

Tasty — Or Tasteless?

Matthew 5:13

This morning I have the privilege of starting a new preaching series on the parables of Jesus — those marvelous, wonderful teachings that make up almost a third of our Lord's instruction to his disciples. They remain at the very heart of what Jesus thought and taught and lived — and at the center of what God wants us to learn and walk by in this life .

If you've ever watched some of the videos that are out on the life of Christ, perhaps you can visualize him now as he walked through the countryside with his followers behind him, stopping at different points and using natural illustrations like lilies of the field and birds of the air to teach them spiritual truths.

A parable is often referred to as "a earthly story with a heavenly meaning." It's a technique that many teachers used as they instructed their followers — but none mastered it like our Savior. Of course, Jesus was the master of everything he did while on the earth.

The word parable is used 34 times in the Scriptures and literally means, "a throwing alongside," where one thing is placed by the side of another for the purpose of comparison. A parable is not like an allegory, where every detail in a story has a meaning. In a parable, each detail is not necessarily significant but often there to add color to the story. I'll try and point that out along the way.

The first challenge is identifying which teachings are parables and there are differences of opinion. However, even if we incorrectly identify a teaching as a parable, we will still profit by the teaching! God's word never returns to Him empty (Isa. 55:11).

The second challenge is in interpreting the parables correctly. To do so, we must search for the central truth that Jesus' teaching sets forth. Once that's accomplished, usually all other parts of the parable will fall into place. Knowing the context and setting of the parable is extremely important in helping our understanding of what God wants us

to know. All of Jesus' parables are treasures. Let's ask God to help us find those precious nuggets of truth that will change our lives for Him forever.

This morning, we'll look at perhaps the shortest and maybe one of the first parables that Jesus taught his followers, from the Sermon on the Mount, preached in the early days of Jesus' public ministry at Capernaum in Galilee. All of his disciples were present and many others than the twelve were now following him. The setting, many believe, is on a hillside outside of Capernaum, Jesus' home city, overlooking the Sea of Galilee. This was definitely a teaching session with the Master (Mt. 5:1).

¹³ "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."

Salt was such an important commodity in the ancient culture that it was often used just like money. You could pay for goods with salt because of its universal appeal. Historians tell us that at times the Roman soldiers were paid in salt. This may be where the expression, "He's not worth his salt" began. Salt was used as a preservative of certain foods, especially meat, making it last longer and keeping it from spoiling. Refrigeration was hard to come by in those days!

Salt was also used to purify and cleanse. Placed on a flesh wound, it would sting but it would also kill germs and ward off infection. Gargling with salt had a similar effect — it still does.

Now all of these characteristics and attributes of salt certainly are tempting for us to apply in developing spiritual truths from this parable. Jesus said that his disciples are "*the salt of the earth.*" Salt having had monetary value could apply to our having value in our culture as we minister to people. Someone could say "we are not worth our salt" when there is no spiritual fruit in our lives. Salt being a preservative could certainly be applied to our helping keep

our culture from rotting away or spoiling. Salt as a purifier and cleansing agent could reflect our bringing light and healing to a sick society.

Jesus, however, was very specific and addressed only one characteristic of salt in this passage and I have yet to mention it. It has to do with the taste of salt! He said, "*But if salt loses its saltiness*" (NIV). The NAS Bible says, "*but if the salt has become tasteless.*" The RSV says, "*but if salt has lost its taste.*" The old King James Version uses the word, "*savor.*" Our Lord is pointing to salt losing its flavor — to you and me losing our distinct taste and ability to add flavor to the lives and culture around us.

How does that happen? How does salt lose its taste? Well, it has to be diluted, contaminated, or polluted by something else. Left to itself, salt can't lose its taste. Salt, in its purest form is just that — its salt! But when other things are added to it, even though it's still salt, the taste begins to change dramatically.

How about this example. Let's take a glass container that only has pure salt in it. Now add some water. It's now been diluted and the taste of salt becomes a lot weaker. Rather than just salt, it's now saltwater. Add more water and it's weaker still. Now let's throw in some dirt. Now it's been contaminated. Even the consistency has changed. If you tasted it now — and who would want to, you could barely detect the salt flavor — if at all. Now let's throw in some weeds from my garden. Now it's been polluted. How about some lemon juice to reflect our sour disposition for added flavor? Now let's mix it all up and see if we can sell it at ten cents a glass at our neighborhood refreshment stand.

Do you think anybody would want to taste our new concoction? If they did get past the look and smell, do you think they would come back for more? This is salt that has lost its taste. This is us, as Christians, when we become so diluted and contaminated and polluted and flavored by the world, that no one wants us around (See 1 Jn. 2:15-17). No one desires what we taste like. Our original salt has become tasteless. Jesus says, when we get to that point, we're no longer good for anything. The parallel passage in Luke says, not even "*for the manure pile*" (14:35). That's pretty bad!

Let's look at the process by which a salty Christian goes from being tasty to becoming tasteless, which Jesus warns against. We've already explored the outside influences of the world that dilute, contaminate and pollute or testimony but what about what takes place on the inside?

Perhaps a clue can be found in the literal meaning of the word Jesus used which is translated, "*loses its saltiness*" or "*becomes tasteless*" or "*lost its savor*" in the various translations. The word in the original language, comes from the

noun *moros*, which means "foolish, silly or stupid. It's the word from which we get our English word, "moron." It is used in Scripture to describe people who have become morally worthless. The word is used in scorn concerning a person's heart and character. It's an internal perspective and characterization.

I suppose it could refer to the choices we make as Christians. We all know that the basics of the Christian life and discipleship are Bible study, prayer, and communion which includes fellowship with our Lord and with other believers (Acts 2:42). When we let anyone of these areas slide in our walk with the Lord, our character is going to suffer — our morals will be affected and our conduct then becomes a heart issue.

I've seen this happen so many times. People begin to miss church then all of a sudden it's a way of life. They miss worship, testimonies of the saints, sound teaching, hugs and handshakes and pretty soon they're out of touch with the body of Christ.

Some people put their Bibles on their nightstands and they begin to collect dust because they're rarely opened. Life's problems come their way and they don't know what to do about them. They can't recall the promises of God from His word anymore because His word is not fresh in their hearts. They can't help others because they have forgotten what God's word says.

When you lose your taste, you don't show up anymore when the saints gather together for meals, and fellowships and outreach activities and concerts and men's and women's activities. You never witness anymore because Jesus is not alive in your heart. You're dead inside — you're *moros*.

Is there a solution to such a state of the loss of "*saltiness*"? Yes, I believe there is. In Mark's parallel passage of this parable, he records Jesus as saying this about a tasteless condition. "*Salt is good, but if it loses its saltiness, how can you make it salty again?*" Then he answers his own question for the benefit of his disciples. "*Have salt in yourselves and be at peace with one another*" (Mk. 9:50).

"*Have salt in yourselves.*" That's another way of saying, "Get some salt!" In fact, that statement by our Lord is one of those imperative commands in Scripture which leaves us no "wiggle room." Jesus says, "Do it, and do it now! That's your only option." If not, you'll be "*thrown out and trampled by men*" unfit even "*for the manure pile.*" So where are you today? Tasty — Or Tasteless? If it's the latter, here's what you can do: "*Taste and see that the LORD is good. Blessed is the man who takes refuge in him*" (Psm. 34:8). Seek Him today, "*For in Him we live and move and have our being*" (Acts 17:28). *Maranatha.*

7/1/01

1. Salt is a preservative—rubbed into meat it prevents the meat from decaying, and keeps it good to eat.

- Salt doesn't make something good*
- Salt can only keep something from going bad*

2. Salt is an antiseptic-dissolved in a glass of water it will help kill the germs that cause a sore throat.

- You don't gargle with salt water to stay healthy*
- You gargle to kill the germs*

3. Salt is a seasoning-sprinkled on plain food it will make it to taste better.

- Salt by it's self doesn't taste so good*
- Salt applied to food makes it better*