

## **BUMC Weekly Bible and Sermon Study**

**Sermon:** "Salt" (from the "We ARE" sermon series)

**Scripture:** Matthew 5:1-13 (Beatitudes/Salt)

### **Key take-aways from the Scripture**

- This section of chapter 5 in Matthew comes at the conclusion of the Beatitudes, which is a part of the greater Sermon on the Mount text.
- In verse 13, we read: "You are the salt of the earth; but if salt has lost its taste, how can its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything but is thrown out and trampled underfoot."
- The purpose of salt is to add flavor, to cleanse and purify, and slow down the decaying process. Jesus' metaphor suggests that we, as disciples, can make an impact on the world, and in a sense, help to slow down the decaying process and evils of sin.
- In other words, if salt loses these qualities, it is without use and purpose. If disciples of Christ do not impact the world around them, then they lose the special qualities granted to them by God. We are called to be distinctly different as followers of Christ and are set apart to make a difference in this world.
- It is interesting to note that salt was sometimes used in covenants in the Old Testament. See Leviticus 2:13; Numbers 18:19; 2 Chronicles 13:5. According to the NRSV Cultural Backgrounds Study Bible, "Salt was the finest preservative in antiquity, and it symbolized permanence and preservation." It further explains, "Because salt was employed as a preservative, its use in a covenantal context also emphasized the expectation that the covenant would last for a long time, a meaning attached to salt in Babylonian, Persian, Arabic, and Greek covenant contexts."
- Further, "Because salt inhibits the leavening action of yeast, which represented rebellion, salt could additionally stand for that which prevented rebellion." With this in mind and reflecting on Jesus' metaphor of salt in Matthew 5:13, sin is seen as rebellion against God (see Isaiah 66:24) with salt being used to slow sin's decaying process.
- There are two other verses in Scripture that use the salt metaphor: Mark 9:50; Luke 14:34-35.

### Key take-aways from the Sermon

- We continue our sermon series “We ARE” and explore the question of who we are as the Body of Christ. In this, we are exploring how God has wired each one of us for ministry within the church.
- Remember from last week: when we know who we are, we know what to do. Identity leads to clarity and purpose (when you find your *why*, you will find your *way*).
- We are a part of the priesthood of all believers...you do not have to be ordained to be a minister: we are a ministry of all believers.
- In today’s scripture we see that Christ identifies us as *salt of the earth*. There are a few things to consider from a historical perspective:
  - In the 1<sup>st</sup> century Middle East, salt was used to *preserve* and slow decay. In other words, we are a part of the preservation and influence of our culture. We cannot influence the world by removing ourselves or remaining in isolation. We are to be in the world, without being of the world. God is not anti-culture but counterculture.
  - Salt *enhances* flavor: it brings out the taste or character of that which it permeates. In a similar way, we as children of God serve one another to bring out the flavor of God’s purpose for creation.
  - Salt was also used in temple sacrifice to symbolize covenant loyalty. Also, salt was used to signify binding friendships and relationships. Salt was used to purify and cleanse, and Roman soldiers were sometimes compensated with salt!
- Salt is indicative of permanence, loyalty, purification and healing. Christ tells us we are all salt! We are here to make the world a better place...in word and in deed!
- John Wesley once said that we are to be salty in our elections! He gave us three guidelines for voting: (1) vote for the person you judge most worthy; (2) speak no evil of the person you voted against; and (3) take care your spirits are not sharpened against those that voted on the other side.
- Jesus warns can lose our distinctive taste and influence in our faith...like when salt can become “unsalty” and loose its zest and properties (see Matt 5:13).
- As we honor All Saints Day, we remember all of the “salty souls” who were in the world but not of it. Their names remind us of the one Name, to whom every knee will bow, every tongue confess...that Jesus Christ is LORD. In Him we find our identity and purpose. In His name, all hallelujahs will never end!

### Questions for Personal Reflection or Group Discussion

- What were your key take-aways from the sermon? How can you apply this to your everyday life?
- In what ways are we the “salt of the earth”? What does this look like in word and in deed?
- What do we do when salt becomes *unsalty*...in other words, when people of grace become ungracious or if we find we are losing the “zest” of our faith (see Matthew 5:13)?
- In what ways are we “set apart” as Christians (that which separates us from the rest of the world)? What does this mean for our everyday lives?
- Like salt adds flavor and brings the best out in food, how can you affect others to bring the best out in them?



## NOTES

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