

THROUGH NIGHT TO MORNING

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SERMON SIXTEEN -

SALT

"Ye are the salt of the earth: but if the salt have lost his savour, wherewith shall it be salted? it is thenceforth good for nothing, but to be cast out, and to be trodden under foot of men" (Matthew 5:13).

IN literature, ancient and modern, common salt has a prominent place.

It was regarded by some nations not only as precious, but sacred. The ancient Germans gathered for worship in the salt district, and regarded that as a good place for building their temples. They sometimes waged war over their salt springs. Homer sings of "divine" salt; Plato said it was a "substance dear to the gods." In Persia the word for "traitor" means "untrue to salt," and in Arabia friends are those "between whom there is salt." In Abyssinia and Tibet cakes of salt are used to-day for money.

Salt in the Bible is the symbol of character. **"Ye are the salt of the earth."** Not what you say or do, but your own personality, yourself, your character, is salt. "Have salt in yourselves," said JESUS; that is, have character. **"Every one shall be salted with fire,"** which, being interpreted, means that the character of every Christian shall be made by a fiery process.

The process of salt-making suggests the process of character making.

All salt seems to have come from the ocean. The rock salt deposits were gradually made by the evaporation of bodies of water caused by the ocean's overflow during times of convulsion; and our characters come from the infinite ocean - fulness of GOD. We get what we are from JESUS CHRIST. Under the wind of the Spirit Christian graces are crystallized, and we become the salt of the earth.

SALT PRESERVES

GOD made with His people a **"covenant of salt,"** which means that the covenant would be preserved; could not be destroyed. A verse in Daniel indicates that every newborn child was rubbed with salt, symbolizing that the parents should now put about that child influences that will preserve its character. Salt even preserves dead things.

It prevents decay; and it is the salt of Christian character that keeps from putrefaction the things in earth that are spiritually dead. What would infidelity in its literature and its advocates be to-

day but for the influence of Christianity? The civilization of to-day is preserved from putrefaction by the salt of Christian influence.

GOD said to Lot that He would preserve Sodom if He could find ten grains of salt in it; and our cities steeped in wickedness are to-day preserved because more than ten righteous men can be found in them. And salt preserves living things. Animal life can scarcely exist without it.

Lieutenant Herndon says, that in crossing the continent of South America, his horses and cattle died of starvation while they were eating the rich green grass, because his supply of salt was exhausted. They would lie down, too weak to walk, and die while nipping the grass. So Christian character preserves the living Church and the living truth.

The Bible is the foundation of the Church, but there is another sense in which the Church is the pillar and ground of the truth. Without Christian character, or the Word put into flesh and bones and life, the world will not believe the Bible. They do not read it except as it is translated into Christian living.

SALT FLAVOURS

The Irish boy's definition of salt is a good one. "Salt is the thing that makes taties taste bad if you do not put it on them." And Christian character is the thing that makes everything taste bad if it is absent.

I have heard a story which illustrates this point from the children.

A King asked his three daughters how much they loved him. Two of them replied that they loved him better than all the gold and silver in the world. The youngest one said she loved him better than salt. The king was not pleased with her answer, as he thought salt was not very palatable. But the cook, overhearing the remark, put no salt in anything for breakfast next morning, and the meal was so insipid that the king could not enjoy it. He then saw the force of his daughter's remark. She loved him so well that nothing was good without him.

Christian character makes doctrine, work, and worship palatable. Some of the doctrines of the Bible are against the depraved taste of humanity. In order to make the people receive them, you must salt them with a good character, and however good your doctrine, unless it is flavoured by good living, the people will not swallow it.

So with work. I remember a man who could talk well in the prayer meeting, quoting scripture with great fluency. But nobody wanted to hear that man talk. His first sentence chilled the company; and, before he finished, you felt you were in the arctic region without a buffalo robe. The teeth of your soul would chatter. The trouble with the man was that nobody had any confidence in his character. He was known to be crooked in business, loose in his living, and all his talk was tasteless, if not nauseating.

I remember another man who was a driver of a coal cart, and sometimes did not take the pains to wash the dust from his neck before coming to prayer meeting; but when he rose to testify, the people were glad to listen. He broke grammar while he broke hearts. They knew that back of his

stammering speech there was a good character, and it gave flavour to his words.

So with worship. Your devout attitude on Sunday will not impress for good your friends, unless you have salted that worship with a good character during the week.

A gentleman in Brooklyn sitting in the gallery of one of our churches, saw a man who had cheated him in a trade, passing the basket for the collection. He learned that this man was an official in the church, and though he liked the pastor's preaching, he declared that he could not attend the service.

The prominent presence of the dishonest man in the church made everything else tasteless.

Our best words and deeds, unless salted with good character, pass for nothing, or make against the cause we love.

ITS INGREDIENTS

Let us inquire, next, what are the ingredients of this salt? Common salt is made of sodium and chlorine, but this uncommon salt of character is made of several ingredients. It is composed of purity, reality, conviction, and enthusiasm.

Purity. The sight of sin in the Christian is unsavoury. The world knows that JESUS was pure, and that He taught doctrines of purity. His blood cleanseth from all sin, and unless there is shown purity of life no one will accept our claim that we are genuine followers of the pure and holy One.

Reality. This cold, calculating world soon detects a sham. We need to be careful not to profess too much or too little. A preacher said in a convention, some time ago, that he was absolutely dead to sin, the flesh and the world. It was a high claim. It startled some of his friends. The next day this preacher was ignored, as he thought, by the leader of the convention, and he left and went home in a fit of anger. Everybody at once saw the difference between his profession and his possession, what he claimed and what he was, and all he might say after that would lack salt to give it flavour.

Victor Hugo was the friend of Napoleon III, because Napoleon III had said to him, "Washington had virtue, while Napoleon I. had genius. I am not a genius, but I can be an honest man." Victor Hugo, however, declares that he soon saw a wide gulf between this profession of honesty and the reality in his life. He therefore broke friendship with him and wrote against him.

And we need to be just as careful not to profess less than we have. If you abuse yourself too much, and refuse to testify for CHRIST when you ought, your lack of profession will make all you say unsavoury.

The safe course is to make our boast in the Lord: let us talk not about what we are, and what we have done, but of what CHRIST is, and what He has done, and when you talk about Him you cannot be extravagant. All the superlatives of the language fail to express the worthiness of our Lord JESUS CHRIST.

Conviction. It is expected that a Christian will believe something. He is not to drift in every current, or be driven by every wind of doctrine. He must know how to stand, and that he may stand he must have convictions of doctrine and right.

I read an article in the Forum on a prominent New York politician. The writer said that this politician had everything in the way of knowledge, brilliancy, and ability; he simply lacked character; was dependent upon circumstances; was a sort of india-rubber ball that could be pressed into any shape; a jelly fish without backbone. The result of the election proved that the people had no taste for such a man as that.

Enthusiasm. But a most important element in the salt of character is enthusiasm.

Everybody knows that if Christianity is anything it is everything. If it is true it should command the best we have. Enthusiasm at white heat, Dr. Cuyler says, should be the normal state of the Christian. Hot water is palatable, ice is agreeable to the taste, but tepid water nauseates.

GOD therefore says, "**because thou art neither cold nor hot, I will spew thee out of my mouth.**" Lukewarmness in Christian work makes our religion very unpalatable.

One of the most pathetic scenes in history is the execution of Sir Thomas Moore. As he was passing between soldiers from his cell in the tower to the beheading block in the court, a woman was seen to rush from the crowd, and as the soldiers saw her sad face, they instinctively parted, and let her pass through. Hanging upon the neck of the condemned man, she could simply cry with tears, "My father, my father."

After several minutes of affectionate embrace she tore herself away, and started out of the court, but soon dashed back, and hung again upon the neck of her beloved father. The rough soldiers stood silent and wept. Everybody felt that such a demonstration of love was appropriate, that there was no fanaticism in it.

It was just how an affectionate daughter ought to feel towards her beloved but now disgraced father. And if such enthusiasm of love may exist towards an earthly father how much greater the enthusiasm toward the Father in Heaven, Who gave His Only Begotten Son that we may be saved from death, and toward the Son who sacrificed Himself for us.

Let us remember, however, that salt can preserve and flavour only by contact.

The world must be made to feel the force of Christian character. This comes by our being in the world but not of it. Salt loses its quality when mixed with some other ingredients.

So we may become so mixed with worldly designs and plans and people that we fail by contact with them to give them the right flavour of our religion. The salt has lost its savour, and the world comes in contact with in a most contemptuous way by casting it upon the ground and trampling it under foot.

Some professing Christians are good for nothing but to be cast out and trodden under foot of

men. Sin, the lack of reality, conviction or enthusiasm, has mingled with the salt and taken away its saltiness.

ITS SELF-CONSERVING POWER

Finally, salt conserves itself. Geologists tell us that in every geological era except the Silurian, there were deposits of salt, and, as we dig down through the earth, we come to these strata which have been lying there well preserved for thousands of years. So Christian character conserves itself for the future ages.

Abel being dead yet speaketh. His character is a stratum of rock salt which still gives flavour to the faith he held and the work he did.

A good woman who heard Spencer H. Cone, of New York, preach for thirty years, remembered but little Mr. Cone said, but she could not forget him; his character was ever making her life savoury.

David Brainerd lived but a short while, but his Christian character is still preserved, and has been the inspiration which sent many a man to the mission field. The Bible is made up of stratum after stratum of this rock salt of character conserved for the preservation of all that is good in us today.

Sir William Napier, walking near his country place one day, met a little peasant girl who was crying. She had broken her pitcher and spilt the milk she was carrying for her father's dinner. She said, "I am afraid to go to him now, for I am sure that he will beat me."

Sir William felt in his pockets for some change, with which she might buy another pitcher and milk, but as he did not have any, he promised to meet the child there at a certain hour in the afternoon and supply her little wants.

When he returned home he found an invitation from a prominent gentleman, asking him to dine with some distinguished persons at his house the very hour that he was to meet the child.

The question now was, shall I keep my word with this insignificant peasant girl, or shall I go where it will be for my interest and delight?

He said, "she trusted me so, I cannot deceive her," and he therefore wrote a note declining the invitation to the great dinner. This incident in the life of Sir William Napier has made not a few honest men. As we come upon "in reading his biography we feel that we have struck a stratum of the rock salt of integrity. It is savoury, and we delight to praise his character and imitate him in this.

An old tar who was dying on ship board said to his mate, I can think of only one verse of the Bible and that gives me no comfort, "**The soul that sinneth it shall die.**"

He asked, "Are there any other verses that will help a fellow to die better than this?" But the mate could not think of any. "Go and bring little Ben," said the dying tar, "he is fresh from his

home and mother; perhaps he can remember something."

Little Ben was brought, and, opening his Bible, he put his finger on the leaf where was written in a woman's hand these words: "**The blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanseth us from all sin.**" "That is what I want," said the dying sailor; it is good to have come straight from home and mother, and to remember what she has taught us from the Bible. That mother's character was conserved in the life of her boy.

Are we so living that, after we have gone, we shall leave a stratum of rock salt that will help preserve all who come in contact with it and make savoury to them the doctrines we hold, the gospel we preach, and the CHRIST we love?

Sinner, would you have your character like salt that preserves and gives flavour? Take CHRIST into your heart and let him rule your life.

~ end of chapter 16 ~
