



The King's Ransom

Matthew 20:28

Text

Matthew 5:13-16

Topic

Jesus lets us know our real vocation in life is to be the salt of the earth and the light of the world so that as the city set on a hill in this kingdom of darkness we will attract nonbelievers to Him

Title

"Planning Your Salt Light City Vocation"

Introduction

Patmos was the Alcatraz of its day. A tiny, mountainous speck in the Aegean Sea, the 13-square-mile island of Patmos was used as a Roman penal colony.

It's most famous prisoner was the apostle John. He was exiled there in 95AD after being persecuted for his faith.

Several sources record that John, even though an old man, was consigned to hard labor in the salt mines on Patmos. He would pick away at the salt all day, either with an axe or barehanded.

Think of his hands and arms getting scratched and cut, bleeding, and then coming into contact with the natural salt, stinging and burning. He'd get no more relief at the end of the day when the briny water of the ocean would be his only sink and shower.

There he was, being persecuted, mining salt as the brilliant sun shone upon the island. I can't help but think that everyday John would pause and, as the sun was either rising or setting, he would remember Jesus telling him and the other disciples they would be reviled and persecuted because they were the light of the world and the salt of the earth.

John may have lived the illustration more literally than we ever have, but modern-day Christians are still persecuted and are to be no less salt and light than he was. Jesus says to **all** His disciples, down through history right up till today, "You **are** the salt of the earth... You **are** the light of the world."

It gives rise to two questions that I will organize my thoughts around: #1 How Would You Rate Your Saltiness?, and #2 How Would You Rate Your Shininess?

#1 How Would You Rate Your Saltiness?

(v13)

White gold. That's what salt was called in the Middle Ages; that's how valuable it was.

It was incredibly important in the Roman world of the first century. Not only did salt serve to flavor and preserve food, it was an indispensable antiseptic, which is why the Roman word for salt is the root of the name *Salus*, the goddess of health.

Our expression, "rubbing salt in the wound," comes from the practice of using salt as an antiseptic. There is evidence they rubbed newborn babies with a mild salt solution to prevent infection.

Of all the roads that led to Rome, one of the busiest was the *Via Salaria*, the salt route, over which merchants drove ox carts full of salt up the Tiber from the salt pans at Ostia.

A soldier's pay - consisting in part of salt - was called *solarium argentum*, from which we derive the word *salary*.

A soldier's salary was cut if he "was not worth his salt," a phrase that came into being because the Greeks and Romans often bought slaves with salt.

The Romans even had a saying: "There is nothing more useful than sun and salt."

It's been estimated that there are over 14,000 uses for salt. Only 6% of all the salt manufactured today goes into or on the food we eat. The rest goes toward the manufacture of industrial chemicals, water conditioning, agriculture, and highway deicing.

For our spiritual purposes we will need to narrow down the uses of salt to its first century applications.

Mat 5:13 "You are the salt of the earth; but if the salt loses its flavor, how shall it be seasoned? It is then good for nothing but to be thrown out and trampled underfoot by men.

Note that Jesus said "you **are** the salt of the earth." It is something that is already true of you. If you are a Christian, **you are salt.**

The question is whether or not you have "lost... flavor." It may sound as if Jesus was restricting the use of "salt" to its value as a seasoning but that wouldn't be accurate.

- A better translation, and the one you find in the NIV, is, "if the salt loses its **saltiness.**"
- The Amplified Bible says, "if salt has lost its taste (its strength, its quality), how can its **saltness** be restored?"

It seems Jesus had in mind any and all the uses of salt for which it could become useless by losing its saltiness (saltness). When that happened to salt, it was thrown out onto the roads and paths to be "trampled underfoot by men."

Let's first suggest a few uses of salt that would have resonated with Jesus' original hearers. Then we can suggest a few ways salt lost its saltiness.

A great place to start talking about what it means to be salt is to emphasize how precious a commodity it was. It was used as currency. Whole economies in the ancient world were based upon salt. Wars were fought over it.

The equivalent today, I guess, would be gold - although gold seems useless compared to the 14,000 uses for salt. If you are ever stranded on a desert island, you'd better take some salt and leave the gold to sink with the ship.

You are precious to The Lord - far beyond the value of silver or gold or gemstones. Keep that in mind as we discuss the uses for salt.

A primary use for salt in first century Galilee, and in the Roman Empire, was as a preservative. As far back as we can go in recorded history mankind has used salt to preserve foods - rubbing it in to prevent the growth of bacteria in the days before refrigeration.

Galilee was known all over the empire, for example, for what they called pickled fresh fish - fish that had been salted to preserve it for shipment.

God sees us as His preservative - holding back decay as long as possible so men can get saved. An example might be the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah in the Old Testament. God told Abraham He would spare it from destruction if ten righteous persons were present in those cities. Ten salty believers would have preserved them a little longer.

I want to say things are going from bad to worse in our country but I think we are beyond worse. Maybe things are going from worse to worser. Worser to worstest?

Still, we are God's preservative - delaying judgment because He is longsuffering, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.

Looking at another common, first century use of salt, it was an antiseptic. Many ancient cultures used salt as a cleansing agent on wounds in order to cut down on the possibility of infection.

It is recorded, for example, that thousands of Napoleon's troops died during his retreat from Moscow because their wounds would not heal as a result of a lack of salt.

I'm reminded of Peter and John passing by the paralyzed man asking for alms, and Peter saying to him, "Silver and gold I have none; but such as I have I give you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk" (Acts 3:6).

That man was asking for silver; he was asking for gold. *He needed salt* - the precious salt of the earth.

We speak, do we not, of people being 'wounded' who are hurting emotionally and spiritually. Terrible things have happened to them, or to those they love. Or, perhaps, they have done terrible things to themselves and to those they love and are feeling the weight of it.

Who will purify their wounds if not a salty Christian who can apply the sting of the truth - that they are indeed sinners - along with the salve of the Good News that their sin can be forgiven at the Cross.

Medical science is good as far as it goes. Psychiatry and psychology make every effort to help. But in the end the help human beings require is spiritual because the root of the problem is sin. They need salt in their wounds.

Moving on to another use, salt was a fertilizer in ancient times. Even today many fertilizers contain some degree of salt. Obviously too much salt in the soil would not be good, but the first century farmer knew what he was doing and could proportion it correctly.

As the salt of the earth we are sent out to increase the yield of God's harvest. Sharing the Gospel, serving God, increases His harvest by ten, or a hundred, or a thousand fold as we allow Him to proportion us as He sees fit.

Last but not least, salt adds flavor to foods. It makes food taste better; it releases the best taste in a plate of food.

In the Gospel accounts of His life we see people drawn to Jesus Christ. They wanted to see Him, to meet Him, to be around Him. Especially common, everyday people; especially the poor and the outcasts; especially the sick. Jesus had a savor that added the presence of God to every situation He found Himself in. He gave them a taste for the true kingdom of Heaven.

Now that He has ascended into Heaven, that savor is spread by you and I as the salt of the earth.

I wish, just for a moment, we could really understand what it would have meant to His disciples for Jesus to call them "the salt of the earth." Salt was so very precious and important and useful. It's almost impossible to think of a better illustration or comparison. It would have elevated them, humbled them, filled them with awe and the desire to go out to serve Him on the earth.

They would, therefore, have understood His warning to not lose their saltiness. They were far too precious, far too useful, to let that happen.

How does salt, a relatively stable compound, lose its saltiness? Realize we are not talking about the kind of processed salt we have today. Salt in Galilee could come from one of three sources:

1. It could come from evaporating salt water (sea water).
2. It could come from evaporating marsh water.
3. It could come from salt mines.

These sources produce a less stable salt.

1. Evaporating sea water gave you great salt, but if it was not stored properly in really did lose its saltiness.
2. Marsh water salt had a tendency to retain certain impurities that would render it less salty.
3. Salt from the mines lost its saltiness from overexposure to sunlight and the elements.

I would add to that list the fact that you can dilute any salt to the point it loses its flavor.

So, basically, by dilution or mixing it with impurities or through overexposure, salt can lose its saltiness.

You see where this is going. Since you are the salt of the earth, guard against those things, and anything, that might cause you to lose saltiness.

Dilution immediately makes me think of adding things to the Word of God that end up watering it down. Or of adding things to my life that have the effect of making me less salty to others.

I can add liberties to my life, for example; things that are OK for a Christian although they might be questionable. How many liberties can I add, however, before I dilute my witness, leaving me looking and acting just like the world?

There are any number of things that qualify as impurities by which I can lose my saltiness. We need to understand that the world is always trying to get us to relax our standards, to move our boundaries, to call evil good. It doesn't do us any good to be slightly better or more moral than the world. We must remain set apart, in the world but not of the world.

Overexposure could be applied to believers who take in and take in and take in but never give out serving The Lord. Salt must be used, it must be applied, in order to have its effects. So, too, must the Christian engage in serving.

All of this background about salt was necessary so that I could ask myself, and so that you could ask yourself, one, simple question. "How would I rate my own saltiness?"

I am - you are - "the salt of the earth." Stay salty.

#2 How Would You Rate Your Shininess?

(v14-16)

A second illustration was suggested by Jesus:

Mat 5:14 "You are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden.

The illustration pictures a traveller lost in the darkness until he sees, unmistakably in the distance, a "city on a hill," the many lights of its individual homes shining brightly, leading him to safety and shelter.

Implied is that the world is a kingdom of darkness; that mankind is lost, in the dark, groping along, with no hope of getting anywhere.

Jesus came into that darkness as the light of the world. Now that He has ascended into Heaven **you and I are its lights**.

One commentator explained it like this: "Jesus brought the light of His deity into the poor lantern of our humanity, and then set it upon the candlestick of His church so the whole house of the world might be lit up thereby."

Scripture says it better:

2Corinthians 4:6-7 NLT For God, who said, 'Let there be light in the darkness,' has made this light shine in our hearts so we could know the glory of God that is seen in the face of Jesus Christ. But this precious treasure - this light and power that now shine within us - is held in perishable containers, that is, in our weak bodies. So everyone can see that our glorious power is from God and is not our own."

I think, really, we must understand that the "city" is a reference to a larger group. As G. Campbell Morgan said, "No individual Christian [can be the city]. One may be a beacon on top of a mountain, but one cannot be a city."

The larger group, the "city on a hill," is the church. Believers gathering together locally, and living in a new society within the world, are God's method for affecting change in the world.

Jesus said, plainly, "a city that is set on a hill **cannot** be hidden." If the city is the church, it's another way of proclaiming that the church of Jesus Christ cannot ultimately fail in her mission. In another place Jesus will say that the gates of Hell cannot prevail against His church.

Once again my first reaction is to be humbled and amazed. As His disciple I am part of the church; I have my place in this city on a hill by which lost mankind may find their way to God.

Mat 5:15 Nor do they light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house.

The city shines forth because, within it, each individual home is lit by its own lamp. It is the total output of those lamps that is seen by the traveler.

This was a feel-good moment among the disciples. They were a group; they were a society. Each of them a lamp whose combined output would make a difference shining in the world.

Do not people have a desire to belong to something greater than themselves? Sadly, we go about trying to create our own societies or service groups when the greatest society and service group is the church.

On one level I don't know why everyone doesn't belong to a church. I know, I know; it's a spiritual thing. But the church is the most amazing, the most fantastic, group on the earth. In it alone can you discover your purpose and realize your potential. It's filled with people looking to love other people; wanting to help other people.

Jesus suggested something that they would have understood to be ridiculous in the sense no one would do such a thing. **No one would light their household lamp and then try to hide its light under a basket.**

No, they put it prominently on its lampstand to give the greatest possible light. And the side effect is that their light is seen outside the house along with that of their neighbors and it attracts the lost, weary traveler.

An equivalent illustration today might be that of someone knocking on your door at night. You hear the knock, then promptly turn off the porch light, hoping it will discourage them.

That's ridiculous because they know you're home if you turned off the light.

Guess what? **You can't turn-off the light if you are a Christian.** All you can do is try to hide it and, when you do, you're being ridiculous.

Mat 5:16 Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven.

Ministry by definition is the spiritual work or service of any Christian or a group of Christians. One of the greatest revelations we can ever embrace is that whatever we do in life, *is* ministry, because the light of God in us and through us never goes dim. Every job, every assignment, our family, our leisure and whatever pathway that the Holy Spirit may lead us, *is* ministry.

We normally think of our job, if we are employed, as our vocation. Use of the word "vocation" before the sixteenth century referred firstly to the "call" by God to the individual, or calling of all mankind to salvation.

“Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men” (Colossians 3:23-24).

Your place of employment... Your home... Your school... is a place of spiritual service to The Lord. For the believer, the effect of Christ's work is that there is no area of life that is not sacred. Every aspect of life is "set apart for the Lord." All of your actions, not just a few, are done for the glory of God.

Everything is sacred and spiritual to the believer. There is no such thing as secular.

Jesus said to let men "see your good works." Not just your working good, or your working hard, but your "good works," work done for God, work that you pursue because you are a believer.

A Christian should work harder or at least as hard as a nonbeliever. But that doesn't shine on the situation, does it? There needs to be a decidedly Christian emphasis *on* and *in* your work.

You need to come up with things nonbelievers don't do that promotes the knowledge of Jesus Christ.

I can't tell you how you are supposed to shine your light at work or at home or at school; I can only encourage you to want to do so.

God put you where you are in order for you to shine. When you do, people will be led to "glorify your Father in Heaven."

What?! Wait a minute; did I hear that right? My "**Father** in Heaven?"

Jews were not at all familiar with such a term of endearment - not on a personal level. God was certainly Father to the nation; but **my** Father - **my** Daddy?

Now I **am** excited. None of this is duty; it is DNA. It is my spiritual DNA. It's what I am as a Christian. I am the salt of the earth; I am the light of the world. Together with other believers I am the city on a hill that attracts the lost to the safety and shelter of salvation in Jesus Christ.

I *want* to **stay** salty and shiny for my Daddy.