

**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 underfoot.

**14** “You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden. **15** Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. **16** In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.

**17** “Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. **18** For truly I tell you, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished. **19** Therefore anyone who sets aside one of the least of these commands and teaches others accordingly will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever practices and teaches these commands will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. **20** For I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven.

### **You are Salt**

Salt has been given a bad reputation in our society and yet it's vitally important. Too little salt and you will die. Marathon runners have died from low sodium. Too much salt and you will dehydrate and die. Salt is vitally important. Not only important but in Jesus day the production of salt was legally restricted. Salt was used a form of trade and currency. Greek soldiers were paid in salt - their salarium - the origin of our word salary. This also gave rise to the expression, “Not worth one's salt.” Salt was highly valued. But it was also used on everything. Romans put salt on their leafy greens and made salad. Sault found its way into sausage, sauce, salsa, all come from Latin “sal” for salt. Salt is used to preserve food, clean wounds and even remove tattoos. Salt is extremely useful. There are over 14,000 uses for salt. So what exactly is Jesus saying when he calls us salt?

Is it that we are vitally important, highly valued, or extremely useful or a combination of all? Some might feel vitally important as if the church would not exist without them. Others don't feel useful but rather useless because they are unable to do what they used to. You might feel like God couldn't possibly use you in fact you might feel like a burden on the church and this world but Jesus tells us otherwise. He gathers us together and states a fact, “You are the salt of the earth.” Jesus isn't making a

conditional statement, "If you do this then you will be salt." He isn't giving us a command, "Be salty." Rather he makes a statement and we find another promise among the blessings of Jesus, "You are the salt of the earth."

What does salt do? What are the essential qualities of salt? Salt is salty. That's what makes it useful, valued, and important. Take that away and suddenly you no longer have salt. You have sand. *"If salt loses its saltiness it cannot be made salty again."* That's not possible. Salt always remains salt. Some commentators will try to explain that salt can become unsalty by saying, "Jesus wasn't referring to pure salt but salt from the Dead Sea and sometimes contains sand." But that's not salt. Salt cannot lose its saltiness. Jesus knows that just as he knows it's impossible for a camel to get through the eye of a needle.

The point is not that salt can be made not salty but just as salt can't lose its essential quality: a Christian too can't lose their essential quality. But what is that?

You are the salt of the earth. Is it that you are useful? You are useful to God and others. But in order for you to be useful you have to be used. Salt does no good sitting in the shaker it has to be applied to the food. Just as Christians do no good sitting in monasteries and isolating themselves from the world - they too are put to use.

The season of Epiphany is all about God revealing his son to the world. The primary way he does that is by use of his people. Our new banner reads, "He sends us out with the Gospel." We are Christians - little Christs. The body of Christ - his hands and his feet who serve and love our neighbor. The purpose behind our good works...the purpose behind everything we do, *"so that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven."* No matter who you are you can give glory to God. A problem arises when we want to take some of that glory or blend in with the rest of the world - ignoring the qualities of a Christian. It may be that we want people to like us so we use a little sugar instead. Set aside and or downplay marriage, the roles of men and women, or even close communion practices. Diminishing the law and relegating God's Word to little importance after all what really matters is what people think of me.

That puts us in danger of losing the essential quality of a Christian and forgetting who we are. Such a Christian denies the faith. Such a Christian, *"sets aside the least of these commands and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven,"* Such salt of the earth is not useful, important, or valuable. It's not salt and it's neither fit for food nor the manure pile but it is thrown out and trampled underfoot. It's

no good for adding flavor, preserving, or cleaning wounds. It's not even salt. It's worthless. But before you think any of us has been salty Jesus continues, "*unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven.*" We all together become worthless. None of us is vitally important, highly valued, or extremely useful. We ask along with the disciples, "Who then can be saved?"

That's why Jesus had to come. He could see that we were not worth our weight in salt. Jesus the salt of the earth proclaims himself, "*The light of the world.*" Jesus did not come as another lawgiver. He did not come to repeat the law. He did not come "*to abolish the law but to fulfill it.*" Starting at his baptism Jesus began to fulfill all righteousness for us and in our place.

He took up our guilt and shame and suffered for us. Jesus was considered useless, worthless, and unimportant. Jesus was thrown out and trampled underfoot. Jesus took up that often overlooked aspect of salt - the salt that was part of every temple offering. He became the sacrifice for us. So that we can be called, "Salt and light." So that your salvation might not depend on your strength and your effort but his work and so that our Father in heaven might be glorified.

*Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness.* Salt does a number of things for us. It makes us thirsty. On long road trips I would stock up on food. Just the essentials. At that time, "food" consisted of sports drinks, beef jerky, and sunflower seeds. After the first day on the road my mouth was starting to feel a bit like leather. I needed water. In the same way when we see our failure we need our Savior.

Last week Jesus proclaimed, "*Blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*"

Jesus brings us water of life. He brings us back to the refreshing waters of baptism where he quenches our thirst and reassures us of forgiveness. He also gives us his body and blood to remind us of his work for us. He packs us with salt in the Word and Sacrament and Holy Spirit preserves us in this faith. Jesus has made us salty. Being salty involves knowing what your Savior has done. He has made you the salt of the earth. He has done the impossible and restored saltiness to sand.

You are useful. You are valuable because of the price paid for you. You are vitally important. It's not just the good works that you do. It's because you point people to Jesus and back to what he has done for us. Because of what God calls us we want to follow his commands and teach others to do the same. We flavor the world and sometimes that

means rubbing salt into open wounds so that people can see their sin but moreover so we can show them their savior. We live and act as Christians. We can point people to their Savior and demonstrate the reason for the hope that we have.

Being salty shows us our own wounds and our own failures. We know we need forgiveness for all the times we've failed to flavor and for the times when we aren't salty. You are forgiven. You are no longer under the law but under grace. They caused by Jesus working in us and through us as he fulfills the law for us and accomplished everything on the cross.

He tells us, "You are valuable. You are worth more than you weight in salt. You are important. You are useful." Salt may have a bad reputation in the world today, but don't use it sparingly. Rub it into every wound, use it at every meal, and share it with those who have no flavor in their life. You are the salt of the earth and while you may not have 14,000 different uses - the one quality of every Christian has in common is that God calls imperfect people to be salt of the earth and light of this world and that is who you are. Amen.