

Refusing a Salt Free Life

Luke 14:34-35

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Stephen Davey

As Christians, what is the analogy of who we are supposed to be? Many would say a fighter—we fight for God and go to war against secular culture. Others would say a peacemaker—we offer a message of love that is offered to everyone on earth. Even more people might say a firefighter—we rescue people from the fire and bring them into a place of safety. But what does Jesus say we are to be? Well, I'm sure you have some of it sitting on your dining room table; it's so small we rarely give it a moment of thought: salt.

Every one of us today has in our bodies four ounces of something that's pretty important. In fact, it's a matter of life and death. But since our bodies cannot produce it, we have to get it through foods we eat.

If we don't get enough of it, our muscles won't contract, our blood won't circulate, our food won't digest; in fact, our hearts will stop beating.

There's a lot of debate over how much of it is too much, but the older you get, the more you're aware of it; in fact, you start reading food labels because everything you buy today in the grocery store is required to tell you how much it contains of this chemical.

What is it? (By the way, I've had people ask me why I never give illustrations from science; well, you should be thrilled because I'm going to read you a chemistry analysis for this stable compound.) In chemistry terminology—I can tell you're on the edge of your seat—it's a “a chemical compound consisting of an ionic assembly of positively charged cations and negatively charged anions. This compound is composed of positively charged sodium ions and negatively charged chloride ions.”

That was breathtaking, wasn't it?

Well, if you haven't guessed it by now, we're talking about salt.

Supposedly, you should get around 500 milligrams a day and you shouldn't eat more than 2400 mg of it a day, so two bags of popcorn the way I like them means I'm done for the month.

The value of salt has increased over the centuries because of modern discoveries in science and medicine.

Today we know that having the right level of salt helps us in nerve conduction, the absorption of potassium and other vital nutrients, balancing electrolytes, and regulating the water level in each cell, invisible to the human eye.

Jesus declared in *Luke's Gospel* that "**Salt is good**," in *chapter 14 and verse 34*—which is our text for today. Jesus makes this analogy to His disciple and begins it by saying, "**Salt is good**"; stop there for a moment.

He evidently doesn't want His disciples living a salt-free life!

And Jesus would know, because He created it, why salt is good and why it would make such a powerful analogy to the life of a disciple.

And He would know all the reasons we would need it. He certainly knew more than His world knew at the time, and today we still don't know everything about it.

What we do know is that from ancient days, salt was understood to be more than seasoning; it was used as a cleansing agent.

Salt is considered the oldest form of an antibiotic.

Even today we use the expression "to rub salt in a wound"; that phrase comes from the fact that salt, mixed with water, can disinfect wounds. It might sting, but it cleanses.

Today someone might take a salt bath or soak their feet in salt water.

It was viewed so highly in preventing disease that the ancient world rubbed newborns with salt that had been ground to a fine powder.

Humans aren't the only ones who need salt. Farm animals do as well; without it, they lose weight and appetite; in their craving for it they will eat dirt, rocks, and wood, as well as lick the sweat off each other to get a little salt.

Even in ancient times, the demand for salt literally built empires.

Civilizations arose in Africa, China, India, and the Middle east around salt deposits. Trade ships sailed the Mediterranean Sea during the days of Jesus; camel caravans marched through the deserts of Africa carrying salt.

For centuries, the value of salt was twice the value of gold.

In Marco Polo's travels in the 13th century, he watched Tibetans using salt cakes as money; it was as good as gold.

In 1785, a political leader in England wrote that "ten thousand people are arrested every year for smuggling and selling salt." Salt that the government was unable to tax.

They came down on this black market so hard, putting the salt cartels out of business, that hogs and cattle began dying in Britain for lack of salt because farmers couldn't afford to pay the tax.

Gandhi, in India, became famous for demanding that Indians be allowed to harvest their own salt; he called it a "basic human right."

Even John Wesley began preaching sermons against the salt tax. The English Parliament finally relented.

As you can imagine, superstitions also grew up around salt. As far back as Plato, salt was considered to be endowed with mystical power.

On his wedding day, a Swiss groom will put bread in one pocket and salt in another, symbolizing a prophecy of prosperity.

A German bride, on her wedding day, will put salt in her shoe, which to me would mean that walking down the aisle would be uncomfortable. Maybe that was prophetic too!

One video I found online has been watched by several million people, in which a woman explains how to place four salt crystals into your wallet and what to pray when you do it and prosperity is guaranteed.

Of course, there are negative superstitions; spilling salt was considered an omen of bad things to come.

Leonardo Da Vinci painted this concept into his famous "Last Supper" where Jesus is eating with His disciples. If you take a close look—which I have—you can see that one of the disciples has knocked over the container of salt, and that disciple was Judas. It's all because he spilled the salt!

To this day, we use the expression of someone being worth his salt. And this comes closer to the kind of analogy that the Bible has in mind.

During the days of Christ, government employees were often paid with salt, which they could sell at a profit; sort of like being paid today with shares of stock from some corporation.

Roman soldiers were often paid in salt; they were paid—the Latin word was *salarium*—from salt. Today, *salarium* gives us our word “salary.”

So, to be worth your salt meant you were worth your salary.

We know from Old Testament Scripture that salt represented both commitment and continuity. It came to represent life-long loyalty and commitment to God.

God required salt to be added to the Old Testament sacrifices.

Above history and illustrations adapted from “The Salt of the Earth” by Steve Kemper (Smithsonian Magazine, January, 1999)

The salt represented loyalty to God as well as friendship with God.

When Lot and his family were running to escape the judgement of God on Sodom and Gomorrah, we’re told in **Genesis 19:26** that Lot’s wife looked back—which by the way didn’t mean she looked back to see what was happening, it meant that she longed to be back there, that her loyalty was down there in that valley.

And God turned her into a pillar of salt, perhaps to display the irony of her entire disloyalty to God.

Now as the Lord continues toward Jerusalem, just months away from His crucifixion, He continues to describe how faithful disciples live, and He uses salt as His illustration.

He says here in **verse 34**, simply enough:

“Salt is good.”

Luke 14:34a

If you combine the account of Matthew, the Lord said:

“You are the salt of the earth . . . salt is good.”

Matthew 5:13 & Luke 14:34a

And the more you know about salt, the broader and more challenging the application becomes.

In a similar manner of interpretation, the more you know about sheep, the more you can apply the analogy of sheep to the life of a believer.

So, as salt, we are to demonstrate loyalty to God.

We demonstrate that our friendship with God is more important than our friendships with others.

We cleanse the wounds, so to speak, in other people's lives as we deliver the truth of the gospel.

We are the currency God uses in the world as we spread the priceless truths of salvation.

We offer, on behalf of Christ, a divine antibiotic of forgiveness that heals people dying from terminal sin.

As faithful disciples, we become worth our salt as we advance the kingdom of Christ.

So, Jesus delivers here in one short sentence this description:

"You are the salt of the earth . . . salt is good."

Matthew 5:13 & Luke 14:34

By the way would you notice that Jesus does not say, "You will *become* salt; after you've grown in Christ a few years, you'll become salt."

No, Jesus doesn't say "Be salt"; He says, "You are salt."

Douglas Sean O'Donnell, [Matthew](#) (Crossway, 2013), p. 118

This isn't something you become over time; this is something you are right now.

Now following this description, Jesus asks this question in **verse 34 again**:

"Salt is good, but if salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored?"

Luke 14:34

Now sodium chloride is a stable compound, which means salt doesn't become un-salty *unless* it gets mixed with, or contaminated by, impurities—which was common in the ancient world.

And this becomes another analogy to the description of a disciple's life. We can lose our saltiness—our effectiveness—by allowing impurities into our lives that dilute or corrupt our testimony.

The original construction here indicates expectancy: "if salt has lost its taste—and it can—" as if Jesus is warning us that this can happen in the lives of His disciples.

R.C.H. Lenski, [The Interpretation of St. Luke's Gospel](#) (Augsburg Publishing House, 1946), p. 792

He's not talking about losing your salvation; He's talking about losing your saltiness, your flavoring, your credibility, your purity and distinctive quality, the seasoning power He wants you to bring into the world around you.

Impurities can turn your life into bland ineffectiveness.

With that, Jesus brings this analogy down to that most basic application. His world wouldn't know about the cellular value of salt; the invisible chemical value in the bloodstream; the balance of electrolytes and nutrients in the digestive system.

But everyone in His world would understand this fundamental value, which made everyone want it: it seasons everything you taste.

Now Jesus moves from the question to the repercussion.

Verse 35; if it loses its saltiness:

"It is of no use either for the soil or for the manure pile. It is thrown away.

Luke 14:35a

Matthew's account says it this way:

"It is thrown out and trampled under people's feet."

Luke 13:35 & Matthew 5:13b

In the Lord's day, rock salt was salt that had been made impure by other elements, or salt that hadn't been purified, and it would be thrown out on pathways where it would be packed down by the feet of travelers; the salt made a smooth walkway.

If you're from the north, you know all about this rock salt—we call it Halite—it's spread on the roads to melt the snow and ice. It not purified; it's a little darker because it hasn't been processed as thoroughly.

Massachusetts alone uses 500,000 tons of this salt every winter.

If you've moved down here from up north recently, you've noticed we don't have all those salt trucks, so with just a little ice, we must close the whole county. Even a weather report of the *possibility* of snow or ice and everything shuts down.

You might have noticed that what the city does around here is put sand out on overpasses and streets. That doesn't help anything; all it does is make a crunchy sound for you to listen to as you slide off the road.

Salt that has lost its saltiness was used for pathways.

The Lord is effectively saying that the disciples should live in such a way that they create a pathway to the Savior.

And this isn't going to be the easiest way to live. You will deliver the truth to your world, and it might be like a warm salt bath; but it might be like rubbing salt in a wound.

It'll sting, but if accepted, it'll bring healing.

So, we declare sinful what the world declares acceptable.

Maybe that's why Jesus never told his disciples they were sugar, although we can certainly be sweeter; He said we were salt.

The faithful disciple acts as a preservative, as salt does, slowing down the effects of corruption and decay.

William Barclay wrote 50 years ago that the Christian serves as the conscience of his fellow man and the church serves as the conscience to the world around her.

William Barclay, [The Gospel of Luke](#) (Westminster Press, 1975), p. 198

We remind a corrupting world of the truth of God's word:

- That the Bible considers male and female gender as fixed elements of God's creation and denying that truth will bring devastating effects.
- That the Bible considers homosexuality a choice and living it will bring degenerating effects.
- That the Bible considers adultery a violation of a sacred covenant, and it brings disastrous effects.
- We could go on and on about what the Bible says about embezzlement and drunkenness and pornography and anger and gossip and lying—the Bible doesn't pull any punches on declaring and describing sin.

Why? To sting? No—to heal.

William Barclay goes on to write on this text, some 50 years ago:

The disciple must be such that in his presence no doubtful language will be used, no questionable stories told, no dishonorable action suggested. He must be like a disinfecting agent in the circle in which he moves.

ibid

You're going to prick the consciences of unbelievers simply by virtue of being present when they find out who you represent.

You're a purifying influence, a disinfecting agent of cleansing.

I'll never forget one illustration of this happening to me: if you golf, and you go to the golf course by yourself, they're probably going to put you in a group to make it a foursome.

Several years ago, I had chosen a time of day when I knew the golf course wouldn't be busy. Besides I wanted to play by myself, no distractions and time to think. Besides, when you play like I do, you don't want any witnesses.

Wouldn't you know it, they put me with three guys who were great friends to make it a foursome. I introduced myself to them, we shook hands all around and the game began.

As we worked our way down the golf course, they were swapping one dirty joke after another; laughing at every vulgar story; after every bad shot, they'd swear up a storm.

I just kept to myself; finally, around the 8th tee one of them looked at me and said, "Hey, we're sorry to be leaving you out." I said, "Not a problem." He said, "No, tell us, what do you do for a living?"

I said, "I'm a pastor." They nearly fainted; they apologized for their language, and their jokes. They started calling me Father. I didn't want to be their father.

Trouble was, they watched every move I made from then on. Hit a bad shot and I couldn't mutter under my breath any verses of Scripture! I had to smile and wave as my golf ball went off into the wilderness to wander for 40 years.

Frankly, it was more comfortable when I kept to myself.

Salt was never intended to stay in the saltshaker. It was intended to be spread around.

God never intended His disciples to live salt-free lives, so to speak, but to live out who we are.

Salt is not for hiding; it isn't for collecting, it's for sprinkling, spreading, applying, seasoning, convicting, cleansing, restraining, purifying, enhancing, flavoring all of life with its presence.

Jesus ends here with the invitation in **verse 35**:

"He who has ears to hear, let him hear."

Luke 14:35b

In other words, let the meaning of this simple analogy sink in; let it keep sounding in your ears.

Don't forget this truth, let it ring in your ears:

This is who you are.

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