

Salt

Opening Hymn: #238 — Heavenly Truth

salt A colorless or white crystalline solid, chiefly sodium chloride, used extensively as a food seasoning and preservative.

I had never particularly associated salt with the Scriptures, with one exception. Being raised on Bible stories I could not forget the indelible mental picture of Lot's wife. After Lot, his wife, and his two daughters fled Sodom on the morning of its destruction, we read:

Genesis 19:26 But his wife looked back from behind him, and she became a pillar of salt.

I thought that the Lord performed some kind of miracle turning the wife into a standing, vertical pillar much like petrified wood. And there are artist's drawings much to this effect. But of course the miracle was that the destruction of the city did not happen until the Lord brought Lot and his family out of it. There is nothing to say that when the wife died she became a vertical pillar. Undoubtedly she stumbled, fell, became unconscious and was covered with salt deposits. She became a fallen, horizontal "pillar."

There is much more to salt than Lot's wife. It occurs in a variety of contexts. There is one instance where it was offered with animal sacrifices:

Ezekiel 43:23,24 When thou hast made an end of cleansing [the altar], thou shalt offer a young bullock without blemish, and a ram out of the flock without blemish. And thou shalt offer them before the Lord, and the priests shall cast salt upon them, and they shall offer them up for a burnt offering unto the Lord.

Salt was always to be included with the sacrificial grain offerings:

Leviticus 2:13 (NIV) Season all your grain offerings with salt. Do not leave the salt of the covenant of your God out of your grain offerings; add salt to all your offerings.

Just before God tells Israel to add salt to all their grain offerings, he specifically tells them not to burn any leaven or honey on the altar. That we can understand because leaven is a type of sin; honey is sugar and causes fermentation, a kind of corruption. But what about salt? Why was it so important that salt be added to every grain offering?

Salt has long been a prized commodity. We usually use it as a condiment, and so did Job when he wrote, "Can that which is unsavory be eaten without salt? or is there any taste in the white of an egg?" (Job 6:6). From the Latin root for salt we get the word salary, which was money given to Roman soldiers to buy salt. Thus when we say a person is "worth his salt," we're saying he's worth what we're paying him.

But salt was important not just to make things taste better. It was an antiseptic and a preservative. It retarded putrefaction of fish and meat so both could be kept a long time without spoiling. Salt was used by the prophet Elisha when he performed his first miracle:

2 Kings 2:19-22 (NIV) The men of the city said to Elisha, "Look, our lord, this town is well situated, as you can see, but the water is bad and the land is unproductive." "Bring me a new

bowl,” he said, “and put salt in it.” So they brought it to him. Then he went out to the spring and threw the salt into it, saying, “This is what the Lord says: I have healed this water. Never again will it cause death or make the land unproductive.” And the water has remained wholesome to this day, according to the word Elisha had spoken.

Of course the salt did not do the healing. The miracle was done by the Lord at the hand of Elisha. The prophet could just as easily have struck the waters or spoken to them to heal them. Salt water is considered unfit for human consumption unless the salt is removed. But in this miracle the unfit waters were sweetened by **adding** salt—the opposite of expectations. In a November 1998 “Beauties of the Truth” article, David Rice suggested that at the opening of the kingdom the added ingredient will be the teaching influence of the church beyond the veil, as kings, priests, instructors. Those who are called the “salt of the earth” will then bless, nurture, and restore mankind, and cause the blessings of life and truth to indeed refresh and enliven the dead world. The “new cruse” of salt shows this church class to be a fresh, “newly” developed class which will provide mankind the sweet waters of life.

Covenant of Salt

When we use the expression “breaking of bread,” we mean the sharing of a meal with any kind of food. Likewise a “covenant of salt” meant an agreement between two parties had been ratified by eating “salt” together and it was inviolate. It was, in effect, an everlasting covenant. In Leviticus 2 where we read that salt was to be offered with the grain offerings, we were told that it was “the salt of the covenant of your God.” There are two other references to such a covenant in Scripture:

Numbers 18:19 All the heave offerings of the holy things, which the children of Israel offer unto the Lord, have I given thee, and thy sons and thy daughters with thee, by a statute for ever: it is a covenant of salt for ever before the Lord unto thee and to thy seed with thee.

2 Chron. 13:5 Ought ye not to know that the Lord God of Israel gave the kingdom over Israel to David for ever, even to him and to his sons by a covenant of salt?

The idea that salt represented fidelity and loyalty is contained in a text in Ezra, but it is hidden in the translation we have in the King James:

Ezra 4:14 Now because we have maintenance from the king's palace, and it was not meet for us to see the king's dishonour, therefore have we [done certain things].

The phrase “have maintenance” is Strong’s 4415 and means “eat salt.” The Hebrew word is used only here. The writers are using the phrase to acknowledge that their “salary” comes from the king, and hence they are writing their letter out of allegiance to him.

Salted With Fire

Let us turn now to a text in the New Testament:

Mark 9:43-49 (NIV) If your hand causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life maimed than with two hands to go into hell, where the fire never goes out. And if your foot causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life crippled than to have two feet and be thrown into hell. And if your eye causes you to sin, pluck it out. It is better for you to enter

the kingdom of God with one eye than to have two eyes and be thrown into hell, where their worm does not die, and the fire is not quenched. Everyone will be salted with fire.

This is a favorite text of those who believe hell consists of unquenchable fire and never-dying worms. And yet, if the way to avoid such a terrible fate were to amputate a hand or a foot, one would expect to see countless examples of this happening in Scripture. In fact never do we hear of any disciple doing such a thing. And note that Jesus was speaking to his disciples, not the world in general. In verse 33 he confronts the 12 with their strong desire to have the preeminence. In verse 38 John tells Jesus that they tried to stop a man who was casting out demons because he was not “one of them.” This feeling of superiority, of pride, and of ambition on their part could, if persisted in, keep them from entering the kingdom—from “entering life” as he puts it in this text. In fact it could cause them to die the second death, pictured by *Gehenna*, the Greek word translated “hell.”

Clearly the Master is not talking about an offensive hand or foot. How, after all, could your hand ever cause you to sin? And your eye? Well, yes, with the cooperation of the brain, the eye can see things that could well lead to sin:

Luke 11:34 (NIV) Your eye is the lamp of your body. When your eyes are good, your whole body also is full of light. But when they are bad, your body also is full of darkness.

It is not our hand, foot, or eye that we need to watch. It is our heart:

Luke 6:45 A good man out of the good treasure of his heart bringeth forth that which is good; and an evil man out of the evil treasure of his heart bringeth forth that which is evil: for [out] of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaketh.

It might be possible to simulate allegiance to the Master for a time, but eventually every disciple of the Master will be sorely tested: “salted with fire,” an expression that appears only in this one text in Mark.

1 Cor. 3:13 Every man's work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is.

1 Peter 4:12 Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you:

Jamieson, Fausset and Brown's comment on this text is that when the Master refers to “every sacrifice” in verse 49, he is referring to every acceptable sacrifice in the spirit of Romans 12:1—present your bodies a living sacrifice. They suggest the Master's words might be paraphrased this way: “Every disciple of mine shall have a fiery trial to undergo, and every one who would be found an odor of a sweet smell, a sacrifice acceptable and well pleasing to God, must have such a salting, like the Levitical sacrifices.”

Although we make no judgment about the ultimate fate of Judas, surely he was an example of someone whose “hand” was corrupting him. What should he do about it? He should cut it off! He needed to take swift action to distance himself from all feelings of disloyalty. He had “broken bread” with the Master. He had entered a “covenant of salt” and was expected to remain faithful to it.

Mark 9:50 (NIV) Salt is good but if it loses its saltiness, how can you make it salty again? Have salt in yourselves and be at peace with each other.

This “salt” is an antiseptic, a preservative. Certainly the disciples needed some kind of antidote to the corruption that was entering their ranks.. Far from being at peace with each other, they were jostling to see which of them would be the greatest, who would sit on his right hand and who on his left. It was John—and he probably voiced the thoughts that were in the minds of others—who was concerned that anyone not of their particular group should do anything good in the name of Jesus. Rather than being examples of true Christians, they were behaving like the scribes and Pharisees.

Matthew 5:13-16 (NIV) 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. You are the light of the world. ... Let your light shine before men that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.

Today we don't understand how salt could lose its saltiness, but such was possible in ancient times. Salt deposits were often mixed with other elements and when exposed to the wind and rain, the salt could be leached out leaving behind worthless things of the earth. In this text the disciples are compared to salt. Are they having a positive affect on those with whom they come in contact? Are they retarding the corruption and putrefaction of the world around them? If they are not, they have become useless, the equivalent of salt that has lost its saltiness.

Lessons for Us

We have so much to be thankful for. We have been called out of a state of darkness into a state of light.

1 Peter 2:9 But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvelous light:

We are to be single-minded in our dedication to this great commission.

Luke 14:33 Whosoever he be of you that forsaketh not all that he hath, he cannot be my disciple. Have you forsaken all that you have, or are you still clinging to something or someone in the world that means a lot to you? Is there something other than the Lord that is as dear to you as a “right arm”? If there is, cut it off. Otherwise you will cease to be a disciple. You will be like salt which has lost its seasoning power. Verse 34 of Luke 14 reads: Salt is good: but if the salt have lost his savour, wherewith shall it be seasoned?

This is the time of refining experiences for those antitypical “sons of Levi” who are to be as valuable to the Lord as gold and silver is to most people:

Malachi 3:2,3 But who may abide the day of his coming? and who shall stand when he appeareth? for he is like a refiner's fire, and like fullers' soap: and he shall sit as a refiner and purifier of silver: and he shall purify the sons of Levi, and purge them as gold and silver, that they may offer unto the Lord an offering in righteousness.

We all live on a tiny, insignificant grain of sand in this vast universe. Even those among us who live reasonably long lives would be the first to agree that life is short. Would some temporary gain lasting at most for a couple of years be worth jeopardizing your reward in heaven? Surely not!

Matthew 16:25 For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it.

This is the great paradox of the Bible. Lose your life in the service of the Lord, the truth, and the brethren, and you will in fact find it. The fact that the world takes little note of us, thinks we are misguided and misinformed, means nothing. That's what the world has always thought of those who are the Lord's:

Matthew 5:11,12 Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you.

Although a race course has been used to describe the attainment of our reward in heaven, it is a comparison that is seriously flawed. A race has only one winner; the rest are losers. But that's not descriptive of our walk along the narrow way. Of course we want to attain the prize of the high calling in Christ Jesus, but we should be equally dedicated to helping our brethren attain that prize as well. Let us not fall into the trap of seeking advantage over someone else, let us not criticize anyone who is doing a great work for the Lord who is not "of us." This was the attitude of the Pharisees and it was condemned by the Lord in the strongest possible terms:

Matthew 23:29 Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! [verse 33] Ye serpents, ye generation of vipers, how can ye escape the damnation of hell [Gehenna, a reference to the second death]?

We have made our calling sure. Let us make our election sure as well. And may we help those with whom we come in contact by watching what we say:

Col. 4:6 Let your speech be always with grace, seasoned with salt.

Salt makes food wholesome and palatable; may grace season our speech so that it contributes to the nourishment of our brethren.

Closing Hymn: #331 — Christ For Me

[First given in Los Angeles, September, 2002]

The One Loaf

The twilight hour, when all the world doth dream, I stand amid
 The ripening grain, that ripples, like the bosom of a lake
 Beneath the evening breeze. I pluck, and idly hold within
 My hand, one golden ear, the while in swift succession pass
 Strange visions of the olden time. I see a threshing-floor—
 The wheat by wooden flail bereft of chaff and shining husk.
 The scene is changed: I see a woman grinding at a mill—
 Between the upper and the nether stones the grain is crushed
 Until no semblance of its former state remains, but each
 Is merged into one common whole—a coarse and homely meal.
 Another picture—mixed with water and with salt, a loaf
 Or flattened cake is formed and laid upon the glowing coals.

 And as I gaze my thoughts are lifted to a higher plane;
 I see “the members of His body” like the golden grain,
 Denuded of their glittering robes of earthly pride and fame;
 The upper and the nether stones of life’s vicissitudes
 Are slowly, surely, grinding rich and poor, the high, the low,
 Into one common-union—heart and mind, and zeal and love.
 With purifying salt, life-giving water of the Rod,
 The mass is being drawn and held and molded in “one loaf.”

 Ah, then, beloved, when we drink of that memorial cup,
 And eat the symbol of His flesh, let us partake with joy,
 Nor marvel if we need that strange, transforming power of fire,
 Ere we are counted worthy to be like our Lord and Head,
 And “broken” that a hungry, fainting, dying world be fed!

—*Poems of Dawn*, p. 54