

## THIS SALT IS GOOD FOR YOU

Mark 9:38-50 Text: 49-50 *“Salt is good, but if it loses its saltiness, how can you make it salty again? Have salt among yourselves and be at peace with each other.”*

In Mark’s Gospel Chapter nine, the closing words of Jesus to His Disciples were that they were not to be stumbling blocks but were to be salt. *“Salt is good; but if the salt becomes unsalty, with what will you make it salty again? Have salt in yourselves and be at peace with one another.”* (Mark 9:50) Salt was a necessity of life in Israel. In Job 6:6, Job was expressing his frustration and despair about his life when he said, *“Can something tasteless be eaten without salt?”* which shows Job’s feeling that his suffering was as unpalatable and unbearable as tasteless food. His friend Eliphaz had suggested that Job’s suffering was the result of his own wrongdoing. And Job said his advice was as unsatisfying and unhelpful as unsalted food. He was saying that just as tasteless food needs salt to be palatable, his situation needed real comfort and understanding, not empty words.

Now, a low sodium diet may benefit some people with certain health conditions. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommend adults consume no more than 2,300 mg of salt per day. And higher-risk groups such as older adults, no more than 1,500 mg. per day. Yes, a reduced-sodium diet may decrease blood pressure if you have an elevated blood level. But some studies have shown that reducing sodium can have a negative effect on your health. But what’s the first thing most do in a restaurant after the waiter or server brings food to the table? They reach for the salt.

And salt played a key role in Jewish Temple worship. All offerings had to be salted. In the Bible, salt was used to approve God’s Covenants with His people. God made several significant Covenants with the Jewish people. And each played a crucial role in the relationship between God and the Jewish people. There was the Covenant made with Adam which outlines the consequences of sin and the promise of redemption. (Genesis 3:14-19) The Covenant with Noah after the flood, promising never to destroy the earth with a flood again, symbolized by the rainbow. (Genesis 9:8-17) And God’s promise to Abraham to make him a great nation, by blessing him and giving his descendants the land of Canaan. (Genesis 12:1-3, 15:18-21) And the Covenant given to Moses on Mount Sinai. That includes the Ten Commandments and the laws for the Israelites to follow. (Exodus 19-24) Then there was God’s promise to David that his descendants would rule Israel forever, resulting in the coming of Jesus. (2 Samuel 7:12-16) And the New Covenant established through Jesus Christ, offering forgiveness of sins and a personal relationship with God. (Jeremiah 31:31-34, Luke 22:20).

All these Covenants highlight God’s ongoing commitment to His people and His plan for redemption. Obedience to God’s laws will be rewarded with divine protection and blessings. Then by adding salt to offerings, the grain offering, the burnt offering, the incense offering, it ensured the Jews remained pure and acceptable. Salting sacrifices was a way to honor God by presenting offerings to Him that were not only pure but were pleasing to God. Salt’s ability to preserve and purify was seen as a symbol for the spiritual purity expected of the Israelites. Salt reminded them of their duty to remain faithful and pure in their relationship with God. It underscored the importance of the lasting nature of the Covenants *between* God and His people. Salt was, also, used as fertilizer in farming. But if too much salt was used it damaged the soil. In Leviticus 2:13, God commanded, *“Season all your grain offerings with salt, to remind you of God’s covenant.”* Because salt purifies. It cleanses. It protects from corruption, as Jesus used it here in our lesson. His disciples were to be salt purifying, cleansing, and preserving the world.

And as His disciples, we too, are to remember His faithfulness to us, just as the salt in sacrifices reminded Israel of His covenant and faithfulness to them. As salt adds flavor to tasteless food, the Holy Spirit uses Jesus disciples to inspire this present, godless world through the power of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. And as we *“talk the talk and walk the walk”* as disciples of Jesus, we must be agents of change, in order for the Holy Spirit to reverse the moral decay in our society today. We must help bring His Kingdom, and obedience to His Will here on earth, as it is in heaven. And still, Jesus warned *“if the salt becomes unsalty, with what will you make it salty again?”* Or, in Jesus’ *Sermon on the Mount*; *“You are the salt of the earth; but if the salt has become tasteless, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled underfoot of men.”* (Matthew 5:13) Israel’s source of salt was the Dead Sea. The Dead Sea is nine times saltier than any Ocean. Deuteronomy 29:23 says, *“All its land is brimstone and salt, a burning waste, unsown and unproductive, and no grass grows in it.”* The Hill of Salt that covers fifteen square miles at the Southwestern corner of the Dead Sea is where Lot’s wife turned into a “pillar of salt.” The salt there is made of rock or fossil. The outer layer is filled with impurities. And after it is gathered, it undergoes frequent chemical changes. It lacks flavor. The outer layer is destroyed because of its worthlessness. And so, it is with Jesus’ disciples who lose interest in being “salt” for Jesus. They can no longer be effective as His servants, apart from repentance and renewal. So, are you a stumbling block? Or are you salt in the hands of Jesus? The words of a poem, by an unknown author, brings this message home in a powerful way:

“Isn’t it strange that princes and kings  
And clowns that caper in sawdust rings,  
And common folks like you and me  
All are builders for eternity?”

“To each is given a book of rules,  
A block of stone and a bag of tools;  
And each must shape as time has flown.  
A stumbling block. Or a steppingstone.  
Which are you?”

In Scotland many years ago, farmers wanted to make peace with evil spirits. So, they left a corner in each field, unplowed. They felt if they left a small part of their land to the evil spirits, the remainder of the field would yield good crops. But what happened? The corner that was left alone by itself produced a lot of weeds. And those weeds soon scattered by the wind and would spread over the whole field making it become full of weeds. And their crops suffered. So, it is with your life in Christ. Jesus doesn't want you to leave a part of your life empty so sin can invade the rest of it. He wants you to do something about it. He wants you to get rid of your weeds so your whole being might be clean. Jesus doesn't want one part of your life in the Devil's hands, because eventually, the devil will have your whole life. Jesus wants you to be realistic about your life. Repent. Change that which separates you from God. Things which drive a wedge between you and God.

Repentance happens when you are honest with yourself, and with God. Each day, come to Him. Ask Him to forgive you. To cleanse you. To renew you. And to make you right again. This can happen in your daily prayer life. It can happen each time you come to the Communion table to eat the bread and drink the fruit of the vine as symbols of Jesus' body and blood given and shed for you. It happens each time you reconcile yourself with your neighbor seeking forgiveness for a wrong you have done. Your life should be in a constant state of confessing, receiving, and forgiveness. It's not just for one time! It's repeated again and again! Jesus is calling you out of your submission to sin to a life that each day seeks God's forgiveness for the wrongs you have committed.

A professional piano player once said, "If I miss one day of practice, I know it. If I miss two days, my friends will know it. And if I miss three days, my audience knows it." He had to keep at it, day in and day out. So, it is with living life as a Christian. You have to keep at it each day. Confess your sins and receive forgiveness. Love your neighbor as yourself. Worship God in spirit and truth. You see, living in Christ is a day in and day out way of life for a Christian. What kind of people does this church produce? I hope people who recognize the sin in their lives, so that each day they will confess, repent, and receive forgiveness. And having the strength and courage to live in God's everlasting grace.

Steve Irwin, the *Crocodile Hunter* we used to see on TV, had a passion for conserving wildlife. During his memorial service, Irwin's father said not to grieve for Steve. He's at peace. Instead, he said, grieve for the world's animals – they've just lost the best friend they ever had. People could not deny his enthusiasm, his passion for bugs, reptiles, and koala bears. That's the salt Jesus said we should have. When it comes to the kingdom of God, that Salt is available at one place only – the foot of the cross on Calvary.

When you come to Jesus and surrender to His will and His way, the Lord sprinkles His Holy Spirit from His own personal shaker from on high – and you're covered with it! With that salt you can change this present generation for God. That salt will change everything it touches...the salt that's available from Jesus, changes everything. Hunger is filled. Want is satisfied. Sorrow is exchanged for joy. It's the kind of salt that can change war to peace. Have that salt within you. And be at peace!

. . . . Let us pray. Be peaceful this week. *"Forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, press on toward the goal for the prize of the heavenly call of God in Christ Jesus."* And go in peace, filled with His Spirit. Ready to do God's will. And by the power of Christ, help prepare those who are yet to become His people. And be salty! Amen.