

“SALTY FOLLOWERS OF JESUS”
Isaiah 58:1-12, Psalm 112:1-10, Matthew 5:13-20
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In his book, *Led by the Carpenter* [(Thomas Nelson, 1999), p. 46], D. James Kennedy tells this wonderful account about a man who encountered salt. He says, “A man walked into a little mom-and-pop grocery store and asked, “Do you sell salt?”

“Ha!” said Pop the proprietor. “Do we sell salt! Just look!” And Pop showed the customer one entire wall of shelves stocked with nothing but salt—Morton salt, iodized salt, kosher salt, sea salt, rock salt, garlic salt, seasoning salt, Epsom salts—every kind of salt imaginable.

“Wow!” said the customer.

“You think that’s something?” said Pop with a wave of his hand. “That’s nothing! Come look.” And Pop led the customer to a back room filled with shelves and bins and cartons and barrels and boxes of salt. “Do we sell salt!” he said.

“Unbelievable!” said the customer.

“You think that’s something?” said Pop. “Come! I’ll show you salt!” And Pop led the customer down some steps into a huge basement, five times as large as the previous room, filled wall, floor, to ceiling, with every imaginable form and size and shape of salt—even huge ten-pound salt licks for the cow pasture.

“Incredible!” said the customer. “You really do sell salt!”

“No!” said Pop. “That’s just the problem! We never sell salt! But that salt salesman—Hoo-boy! Does *he* sell salt!”

“Salt that stays on the shelf doesn’t do any good at all.”¹ The question is, what is the good of having salt if it is not used for the purpose of contributing to the lives of our families and those around us? What good is salt if it is not used in our daily living? If salt is not used, all of its healing and flavoring and working contributions does nothing for anyone. Salt must be used to bring about anything

¹ (PreachingToday.com, *Perfect Illustrations*, [Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 2002] pg. 80)

good from it. Salt has to be put into action in order to allow many others to gain its benefits. Salt must be shared and used if we are to see anything good come from it.

Here in Wisconsin, salt comes in handy to give us good driving conditions and safe sidewalks in the winter time. After it snows heavily, the snow plows are out clearing the snow off of the roads, but before they are able to do that, many people have already driven over the roads, creating snow encrusted and icy roadways. They are dangerous to drive upon, so the road crews put salt on the roads to melt the snow and ice in order to create good driving conditions. The salt melts the ice and clears off the dangerous conditions and brings safety to the drivers as well as those on the sidewalks.

But what if the city and county workers would only store the salt in their large storage sheds? Certainly there would be no snow in those sheds, but it wouldn't do the citizens of the city or county any good if the sheds were not opened, or the trucks filled with salt, and that salt distributed onto the roads. The salt has to be put to work before the road conditions will change.

In the same way, salt is just like faith in the Lord Jesus. We can have great faith in who Jesus is, we can have abundant trust in Jesus as the Savior of our souls, but unless we put that faith into action, that faith is useless. James 2:20 tells us plainly "...*faith without works is dead.*" If we keep our faith to ourselves, it becomes useless to the lives of those around us. Faith, like salt, must be put to work before anything changes.

Isaiah 58 describes it this way, "*Is not this the kind of fasting I have chosen: to loose the chains of injustice and untie the cords of the yoke, to set the oppressed free and break every yoke? Is it not to share your food with the hungry and to provide the poor wanderer with shelter - when you see the naked, to clothe them, and not to turn away from your own flesh and blood? Then your light will break forth like the dawn, and your healing will quickly appear; then your righteousness will go before you, and the glory of the Lord will be your rear guard. Then you will call, and the Lord will answer; you will cry for help, and he will say: Here am I*" (58:6-9a).

Unless our faith is put into action, there is no reward for us, and all that we claim in Jesus Christ

is useless. Then those who speak of Christianity being dead will be proven right, for if we do not practice our faith in the sight of the rest of the world, then our faith is worthless. Dead!

Psalm 112 tells us the same thing. In this “blessing of the righteous” we hear, *“Surely the righteous will never be shaken; they will be remembered forever. They will have no fear of bad news; their hearts are steadfast, trusting in the Lord. Their hearts are secure, they will have no fear; in the end they will look in triumph on their foes. They have freely scattered their gifts to the poor, their righteousness endures forever; their horn will be lifted high in honor”* (112:6-9).

The faith we have in Jesus makes us the righteousness of God. But lest we put that faith into action and work out our salvation, the world will never see it and our righteousness will be regarded as selfishness and greedy. Our faith must be shown or it will be viewed as dead, not only by the world but also by the Lord our God.

So Jesus invites us to become salty followers, making a difference in the lives of those around us. He invites us to live in such a way as to touch the lives of those who need to see an example of what faith is all about. Listen to what Jesus tells us in Matthew 5:13-20. (READ Matthew 5:13-20)

“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 underfoot” (Matthew 5:13). In our world today, we don’t quite get the full understanding of this passage. What does it mean to lose your saltiness?

In Jesus’ day, the refining of salt had not been established like it is today. For people to get salt into their foods, they would put salty sand in a bag, tie it off and then put that bag into a pot of soup or stew. When enough of the salt had leached out of the bag for the flavoring of the food, the bag was removed and stored for the next time it was needed. When finally all of the salt had been dissolved out of the sand in the bag, the bag was untied and the sand was poured out onto the walkway, no longer useful for providing salt.

But Jesus was telling us that we are the same - if we stop living our faith in the communities that we live in, when there is no more salt given for the benefit of those around us, we become like the salt-

less sand, no longer suitable to do what we have been called to do. When we stop making a difference for the Lord Jesus in our homes, in our communities, or even in our world, there is nothing left for us but to be “trampled underfoot.” So what does it look like for us to be salty followers of Jesus? How can we continue to make a difference for Jesus Christ? Listen to part of Dick Russell’s story.

“Dick Russell had a Bible study group. An unsaved man, at the urging of his wife, joined the group and discovered he really liked the acceptance he found there and especially the prayer time. He realized even Christian men had serious issues to deal with in their lives, and week after week there were praises to God for answered prayer. No stranger to family problems, the man told Dick as he called one night, ‘You know, my son was shot in the eye with a pellet gun. And the damage on the retina seems to be threatening his eyesight. I’d like for you to pray, Dick, that God would restore the sight.’ And so he agreed with him and they began to pray.

“The next day, the doctor went in and discovered two cataracts, one on each eye, along with the damage in the retina. The fella was on his face before God as the doctor was doing his work. Then, lo and behold, when the gentleman came home from that surgery, their house had been burglarized. And things were in a turmoil. He called Dick. Again they prayed. The operation was a miraculous success. His son was fitted with contacts, and he had his eyesight back.

“Before long the phone rang again. Dick was asked to pray about another need. The fella’s daughter, hooked on heroin, was becoming destructive and breaking the windows and destroying pieces of furniture in the home. He said to Dick, ‘You have no idea what it’s like to literally wrestle with your child and to pull her arms behind her back while the police snap the handcuffs on and take her out of the house.’ That, by the way, led to harassment from the drug crowd that she was running with - motorcycle gangs and obscene phone calls and again attempted damage to the home. Just one breaking experience after another.

“And the fella stayed in this Bible study. Dick prayed with him about this impossible situation, growing in urgency, but unknown to the people he worked with. Just sort of a quiet burden he held

onto. Finally, this led to the ultimate.

“There was one person in the family with whom this man really felt close - his wife’s mother. And would you believe it, she had a heart attack. Just sort of an ultimate climax, a final blow.

“That evening, he came home from work, went upstairs to his room without a word, and closed the door. His wife, downstairs fixing supper, heard a noise, heard words. She went up and listened. She heard this man, broken and weeping, just dumping out to the Lord every ugly sin of his life and saying, ‘I’m spiritually bankrupt. I ask You now, Father, through Jesus Christ, to come into my life.’ And the wife, on the other side of the door, also wept, rejoicing at what God had done in this strange set of circumstances that broke that man to the place of submission and salvation. An answer to her own prayers for his salvation.”²

All this because Dick Russell took the time out of his life to befriend the man, daily pour the Word of God into him, and pray with him through the long trials and struggles going on in his life. Dick took the time to walk in faith with this man, and it changed his life. Dick’s saltiness in Jesus had helped this man find his home in the Kingdom of God.

You see, Christianity is the life-giving element to all of life here on this world. Jesus Christ came to this earth, not to condemn it, but to free it from its slavery to sin and death. Those who recognize the salvation of Jesus Christ and accept it for themselves, find new life given to them as they no longer trust in the ways of the world, but trust in the ways of God.

That process, however, is not always an easy one, because so often we are so entrenched in the pleasures and delights of this world we don’t see the direction that their pursuit is taking us. The world, ruled by our enemy, Satan, seeks to lead us away from the things of the Lord God Almighty, and when we base our lives on the things of the world, we have no hope for anything beyond this life. Many will give their all to enjoy every pleasure and delight here in this world, only to find themselves bankrupt spiritually with no hope of eternal life. God tells us throughout the Bible that those who chase after the

² (Charles Swindoll, *Swindoll’s Ultimate Book of Illustrations & Quotes*, [Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1998] pg. 499-500)

things of the world are condemned already, not by God's rejection of them, but by their own choosing to live apart from the ways of God. Each of us has a choice to make as to whom we will follow - the world or the Lord. The world will lead us to eternal death separated from God because of our own sinfulness. But the Lord seeks that all would come to Him and find eternal life, and that only happens when we claim Jesus Christ as our Savior and Lord, and follow His commandments. The world cannot save us. Our deeds, even if done in righteousness, cannot save us. The church cannot save us. Only faith in the Lord Jesus Christ is what saves us from an eternity of death and suffering. And the Lord sent Jesus to the earth to "*seek and to save the lost*" (Luke 19:10).

For those of us who have claimed the Name of Jesus, for all of us who have found Salvation in His Name, it is expected that we live in such a way as to enable others to come to know about Jesus so that they might claim Jesus as their own Savior. But if we keep our faith to ourselves, then those around us don't see anything different than the others living according to the world, and there is nothing that attracts them to change their lives put their trust and faith in Jesus as the Savior.

So Jesus calls us to become the "*salt of the earth*" (Matt. 5:13), and the "*light of the world*" (Matt. 5:14), so that all of those around us might see Jesus through us and have the opportunity to believe in Him, too.

But salt often brings pain before it brings healing. When you have a cut on your hand, or a split cuticle on your finger, and you get some salt in it, WOW does that hurt. But the hurt comes as the salt cleanses the cut or the wound from the bacteria that threatens to infect it. The salt wipes out the evil, and enables the healing to begin. Without the salt, the bacteria grows and flourishes and brings contamination to the body which threatens the life of the individual.

Likewise, as we live as salty followers of Jesus, there will be times when we need to confront the evil that is around us. When we stand up to live our faith in the face of evil and wickedness, there is a chance for healing and righteousness and justice to begin, bringing life to those involved. When we stand up for Jesus, adamantly striving for following His will and His ways, the wicked have to flee and

peace can abound, bringing life to all people. But when we lose our saltiness, when we become sluggish to live our faith before the world, then the wickedness of the world flourishes and the lives of many become jeopardized. Only our saltiness, living in the ways of Jesus, can bring real life to those around us.

You see, salt also acts as a preservative, keeping foods fresh when they're not refrigerated or frozen properly. R.V.G. Tasker shares this account. He asks, "Have you ever smelled old, rotten meat? There's an odor that accompanies decay that's like nothing else.

"Down in Houston where I was raised," Tasker continues, "we were only fifty miles from the seaport city of Galveston. Delicious, fresh seafood was available in numerous restaurants in that area - and still is. But there were other ways we used to use seafood, especially shrimp.

"When a friend would get married, one of our favorite tricks was to secretly pull off the hubcaps of his getaway car and stuff them full of shrimp. It was great! Those shrimp wouldn't make any noise as they sloshed around hour after hour in the heat of South Texas. But the result was unreal. After two or three days of driving, parking in the sun, stop-and-go traffic, the bride (bless her shy heart) would slowly start sliding over closer to the door. She would begin to wonder if maybe her beloved groom had forgotten his Right Guard. As the day wore on, he would begin to wonder the same about her! All the while those little shrimp were doing their thing in each wheel.

"Finally (and sometimes they wouldn't discover the trick for over a week!), young Don Juan would pop off the hubcap - and I don't need to tell you the result. Old shrimp inside a hot hubcap for a week would make a skunk's spray seem like a shot of Channel No. 5. It's is gross! To keep shrimp, you must preserve them. If you don't, they perish. Years ago salt was used. Today we use ice more often.

"But think of this earth as shrimp, [decaying in the heat of the hot Sun]. The earth's inhabitants are in a continual state of perishing. [And because of the steady decay, there is a stench that has emanated over all the land.] Tasker, professor emeritus of New Testament exegesis at the University of

London, is correct: ‘We are the “salt of the earth.” The disciples [of Jesus], accordingly, are called to be a moral disinfectant in a world where moral standards are low, constantly changing, or non-existent.’³

Our influence in the world as salty followers of Jesus keeps the moral decay at bay and enables fresh new life to continue to be enjoyed. Without our faithful witness to the world according to the teachings of Jesus, the stench of the decay becomes overpowering, and all sorts of evil and wickedness are touted as right, and the right is declared as wrong. Unless we determine in our own hearts to live the faith we have in Jesus, it will only get worse and the results will only lead to the death of our society.

Oh, the world will sneer at our faithful witness. In fact it will outright reject the righteousness of Jesus shown in any form whatsoever. But we are to continue to make a difference in our own small segment of the world where we rub shoulders with others, encouraging them to pay attention to the commands and teachings of the Lord God Almighty, and living in such a way as to demonstrate the blessed results of living according to those laws and commands. The tough question is whether or not we will determine to live as salty followers of Jesus, or not. Our world depends upon us. Let’s stay salty, shall we?

Father, thank You for the call in each one of our lives to adamantly stay true to Your Word in the Bible, to trust in Jesus as our Savior and Lord, and to live as witnesses in our world as to how You want us to live. Give us the courage and the stamina to remain strong in our Christian walk so that others might see our faith lived before them, and they be turned from the ways of this world to find the blessings of Your ways. Help us not to become afraid to live differently than those in the world. Help us to stay true to Your word, not cowering in fear, but boldly standing for the Way, the Truth and the Life found only in Jesus. Help us to get used to being salt in our world so that we might bring life, not death; peace, not war; hope, not discouragement, faith, not sinfulness. Then, let the people around us turn and find Your salvation through Jesus Christ, that they might really live. Father we ask all this in the name of Your Son, our Savior, Jesus Christ our Lord. AMEN.

³ (Charles Swindoll, *Swindoll’s Ultimate Book of Illustrations*, pg. 495-496)