

## The Salt Life – February 9, 2020 – Pastor Donna Doutt – Matthew 5:13-20

I remember the first time I saw a “Salt Life” bumper sticker. I was walking my dog, and I saw it on the back of a car in a driveway. Being a fan of bumper stickers, I wondered to myself, “Hmmmm...what does that mean?” Is it a restaurant chain? Is it a town by a beach? What’s up with that?”

Then I went to Florida, and I saw those bumper stickers everywhere. I thought, “I must be getting close!” I thought for sure it was a restaurant chain. But having never found a “Salt Life” restaurant, I did the only sensible thing...I Googled it!

As it turns out “Salt Life” was originally a bumper sticker used to denote a surfer, bodyboarder, or general beach bum whose life centered around the ocean or related beach-going activities. Have you ever seen a 30 or 40 year old person who primary activity in life is surfing and building their tan? That person could legitimately sport a salt life bumper sticker on their woody wagon.

<sup>1</sup>The Urban Dictionary explains that, “Unfortunately the trend spread to senior citizens, wanna-be hipsters, soccer moms, and other persons wishing to inform the world that yes, they too have visited the beach at some point in life and they have the sticker to prove it.”

You may not be a surfer, but you may lay claim to the “salt life” yourself. Why? Because you’re a Christian!

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=Salt%20Life>

Our scripture last week presented the Sermon on the Mount that laid out for us all the virtues of a Christian. Then, without skipping a beat, it goes straight into our scripture for this week telling us we salt and light.

Our scripture says, <sup>“13”</sup> “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.”

Before I became a student of the Bible, if someone would have asked me, “What does this mean, ‘salt of the earth?’ I wouldn’t have known how to answer. Or if someone told me they were insulted that Jesus told them that if I lost my saltiness I would be worthless, how would I respond to that?

Let me clear up any misconceptions you might have about that. I’m going to begin at the beginning. Back in the day, the Egyptians discovered that if they used the salt they collected from the Nile delta, they could preserve their rotting meat by cutting slits into it, and packing salt in the cuts. That made the shelf life of their meat provisions last much longer.

Then along came the Romans, and they discovered the significance of salt in the diet of their soldiers. Because here’s the thing...our bodies need salt. As the soldiers fought, they sweated, and when they did, they were losing valuable nutrients through the process. Salt is found in so many parts of our bodies: it’s in our sweat, our saliva, and our tears. It stimulates nerve cells and muscles. Without a component of salt in our bodies, our heart would fail to beat. Salt deficiencies cause mental confusion. To the Roman armies, salt because so precious that Roman soldiers were partly paid in salt. It is said to be from this that we get the word soldier – ‘sal dare’, meaning to give salt. From the same source we get ‘salarium’ and folks, that’s where the word salary comes from!

At one time, salt was traded for the same value as gold, that's how important it was to the health of civilization. It was so valuable to the Romans that they built a "salt road" to make sure there was a clear and direct route to the soldiers. That's one reason why you might hear someone say that they are "earning their salt" or "worth their salt."

So, you see, my friends, you have a legitimate claim to a "salt life" because as a follower of Jesus Christ, you are more valuable than gold to Him. Just as salt is placed between the layers in curing fish and meat, so too, you are embedded in this Christian culture. Jesus is telling us that as the salt of the earth, everywhere we go, we're going to bring the taste of heaven down to earth.

But here's another thing, the continuation of our scripture goes like this, "If you lose your saltiness, how will people taste godliness? You've lost your usefulness and will end up in the garbage."

So how DO we lose our saltiness? Well, friends, salt loses its value when other things dilute it. Here's one way to look at it,<sup>2</sup> "when salt is overpowered by the presence of other things, it loses its ability to influence." And so do we! That means we lose our ability to influence others into the way of Christian life! How can that happen?

Easy. It can happen to us before we know it. Life distracts us away. Our busy schedules create chaos of our best intentions. We skip church. We don't serve. We are too busy. We are too caught up in work, errands, social media, and sports. God's desires are no longer ours.

Don't get me wrong, I'm sure we have the best of intentions, but our saltiness becomes diluted by everything else.

When Jesus says, "If you lose your saltiness, how will people taste godliness? You've lost your usefulness and will end up in the garbage," he's referring to fertilizer salt. That's how you keep your saltiness

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<sup>2</sup> Feinberg, Margaret. *Taste and See*. Zondervan. Grand Rapids, Michigan. 2018. Print.

viable. Salt is a component of fertilizer. Plants need salt. Here's where my Master Gardener certification comes in handy. We all know (and least I think we do) that manure is a great fertilizer. However, if you just pile some fresh manure near or on a plant, it's too strong, too "hot" as they say. It needs to be broken down in some way to make it a friendlier environment for plants, and that is accomplished by adding salt. Even today, potash from the Dead Sea is used to make fertilizer. Salt breaks down the manure so that plants can absorb it.

How is knowing that the cast off salt can become fertilizer make you feel about that "salt of the earth" designation? Did you ever think of yourself as being fertilizer for Christ? You can be!

You can nourish others. You can help feed them and build them up so that Christianity continues to flourish like a well-nurtured garden.

Luke 14:34-35 in the parallel reading of this scripture takes it out just a little further, <sup>[34](#)</sup> "Salt is good; but if salt has lost its taste, how can its saltiness be restored?" <sup>[35](#)</sup> It is fit neither for the soil nor for the manure pile; they throw it away. Let anyone with ears to hear listen!"

### ***"Let anyone with ears to hear listen!"***

You, my friends are a preserving agent for Jesus, flavoring the lives of those around us. God wants us to be a preserving agent. He wants us to demonstrate the way of Jesus teaching and life. That is His vocation for us. And He's asking us to do it right here and now right where we are.

Another word that comes from the Latin root of "salt" is "salvation." We don't want to be the worthless, thrown away salt. Jesus gave us the gift of salvation when He died on the cross for us. The on-line Oxford dictionary defines "salvation" as "preservation or deliverance from harm, ruin, or loss." Hear that? "***Preservation!***" Salt preserves doesn't it?

Our scripture continues on when it proclaims also,<sup>14</sup> “*You are the light of the world. A city built on a hill cannot be hid.*<sup>15</sup> *No one after lighting a lamp puts it under the bushel basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all in the house.*<sup>16</sup> *In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven.*”

Jesus is calling His followers, “the light of the world”. In our modern society, where most of the world is lit, we can easily imagine that. But Jesus first-century listeners would be astonished at the availability and importance of light in our culture today. We use our light not only to illuminate but to communicate. Early Christians may not have understood that. It’s as if Jesus knew we could do that in this day and age. Jesus wants us, as His followers, to shine, to be visible and attractive, not to bring attention to ourselves, but to bring people to God. Again, our vocations are one of the primary means we have to reflect Christ to others.

Jesus’ teaching here challenges us as His followers to ask: How are we engaging that in our community? What positive changes are we trying to promote in the name of Christ? What impact for God are we having and demonstrating through our work?

Have we lost our saltiness? Are we standing around like burned out street lights, useless to our community?

Here’s something REALLY important about this scripture today. Did you notice, Jesus doesn’t say, “Do you want to be salt and light?” He makes a matter of fact statement. **“You are the salt of the earth.” “You are the light of the world.”** He is emphatic that you ARE what He needs. He’s designating YOU to represent Him here and now, this day, this week, this year, in this community as an extension of Him.

Remember last week at the very end of the Beatitudes, that Jesus gave the disciples the greatest commandment of all, when he said to “Love

the Lord God with all our heart, mind and soul; and our neighbors as ourselves?" If we leave here today with the mindset that we are to bring the flavor of Christ and the light of Christ to the world, then we are much more likely to fulfill that great commandment.

I invite and encourage you to be the salt and the light for Christ today. Live the salt life. Earn your bumper sticker.

Amen.