

“THE SALT OF THE EARTH”

Scripture: Matthew 5:13-16

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I wanted to share with you from Matthew, chapter 5, the Sermon on the Mount, especially verse 13, but let me read through verse 16:

And Jesus said: 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 by men. 14 "You are the light of the world. A city 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 men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.

Verse 13 Jesus says, *"You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again?"*

Eighty-thousand dollars a second. Think about that: the time it took to speak that, almost a half a million dollars is spent by a Super Bowl commercial; that's how much it costs; that's the going rate. Anheuser-Busch again is the largest sponsor for Super Bowl commercials. For five minutes and twenty-four million dollars, they are going to be promoting their product. They want you not just to drink beer, they want you to drink *their* beer and they are going to have five sales with snow ball fights and other commercials to try to influence you for that cause.

Pepsi, for the twentieth year in a row, is going to be advertising again. They want you to drink Pepsi, not Coke. And Lay's Potato Chips got a thirty-second commercial, directed by none other than Spike Lee. For about two and a half million dollars they have children that lose the ball to a grumpy neighbor across the fence but they give him some Lay Potato Chips and that softens him up and he not only gives back the ball but gives back all these other things that have been going over the fence all these years.

Anyway, I look forward to the commercials and also the game. But what did Jesus mean? All of these commercials we know, not just because it's Super Bowl Sunday — although the price really goes up — are to influence us. They know definitely what they want and what they are after. Jesus, when He says, "You are the salt of the Earth," to these Disciples is saying, "This way of life is not intended to be secretive about, to be ashamed of, to keep to yourselves. I really want you, not just some of you, but I want all of you to be the salt. I want you to influence those around you with the good news of Jesus Christ. You are the salt of the Earth."

Who is influencing you today, and who are you influencing for the good news of Jesus Christ? Time Magazine this past week profiled some very influential Christians, these Evangelical Christians that are having a great impact. Some of these will not be a surprise to you. Rick Warren, who is the son of a Baptist preacher, fifty-one years old, who I have heard of now for about five

or six years, but now he sold *The Purpose Driven Life*; I believe it is the best selling hardback of all time. I think up to maybe twenty million books have been sold, but he had a twenty-two thousand member Church. God is using him because people are hungry to discover their purpose in living.

James Dobson has been on the radio for a long time. A lot of people have listened to him about how to raise their kids, or how not to raise their kids. Again, the son of a minister, he is a psychologist but still God is using Him especially as he seeks to influence the families for Christ.

Tim Le Haye was a Baptist minister — he's still a Baptist minister — for many years but on the plane one time he noticed the pilot flirting with the flight attendant, which he didn't think he should be, and then he got the idea, well, what would happen if the Rapture occurred? How would he feel about it if that happened right now? And that became one of the best selling religious fiction series of all time, *Left Behind*.

Joyce Meyer certainly appeals to women — well, men and women — but Joyce Meyer is a very engaging preacher, but she especially speaks out of her own hurt, and people like that. These are people that are very influential, but sometimes, you know, when we hear about people like this, or Billy Graham and Franklin Graham, we know that God is using them and they are very influential, but what about ordinary people like you and me? Can He use us?

One of the best books about being the salt of the Earth was written by Rebecca Pippert. It was back in 1979 when she was on the staff of University of Christian Fellowship and it's called *Out of the Saltshaker and into the World* which says, essentially, oftentimes Christians are like more like salt that just stays in the shaker. It's salt but it's not getting out; it's not really having any influence on people around us. And she shares about one of her first attempts about being a little salt here and trying to share her faith, and she started a Bible study when she was studying abroad in Spain. She kind of targeted those young students that she thought would be interested and that she would like to come to her Bible study and she invited all of those girls but none of them came, but one girl that she especially didn't want, Mary, that was a girl from Ireland, who was just real antagonistic to the faith and real intimidating kind person to be around — wouldn't you know — she found out about the study and she came. So about 7:20, here she comes.

She comes in there and says, "Well, you're really packing them out, aren't you?"

She said, "Well, I guess they had some things to do." But they sat down and they talked for about two hours about Christianity. She didn't know how to bring it to a close and Mary actually asked her about how do you become a Christian and she was just really stunned by that. "Well, I didn't think we would get that far tonight."

So she gave her a book by John Steiner about basic Christianity and said, "Now, go home and read this book and I'll see you later." Well, next week came. Again, she couldn't believe all these girls that gave their excuses or reasons why they weren't there. The next week came, about 7:15, 7:20, she felt like, well, this is just not working. The doorbell rings; well, it's Mary again. And again, it's not who she wanted. But Mary sits down and said, "You know, I read that book you gave me; I read that part about sin, and gosh, I felt like hiding under the bed." And she

thought, gosh, she actually is coming convicted under this book that I have given to her. And she didn't become a Christian that night, but what Rebecca Pippert is sharing out of that, she said, "You know, I fumbled a whole lot of that. I mean God gave me this wonderful opportunity to share my faith and it wasn't who I wanted, and I felt real inadequate, but, you know, she became a Christian anyway." And she shared that to say, "You know, we don't have to become someone totally different to have an influence for Jesus Christ. God wants us to be who we are. He will take us, successes and failures. He'll use our fumbling, but most of all, He wants a heart that really wants to see other people influenced with the love of Jesus Christ."

In that book she says that when we look at Jesus as example, there are three things: First of all, He is very *human*. The Word became flesh and dwelt among us. Jesus wants us to be human. He ate; he slept. In fact, He was called a wine-bibber because He enjoyed eating. But Jesus was very human and very down to earth.

Jesus was also, as she says, *delightful*. That is, that His first miracle was at a wedding feast in Cana of Galilee. People wanted to be with Him. Children flocked to Him. He had the joy of the Lord and people wanted to be with Him. He was compassionate in healing the sick and raising the dead. He was compassionate when people seemed like sheep without a shepherd. But Jesus could also be exasperating, or what she meant by that, He called for commitment; He was not wishy-washy. When He preached his first sermon in the home town synagogue, and told them that He was the Messiah, they were ready to stone Him. He was real straightforward. The scribes and Pharisees called Him hypocritical because He expected more out of them, but Jesus Christ called for a commitment and He still does today.

But most of all, Jesus *loved* people unconditionally. I think of the woman who was caught in the act of adultery and He looked at her and said, "Does no one condemn you?" "No, Lord." "Well, neither do I. Go and sin no more." Jesus, when He encountered people, their lives were never the same.

But sometimes we lose our saltiness. How does that happen? Well, today sometimes it happens that we are influenced by other people or, as Paul said in Romans,

Do not be conformed to the world around you, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.

Sometimes peer pressure, we are influenced by other people to go in the wrong direction. You know, I was heavily influenced to follow Chapel Hill as my favorite team. If you are a Duke fan you may think that's a *terrible* thing to do to a young boy, but my brother went off to Carolina when I went off to kindergarten and so, throughout my lifetime, I was just brainwashed and so, when the game is coming up Wednesday night, again, I know God loves both of them but I am just hoping that He loves Carolina more. There again, you forgive me.

But sometimes, though, we are influenced in a lot worse ways than that. We don't want to make waves. We don't want to upset people, and so we compromise our faith. We conform to the world around us. And then, sometimes, Christians just flat get worn out and they are not salty anymore. Bill Easum, who has been quite an evangelist and teacher, not just for the Methodist Church, but for Christianity period, finally wrote a book about putting on your own oxygen mask

first because he realized so many Christians are not effective in the Christian faith because they are tired. They are worn out. And he spoke from a time in his own life when the Church was at a standstill and he was ready to quit. His people wouldn't let him; they put him on a sabbatical. And what he discovered was, he was just that burned out, worn out, and realizing that instead of letting God work in the lives of his people and to work in his life, he was trying to do it all. Sometimes we become weary in well doing.

But how can we be salty during Lent? Let me share with you four words that spell the word *salt* to keep in mind this Lenten season. First of all, *S* is *see*, and we ask God to help us see the needs around us. Help us to see the needs around us. I was reading about Troop 14 in Syracuse, NY, a Boy Scout Troop that was started about five years ago; the Church sponsored, because they really, really needed it in that community. So many of the boys, the only alternative they had was gangs, crimes and drugs. Eddie Cortez is one of those who got off the streets, got into the Scout Troop — not a big Troop — but a good Troop. He aspired to be an Eagle Scout. They are concerned right now because they have lost their Scout Leader. That's fear and trepidation, isn't it? But they are looking for one right now because they know that even though they have only about thirty people in that Church, this is one of the best things that God is doing in changing lives in that community. We ask for God to help us see the needs around us.

And then *A*. We *ask* God in prayer what He wants us to do in response. Terry Teykl, has a book about praying the price. He is very convicted that what is needed more and more today in fulfilling the Great Commission is to pray, to ask God to help us to see the needs and to what we should do in response to that.

L is we just need to *love* people. I know that's not real profound but that is the heart of being the salt of the Earth. We are to love people. His name is Neil Warren and I saw his commercial a couple of times, talking about eHarmony.com, playing match maker. I didn't realize he is a teacher at Fuller Theological Seminary. He has been a marriage counselor for many years, been married for forty-five years, and this was just a dream he had to help people get off on the right start. One of the best ways that we can truly be salty is that we love people, especially in marriage.

And then *T* is *time*, that we are willing for God to get a hold of our schedule and take time to help the needs of other people. Bethesda United Methodist Church in Bethesda, Maryland, on January 2nd had a Wave of Compassion Concert. They raised six thousand dollars for the Tsunami victims — just one of many examples of people who have responded to that great disaster.

S is *see* the needs. *A* is *ask* God in prayer what He would have us to do. *L* is to *love* His people. *T* is to actually take the *time* that it would take.

Oftentimes when we are the salt of the Earth, we don't realize it, but when we are willing to actually put our faith into practice, it will influence and inspire other people.

Bernadina Mozel is a woman who, at age seventeen, found out that she had rheumatoid arthri-

tis. She almost died, living over in Holland during WWII, but she finally got some help. Her father said, "What you need, Honey, is to have a dream."

So God planted a dream in her to be an artist and she went to the academy. She became an artist and ended up marrying and emigrating to the United States a few years ago. After surgery at Los Angeles Orthopedic she went and saw the disabled children, and God gave her another dream and that was to paint paintings and sell them to raise money for these disabled children. Elizabeth Sherrill visited her at the advice of someone else. She was suffering from arthritis; she was inspired. She was influenced to think this is a woman that rarely goes an hour without pain, but her dream, at eighty-one years old, is I want to be able to, as long as I can, each day raise money for these children to have help that I didn't get when I was their age.

Jesus said, "You are the salt of the Earth."

Let us pray.

Our Lord, we thank You for the unique way that You have created us, and Lord, for the mission that You have given to us, that we are Your workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works which, God, You prepared before hand that we should walk in them. We pray, especially, in these forty days, these six weeks, that as we prepare our hearts, as we confess our sins, as we prepare to celebrate the Resurrection of Jesus Christ, that You empower us by Your Spirit to be the salt of the Earth, that we would be salty, that You would fill our hearts with love for others. We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen.