn the doctrine of God our Savior in all things...”
4. The NIV has rendered the last phrase—“so that in every way they will make the teaching about God our Savior attractive...”
5. Bondservants are to play the part of salt towards their masters—they are to adorn religion or render it attractive...
6. This is done by being obedient, well pleasing in all things, not answering back, not pilfering, but showing all good fidelity...
7. For example—think of a Christian employee, who works for a nonChristian employer—his faithful work habits is a wonderful way to adorn the doctrine of God...
8. Conversely—what a tragedy it would be if a person claimed to be a Christian, yet was untrustworthy and unreliable...
9. Far from adorning the gospel it would actually eclipse it—and instead of adding flavor to it, it would render it distasteful...
10. Col.4:6—“let your speech always *be* with grace, seasoned with salt, that you may know how you ought to answer each one...”
11. Here the apostle likens speech tempered with grace to speech seasoned with salt—that is—speech that is gracious and pleasant...
12. In other words—our speech should always be attractive and inviting—“that you may know how you ought to answer each one...”
13. That is—speech seasoned with salt [that is attractive and inviting]—will enable others to respond appropriately and in turn...
14. Notice [2] salt preserves—within Biblical times, and even today, salt is used as a preservative, to hinder the process of decay...
15. John Broadus—“As salt preserves things from corruption and decay, so it is the office of Christians to preserve the mass of mankind from utter moral corruption and ruin...”

16. Thus the Lord said of the old covenant [as a type of the new] in Lev.18:19—“it is a covenant of salt forever...”
17. That is—it is a covenant that will not decay—it is an abiding covenant, a covenant seasoned or preserved with salt...
18. Accordingly, I suggest by “salt” our Savior refers to its enhancing ability—but especially to its preserving quality or ability...
19. Thus in describing His people as “the salt of the earth” our Savior means that Christians are to render the gospel attractive to the world...
20. But furthermore, Christians because they possess true grace, are to act as a preserver—to check the moral corruption of the world...

B. What is meant by “if the salt loses its flavor?”

1. The single Greek word translated “loses its flavor,” “loses its saltiness” or “becomes tasteless”—literally means—“to be or become foolish...”
2. When the word is used with reference to the mind it means “to be silly or foolish” but when it is applied to the taste it refers to something that has become “tasteless, insipid, or bland...”
3. It here refers to salt that has lost its usefulness—it has lost its ability to flavor or preserve—it has lost its distinct and valuable qualities...
4. Thus by it our Savior refers to those who lose their Christian influence—to those who no longer play the part of salt to the earth...
5. Obviously He is not referring to Christians who cease being Christians [this would contradict the entire Bible]—but instead to professing Christians who prove false...
6. For example, in Matt.13:20-21 our Savior speaks about the stony-ground hearer—“this is he who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy; yet he has no root in himself, but endures only for a while...”
7. Such a person gave the appearance of salt—but lost its flavor—the reason being—he was never truly converted...
8. While at one time he stood out from the world and participated in Christian activities—he perhaps even played the part of salt to the world...
9. But as time progresses, and the difficulties of following Christ arise—“immediately he falls away”—that is, he goes back into the world—salt that loses its flavor...
10. Thus when our Savior asks—“but if the salt loses its flavor, how shall it be seasoned”—He means—how can it regain its saltiness...
11. Salt that has lost its flavor has become useless and good for nothing—it can never regain its flavoring and preserving properties...
12. The point being—a person who forsakes the faith is rarely recovered—Pink—“Those who depart from fidelity are very seldom, and then only with great difficulty, recovered and restored...”

C. What is meant by “it is then good for nothing?”

1. Because such salt has lost its flavor—“it is good for nothing”—and because it is good for nothing—“it is thrown out and trampled underfoot by men...”
2. Our Savior expands upon this phrase in Lk.14:35—“it is neither fit for the land nor for the dunghill, *but* men throw it out...”
3. That is—it is not only useless but harmful—Barns—“It is not only good for nothing itself, but it actually destroys all fertility wherever it is thrown...”
4. Thus salt that has lost its flavor is good for nothing—it is cast away as rubbish—not even worthy of the dunghill...
5. So too—fallen humanity—has become “good for nothing” as it has by the fall lost its saltiness, Rom.3:12—“all have turned aside, together they have become useless; there is none who does good, no, not one...”
6. There is a true sense in which fallen man is “good for nothing” in that left to himself he is unable to do anything good...

7. In the strictest sense he is “useless” in that he can do no eternal or lasting good—thus salt that has lost its flavor is good for nothing...
8. But this is especially true of those who at one time professed to be salt—for their departure can potentially do the greatest harm...
9. Jeremiah Burroughs—“There is not a more miserable creature than an apostatizing Christian; they are good for nothing, for now neither God nor man will trust them...”
10. He elsewhere said—“They go up and down as poor wretches, forsaken of God and men, because they are of no use at all to the world, of no note or account in the church, but do hurt wherever they are...”
11. Of such useless salt our Savior says—“it is good for nothing but to be thrown out and trampled underfoot by men...”
12. This is imagery that would have been common to those in the East—salt that has lost its flavor was simply cast out into the street as useless...
13. Robertson—“It is common in Syria and Palestine to see salt scattered in piles on the ground because it has lost its flavor...”
14. What our Savior here means I trust is obvious—those who are useless—who fail to serve as salt to the earth are cast out into eternal darkness...
15. Matt.8:12—“but the sons of the kingdom will be cast out into outer darkness. There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth...”
16. Jn.15:6—“if anyone does not abide in Me, he is cast out as a branch and is withered; and they gather them and throw *them* into the fire, and they are burned...”
17. Here failure to “abide in Christ” is the same as “salt losing its flavor”—the end is the same for both—they shall be cast out and trampled or burned...
18. Thus our Savior describes His people as “the salt of the earth”—yet if they lose their saltiness they shall be good for nothing and cast away in the end...

II. The Metaphor Applied—byway of three summary lessons

A. We learn something about the earth

1. I suggest this lesson byway of inference—if the church is salt to the earth—then of necessity the earth is in need of salt...
2. Now I trust it’s obvious that by “earth” our Savior does not refer to the actual physical earth but to the people who inhabit it...”
3. The inhabitants of the earth—native or nature man—the earth—stands in dire need of the preserving influence of the church...
4. But to be more specific—[1] the earth is rotten—by this of course I mean that the earth [composed of unsaved humanity] is morally and ethically putrid...
5. Notice [2] the earth is rotting—by this I mean, the earth is not only rotten—but it is rotting—that is, its getting worse...
6. This of course is the clear teaching of Romans chapter one—mankind left to himself—given over by God—grows worse and degenerates...
7. Think of a piece of meat left outside in the heat—unless someone intervenes the meat will rot—and the longer it remains unprotected the more rotten it will become...
8. The same is true with reference to fallen man—unless God intervenes by putting salt in the earth the earth would grow worse...
9. Now this is not to deny the overall progress of man with regards to certain medical and technological inventions has improved...
10. But morally and spiritually man does not incline but decline—for example, just consider this very country—let me ask you—have we increased or decreased in morality...
11. I’m sure we all would agree—that this country is decaying or rotting in an alarming rate—and the reason is obvious—there are fewer and fewer true Christians in this country...
12. What a tragedy it is—that so many people want a happy, safe, and prosperous country—but want to illuminate the very salt that will secure these ends...

13. Let me put it this way—remove the salt and eventually you’ll have rotten meat—and what we want in this country is—fresh meat without salt...
14. Have you ever seen these polls that suggest that 75 or 80 % of Americans are born again Christians—but do you know why these statistics are false...
15. If this country was even 50 % true Christians the church would have more of an influence in checking the moral decay of our society...
16. But the largest problem with the church in this country is that she has lost her savor—we have become saltless Christians...
17. It’s become almost impossible to discern between the supposed salt and the dirt—there is little if any qualitative difference...

B. We learn something about God

1. While it is true, that by way of inference we learn something about the putrid state of the earth—we also learn something about the grace of God in giving salt to the earth...
2. Oh my friends, God was never under an obligation to leave one single ounce of salt within this rotten and fallen world...
3. How does native man treat the salt but persecutes them, hates them, excludes them, and speaks evil against them falsely...
4. God would have been perfectly just to remove His people from this earth, and leave it to rotten and putrefy in the heat of its own lust...
5. Thus God leaves, dispersed throughout the entire world, a remnant of true Christians as salt to have a positive and preserving effect...
6. But the question I want to here address is—why—why does God leave His people in the earth to serve as salt...
7. Let me suggest three reasons—[1] to preserve a pedigree from which His elect would come—why doesn’t God destroy this wicked world—because He has a people who will be born from it...
8. In Gen.18—the Lord promises not to destroy Sodom if there were but 10 righteous people within it, v32—“and He said, I will not destroy it for the sake of ten...”
9. Because there were not even 10 righteous people, the Lord did destroy it—by raining down fire and brimstone from heaven...
10. My dear friends, if all the righteous people were removed from this earth—all the salt removed—it would warrant, even necessitate, the fiery judgments of God...
11. But because God has an elect people—and many of these have yet to be born—the Lord has need of this earth...
12. Notice [2] to restrain evil for His people’s good—the depositing of salt within the earth is a means of restraining evil...
13. It is an undeniable fact—that that country who knows the least of true religion knows the most about immorality...
14. Matthew Poole—“If it were not for the number of sound and painful ministers, and holy and gracious persons, the earth would be but a stinking dunghill of drunkards, unclean persons, thieves, murderers, unrighteous persons, that would be a stench in the nostrils of a pure and holy God...”
15. Conversely—to the degree that true religion exists—so the society will thrive and a general prosperity enjoyed...
16. This can be illustrated throughout Biblical history—for example, think of Jacob in the house of Laban, and Joseph in the courts of Pharaoh...
17. Both the house of Laban and Egypt prospered because of Jacob and Joseph—they served as salt to the earth...
18. This can also be illustrated by church history—throughout the Reformation and Great Awakenings—whenever true religion was revived everyone benefited...
19. Why—because during the Reformation and Great Awakenings a lot of people were converted—and being converted they were made the salt of the earth...
20. Notice [3] to reveal His love to a decaying world—this is to say—He leaves a measure of salt in the earth not only for the good of His people but for the good of the earth...

C. We learn something about the church

1. This brings us to the point of our text—the church in general and individual Christians in particular—are the salt of the earth...
2. What a blessed description we here find of true Christians—while hated, excluded, and misused—they are literally precious to this earth...
3. Now it must be admitted that our Savior does not here exhort us to be the salt of the earth, but actually states it as a fact—“you are the salt of the earth...”
4. Yet this doesn’t deny the obvious application—that Christians are to be in practice what we are in fact—in other words we are to be salt to the earth...
5. We find this expressly stated in Mk.9:50—“salt is good, but if the salt loses its flavor, how will you season it? Have salt in yourselves...”
6. That is—foster within yourselves those salt-like qualities that will enable you to have a preserving influence upon the earth...
7. Thus I want to at this point answer the question—how are we as Christians to serve as salt to a rotten and rotting world...
8. Notice [1] we have to have direct contact to the earth—by this I mean, salt will have no effect on meat unless it be rubbed into the meat...
9. For example—regardless how many salt shakers you had on the table—your food will not be salted unless the salt is directly applied to the meat...
10. So too—the world can be filled with Christians—but unless they get in direct contact to the earth it won’t be salted...
11. Thus we learn how unscriptural any view of Christianity is, that removes Christians from the general society...
12. In the medieval ages there were monasteries, where the truly devoted separated themselves from society in general...
13. Today we have the Mennonites—who distant themselves from society, dwelling in little clusters by themselves...
14. But is this the purpose of salt—has the Lord left us here to simply clump together in piles—how are we ever to influence the earth if we fail to rub shoulders with it...
15. Jn.17:15—“I do not pray that You should take them out of the world...v18 as You sent Me into the world, I also have sent them into the world...”
16. Notice our Savior expressly desires that His people remain in the earth—He in fact sends His disciples into the earth...
17. Why—that they might act as salt in the earth—my friends, can you here the necessity of having Christians scattered throughout society...
18. To have true Christians as business men, working in grocery stores, public schools, police force—to have true Christians scattered throughout all kinds of neighborhoods...
19. I go even further—what a need we have of befriending those around us who are not Christians—coworkers, school mates, neighbors...
20. When was the last time you or I had an unconverted couple [perhaps a coworker or neighbor] over for dinner...
21. My dear brethren, we as Christians are the only salt this earth with know—if we don’t salt it then nobody will...
22. Notice [2] we have to remain separate from the earth—this is the other side of the coin—they are in but not of the world...
23. Jn.17:16—“they are not of the world, just as I am not of the world...”—that is, they are utterly and totally different from the world...
24. My friends, what makes salt appealing but the fact that it’s utterly different then the food it seasons—a saltiness salt has no appeal to it...
25. What happens to some is instead of influencing the earth the earth influences them—and thus they lose their flavor...
26. No my dear brethren—our effectiveness is contingent upon our distinctness—our value lies in the fact that we are unless the rotten meat...