

“Have Salt”
(Mark 9:38-50)
Pastor Espinosa

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.
Amen.

The Text: *“Salt is good, but if the salt has lost its saltiness, how will you make it salty again? Have salt in yourselves, and be at peace with one another.”* – Mark 9:50

What’s with this emphasis on salt? It really is important. “In the ancient world salt [had] religious significance.” (Kittel, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, Vol. 1, 228) “Because of its purifying and seasoning (Job 6:6) and preserving qualities it is a symbol of **endurance and value.**” [emphasis mine] (ibid, 228) Jesus is teaching you Christian that the child of God, the disciple of Jesus – like you and me – are to be characterized by this salt-quality: endurance and value. Christians are called to be those who endure in the saving faith and who are valuable as they endure by virtue of having received eternal life in Jesus.

This is the point of the radical examples of living the life of faith -- in holy living/sanctification -- which turns away from sin. If any of these at any given moment would lead you into sin, then cut off your hand, cut off your foot, and tear out your eye. These are super radical images that make a single point: hold on to Jesus above all other things. Turn away from sin, don’t serve it. There is a very practical Bible verse about what you serve and what you sacrifice to as your “god” in life, that which you love above all else. Will you offer yourself to the true God who gives eternal life; or some cheap idol that might give instant gratification, but then leads one to permanent corruption?

Romans 6:13: “Do not present your members [like your hands or feet or eyes] to sin as instruments for unrighteousness, but present yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life, and your members [like your hands or feet or eyes] to God as instruments for righteousness.”

This is the point of the super radical images in this gospel. Jesus is teaching us to tear ourselves away from offering ourselves to serve sin; and instead serve and offer ourselves to the Living God. This is the salt-life: it endures and remains faithful in the Lord. It is the salt-life that is valuable, because the Lord in His grace has made it so (He is the One who provides the means which preserves you in the faith).

With the salt-life, life becomes marked by faithfulness and endurance. “The story goes that a Montana sheepherder got sick and was taken to the hospital in Fort Benton. His sheep dog followed his master to the city and kept watch outside the hospital door. When the

shepherd died, his body was taken to the train to be shipped back to his family in the East. The dog, Shep by name, appeared at the train station, cried for his master, and vainly chased the train down the tracks. For the next five and a half years, Shep met every train that came into Fort Benton, hoping that one of the passengers getting off would be his master. Shep became well known, and kindly people took care of him; but he refused to be taken to anyone's home. He had but one devotion: waiting for his master to return. Shep's devotion did not waver until the cold winter day in 1941 when he died." (Concordia Journal, July, 2003, Volume 29, Number 3, Dale A. Meyer, 323) This is a true story and it teaches us about enduring devotion. We should pray to be a little like Shep, but with our devotion trained on *our* Master, the Lord Jesus Christ.

"Take your eyes off Jesus, and other things become your reason for living. They may be good things, like family, health, or career. Or bad things, like alcohol, drugs, greed – whatever. If a lot of things are vying for your heart, chances are you feel pulled in different directions, scattered, with no ultimate purpose in life." (Ibid, 323)

But -- as Lewis described -- "Christ says, 'Give me *all*. I don't want so much of your money and so much of your work – I want *you*. I have not come to torment your natural self, but to kill it. No half-measures are any good. I don't want to cut off a branch here and a branch there; I want to have the whole tree down. I don't want to drill the tooth, or crown it, or stop it, but to have it out. Hand over the whole natural self...I will give you myself; my own will shall become yours.'" (Ibid, 324, quoting C.S. Lewis, "Beyond Personality," in *Sermon Illustrations for the Gospel Lessons* [St. Louis: Concordia, 1982], 82)

But as I continue to elaborate on this key point: be salted, endure as you are completely devoted to Christ, how do we do it? Where does the salt that enables us to sacrifice to God instead of sacrificing to the passing things that lead to hell come from? Salt must mark the sacrifice of our lives!

In the Old Testament, the sacrifices presented to God had to be salted:

Leviticus 2:13: "You shall season all your grain offerings with salt. You shall not let the salt of the covenant with your God be missing from your grain offering; with all your offerings you shall offer salt."

"Salt was added for practical and symbolical reasons. Practically, it was a preservative that lessened the likelihood of mold and decay. Symbolically, it was associated with permanence, because it was a very stable substance that lent its characteristics to other substances without any change to itself." (John W. Kleinig, *Concordia Commentary: Leviticus*, 76)

I share this to clarify: that this salt is separate from us. We do not automatically possess it (in this spiritual sense). We must acquire it. It must be given to us. We must be (as we are passive) salted (someone else must salt us; must make us salty).

When we are salted, then we are enabled to be faithful. When we are salted then we endure; then we are preserved. But again, how does this happen?

The question becomes extremely vital since the words of this gospel convict us. How many of us are convicted by Jesus' words?! Has your hand caused you to sin to handle that which served sin? Has your foot caused you to sin taking you to a place you should not have been? Has your eye caused you to sin when you made a thing your utmost desire even over God? We are convicted and our Lord's words of warning about hell become terrifying. It won't do to join the bandwagon that tries to lessen the teaching about hell. It is pictured as everlasting internal corruption and external torture. 2nd Thessalonians 1:8-9: hell is *"flaming fire, inflicting vengeance on those who do not know God and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. They will suffer the punishment of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might,"*

And then in the first half of verse 50 a most disturbing thought is also presented: the salt itself can lose its saltiness. Disciples are called to endure – they do so when they are salted – but they might also neglect God's gift. They might lose their place; they might lose their faith. Again: terrifying!

But in our sin we cannot salt ourselves; and even as we live in the faith, we constantly sin and when we do, what do we do to our salt?

But in verse 49, the Gospel is also proclaimed, the Good News is given to you and me:

Mark 9:49: *"for everyone will be salted with fire."*

This is a Gospel promise and it teaches the way out for the condemned sinner who despairs over his guilt. (Buls, Exegetical Notes: Gospel Texts, Series B: Mark-John, The Season After Pentecost, 68) Where the text says "everyone" it is everyone who comes in possession of the Lord Jesus Christ who died and rose for everyone. To have faith in Jesus is to have received the salt of salvation! This one is cleansed and purified. This is what salt does.

The purifying salt is presented in terms of fire, a fire that is opposite of the other fire mentioned in Mark 9. There are two fires: the fire of hell and the fire of purification. Does Scripture present these two fires elsewhere? Consider Luke 3:16-17:

Luke 3:16-17: *"John answered them all, saying, 'I baptize you with water, but he who is mightier than I is coming, the strap of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie. He will baptize*

you with the Holy Spirit and with fire. His winnowing fork is in his hand, to clear his threshing floor and to gather the wheat into his barn, but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire.”

Did you hear the different fires? The one is what Jesus gives in baptism: the Holy Spirit and the purifying fire of His forgiveness and grace; the other the unquenchable fire of judgment. There are two fires.

And here we answer the question, “How am I salted?” The Lord Jesus is the One who salts you. He has done so by giving you His Word and His Spirit. Through the Word and the Holy Spirit -- received in Holy Baptism, and over and over again in the Gospel proclaimed, and over and over again in the Holy Supper -- you receive the purifying fire. The Word is the cleansing fire through which the Holy Spirit works to make you clean and to make you endure.

John 15:3: “[Jesus said] Already you are clean because of the word that I have spoken to you.”

The ancient father Ephrem the Syrian wrote, *“Glory be to God on high, Who mixed his salt in our minds, His leaven in our souls, His body became bread, To quicken our deadness.”* (Oden (ed.), *Ancient Christian Commentary On Scripture, New Testament II: Mark*, 133)

The salt of God: the Holy Spirit working through the Word of Jesus has made us salty people who by the grace of God endure. “Without the Word and Spirit there can be no forgiveness, no battle against sin, no everlasting life...Only when we have the Word and Spirit in ourselves can we have peace among ourselves.” (Buls, 68).

“[T]he disciples must be seasoned with salt like the sacrifice. This will take place through trials (cf. the fire of 1 C. 3:13), and everything contrary to God will be purged away. Salt also typifies...the speech of the Christian (Col. 4:6)...” (Kretzmann, *Popular Commentary of the Bible, Old Testament*, Vol. I, 709)

That is, we now confess the forgiveness that keeps us salted. We forgive because we’ve been forgiven; we love because we’re loved; we offer words of peace in a world that is desperate for peace. Why? Because we’ve been salted. We endure trials, because we have salt. Jesus has given us His salt; His Word fills us; the Spirit keeps us in Jesus’ Word.

Stoekhardt: “He who tames his members with the help of the Holy Spirit, holds himself within bounds, does not give sin free reign, he keeps his faith and a good conscience, keeps his body and soul to everlasting life. The Lord demands a painful offering from His disciples, the offering of their own members...Christians, who are sanctified and make progress in sanctification through the Word and Spirit of the Lord, must always have this salt and with God’s Word and Spirit must part ways with the rotten deeds of the world, rather than to permit

themselves to be lured into sin by the world, but must practice mutual peace and must not consider themselves superior to others.” (Buls, 68)

This happens on account of the salt that Jesus has given to you: His Word that unites you to His death where His blood covered your sin; His Word that unites you to His resurrection where His life conquered hell’s ambassador called “death.” In Jesus, His Word and Spirit, give you His life, His new life, a salty life, a life that will endure; a life that is invaluable: your life.