

Scripture: Mark 9:42-50

Text: Mark 9:49-50

Living as Salty Christians

Beloved in Christ, salt has many uses; at least three distinct qualities or uses. First, salt is used on our food to bring out flavor. Food is bland or flat without salt.

Second, salt is also used as a preservative. Salt preserves foods, especially raw meat from spoiling and becoming rotten. Salt slows down the process of decay.

Salt, in the third place, also has a medicinal purpose. You may apply it to a wound. It is used as an antiseptic to cleanse wounds and bring healing.

In these final words of Mark 9, Jesus is addressing His disciples: *"Have salt in yourselves..."* Here salt pictures the quality which is the distinctive mark of Jesus' followers in the world. Count the times Jesus uses the word 'salt' in **verses 49-50**, *"For everyone will be seasoned [lit. salted] with fire, and every sacrifice will be seasoned [lit. salted] with salt. Salt is good; but if the salt loses its flavor, how will you season it? Have salt in yourselves, and have peace with one another."*

In light of Mark 9:49-50, Jesus calls His disciples to be salty Christians, living as

1. Salty sacrifices [v.49]
2. Salty flavor – tasty sacrifices [v.50]

1. Salty sacrifices [v.49]

Jesus is still talking with His disciples about the cost of following Him. They are ready to leave Galilee and go to the region of Judea [10:1]. Jesus has been ministering all along in Galilee and now He is on the way to Jerusalem, where He will give His life on the cross in the place of and for the sins of His people. Twice He has announced to His disciples His upcoming suffering and death [8:31; 9:31].

And He concludes His talk with His disciples here with these strange sounding words: *"For everyone will be seasoned with fire, and every sacrifice will be seasoned with salt"* [verse 49]. He begins with a mixed metaphor. How are believers be salted with fire? This sounds strange. Verse 49 occurs only here and is in no other gospel.

Context helps, especially verses 43-48. Jesus has just been talking about fire, the fires of hell. If your hand or foot causes you to sin, cut it off; it's better to enter life . . . rather than having two hands, or two feet, or two eyes to go to hell, into the fire that shall never be quenched.

But now, Jesus no longer talks about the fire of punishment, but of purification, refining. By making these sacrifices for the sake of Christ, by hacking off sin in your life, these sacrifices of following Jesus refine you.

Then Jesus adds these words, *"and every sacrifice will be seasoned with salt."* We need to understand these words in light of Old Testament sacrifices.

We might not be aware of this but God required salt to accompany all temple sacrifices in the Old Testament according to Leviticus 2:13. The burnt offerings of God's people for sin, whether bull, ram, or bird, were required to be totally consumed by fire in order to be acceptable to God. Smoke rising from the consuming fire was a pleasing incense to the LORD. Salt was added. The salt of the covenant shows that God was

preserving His promise to send Jesus to be the ultimate, the only perfect sacrifice for sin. That was the seasoning! That was the salt!

The sacrifices, totally consumed by fire, point to Jesus' own death for us and in our place. The wrath of God for our sin consumed Jesus. In Ephesians 5:2 we read, ". . . *Christ also has loved us and given Himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling aroma.*"

How does this apply to us today? We are now living sacrifices. The good news of salvation, Christ our sacrifice, is the salt in all who believe in Jesus. He preserves me in the salvation He gained for me -- as I trust Him, giving my whole life totally to Him. Not keeping any part for myself.

Using the language of sacrifice, it must be totally consuming or it is worthless. It is taking up the cross of Jesus and following Him [8:34]; it is nurturing the faith of another believer, not causing them to stumble [9:42]; it is willing to make the immediate and decisive cut with sin. In Christ, through faith, I am a holy, living sacrifice acceptable in Him. The Bible says in Romans 12:1-2, "*I urge you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service.*"

Believers today are living sacrifices seasoned with salt, like the Old Testament sacrifice. Salty sacrifices. Following Jesus also means God uses fiery trials, tests, temptations, or a decisive hacking off the hand, the foot, or the gouging out of the eye, to refine us from sin, to help us grow in His grace, and to preserve us in our relationship with Him in the covenant.

Jesus is telling His disciples this, preparing them, as He now takes the road to the cross, to sacrifice His life for them. In light of His sacrifice for us, we offer ourselves totally to Him in thanksgiving. Sacrificing ourselves for the sake of Christ, is painful, even frustrating. It hurts. But the joy in this is that in Christ, the sacrifice is pleasing to God. The Bible in 1 Peter 2:5 speaks of offering up, "*spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.*"

This is the seasoning with fire. Preserved through fire! He preserves us from falling apart, from the decay of sin and growing rot, from becoming tasteless. Living as salty Christians, preserved but also full of flavor in a decaying world. This brings us to verse 50,

2. Salty flavor -tasty sacrifices [v.50]

The first thing Jesus says in **verse 50** is that "*salt is good.*" Salt preserves food, especially raw meat from going rotten. but it also brings out the flavor. It enhances the taste and makes food tasty. Here Jesus brings out the savoring influence of salt. Salt is good.

The savoring influence of salt is a picture of the gospel, the good news of salvation in you, in Christ's followers. Like salt, it should permeate your whole life as a living sacrifice. "Salt is good" Jesus says. The influence we have on someone at work, or in our social circle, might take days, months or even years to make its full impact. Yet we may never come to know in our lifetime how our kind words to a nurse, or our Christian character in the workplace, or gestures of kindness may impact someone. It may be that one comes to Christ for salvation through our 'salty' influence.

Salt is good. Salty Christians hold back the decay and rot with the truth of God's Word in society while bringing life and flavor. Yes, salt stings the open wounds brought by sin. It may scream and yell back. It's not sugar. It does not taste sweet. But it improves the taste. It makes the world a better place. "Salt is good."

But we can lose our salt-like quality. Jesus warns in **verse 50b**, *"but if the salt loses its flavor, how will you season it?"* How can you possibly re-salt salt? How can you make it tasty again? It is worthless, good for nothing.

'Saltless salt' pictures the church blending in with the surrounding society. It's like a chameleon changing its color to blend in with its surroundings. It adapts; it accommodates; it compromises; and is diluted. It sacrifices the truth of God's Word; it sacrifices Christ for the accepted ideas of society. Churches today are giving in to their distressing ideas of gender inclusive language, alternative lifestyles, about marriage and that all religions are true. All lines are blurred; no truth, no right and wrong; there is no black and white, only grey; everything is okay. It turns away from the path of following Christ. There, then, is no offer of salvation found in Christ alone anymore. There is no gospel of repentance and forgiveness in Christ anymore. No call to faith! There is no difference anymore. We begin to taste like the world. The church then is saltless, tasteless, and becomes rotten.

It becomes useless. Jesus says in Matthew 5:13, *"It is then good for nothing but to be thrown out and trampled underfoot by men."*

You don't pay your HST, how is that being salt-like? Lying to and cheating to authorities or to your boss at work, how is that being salt-like? How does that show commitment to Jesus and the gospel? That's conforming to the world; not being transformed by the gospel!

Unsalty salt is useless.

So many say they believe in Jesus but they are salt in name only. They cause new believers to stumble [v.42]. They cause themselves to stumble [v.43]. If your hand causes you to sin, cut it off," says Jesus. A salty Christian hacks it off because he treasures his life in Christ.

Whom should be influencing whom? The church should be influencing the world not the other way around. Salty Christians speak the truth, stand up for the truth in their love for Christ, sacrifice themselves for His sake.

Jesus warns about losing our salt-like quality. The world wants everyone to become bland and tasteless. Don't lose your flavor! Otherwise, you will be thrown out.

That's why Jesus exhorts His disciples to guard their salt-like quality. See the rest of **verse 50c**, *"Have salt in yourselves and have peace with one another."* How special this is – God's position of His church in the world. All the preserving power of earth is stored in the little flock of God. It's really, really important to guard that salt-like quality among ourselves as a congregation. We are one of only two [?] congregations in this part of the city. May Christ use us as a preserving, flavoring influence in this community! This begins with having salt in ourselves.!

A few moments earlier, Jesus was rebuking the disciples for arguing about who would be the greatest. They were thinking rank, status and worth. This is the world's way of thinking. Today our society defines your usefulness by rank or worth. If you are lying in a hospital bed paralyzed, you have no worth. Your doctor can give you the needle of death. If you are old, or mentally handicapped we can dispose of you. Your worth is tied up in how useful you are to society. In the meantime there is jostling and fighting for importance.

But, think back to Jesus' words to His disciples when He took a little child into His arms. Having salt in yourselves is serving little ones; that is, the 'insignificant or lowly' brothers and sisters in the faith; putting others before yourself. That brings out taste and flavor of a new life in Christ!

It may be serving one who is physically or mentally handicapped, it may be the aged, it may be one in the final stages of cancer or one who is weak, struggling or new in the faith. The salt like quality of the care, the love, the concern is tasty, even attractive and winsome. How many doctors and nurses have not been won over to Christ? Having salt within yourself shows in sacrificing yourself for the sake of Christ: promoting truth, forgiving others, showing kindness, peace and joy within the family of Christ.

Salty Christians put others first, not themselves. This willingness is a fruit of God's grace in Christ. It brings peace. That's why Jesus adds, "Have peace with one another." Such is the power of the gospel of the risen Christ in the life of the family of believers, so distinct from the world. This is the savoring influence of the salt of the gospel: peace. It also changes the way you talk with one another. We read in Colossians 4:6, "*Let your speech always be with grace, seasoned with salt, that you may know how to answer each one.*" Salt preserves us from corrupt talk [Ephesians 4:29].

Jesus calls us to be salty Christians. He calls us to live as salt in a tasteless, decaying world as salty sacrifices and salty flavor – tasty! From where do we receive the strength to be salty? The Holy Spirit. Yes, God calls us to be salty but He also freely gives His grace through the risen Christ by the power of His Spirit to "have salt in ourselves."

Be filled with the gospel. Let it permeate your whole life. All for the glory of God and for the growth of His church. Amen.