

August 2, 2015

## SALT

Matthew 5:13

*"You are the salt of the earth!"* First, let's figure out to whom Jesus is talking. The first verse of Chapter Five mentions *"the crowds"* that had begun to follow Jesus – *"From Galilee (where He started His ministry), the Decapolis (ten cities founded by Greeks in the tribal region of Manasseh which was on the east side of the Jordan River – indicating that pagans, or, Gentile God-fearers were following Jesus in great numbers), Jerusalem, Judea, and the region across (east of) the Jordan."* But...it says that *"when He saw the crowd, He went up on the mountainside and sat down. His disciples came to Him, and He began to teach them..."* (Matthew 5:1)

It sounds a bit like Jesus could be teaching only a handful of men, *the Disciples*, while *the crowds* watched from a distance. But that just doesn't make sense. I can't help but believe He would want as many people as possible to hear His message. The *"You"* in His preaching there is universal not selective. Why would Jesus ignore the crowds and speak only to a few *"disciples?"*

Even so, IF Jesus is preaching to only a handful of men who are His disciples, and IF they, at the end of the Gospel of Matthew, are to *"go and make disciples of all nations;"* and IF disciples are the serious followers of Jesus, then He is talking to everyone, to us when He says you. He is talking to the Church!

So, now, what does it mean to be *the salt of the earth?* Without spending a lot of time on the importance of salt for...life, for taste, for the preservation of food; for the way salt was used to pay Roman soldiers (*salt* is the root of the word *salary*), and for its uses in many other ways; let's just say that it implies the type of person the world truly needs: The backbone of labor, the moral example, the steadfast, the loyal, the honest...the people who are good for *something*.

Jesus does say that when the salt is no longer really salt – when it has *"lost its saltiness,"* it is good for nothing, or, at least, nothing but pot-hole filler... *"to be trampled"* on. So, perhaps Jesus is saying that those who are following Him are not good-for-nothings. They are salt – good for everything. And that, I believe, is a good description of *you*, the Church, the followers of Christ!

The Church is good-for-everything. The Church is good for the world as a cluster of the morally righteous. I know that, as a human institution, it will exhibit failings. But...we're trying. As a cluster, we try to hold one another accountable to the values of our faith, to right living, to gracious behavior. As a group of people with an ethic of love and kindness, of mercy and mission, of hope and forgiveness... we are the salt of the earth. And when you unwrap all those things, the Church is like a family, a home away from home, a group of people together seeking the best interests of, not only their group, but of their larger community and the world; reaching out wherever there is a need; offering acceptance, healing, and well-being, and, doing good to all.

As the salt of the earth we are good for everything. I believe that, without the Church, there would be so much good left undone, so much ministry and mission work never shared, and so much anguish never met with true care and compassion... that life on earth would be reduced to mere survival. The Church makes its members good for something. And without it, we would have a tendency to be good-for-nothing.

Let's talk about that. The Golden Rule! It's primarily taught by the Church – "*Do unto others as you would have others do unto you!*" (Matthew 7:12) The world does not teach this ethic...not really. The way of the world is more about looking out for yourself, for your own interests, than looking after the interests of others. In that regard, if I am one of the "others" and I see you looking out only for yourself, I will tend to think that you are good-for-nothing! You are not the salt of the earth!

Without the promptings of the Church's care and compassion, people tend not to be involved in mission and ministries that bring relief to those in desperate need. At least not with the same zeal and strength that we, as a group, can offer. They may be tweaked at times to respond in a sort of humanitarian way, but so much more is accomplished by our team efforts. Even the way our government responds with humanitarian aid anywhere around the world is because of values and an ethic that was and is initiated from a faith-based leadership that goes back to our beginnings. We may not be able to say that The United States of America is a Christian nation, but it is strongly influenced by the values of people who are the salt of the earth. We do not want to be good-for-nothing. So...let's get cracking wherever we've been neglectful! The salt of the earth are the responsible people.

To be the salt of the earth is to be the type of people the world truly needs. And the world needs the influence of our example, of our sense of moral goodness, of our care, of our compassion, of our honesty, of our accountability, of our goodness. Good for everything!