

The Witnessing Church: The Salt and Light

Christian witness is something for here and now.

If somebody asked if our Nation or Church or Institutions we work for were Christian, what would we say? What about our families or places we stay in? What about our individual lives? I guess many of us would think about statistics for corporate bodies and names for families and individuals.

In the text read in Matthew 5:13-16 Jesus' definition of a witness is different. He mentions five key words thus

You are...., Salt, Earth, Light, World the sixth being the Glory of God i.e. result of our witness.

Many scholars disagree with the translation of **earth** as **soil**, most see it as referring to the **world** and in Schweizer's¹ words "the totality of mankind," even though the more common word used for this purpose is *anthrópos* and that *gé* is used extensively as "**land**" or as physical earth. I can add that there is a sense in which this means the 'environment' in which a particular witness stays and operates in.

On the other hand You are.... (V13 and 14) indicates that Jesus never gave us an option on whether we could be, may be shall be, will be.... He simply states a matter of fact... We are, You are and the alternative is that You are not....!

DIVISION 1 The Salt...

¹³ **"You are the salt of the earth.**

Salt was extremely important in the period, and ancient communities knew that salt was a requirement of life. It was most used as a:

1. **Currency:** Salt was key in ancient days because its' this use was important enough that salt was sometimes even used as currency, from which the word **salary** originates. Soldiers would be paid in a salt currency.....
2. **Preservative:** The most common interpretation of this verse as a reference to salt is as a preservative, and to thus see the duty of the disciples as preserving the purity of the world. **Without a fridge salt indeed preserve** meat or any other foods and guards it against bacteria. Are a preservative?
3. **Fertilizer:** Many fertilizers use salts in appropriate quantities. Many scholars note that salt was a minor but essential ingredient in **fertilizer** making and he feels that "earth" should be translated as **soil**, and the disciples are thus to help the world **grow and prosper**. This growth is one that positively affect the world. Are you facilitating growth and prosperity?

¹ Wikipedia.com

4. **Chemical agent:** Greek word for salt also here refers to the indicating that the disciples are to bring new life to the world. Wherever you are, you are a change agent! When we were studying Chemistry, Salt would change acidic conditions to make them 'alkaline'. Christians are change agents
5. **Wisdom:** A common Jewish expression at the time was to call the **Laws the "salt and the light"** of the world. This also had a connotation to do with WISDOM, which may mean this that is how Rabbinic literature of the period salt was a metaphor for wisdom.
6. **Purity:** Salt also played role in ritual **purity** and all sacrifices had to contain salt. Scholars argue that the many different uses of salt show its importance in the life of the period, and it is this importance of the disciples that is being referenced. The phrase **Salting the earth** also comes from the **purifying attributes** of salt, and some have suggested that Jesus was indicating that evil could not grow in an area purified with salt of the earth discipleship.
7. **Facilitating Light:** Ancient peoples sometimes put salt on the wick of lamps to increase their brightness.¹

The Challenge: Losing saltiness

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 underfoot.

The issue of salt **losing its flavour** is somewhat problematic. Salt itself, **sodium chloride**, is extremely stable and cannot lose its flavour. France notes that Jesus was giving a lesson in moral philosophy and "not teaching chemistry," to him whether or not the proverbial image is factually accurate is of little relevance to the actual message of this verse. Nolland considers the impossibility of what is described as deliberate, it is **counter to nature** that **salt lose its flavour**, just as it is counter to God's will that the disciples lose faith.

The most common explanation for this is that what would have been called salt in that era was **quite impure, containing a wide array of other compounds**. Of the substances in this mix the NaCl was the most soluble in water and if exposed to moisture the NaCl would disappear leaving a white powder **looking just like salt, but not having its flavour or its preservative abilities**. The salt used in the area mostly came from mines around the **Dead Sea** and material extracted from that area demonstrates these same properties today. Gundry notes that some other explanations have been advanced. Salt was extremely valuable and unscrupulous merchants may have replaced the salt with other substances. For some purposes **gypsum** was added to salt, but this would erase its flavour and make it **unfit for consumption**

And the Light

¹⁴ "You are the light of the world.

Light	Darkness	¹⁵ <i>Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl.</i>
Known	Unknown	<i>Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in</i>

Jesus Christ	Moses	<i>the house.</i>
Heavenly	Earthly	
Above	Not Above	<i>This "life" is a gift Jesus brought from God into a dying world. In John, "darkness is present in the absence of light; the absence of eternal life," and darkness referring to death, spiritually. Those who walk in darkness do not have eternal life because they are unknown to God. The only way to receive "life" is to be known of the light through God and his promises.</i>
Spirit	Flesh	
Sight	Blindness	
Insiders	World	
Day	Night	
Seen	Hidden	A town built on a hill cannot be hidden

¹⁶ In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may **see your good deeds** and **glorify your Father in heaven.**

It is not for: Self or organization:

- 1. Commendation, Promotion, human**
- 2. Profits, business and power**

Isaiah 42:8 Only God
Dan 4:29 King of Babylon
Acts 12:21 Herod

The purpose of salt and light is to glorify God! Not ourselves

Do you glorify God in all and every action?