



Salt and Christianity

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In the beginning, God created the heaven and the earth, and in creating the earth He provided us with a plentiful supply of salt. We rightfully refer to salt as the “fifth element.” We are as dependent on it as on air, earth, water and fire.

Salt is abundant on and deep within the earth. Great veins stretch throughout Canada and the United States many hundreds of feet below land. Louisiana has scores of great dome-shaped deposits, mined much as coal is mined.

Here and in other parts of the world, salt is also produced by what is called the solar method. The salt water is pumped into ponds. The sun evaporates the water and leaves the salt to be harvested. The oceans of the world contain 50 million billion tons. Utah’s Great Salt Lake is a source of much salt.

True, our great God-given salt shaker will never become empty. But like the small table shaker, we must work to make it available and plentiful. Engineering and geological skill and chemical knowledge enable us to utilize this resource to its fullest advantage. Forty million tons are required each year to fill our needs.

The possession and control of so valuable a commodity has often been an objective in war, and indeed the cause of war. More wars have been fought over salt than over gold. The early salt road via Solaria from Rosettia to Rome was constantly guarded by Roman soldiers who fought off marauders and hostile armies seeking salt. The Germans waged war for saline streams. In our own country, many of the Indian wars were fought over salt licks or salt springs; these were few and widely separated and the Indians protected them at all costs.

During the Civil War, one of the principal purposes of the Union campaign in Virginia was to capture a source of salt of the Confederacy at Saltville. The Northern army’s objective in Louisiana was to cut off another major source of salt supply from springs and deposits near New Orleans. The North’s success in this attempt materially helped to shorten the war. Salt in 1865 sold for up to a dollar a pound in the South.

The importance of salt in ancient times is equally apparent. The Bible makes numerous references to salt. In the book of Job, written hundreds of years before Christ, is found the line, “Can nothing which is unsavory be eaten without salt.”

Probably the most familiar reference to salt occurs in the story of Lot’s wife. Lot was a nephew of Abraham who lived with his wife and two daughters in Sodom. Just before the wicked city was destroyed for its sinfulness, two angels came to Lot and warned him to escape, cautioning him and his family not to look back once they departed. Lot’s wife,

however, disregarded the command and turned to look back at the burning city. She was turned to pillar of salt.

Whenever salt is mentioned in the Bible, it is as a most important essential. We especially notice this in the direction of religious services. When Elisha sweetened the waters of Jericho, he cast salt into them to illustrate its purifying power. Since earliest times salt has been associated with value and worthiness. Thus, the Bible reference, "Witness, we are the salt of the earth."

Homer called salt "divine" and Plato terms it a "substance dear to the Gods." Shakespeare mentions "salt" 37 times in his immortal plays. The wide-spread notion that the spilling of salt entails evil consequences is probably a relic of the notion of its sacred character in early times. Anyone unfortunate enough to spill salt is supposed to incur the anger of all good spirits.

Perhaps Leonard da Vinci had this superstition in mind when he portrayed an overturned salt cellar before Judas in his famous painting "The Last Supper." Was he thinking of the covenant of love and friendship that Judas had broken?

Throughout the ages, a belief in the sacred properties of salt has persisted. In Scotland, salt was held in high repute as a charm and the salt box was the first chattel to be removed to a new dwelling. As the poet Robert Burns was about to occupy a new house in Ellisland in 1789, he was escorted along the banks of the River Nith by a procession of relatives carrying in their midst a bowl of salt resting on the family Bible.

One of the interesting things about salt is that when it is used it loses itself. You do not see salt in your food because it makes its contribution and is gone. When used in various chemical processes, salt also dissipates after fulfilling its purpose.

Salt used on icy highways and streets makes winter travel safe and disappears. In the same way, Christians who are the salt of the earth do not hesitate to give of themselves as they serve their God and their fellow man. In Matthew 5:13, "Ye are the salt of the earth but if the salt lost its savor, wherewith shall it be salted. It is thenceforth good for nothing but to be cast out and to be trodden under foot of man."

Salt never loses its taste. It will become rock hard, it will become damp so that it won't come out of the shaker unless you unscrew the top and pour it out. Even so, it tastes the same. It is still salt.

Salt in the days of Jesus Christ, as today, had many purposes. The religious ritual demanded that all sacrifices be salted before they were offered to God. New born babies were rubbed with salt. A grain of salt placed in a tooth cavity was the usual remedy for a toothache. One of the most extensive uses of salt was in preserving meat and fish. As there was no refrigeration in those days, meat and fish were packed in salt to draw blood and moisture from them (even in this process salt performs its purpose and disappears).

A primary source of salt was the shore of the Dead Sea or the Salt Sea that is referred to many times in the Bible. Nothing was known about refining salt in those days. It was difficult to tell the difference between the salt and the sand on the shores of the sea so this substance which they called salt was really a mixture, sometimes more salt than sand. When it was more sand than salt, it had "lost its savor" and therefore was good for

nothing but to be “cast out and trodden under the foot of man.” Jesus said to His followers: “You are the salt of the earth, but if the salt has lost its taste, it is good for nothing except to be thrown out and trodden under the foot of men.”

If Jesus were to speak today, He might remind us that we have diluted our sense of moral value with the sand of modern apathy and greed; we have mixed our love with the sands of selfishness and we have cast out the golden rule and trodden it under our feet.

There are many appearances in our land that ours is a Christian nation. Is this really salt, or is much of it sand? Churches are found in every city and town. In fact, the building of new churches has become a major part of the construction industry. Sixty-five percent of our people belong to some church. Evidence of belief is to be found everywhere. But do we let our speech be always with grace “seasoned with salt that ye may know how he ought to answer every man.” (Colossians 4:6).

I like to think that seasoning with salt means the salt of truth and that knowing how ye ought to answer every man is answering truthfully. My father taught me that if I did not tell a lie I did not have to remember what I had said.

The three great problems that face us today are war, racial tensions and the lack of truth and moral values. If any one gets completely out of hand, it could destroy us as a nation. If the answer to war is to completely destroy and kill, then we do not speak with grace seasoned with salt and are only sand. If the answer to racial tension is Memphis and Selma or rocks and fire bombs, then we do not speak with grace seasoned with salt and are only sand. If the answer to truth and moral values is lies and immorality in business and government, then we do not speak with grace seasoned with salt and are only sand.

What we appear to be is not enough. We can look like the salt of the earth, we can appear to speak with grace seasoned with salt, but if we have lost our saltiness we are good for nothing. No matter how good we may appear, if we have lost the fundamentals that make the Christian life, then we are only sand and will be thrown out and trodden under foot.

It is easy to look like a Christian. We may go to Church every Sunday. We may talk about our church and how much it means to us. We may do all this and still be only sand. Salt, like Christianity is no good unless it is used. Christianity, like salt, preserves what is good and prevents decay. Would you consider using salt only on Sunday?

Salt, when used, loses itself. You do not see the salt in food and chemicals or on the highways. In the same way, we must not hesitate to give ourselves to serve our God and our country and we must not be afraid to lose ourselves as we do this. Let us be true followers of Him; let us be true users of salt. Let us be the true salt of the earth. Speak with grace seasoned with salt. Oh God, give us the sense of moral values as pure as salt. Oh God, grant us the capacity to love as abundantly as salt. Oh God make us dependent on the Golden Rule as we are on salt.