

THE TRUE DISCIPLE: THE SALT OF THE EARTH MATHEW 05:13

Introduction

There is so much in this little parable, but the main thrust is *distinctiveness*. Salt is distinctively different from the thing upon which it is put. By nature and by purpose it is different. So are believers. They are distinctively different by nature and by purpose. *By nature* believers are a new creation, born of God (2 Cor. 5:17; 1 Pet. 1:23); *by purpose* believers are to penetrate and change the very taste of the earth. They are like salt.

- I The disciples' character: salt (v. 13).
- II The disciples' place to salt: the earth (v. 13).
- III The disciples' mission: to salt the earth (v. 13).
- IV The disciples' danger: becoming useless and destructive (v. 13).

I. *Mathew 05:13 The Salt of the Earth*

The disciples' character is like salt. Believers are *called and designed* (made) to be the salt of the earth. Several things can be said about salt that point out just what Jesus means.

1. Salt is *distinctive*. It is totally different from the food or object upon which it is put. The power of salt lies in this difference. Believers, just as salt, are to be different from the world. The power of their lives and their testimony lies in their being different and distinctive. They are to "keep [themselves] from being polluted by the world" (Jas. 1:27).

Rom 12:2 *Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is — his good, pleasing and perfect will.*

2 Cor 6:17-18 *"Therefore come out from them and be separate, says the Lord. Touch no unclean thing, and I will receive you. I will be a Father to you, and you will be my sons and daughters," says the Lord Almighty.*

James 1:27 *Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world.*

1 John 2:15-16 *Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For everything in the world — the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does — comes not from the Father but from the world.*

2. Salt *preserves*. It keeps things from going bad and decaying. It cleanses and disinfects. Believers, just as salt, are to cleanse and preserve the world. They are to
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disinfect the world and keep the germs of the world from causing things to go bad. They are to save the world from corruption.

1 Pet 1:22-25 Now that you have purified yourselves by obeying the truth so that you have sincere love for your brothers, love one another deeply, from the heart. For you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring word of God. For, "All men are like grass, and all their glory is like the flowers of the field; the grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of the Lord stands forever." And this is the word that was preached to you.

3. Salt *penetrates*. It inserts a new quality; substance, and life. It changes that upon which it is put. Believers are likewise to penetrate the world and insert a new life into it.

2 Cor 5:17 Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!

Eph 4:24 And to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.

Col 3:10 And have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator.

4. Salt *flavours*. It influences the taste of things. It takes a bland, tasteless food and makes it enjoyable. Believers are to so flavour and influence the world for Christ. They are to take the bland and the tasteless and salt them, making them enjoyable and desirable within the world.

Gal 5:22-23 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law.

1 John 1:3 We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ.

5. Salt is *quiet*. It is visible, but it works silently, making no noise whatsoever during its work. Believers, the salt of the earth, are to work quietly and discreetly.

1 Pet 3:4 Instead, it should be that of your inner self, the unfading beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is of great worth in God's sight.

6. Salt *spreads*. Its flavour spreads all around. A sprinkle of salt has a widespread effect. A believer's salt spreads far and wide.

Acts 4:20 For we cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard.

Col 4:13 I vouch for him that he is working hard for you and for those at Laodicea and Hierapolis.

1 Pet 3:15 But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect.

1 Th 4:11-12 Make it your ambition to lead a quiet life, to mind your own business and to work with your hands, just as we told you, so that your daily life may win the respect of outsiders and so that you will not be dependent on anybody.

7. Salt is *irrepressible*. Once applied, it cannot be stopped. A believer's salt, his testimony, is irrepressible; it cannot be stopped.

Isa 55:10-11 As the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return to it without watering the earth and making it bud and flourish, so that it yields seed for the sower and bread for the eater, so is my word that goes out from my mouth: It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it.

II. *Mathew 05:13 The Place of Ministry*

The disciples' place of ministry is the earth. The world is the place where believers are to move about and salt (live and minister). Why? Because the World is (1) bland and tasteless, (2) decaying and rotting, (3) corrupting and foul.

Thought 1. Too many believers live as though they are already in heaven: safe and secure from all harm. They do not pay enough attention to this earth: its needs, its turning bad, its decay, its corruption. While on this earth, believers are called to salt and flavour the earth, not heaven.

Thought 2. In one sense the church is the salt factory and the world is the market place for the salt. Too much salt is being stored and locked up at the church. There is not enough salt being sent out into the market-place. The result? The world is not being salted and flavoured enough.

Luke 10:2 He told them, "The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field."

John 4:35 "Do you not say, 'Four months more and then the harvest'? I tell you, open your eyes and look at the fields! They are ripe for harvest."

Ga16:9 Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time He will reap a harvest if we do not give up.

III. *Mathew 05:13 The Great Mission of the Disciples*

The disciples' mission is to salt the earth. Note a critical point: believers are the salt of the earth, not of heaven. They can do nothing to salt heaven. They cannot penetrate, flavour, or preserve heaven. Any relationship whatsoever they have with heaven is a gift from heaven. However, believers are the salt of the earth; they can penetrate, flavour, and preserve the earth. But two things are necessary *before a person can salt* the earth.

1. Believers must have salt in themselves.

Mark 9:50 *“Salt is good, but if it loses its saltiness, how can you make it salty again? Have salt in yourselves, and be at peace with each other.”*

2. Believers must spread out into the world. But one thing must be known when a believer *scatters* into the world: his salt is necessary and useful. There is no salt other than the believer’s salt. There is nothing else that can salt the earth, nothing whatsoever. The task is upon the believer alone. The success of the mission rests upon the believer and him alone.

Col 4:6 *Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone.*

Mat 28:19-20 *“Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”*

Mark 16:15 *He said to them, “Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation.”*

John 20:21 *Again Jesus said, “Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.”*

Acts 1:8 *“But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”*

1 Pet 3:15 *But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect.*

IV. Mathew 05:13 Judgment: Cast Out

The danger of the disciple is that of becoming useless and destructive. Salt does not lose its saltiness and flavour. However, in the time of Christ the salt of Palestine was gathered in such a manner that dirt and other impurities were often mixed with it. The salt was thus useless and good for nothing. In fact, it actually destroyed the fertility of the soil. Therefore, it was not only useless, but destructive. (See Mt. 25:30.) Two significant points are:

1. This is a picture of the backslider, of a believer who loses his flavour and saltiness or testimony. Three things can be said about the backslider.
 - a. He becomes useless just as salt does.
 - b. He is of no value. He may as well be cast out and trodden underfoot.
 - c. He actually destroys the fertility of some out in the world by becoming a stumbling block and by not being able to salt them.

Luke 9:62 *Jesus replied, “No one who puts his hand to the plough and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God.”*

Luke 11:26 *“Then it goes and takes seven other spirits more wicked than itself, and they go in and live there. And the final condition of that man is worse than the first.”*

Heb 10:38 *“But my righteous one will live by faith. And if he shrinks back, I will not be pleased with him.”*

2 Pet 2:20 *If they have escaped the corruption of the world by knowing our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ and are again entangled in it and overcome, they are worse off at the end than they were at the beginning.*

Rev 2:4 *Yet I hold this against you: You have forsaken your first love.*

2. If the believer’s salt loses its flavour, the believer will experience the judgment of God.

a. He will be thrown out.

Mat 5:13 *“You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled by men.*

b. He will be disqualified.

1 Cor 9:27 *No, I beat my body and make it my slave so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified for the prize.*

c. He will experience loss when he appears before the judgment seat of Christ.

2 Cor 5:10 *For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive what is due him for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad.*

1 Cor 3:11-15 *For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ. If any man builds on this foundation using gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay or straw, his work will be shown for what it is, because the Day will bring it to light. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality of each man’s work. If what he has built survives, he will receive his reward. If it is burned up, he will suffer loss; he himself will be saved, but only as one escaping through the flames.*

Thought 1. If salt loses its flavour, what is going to restore its flavour? There is nothing. Once the saltiness is gone from salt, it is gone. It can no longer salt the earth.

Thought 2. There is no one other than Christ who can salt and save a person from decay. A person who professes to have salt and remains bland, tasteless, and corruptible has no hope of ever being salted. No one else can salt him. He either lets Christ salt him or else he is never salted.

Thought 3. A person who has not been salted and saved from decay is doomed to ruin. He is good for nothing but to be thrown out. (Jn. 3:16-18; Heb. 9:27). ■