

## “YE ARE THE SALT OF THE EARTH”

This discourse was given at the Saginaw, Michigan convention, Sept. 6, 1959, by Alvin Raffel.

After stating the blessings of the Beatitudes to His disciples in the 5th chapter of Matthew, our Lord states in the 12th and 13th verses that they were to “Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets who were before you.” “Ye are the salt of the earth: but if the salt have lost his savour, wherewith shall it be salted? It is thenceforth good for nothing, but to be cast out, and to be trodden under foot of men.”

When we are in the “blessed” class referred to by our Lord, especially in the seven heavenly promises, then we are indeed “the salt of the earth” and blessed with all those who qualify as the Lord’s disciples. The true church is referred to at various times in the Scriptures as “wheat,” “sheep,” “gems,” “temple stones” etc. At this time I thought it would be profitable to consider with you THE Church as “the salt of the earth.”

We know that salt, in some form is absolutely necessary to maintain all forms of life on earth. Whether man or beast, fish or fowl, in this green earth, all are dependent on one of the basic elements—salt. So let us consider some thoughts and Scriptures on this subject. We see our Lord did not use some rare and expensive condiment such as sorrel or saffron as an illustration of His church. But instead He chose an everyday ingredient of our food—common salt. A rare and costly spice could have been interpreted to indicate a wealthy or high minded class. But salt indicates the common, humble fisherman type of disciple that our Lord chose.

Of all the many and varied seasonings in the world, both mild and powerful, just why did the Master choose common salt in referring to His disciples? For one thing, salt has a long history and fine tradition back of it, understood by almost all men throughout the world. Among the ancients, every meal that included salt had a certain sacred character about it, creating a bond of piety and friendship between the host and the guests. Hence the Greek phrase for fidelity—“there is salt between us.” There is also the Persian phrase—“untrue to salt,” meaning to be “disloyal and ungrateful.”

Some of the oldest trade routes included traffic in salt. The oldest road in Italy, the Via Salaria, was built with the salt trade in mind. In ancient times in some places, cakes of salt were used instead of money. For example, in Abyssinia, Central Africa, Tibet and parts of China. This gives us some idea of the important role salt has played in man’s history, and why it was regarded so highly.

Salt is one of the most versatile of the elements and seasonings. Used wisely, its seasoning assures a good taste to foods. Symbolically, it stands for faithfulness, fidelity, purity and preservation. Contrariwise, too much salt, or impure salt, is distasteful and bitter and a great amount is able to destroy man, animal and vegetation. (The Florida hurricane of 1926 was a good example of what salt water will do to big live oak and palm trees, since each gallon of sea water contains a quarter pound of salt.)

In olden times, after a city was conquered, the ground was covered with salt by the conquering army so that nothing could grow there. In speaking of our day, the Lord used salt as a symbol of destruction when He admonished us to “Remember Lot’s wife.” Evidently Lot’s wife was not fully convinced that God would destroy Sodom. In looking back to the city from which she was being delivered, she displayed her inability to forget the things behind. The same lesson is emphasized by our Lord in Luke 9:26, “No man having put his hand to the plow, and looking back is fit for the Kingdom of God.” Likewise in Heb. 10:38, 39 we are told, “The just shall live by faith: but if any man draw back my soul shall have no pleasure in him. But we are not of them who draw back unto perdition, but of them that believe to the saving of the soul.”

Now with reference to the preserving quality of salt, you may remember in the 2nd World War, the Nazis hid the German masterpieces of art, worth millions of dollars, in their salt mines for preservation. This reminds us that some of the Church, the Lord’s Masterpiece, is still hidden in the earth as stated in 1 John 3:1, “The world knoweth us not, because it knew Him not.” So we rejoice in that “the Lord knoweth them that are His.” Thus we are “Hid with Christ in God.” Col. 3:3.

From the natural aspect, it was interesting to learn that the largest salt mine in the world is near Krakow, Poland. This salt formation is over 500 miles long, 25 miles wide and 1,200 feet thick. Some of its chambers or streets are over one mile in length. This salt mine employs over a thousand people, some of whom live mostly underground. Actually there are enough houses in this mine to form a complete village, streets and all. It produces over 55,000 tons of salt annually, and has been in constant operation for over 650 years. Even its atmosphere is especially healthy, preventing colds, asthma and other respiratory ills as well as neuralgia and rheumatism.

However the “salt mine” we are vitally interested in is the Bible. It takes in all the world and all space for all time. Men have neglected its healing and everlasting qualities, although it has been available for centuries. It tells about a perfect world that was lost through Adam and of a perfect world to come through Christ. A perfect world for all mankind and of the many mansions the Lord has prepared for His own Church in glory. Not only will earth’s atmosphere be healthy and pollution free after the Millennium but there will be no more pain, sorrow nor dying. (Rev. 21:4) The glorified church will have

untold pleasures ahead of them because, while on earth, they were the faithful “salt” class that never lost its savor.

As an illustration, let us say salt, since it is white when pure, represents truth and righteousness; and that pepper, since it is black, represents error and unrighteousness. Salt has healing qualities, while pepper is generally recognized as a spicy irritant. At a table, have you ever used the pepper shaker thinking it was the salt? So in our speech, have we hastily used the “irritant of pepper” instead of the “seasoning of salt”? When witnessing to the Truth, or in solving a problem at work? or in a difference of opinion with a neighbor? or in a trial with another member of the Ecclesia? (You know that’s the trouble with the Russians in the [U.S.S.R. Instead](#) of using any salt in their dealings, they like to use a good amount of their “RED” pepper.)

In the winter time, we find an additional use for salt on icy roads and sidewalks. The melting of the ice can prevent your falling and breaking an arm or leg. Likewise the salt of the Word can preserve you and keep you from falling and breaking your “covenant by sacrifice.”

Calcium chloride, or salt, isn’t always found in a pure state since in some places, sulphates and carbonates have to be filtered out. There are also various kinds of salt such as sea, mineral, rock and refined. Coarse and impure salt could be said to represent coarse and impure words. However, a pure grain of salt, always in the form of a cube, is quite clear under magnification, and, if used as a crystal with a beam of light projected through it, radiates all the colors of the rainbow.

Likewise, the beauty of God’s Word should shine out through us and radiate with as little obstruction as possible. In this sense of light being projected through “salt crystals,” we are “the light of the world” as well as “the salt of the earth.” In the Harvest Time it took Bro. Russell to refine and classify topically the salt of the Word for use on the Lord’s table. His work helps us to season our words more graciously also. A word of caution should be stated regarding the use of “Scriptural salt.” We know it can be watered down until it has no savor, nor any preserving effect, nor sanctifying influence.

Another symbol is used in the expression “he’s an old salt,” referring to an old experienced sailor. In some respects, the old experienced Christian is an “old salt,” having been victorious through many storms on life’s tempestuous sea.

We remember our Lord used the symbol of salt to teach important lessons, both under the old dispensation of the Law and under the new dispensation of Grace. For instance, salt was an important element in the Jewish sacrifices. The covenant mentioned in Num. 18:19 and 2 Chron. 13:5 is called “A covenant of salt.” Salt was to be offered in sacrifice with the best of oil, wine, fruit, sheep, cows and goats. This was also known as “a

covenant of faithfulness.” In Ezra 6:9 salt had to be included in the offering to God, along with the animals, wheat, wine and oil, and this was to be done “without fail.” In Ezek. 43:23 we read that ALL the animals had to be without blemish and the priest cast salt on them for a burnt offering. Thus the old Testament Scriptures tell us that salt was used in the sacrifices, as a symbol of purity and faithfulness.

You know Job asks a couple of good questions in 6:6: “can that which is unsavory be eaten without salt? or is there any taste in the white of an egg?” This is why many people find the Scriptures unsavory and tasteless, or even bitter. They lack the proper application or method of Scriptural Salting that we are privileged to enjoy by the Grace of God.

But to continue regarding sacrificing, we read in Lev. 2:13 of the importance of salt. “Every oblation of thy meat offering shalt thou season with salt: neither shalt thou suffer the salt of the covenant of God to be lacking from thy meat offering. With all thine offerings thou shalt offer salt.” It is very evident that the Lord was trying to impress upon the Israelites, through the symbol of salt, their need of being faithful to the Lord and His law. You recall they ended up faithless or “salt-less.”

We read in 2 Kings 2:21 that by a “Thus saith the Lord,” Elisha used salt in the miracle of healing impure waters—“And Elisha went forth unto the spring of the waters and cast the salt in there and said, Thus saith the Lord, I have healed these waters; there shall not be from thence any more death or barren land.”

Like Elisha, we too should endeavor to cast “Scriptural salt” into impure and brackish waters—by precept and example, so that the ministry be not blamed and by all means a “Thus saith the Lord.” In the Millennium, impure waters, or teachings are purified by the former “salt class” reigning with Christ.

The symbolism of salt, as referred to, is one of faithfulness and of a healing and purifying influence. It preserves that which is good, cleanses impurities and protects a sacrifice from injury and decay. Hence our Lord made a significant comparison when He said “Ye are the salt of the earth.” We are also called the “prudent class” or “wise virgin” class in handling the Lord’s affairs.

When we made our consecration and covenant by sacrifice, did any of us think we would be getting into the “salt business” with the Lord and “mining” it so to speak? This “salt class” is a preservative in society not because of their example primarily (because we are considered fools, by the world, for Christ’s sake) but rather because our Father will not permit the winds of anarchy to be loosed as long as the “salt class” has not finished its course this side of the veil.

Being the “salt of the earth” also involves a great responsibility on our part; first, toward our Heavenly Father, with whom we made our covenant; second, toward the Truth, our Lord of John 14:6; third, toward our brethren in Christ; and fourth, toward the world in general.

As “salt” we are included in Paul’s words of Gal. 3:29, “If ye be Christ’s then are ye Abraham’s seed and heirs according to the promise.” Thus by God’s grace we are exalted to fellowship and joint-heirs with Christ and though in “heavenly places” (Eph. 1:3) we should bear in mind that one of our missions is bringing blessings to the world of mankind. As one brother said years ago, regarding our work, “it won’t be all up there and none down here.” Even now, before the time of the general blessing of mankind we are to be a blessing by word, deed and example. As Paul calls to our attention in Gal. 6:10, “As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith.” Also in Col. 4:5, 6 we are exhorted to “walk in wisdom toward them that are without, redeeming the time.” (Remember Christ is our wisdom—1 Cor. 1:30.) And we are to let our “speech be always with grace and seasoned with salt” in order to “answer every man.” Isn’t this the way we are to use the “Scriptural salt” of purity, faithfulness, righteousness and Truth properly?

As “The salt of the earth” we are to be generous, kind and loving in dealing with the world. We should understand them although they do not understand us, or the Lord. This is because we are not of the world—its selfish aims and ambition for self glorification. Our actions should speak as loud as our words, since their COMBINED testimony is then more convincing and of greater influence. What greater testimony can be given as “the salt of the earth” than that of walking with God? As Micah 6:8 states, we are to “do justly, love mercy and walk humbly” just three of many other things in our Christian walk.

In Mark 9:49, 50 our Lord introduces “fire” and “peace” in our subject. He tells His disciples—“Everyone shall be salted with fire. Salt is good, but if the salt have lost his saltiness, wherewith will ye season it?” Have salt in yourselves and have peace one with another. Here our Lord is referring to the fact that His disciples would be tried “with fire” but if they had “salt” in themselves, they would be purified, made righteous and experience “peace.” “Spiritual salt” would have all these edifying influences. If then, we do not have this “salt,” our Lord refers to in ourselves, how can we be “the salt of the earth” or experience His “peace”?

Sometimes our tears can indicate the amount of “salt” in ourselves and whether or not we are sympathetic, understanding and compassionate under-priests. The shortest yet most poignant Scripture in the Bible is John 11:35. It states simply that “Jesus wept.” Don’t you think there was salt in those tears? Also when Jesus wept over Jerusalem—Luke 19:41?

If we are not sincerely trying to be righteous, how can we expect to be the examples of 1 Tim. 4:12, or the influence our Lord calls to our attention in Mark 9? How else can we eventually obtain our goal, which is Christ? Lip service or outward profession is no substitute for sincere holiness. A mere profession has no purifying properties; nor can such an attitude fulfill our responsibilities to our Lord, the Truth or the brethren, or even to our fellowmen. Mainly by the “salt of holiness” in ourselves can we be “known and read of all men” (2 Cor. 3:2) to the praise, honor and glory of our Heavenly Father.

Back in the days of King Artaxerxes his subjects were to be “salted with the salt of the King’s palace.” This meant they were bound by sacred obligations of loyalty to their king. How much more so should the Lord’s servants be subject and loyal to their King? Unique among all kings, He was the only King to die for ALL His subjects.

So today, the expression “to eat bread and salt together” is one of mutual understanding, love and trust. This helps us to realize more fully why the Israelites were to use salt “without fail,” in obeying God. This also helps us to understand that, before the Lord’s disciples died, or were put to death, they learned the full meaning of “eating bread and salt together” with the Master. At first the disciples did not realize the amount of sacrifice, love and trust that was involved in following the Lord—but they did before their course was ended.

As with the twelve, so with us. We too, are to realize, if we have not already, how much sacrifice, love and trust it really takes to be partakers of the bread of life—seasoned with salt. It takes so much now to be “the salt of the earth” before our glorification in Heaven.

Using the symbol of salt, our Lord adds a word of warning—“If the salt have lost his savor, wherewith shall it be salted? It is thenceforth good for nothing, but to be cast out, and trodden underfoot of men.” Similarly Paul writes in Heb. 6:4-6, “For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened and tasted of the good word of God, and the Heavenly gift and were made partakers of the Holy Spirit; if they shall fall away, to renew them again unto repentance; seeing they crucify to themselves, the Son of God afresh, and put Him to an open shame.”

We can have great pity for this class who lost the salt wherewith they were salted in their first love. Consequently the lesson is clear for those who remain “the salt of the earth” that they do not lose THEIR savor.