

SALT AND LIGHT

by

D. James Kennedy

A.B., M.Div., M.Th., D.D., D.Sac.Lit., Ph.D.,
Litt.D., D.Sac.Theol., D.Humane Let.

“Ye are the salt of the earth: but if the salt have lost his savor, wherewith shall it be salted? it is thenceforth good for nothing, but to be cast out, and to be trodden under foot of men. Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on an hill cannot be hid.”

—Matthew 5:13–14

Some years ago a man came into a small “mom and pop” grocery store and asked this question: “Do you sell salt?” To which pop replied: “Ha! Do we sell salt? Come look.” He showed him a whole side wall—nothing but salt.

He said, “Do we sell salt? Come with me.” He took him into the back room—wall to wall, nothing but salt. “Oh, do we sell salt? Look at this.” He took him down into this huge basement and there, wall to wall, floor to ceiling, aisle after aisle, nothing but salt. He said! “Do we sell salt? No, we don’t sell salt. But that salt salesman—does he sell salt!?”

Now we don’t sell salt here—we make it! Think about it. This is a salt factory. That is what every church ought to be. When a dying, decaying, corrupting, decomposing soul comes into contact with Jesus Christ, who is life itself, then he is cured and cleansed and made alive, and he is transformed into the salt of the earth.

“Ye are the salt of the earth,” said Jesus. That is an astonishing statement and I want to fix our attention on its significance today. Though Christ said we were both salt and light, let us look at the former.

The setting: A handful of people standing beside a lake in a nondescript corner of the Roman Empire and Jesus says to them: “You are the salt of the earth.” Amazing! Does something of the weight of that rest upon you? Things are corrupting badly in Mongolia. You had better get going. Africa is a mess. Take off! It is rotten in Turkmenistan. We need some salt to stop the rot over there.

Yet, amazing as it may seem, this astonishing statement and prophecy has turned out to be true. Christians, the followers of Jesus Christ, have in fact proved to be, more than anyone else, the preservatives of decency and morality in the world. It was an incredible statement made by Jesus to just a few people way back then.

Salt acts as a preservative. It stands with feet spread, hands on hips, arms akimbo, across the threshold of the door that leads to all of the purity and decency and morality that exists in the world and says to everything that would corrupt, everything that would pollute, everything that would decay: “Thus far, and no farther shalt thou go.” That is what *we* ought to be doing if we are the salt of the earth.

Vance Havner said, “Humanity is a decaying carcass awaiting the vultures of judgment.” So, my friends, it really comes down to this: We are either the carcass or the salt. Which are you today?

SALT AS A PRESERVATIVE

Obviously, the first thing that salt does, it preserves. This would have been much more obvious to those ancient fisherman beside the Sea of Galilee than it is to us, since the advent of refrigeration. But in that day it was salt which was almost the only preservative they had. Those fisherman who caught their fish in the Sea of Galilee shipped many of them to Samaria and to Jerusalem. They knew that without salt their fish would be spoiled before they ever got to market, especially in those hot temperatures in Israel. “Ye are the salt of the earth.” They understood clearly what was meant by the illusion; that metaphor did not fall on deaf ears. No doubt they were astonished that *they* would be the salt of the earth.

Salt was exceedingly valuable in those days. In some places and times in history salt has been used for money. Did you ever hear of a man who was “worth his salt”? Salt has also been used in some cultures as gifts. You got salt for your birthday because it was rare.

However, for salt to preserve meat from corruption, it must have direct contact. The modern word is “involvement.” However, today there are many Christians who have little involvement with the corrupting meat of this world. We have our own churches, our own schools, our own societies, our own sports teams, our own health insurance, our own fellowship groups, our own everything, and sometimes it is almost impossible to get the salt out of the salt shaker. It is so “comfy” in there. By the way, who wants to get rubbed all over that rotting meat, anyway? So, that direct contact is often avoided as much as possible.

I wonder how many unbelievers you have any kind of real social contact with. We ought not to be seeking our fulfillment from them, because they can’t provide it. If we truly are a Christian we have a heart that has been changed. It is a God-shaped blank, and we know that only God can fill it. Jesus went among sinners in order that He might give to them, not in order that He might get. We need to have contact if we are going to preserve. In this society of ours, when there are so many corrupting influences, Christians need to make contact with that world. We should be those who say no to all of the influences that would tend to corrupt society.

Somebody told me some while ago they were thinking about taking a step downward into something that was—obviously they must have known—immoral, something which was offensive to decent tastes. I was told from the inside that they were very concerned about what you and other Christians were going to say about it. So they took the step very gingerly and waited for the reaction. They waited and waited. A couple of people wrote letters and that was it, and so they continued. And so the world goes, down one step, and then down another and another, because the salt is not there to confront the decay and to stop it in its tracks when it so easily could.

How much, dear friend, are you acting as a preservative for this society. You could do far more than you imagine. You could change many things in this society if you would just sprinkle some of that salt upon some of that decaying meat. Let your voice be heard. Don't be afraid. We can have an influence . . . a preservative influence everywhere we go.

I have always appreciated a story I once read about General Robert E. Lee, who though he had a blind spot, not uncommon in his day, about slavery, was nevertheless a Christian man and a gentleman. One day a number of people were standing around in a large circle. They were just talking. One of the men said, "I heard a good joke the other day." Then he looked around and said, "I just wanted to make sure there were no ladies present."

Lee said, "Sir, I would remind you there are gentlemen present." Do you think that joke was told? No way.

SALT STINGS

Someone says, "I heard a funny story the other day. Want to hear it?" Just say, "Sure, I love clean jokes." That will be salt. If they haven't got one, you tell one, because you see, another quality about salt, is it not only preserves, but also, it stings. Rub some salt into a wound—ouch! That hurts. And in a society that is filled with wounds and bruises and putrefying sores, they don't always welcome salt, as I have discovered many times. In fact, they can be positively offended by it. That, of course, is something that goes with the territory of being a follower of Jesus Christ.

Billy Sunday, who was the "Billy Graham" of maybe seventy-five years ago—preached boldly against sin and immorality in his day. One man came to him and said, "Mr. Sunday, you rub the fur the wrong way."

He said, "No, I don't. Let the cat turn around."

Last night at our concluding meeting of the Reclaiming America for Christ Conference, this church was packed with people who had come to hear marine Lieutenant Clebe McClary speak. He had had his left arm blown off as well as his one eye and half of his face. But that didn't keep him from still leading his platoon there on the top of that lonely hill in Vietnam. He said when he looked back at the sixties, when he went to college, he couldn't figure out what some of those people were there for. They weren't there to learn because they wouldn't study. They weren't there to earn because they wouldn't work. Obviously they were there to burn, because he

watched them burn a flag. That act caused him to enlist in the marines. He said what they should have done was “turn.” Let the cat turn around.

I have always been impressed by the fact that after waiting hundreds of billions of trillions of eons of time, all during which time God knew and Christ knew that one day He would be coming into this world, that God himself would come to speak to His creatures. No doubt He had given much thought to what He would say. When He appeared, the first thing Jesus said, having pondered it for trillions of eons, was, “Turn.” He said, “Let the cat turn around.” That is a loose translation of the Greek. The word is *metanoeo* and it means “repent, turn around.” The first thing Jesus said was “Repent and believe the gospel.” He said later, **“Except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish” (Luke 13:3)**. So salt does irritate, it does sting. Nevertheless, we are called upon to be that salt. Not only am I, but you are, as well.

Peter Marshall, the chaplain to the Senate, said that when the apostles preached, there were either riots or regeneration. Today we get a pat on the hand and a “nice sermon, pastor.”

Today, there is a new brand of Christianity around, Havner tells us. It is a new non-irritating brand of Christianity. It is without offense and without effect. Ah, but dear friends, Jesus didn’t call us to be the “sugar of the world.” He called us to be the “salt of the earth.”

I want to tell you something, I would much prefer to be the sugar of the world. I would be delighted to have all men think well of me. I want you to know that I don’t like it when people carry signs and say that I am a Nazi and a hater, a fascist, a Khomeini and all sorts of other lies. I don’t like it when the newspapers print nasty things about me. I really don’t like that at all. Would you? I would much rather be Uncle Sugar Daddy, and everybody would love me. But **“Woe unto you, when all men shall speak well of you! for so did their fathers to the false prophets” (Luke 6:26)**. **“Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven” (Matthew 5:12)**.

How much persecution for Christ’s sake have you endured? Oh, we all endure some persecution for we are offensive, because we are obnoxious, and that should not be. But how much persecution do we endure for Christ’s sake? The Bible says, **“Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution” II Timothy 3:12)**. Christ said, **“But be of good cheer; I have overcome the world (John 16:33)**.

SALT HEALS

We are also not called to be the vinegar of the world—neither the sugar nor the vinegar. But we are called to be salt, because salt not only stings, it also purifies and cures and heals. There is nothing like hot salt water for a bad throat, as every speaker and singer knows, and many others, as well. So we should not only irritate, if need be, if the cat won’t turn around but also, we should be the healing balm. And salt is that. In the first part of Matthew, chapter 5. Christ has described all the virtues and qualities of the Christian life. If we possess these qualities that Christ has given us, then we will be a healing balm to others and people will come to us.

Have you ever noticed that so many people will revile Christians and they will say all manner of evil against them falsely . . . until they get into trouble? Then where do they go? So many of them will come to a Christian—the only person they know who prays—and ask them to pray for them. They ask them to help because they know they have seen somebody who has received help, whose life has been cured and healed by Christ, and they want the same sort of thing.

SALT SEASONS

Something salt does as well is that it seasons things. It gives zest and tang and flavor to life, and so ought we too. We are not called upon to be the wet blankets of the world, but rather we should be salt.

What is salt? A young boy defined salt as that stuff that tastes bad when it's not there. We should have the elements of joy bubbling up in us—a smile, a laugh, happiness. Christ makes us happy. Blessed are ye. Blessed are ye. Blessed are they. Blessed are they, said Christ. Blessed means happy, and so the Christian should have a happy face. Some Christians have that deep down joy . . . so deep down you would need an oil derrick to get it up. The only thing that smiles is between their toes.

Do we have that kind of joy, that kind of smile that makes other people happy when we come into the room? Do we have a positive attitude, or are we always finding what is wrong with everything? Are we always criticizing and judging and faultfinding and negative? That attitude doesn't attract anyone. We should have love in our hearts. Ah, dear friends, the Christian is called upon to love everyone. We are to love our enemies, as well. We are to love those who disagree with us. We are to love those who are in bondage to sin.

The Christian, indeed, is called upon to hate sin, but he is ever called upon to love the sinner, to pray for him, to seek his well-being and to witness to him. Now, sometimes, for some astonishing reason, those sinners don't welcome that witness because it smarts, it stings, it irritates because of their wounds. Nevertheless, though we may be rejected, we are called upon to bear that kind of a positive witness for Jesus Christ.

SALT CAUSES THIRST

Let me say, lastly, that salt also makes you thirsty. You have heard the cliché, "You can lead a horse to water, but you can't make him drink." I have said many times that any horse you can lead to water, I can make drink. It doesn't take a rocket scientist, and I don't know a whole lot about horses. But I am quite certain that if you place salt tablets in the horse's cheeks, you had just better get out of the way or you are going to get water splashed on you. That horse is going to get thirsty.

Christians ought to make the world thirsty for the water of life, thirsty for the way of Christ, thirsty for righteousness and holiness and goodness, thirsty for the real thing. We have been told "Coke is the real thing." Well, *Christ is the real thing*. He is the real joy, the real peace, the real love, the only real thing that can fill the empty hearts of men.

How many people have you made thirsty for the water of life? How many people have ever said to you, “I don’t know what it is that you have, but whatever it is, I want it.” How many times do we hear just the opposite: “If that is Christianity, I don’t want any part of it.”

I remember visiting a couple some time ago. The wife, I discovered, had accepted Christ about a year before and the husband was very clearly not a Christian. We were talking away, and then he said something that I was afraid he might say. He said to me, “Well, you know, about a year ago my wife got religion.”

I thought, “Oh, oh, here it comes! I might as well pack up and go home.”

He said, “I don’t know what it is, but she has been more forgiving and she has been more joyful, and seems to be more peaceful than any time in our entire marriage. I don’t know what it is, but whatever she’s got, I’d like to have it.”

I said, “Praise the Lord. Just happen to have brought some with me.”

Now that lady was the salt of the earth and the salt of her home, as well. That is what Christ calls all of us to be. Make people thirsty for the water of life, and then give them a drink . . . give them a drink of that water of life. Share with them the glad tidings—that sparkling, bubbling well of water Christ offers to us of life everlasting. Share the good news of the Gospel with them.

Somebody said that too many Christians are like Arctic rivers: they are frozen at the mouth. How about you? Are you assuaging the thirst of any today? God grant to all of us that we might, in truth, become the salt of the earth, lest having lost our savor—our saltiness—we become good for nothing but to be cast out and trodden under foot of men.

PRAYER: Dear Lord Jesus, let us seek ye day by day, hour by hour. Let us immerse ourselves in Thy word and seek Thy face in prayer that we may become more like Thee. Lord, make us the salt of the earth and may others be drawn to Thee as they are made thirsty for the water of life. Grant us the courage to stand against the corruption of our time. We ask it, O Christ, in Thy holy name. Amen.

Sermon delivered by Dr. D. James Kennedy on March 19, 1995, at Coral Ridge Presbyterian Church in Fort Lauderdale, Florida.

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