

## **As the Salt of the Earth**

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I loooooove salt.

My husband and family make fun of me a lot for how much I put on my food.

Get the classic, “would you like some dinner with your salt?” comment a lot.

Put it on a bunch of stuff: sprinkling it on oatmeal is the newest use I’ve found for it.

Apparently my great aunt even used to put it on her *fruit*.

Haven’t gone there, yet, but I’m curious.

Before sitting down to write this sermon,

I did some research on the different uses for salt,

And found I’m definitely not the only one who cherishes sodium... this stuff is huge!

Just at the start of looking into it, I found all sorts of readings

dedicated purely to salt, and all of its uses.

Found pages and pages on the HISTORY of Salt,

and the ways it helped shape the world as we know it, today!

Seems such a tiny thing---that white sprinkly stuff sitting by the napkins on *any* kitchen table,

but don’t be fooled (!)--- it’s kind of a “big deal.”

Throughout history, and especially in ancient times (as far back as 6000BC!),

salt has been deeply interwoven into the daily lives of countless civilizations.

Sodium served as *currency* at various times and places, and has been the cause of bitter wars.

Because it was so highly valued, and used as a

method of payment for different goods and services,  
the word “salary” was actually derived from the word “salt.”

(Originally came from the fact of special salt rations  
being given to early Roman soldiers. “salarium argentum”)

Another interesting tidbit: In the ancient world,  
salt being of such crucial importance economically,  
a far-flung trade in ancient Greece involving the exchange of salt for slaves  
gave rise to the expression, “not worth his salt.”

(Thought that was pretty neat. *Sad*, but neat.)

Past this, the stuff was used as a part of Egyptian religious offerings,  
and it was also used to preserve bodies in Egyptian burial practice.

Salt even served medicinal purposes. Used as *healing* agent for the wounded.

It’s recorded in the history books,  
that thousands of Napoleon’s troops died during his retreat from Moscow,  
because their wounds wouldn’t heal as a result of a lack of salt.

And in the ancient world, offering salted bread  
to guests in your home was a widely practiced custom.

Sodium chloride is an *essential* element in the diet of not only humans  
but of animals, and even a lot of plants.

It’s involvement in our lives and the history of the world goes on and on.

But even looking into its *modern* uses, I was blown away.

There are many, to say the least. Some might seem inconsequential,  
but please pay attention to the subtleties,

Because it'll come back to what we'll share together in a few minutes.

Here are just a few of the uses I found:

Besides *enhancing the flavor* of the foods we eat to survive,

-It's also used as a highly effective *cleaning* agent.

It can return the white to yellow bathtubs.

Poured as brine down sinks it *prevents the build up of grease and grime*.

-Salt can be used to *put out fires*. It's always good

to keep a container by the stove in case the grease catches.

-Salt helps to *destroy moths*, which eat away at our clothing.

-Salt is an *antiseptic*---kills germs, those elements which make us sick or weak---

---so it makes for an excellent mouthwash, eye-wash,

and even can be massaged into the skin to improve your complexion.

--Salt can be used to *test freshness*. Drop an iffy egg into a cup of water with 2 tsp of salt.

A fresh egg sinks; a doubter will float.

--It prevents *mold*. Stops the growth of those elements which destroy  
the foods which sustain us.

--Salt can even *remove blood stains* from cloth(!),

returning our clothes back to their pure, original state.

And there are so many more. Geez.

--Salt *soothes sore feet*. *Relieves fatigue*. *Treats all sorts of stings*. *And kills weeds*.

It brings relief from those things which make our lives uncomfortable,

or which threaten to overtake what we've built up as shelter in our lives.

..Pretty amazing.

I could fill this entire hour reading off a list of the different uses for salt. It's astounding.

But don't worry, I won't. You might already be wondering,

“Whhhhyyyy is she still talking about *salt*?...*Must've run out of sermon ideas...*”

Well, this focus on salt isn't my idea. Salt is referenced at least 30 times in the biblical texts.

And it's referenced again, today, isn't it?

This morning we're moving on with our sermon series on Servant Ministry, before Lent,

And we're moving right off from the beatitudes, in Matthew chapter 5.

From verse 13:

(Matthew 5)13 "You are the salt of the earth; but if salt has lost its taste, how can its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything, but is thrown out and trampled under foot.

After all of these blessings Jesus is talking about...

...after this call to ministry he brings to the disciples...

...he tells us we are *salt*.

...What does that mean?

After telling us we're salt, he even goes on to mention

this risk of losing our saltiness, doesn't he?

---This thought that as salt, it's possible for us to lose our flavor,  
and that we need to do what we can to stop that from happening.

Now, that might sound a little confusing to us. How does salt lose its saltiness?

Salt is salt, right? If salt is, it has flavor.

Before we go on with all of this, just as some background into the ancient world---

---the meanings and realities which existed for Jesus in the days of his own life.

---the meanings which are sometimes lost to us, now, living differently...

---in Jesus' day, salt wasn't just straight sodium chloride, like it is today.

Because it was of such high value to the ancients,

a lot of times, salt was cut with other compounds.

The more salts in those compounds, the more valuable it was, and the saltier it tasted.

The more compounds in the mix---the more "*fillers*", we might say---

---the less salty, and the less valuable it was.

Okay... so with that understanding, there... what is it Jesus is trying to say to us?

"You are the salt of the earth."

We're just coming off of those verses from the beatitudes,

where Jesus told us of the different ways we can

both be blessed and be a blessing to others in this life.

We're learning about what it means to be in servant ministry for God.

There's requirement in this blessing and expectation.

...And we've just learned a lot about salt, right?

As the salt of the earth, Jesus is telling us here, that we're being led and loved by God,

into being a certain way, here on the dirt.

As salt, maybe Jesus is sharing with us the truth that we are valued, and loved.

That we hold a deep worth in our souls---something to be shared.

Exchanged with others. Given and given and given again.

As salt, we're called to not only improve other people's experience of the world...

... adding depth and flavor to this life, for each who seek to taste,

But we're also called to bring into the world, of all of the other

life-giving blessings God's put in the essence of who we are,

And given us the ability to give to others.

As salt, we're here to *clean the grime*, right?

---All of that horrible, corrosive stuff that builds up in our lives

and the lives of others, to make us less comfortable;

---All of that stuff that smothers up the pure things inside.

As salt, we're called to *prevent the build up* of all of those danker,

soul-suffocating forces which create distance between us, and others,

And create a barrier between us and our sense of the touch of God in our lives.

And as salt, we're called in our servant ministry to *extinguish those flames*, right?

Those horrible moments when we burn each other, cause each other pain.

As salt destroys those moths which eat away at our clothing...

...as salt works as an antiseptic to kill germs,

---all of those elements which make us sick or weak...

...as salt cleans our mouths and our eyes, and our skin...

...as salt reminds us of our freshness, and warns us away from what's rotten...

...as salt takes away the stains of blood...soothes soreness...

...relieves fatigue...and heals our wounds...

...maybe Jesus is telling us in these words that we're here to do the same.

Not just for ourselves, but for each other.

So that maybe one day this earth, and all of together standing over the soil,

might experience a better, more wonderful, taste of this life in our mouths

as we eat and share our daily bread through each of these hours we're blessed to be.

All right... so there's that way of looking at it.

But he's also talked to us here about the risk of *losing* our saltiness, right?

And in Jesus' ancient world, the loss of saltiness comes from this cutting we talked about before.

...This lessening of the actual salt, by padding it up with other things.

And meditating on this, what might that come from?

Our friends of the General Board of Discipleship seem to think that this cutting, this padding,

in our lives "as salt," comes from our habit of diluting our *passion* for God.

That it comes from our tendency to water down the urge inside of us to give all we can

to help others experience the deeper, more satisfying flavor of a life lived in love.

In their view, we lose our saltiness, as a result of that corrosive urge inside

to lessen what God's kingdom is doing, with "fillers" from the kingdoms of this world.

...Now that's an interesting thought.

Basically a fancy way of saying that we let ourselves become distracted by the petty stuff.

...Our focus on whether or not our blouse is nice enough

for our lunch date with friends who make a lot more K's each year than we ever have or will.

...Our willingness to push others away because of incidental things,

like the sound of their words, or the color of their skin, or their choice of romantic partners.

...Our minds being pulled away in the stress of strained relationships,

drawing our souls into anger and frustration, instead of care and concern.

...Maybe even our rage over the fact that the Broncos lost the Superbowl

because such and such doesn't know how to hike a ball.

...You know. The small stuff. The incidental stuff.

The stuff of the world we give way too much priority to---

--rack our souls way too feverishly over---that don't actually matter in slightest.

We lose our saltiness when we let the pure love in our hearts get all mucked and covered up

With all of the less valuable gunk of the world.

--The stuff that's just not worth it.

...The "filler" that doesn't hold a fragment of the value of the love and glory of the Lord, God's given us to give.

So how do we hold onto it? ...This saltiness...

Isaiah talks to us a little about this, doesn't he?

7 Is it not to share your bread with the hungry, and bring the homeless poor into your house; when you see the naked, to cover them, and not to hide yourself from your own kin?

...to loose the bonds of injustice, and to let the oppressed go free?

From chapter 58, verses 6 and 7.

"You are the salt of the earth."

'You are valued and you have the ability to do some amazing things with the life God's given you,' Jesus tells us.

And he tells us to keep it up. To continue being what we are in our call from God to do and continue doing something wonderful to this world.

Having this ability to enhance the goodness, to clean away the grime, to clear away the blood, to put out the fires, and bring some relief to the tired, is a blessing from God to us; and as we live each day in our servant ministry to God's creation,

we're blessed to bless others in more ways than we can count  
each of the days we're here.

Amen.