

## BIBLE STUDIES - WHO ARE YOU?

SERIES: **NAMES GOD USES FOR CHRISTIANS**  
***“A good name is to be more desired than great wealth.” (Prov. 22:1)***

Lesson #4 **“SALT”**

**Matthew 5:13**

***“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.”***

Jesus used the analogy of salt when illustrating the value of His followers to society. Salt, is a valuable and necessary substance. It is commonly known and needed all over the world. Salt mines are located in various parts of the world, however, we are told that there is more salt in the oceans of the world than there is on the land mass. Some seas are more salty than others. For instance, a ton of Pacific Ocean water when evaporated yields 79 lbs. of salt. A ton of Atlantic Ocean water yields 81 lbs. of salt. However, a ton of water from the Dead Sea, or Salt Sea, as it is often called, yields 187 lbs. of salt.

Jesus was not very far from the Dead Sea or Salt Sea when He said to His disciples, “You are the salt of the earth.” Why did Jesus use such a common substance to describe His disciples? I will give the answer in three parts: the history of salt, the theology of salt and the ministry of salt.

**THE HISTORY OF SALT**

Some historical background on the value of salt will help us appreciate more what Jesus was saying when He said “you are the salt of the earth.”

**Some Historical Background**

Salt has a very interesting history. I have a book in my library titled: “Salt: A World History” by Mark Kurlansky. It is a volume of almost 500 pages. Would you believe, 500 pages about salt?

*Salt Has a Medicinal Aspect To It*

We do not usually realize the importance of salt in connection with life. In our bloodstream there is always an exact percentage of salt, and any great deviation from this amount could result in sickness and even death. Salt is precious because it is necessary to our lives.

*Salt Has A Societal Aspect To It*

It is so vital to human survival that wars have been fought over it and history records the struggle of tribes, cultures and nations in what are referred to as “Salt Wars.” Empires have been founded upon it and have collapsed without it. Early civilizations grew up around salt deposits. This was true in the Jordan Valley and the Dead Sea areas, in England, France and Germany. The earliest settlements in China were near the Yellow River salt deposits.

### *Salt Has A Commercial Aspect To It*

One of the oldest roads in Europe is the Via Salaria, meaning “Salt Road”. It was built in 400 B.C. to transport salt from the coast to the central regions of Italy. Parts of the road are in use today. In Africa, families in the salt starved interior sold their children into slavery for salt. Roman soldiers were often paid their wages in salt. This was called their “salarium” from which we get our word “salary”. “Salary” literally means, “salt money”. We say, “that person is not worth his salt.” That statement originated in days past when people put great value upon salt.

As early as the 6<sup>th</sup> century, in the Sub-Sahara region of Africa, Moorish merchants routinely traded gold ounce for ounce for salt. In New Guinea a missionary told me of another missionary who paid the laborers who built his house their wages in salt. While in New Guinea I saw a man accompanied by his villagers going to another village to buy a bride. They were carrying sacks of salt as the bride payment! I met a man in China who told me that there was a shortage of salt in his home province in northern China and that salt was used for money.

### *Salt Has A Spiritual Aspect To It*

The ancient poet Homer called salt “divine.” Plato said that salt was “the substance of the gods.” But Jesus used the analogy of salt to describe His followers – “You are the salt of the earth”, He said.

The above is just some of the History of salt. My purpose is to show that when Jesus said, “You are the salt of the earth” He was saying, “You are very valuable to society.” The true Christian is precious! We are of great value to society, though society may think otherwise.

**Illust.** Think of the Apostle Paul and his ship-wreck experience (Acts 27): there he was out on that storm-swept sea with 276 other passengers. The howling tempest seemed to mean sure destruction. But Paul saved the day! He was praying and God told him how to save the ship and the passengers. They all survived because of just one grain of the Savior’s salt! Certainly Paul was of great value to those passengers. Fellow travelers on planet earth should benefit from our presence among them!

## THE THEOLOGY OF SALT

The truth that I want to emphasize now, is that Jesus was not talking about sodium chloride, but saline saints! Consider three principles that Jesus emphasized. He spoke about:

### ***The Region For Salt.***

Jesus said, “you are the salt of the *earth*”, He did not say, “you are the salt of *heaven*.” Heaven does not need the benefits of salt. Neither did He say, “you are the salt of the *church*.” Salt, to be effective, must get out into the world of decay and corruption.

**Illust.** Churches have been described as salt boxes with steeples on top. The church exists more for the world’s sake than it does for its own sake! The sad thing to note is that the earth

has not yet been completely salted! “Untold millions are still untold, untold millions are outside the fold.” Jesus’ constant plea is something like this, “Please pass the salt.”

### ***The Regression Of Salt.***

Jesus said, “If the salt has lost its saltiness ...” i.e. its flavor. The Palestine salt of Jesus day lost its saltiness with rain, wind and age. He likens the Christian who has lost his influence to salt that has lost its saltiness. Have you lost your saintly saltiness? Saintly salt:

- Acts as a preservative in a corrupt society;
- Creates thirst;
- Promotes healing;
- Has a purifying effect upon society.

When our presence does not accomplish the above, our profession and witness is ignored.

### ***The Rejection Of Salt.***

Jesus said, “It is good for nothing but to be thrown out and trampled under foot by men.” Again, “Salt is good; but if the salt has lost its flavor, how shall it be seasoned? It is neither fit for the land nor for the dunghill, but men throw it out. He who has ears to hear, let him hear!” (Luke 14:34-35)

A Christian who has no holy influence in society is good for nothing! That is not my statement, it is Jesus statement! Note the words “thrown out.” In I Cor. 9:27 Paul speaks of becoming a “castaway”. It is basically the same thing. It is possible for a Christian to lose his/her testimony and influence; for his character to deteriorate so that he becomes powerless. In such a case the world will despise, ridicule and reject his Christianity and it will be “trodden under foot.”

**Illust.** There is a salt substitute on the market called “No Salt.” It is mainly for persons who must reduce their salt intake. It looks like salt, it sprinkles like salt and tastes a little like salt but it is not salt. It does not retard decay, create thirst and has no medicinal qualities. It is “artificial salt”. There are many professing Christians who are not genuine salt but are like that salt substitute. They gather in the “Salt Box” every Sunday, but they have no influence for God and good in this rotten world.

So much for our brief consideration of the history and theology of salt. Now, let us move to the heart of Jesus’ statement, “You are the salt of the earth.”

## **THE MINISTRY OF SALT**

Every true believer has a ministry. We are here in this sinful world to minister generous sprinklings of heaven’s salt into our corrupt society. Think about the challenge that is before us in the words of Jesus: “You are the salt of the earth”.

There are three self-evident and encouraging truths regarding saintly salt that will help us understand our ministry as saline saints:

***Corruption Is Present When Salt Is Absent.***

The word, “corruption” and its cognates appear in the Bible some 85 times. It means spoiled, filthy, rotten, putrefaction, poisonous, infectious, unsound and/or decayed or decaying. The word is used to describe the nature of sin, sinful thoughts, the sinful nature of mankind, sinners, the world system, etc.

Peter writes encourages us to “escape the corruption that is in the world” in II Peter 1:4. It is in this setting of corruption that Jesus calls Christians “salt.” And when salt is weakest, corruption and decay are strongest. The only hope for America and the world is for generous sprinklings of the Savior’s salt! Therefore, salt the neighborhood where you are!

***Salt Has Power Out Of Proportion To Its Size.***

Therefore, do not under estimate your importance to the work of Christ! It is not the quantity of salt that is most important but the quality of the salt! Little is much if God is in it!

**Illust.** A baked potato does not need a pile of salt equal to the size of the potato to be effective. A few sprinkles will influence the whole potato. A few genuine Christians can be a powerful influence though small in number. Do you remember Abraham interceding for the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah? Because of Abraham’s praying, God agreed to spare the cities if only 10 righteous people could be found in it! We do not need to be many to be much – but we do need to be genuine!

***There Is No Impact Without Contact.***

If there is the internal imprint of heaven in our lives, we will have an external impact on earth. A sack of salt in the corner of the meat market will never retard spoilage. In order to impede decay and do what salt is supposed to do it must come in contact with the meat. So it is with the Christian! We can be strong in Church with other “salts” but weak in the community.

Think of some who have been a great impact for God and good because they came in contact with society:

- Noah was salt in the old world before the flood;
- Joseph was salt in Egypt;
- Elijah was salt for God there on Mt. Carmel;
- Daniel was salt in the king’s court;
- The disciples of Christ were salt in their world;
- Paul was salt in the Roman Empire;
- John Knox, Martin Luther and the Reformation Fathers were salt in Europe in earlier centuries;
- Christians today can and should make an impact upon society! Remember, no impact without contact!

**CONCLUSION**

“You are the salt of the earth.” What powerful and promising words! There is a history of salt; there is a theology of salt and there is a ministry of salt.

**Illust.** In the middle ages, salt was so valued that any waste of it was considered a portent of doom to come. This is seen in Leonardo da Vinci’s painting of “The Last Supper”. If you will look closely at the painting you will see that the scowling Judas is shown with an overturned salt shaker in front of him and the salt is spilling out. Judas’ life was a wasted life. Da Vinci knew the implication of wasted salt. Are you wasting your sanctified influence? It is interesting that Jesus did not say, “give them salt” – He said “you are salt!” Are you a Saline Saint?

**Illust.** An archeologist was studying a rock formation that was encrusted with salt. He broke off a piece of salt from the exterior of the formation and tasted it. It had no taste at all. He dug farther into the formation and struck a white seam running through the rock. He chipped off a piece of this white salt and tasted it and then noted in his record, “The salt that is closest to the rock is the saltiest.” The secret of Saline Saints is this: we must stay close to the Rock Christ Jesus our Lord if we are to retain our flavor and have His favor!

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