

IN-DEPTH SUMMARY

The Salt of the Earth

The in-depth summary of each bible study differs from the small group bible study laid out before the leader and the students. The small group studies are intended to be interactive, provide a learning atmosphere for students, and open discussions allowing for interpretations of what the gospels' witnessed. The in-depth summary is designed to help the leader with expansive information, much more than what is in the text notes found at the bottom of every bible page. An exhaustive search was completed on each verse to help the leader answer questions that may come up during the study.

Most reviews of the "Salt of the Earth" cover Matthew's version. Sometimes, Luke's or Mark's version is compared concurrently, but not usually all three. To fully comprehend the lesson, it is imperative to have all three perspectives viewed side by side. All three gospels share the familiar verse (outlined in black) if the salt loses its flavor, how will you season it? Each gospel brings several essential details to the table of Jesus' words. Matthew provides Jesus' statement, "You are the salt of the Earth." Luke defines what salt is when it is no longer fit for seasoning. Moreover, Mark provides the most challenging verse in Mark 9:49, where "everyone will be seasoned with fire." We will discuss each verse, how it compares or contrasts with the other gospels, and how each verse flows to the next. Finally, in Mark, Jesus commands us to have salt in ourselves and peace with one another.

We will review each section in the best chronological order we can.

Matthew 5:13a (outlined in red): Matthew is the only one who records Jesus stating to his disciples, "You are the salt of the earth." However, Matthew does not define what that means. In many cases, preachers only use Matthew's version. **What happens when the preacher or pastor only uses Matthew's version?** When only reading from Matthew, the preacher commonly uses any meaning he likes to interpret "You are the salt of the Earth."

In many cases, most preachers will use the metaphor as an example to tell the congregation that "you are to be the salt of the earth." Sometimes, they use salt as a metaphor, such as a preservative or flavoring. 'Sprinkle,' the good news of the Lord's message throughout the world, is commonly used. Just like a sprinkling of salt on your food. Not too little or not too much. Just enough to water their mouths, so the news sounds savory. Luke's version defines what Jesus meant when he said, "You are the salt of the Earth." We will prepare a deeper dive into Luke's version later. This is one of the

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best examples of why it is necessary to compare the different gospels to obtain a fuller understanding and picture of the meaning behind the words.

What is salt? Pure salt is sodium chloride (NaCl). In Jesus' time, salt was scraped up from the shores of the dead sea. The dead sea salt, about a 28% salt solution, was contaminated with many impurities. There were many variations of salts in the dead sea. One popular concentration was "Potash" potassium chloride (KCl).

What is salt used for? There are hundreds of uses for salt. The two most common uses of salt were one as a flavor enhancer, and two, as a preservative. We will focus on how the villagers and travelers in the early first century used salt as their resource. (1) Salt is essential for life. Although, the people of the time probably did not know this. The human body uses salt to transmit nerve impulses, contract and relax muscles, and maintain a proper fluid balance. (2) Salt is used for preservation. Food, such as meat and fish, is preserved using salt and then dried. There were no refrigerators then, and salt helped keep food longer so it would not spoil. A metaphor for Christianity is that the true wisdom of salvation preserves life forever. (3) Salt adds flavor to food. Food is generally tasteless without salt. We put a little salt on our food to make it taste better. As disciples, we make the world better by adding flavor to the world. (4) Salt has been used as a component for fertilizer to help make things grow. To fertilize, you need, Nitrogen (N), Phosphorus (P), and Potassium (K). NPK. Plants need phosphate to develop the roots, nitrate to develop the leaves, and potassium to develop the flowers and fruits. (5) Salt was used not to make things grow. The opposite use of salt here is valid. A correct amount of salt will help plants grow. An excessive amount of salt will destroy the soil fertility and not allow things to grow. (6) Salt promotes healing and has many healing properties. Such as minerals for our organs to function correctly, which reduces and regulates our acid level. Salt helps support digestion, relieves skin conditions, cures canker sores, cleans the throat and nose, relaxes muscles, and nourishes hair. (7) Salt was used as a disinfectant to clean wounds by drawing out fluid and moisture and preventing bacteria from growing. (8) Salt may have been used as currency. Thousands of years ago, when Rome would run low on their currency to pay their Roman soldiers, salt was sometimes used as payment for their services. However, there are no early documents to substantiate this claim. The inference that word "salary" comes from the Latin word "sal," meaning salt. This may have created the saying, "That guy is not worth his salt."

What does salt do to the Earth? Just as salt acts as a flavoring agent to make food pleasant and delicious, so do Christians make the world more enjoyable and righteous.

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Jesus' disciples are to purify a corrupt world. They do this by demonstrating and living a righteous life proclaiming the gospel.

Mark 9:49 (outlined in green): Mark 9:49 is one of the most challenging verses in the New Testament to interpret. Nearly every well-learned theologian throughout history struggled to come up with a definite answer; consequently, there have been multiple interpretations: "Everyone will be seasoned with fire and every sacrifice seasoned with salt." Here are some interpretations: (1) The common belief is that this is a continuation of Mark's previous verses. In this context, Jesus stresses the importance of someone who commits an offense and how he should protect his body. Jesus concludes with several examples and states that it is better to cut off the part of the body that offends them and still enter heaven rather than be unharmed and enter into hell and into the fire that is not quenched. Read Mark 9:42-50. Jesus states this conclusion one after the other. Mark 9:48, Jesus states, "the worm that does not die, in the unquenchable fire." Perhaps Jesus is stating that everyone here shall be salted with fire and that everyone in hell will be physically preserved (as salt is a preservative) in the eternal fire. The wicked in hell will continue their sufferings as a sacrifice to God's justice. (2) Another school of thought is this verse is not only implied for those who do evil for the preservation and punishment in the fire but also to purify those who have sacrificed in God's eyes with the grace of salt. Believers will have their "good works" tested by fire to see if anything is pure enough to remain. By seasoning with salt, those who have done good in the sight of God will have the opportunity to be purified with salt. One of salt's capabilities is to disinfect something. Jesus is using salt as a metaphor to sterilize sin from our souls. God cannot have sin in His kingdom. To purify His people before they can enter heaven, God must do everything to cleanse our sins from a lifetime of living in our souls. Read Matthew 3:11. John the Baptist states to the crowd that he comes to baptize them with water. However, the one after him is Jesus, who will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. (3) A third common acceptable interpretation is that everyone will be purified through the fiery furnace. Read Daniel 3:8-25. Those who follow Jesus will be protected through the fiery furnace. Even when King Nebuchadnezzar ordered the temperature of the furnace seven times more than usual, God protected those who were obedient and worshiped only Him. While nearby, the unrighteous and unprotected by God were killed by the flame of the furnace immediately. (4) The final interpretation is a teaching lesson for the apostles. The apostles must learn that men other than themselves might be faithful Christians. Not to pass judgment on feeble and obscured acts. Look for even the slightest favorable evidence demonstrating they might be true believers. Anything that dishonors religion should be removed. Finally, the apostles need to look at

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anything that would endanger their salvation and should be sacrificed. This allows them to be “salted” or preserved in eternal life.

Matthew 5:13b, Mark 9:50a, and Luke 14:34 (outlined in black): All three verses are very similar. Both Mark and Luke mention, “Salt is good.” Salt has many positive qualities. The most common are flavor and preservation. It also purifies, disinfects, and cleanses wounds. Salt affects its environment just by being what it is. **How can sodium chloride (NaCl) lose its saltiness?** It loses its saltiness not by stopping being sodium-chloride but by being contaminated with other compounds. This is where salt loses its quality and is diminished, and eventually ceases being salt. In essence, it loses its flavor. It loses its saltiness. **What is the metaphor for Christians?** Christians are to influence the world by being different. Jesus stated that following Him would be difficult. Christians have been persecuted for 2000 years in His name. It is becoming more challenging for Christians to be different in today’s culture. There is enormous pressure on Christians to conform to society. Christians lose their saltiness by adapting to society’s pressures and conforming away from Jesus. This is done slowly by bending God’s rules and accepting society’s world. Jesus asks, “But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again?”

Matthew 5:13c and Luke 14:35a (outlined in blue): This is where Luke defines what Jesus means, “You are the salt of the earth.” Jesus states in Matthew 5:13, “it is then good for nothing but to be thrown out and trampled underfoot by men.” But in Matthew’s verse, Jesus does not state why the salt is good for nothing. Only that it is thrown out and trampled underfoot by men. And that is what they would, the roads were usually made of hardened dirt, and when salt or other refuse was no longer good for anything, it would be thrown out into the street and walked on by men.

Furthermore, in Luke 14:35a, Jesus states, “It is neither fit for the land nor for the dunghill.” The keywords loosely translated in many different versions are “earth” and “land.” One standard definition of the word “earth” is “land.” However, another definition that makes more sense is “soil.” The correct mixture of salt acts as a fertilizer that makes things grow. Then he mentions the word “dunghill.” This word is commonly mistranslated. Sometimes it is stated as “manure.” However, it is not animal manure but human manure. What people did in their homes when they emptied their bowels in the backyard or wherever their “bathroom” was located, they would cover it with some, dirt and nearby there would usually be some salt from the dead sea. They would spread some of the salt on the dirt, used as a disinfectant to stop the spread of things they did not want to grow. There are two aspects of putting salt on the soil. (1) as a positive,

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salt can be used as a fertilizer in the correct proportion. Christians are to be “The salt of the soil.” (2) as a negative with excessive salt; salt can be used to sterilize the soil and inhibit the ability to grow things. Jesus commonly used examples in everyday life to explain his parables. Christians will positively help promote good things to grow. They will also positively impact negative things not to grow. They do this just by being different from society. Therefore, when preachers talk about Christians being a sprinkling of salt on society, that is enough. It is like sprinkling salt on food. However, much of salt in the correct amount must be used to be either an effective fertilizer or disinfectant. Just shaking some salt from a saltshaker on the ground will not do much of anything.

Luke’s conclusion: If salt is not fit for the soil, meaning it is not a positive to enhance the fertilizer, and it is not a negative to sterilize the soil or dunghill, then it is worthless. And needs to be thrown out into the street where it is trampled on by men.

Mark 9:50b (outlined in orange): Mark is the only one who mentions this scripture. Jesus commands us to have salt within ourselves. In Matthew 5:13, Jesus tells us we are the salt of the earth. If we are the salt of the earth, we must possess salt within us. He wants us to have this salt, to help provide and give the world flavor, to act as the preservative, and be the role model in the world. The purity and strength of our salt are within us. The stronger our flavor and preservative, the bolder our spirit will be to spread His word. **How do we improve the strength and purity of our salt?** To improve the strength and purity of our salt is to improve our faith in God. Many Bible verses speak of men being cleansed by the “blood of Christ,” the “truth,” the “Spirit,” the “light.” All of these have something similar in common. The Spirit of God cleanses the soul with the truth of Jesus Christ. Our hearts are opened with a greater understanding of His word. Engaging and practicing being an active Christian is like exercising our muscles. The more our muscles are used, the stronger they become. The more frequently we demonstrate our Christian beliefs, humility, peace, truthfulness, charity, and contempt for the world, the more people will see the positive role model and the light of Christ within us. Some best practices are:

Learn all you can learn about Jesus’ teachings.

Read the bible.

Exercise your Christian muscles by engaging in bible studies regularly.

Once you have salt in yourselves, Jesus completes the verse by telling us to have peace with one another. Having salt within ourselves makes it relatively easy and natural to have peace with each other. To have peace with someone is to stop fighting or disagreeing. To come to terms and be resolved or reconciled. It does not necessarily

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mean you will be best friends but will begin the road to a new life and work happily together.

Conclusion

Salt affects its environment simply by being salt. Christians also affect their environment simply by being Christian. For salt to have an impact, three things must happen. (1) Salt must be used in a certain quantity. (2) Salt must be used in direct physical contact. (3) Salt must be of high quality; in other words, it must be salty. Christians will only influence the world if we are different from the world. The lesson here is: (1) For quantity, Christians need to be in many places at a minimum quantity of the group. 5-10% of the group would be sufficient to start making a difference. (2) Christians must directly contact all private and public sectors and industries. (3) Christians must have a high quality of being Christian, not being adulterated by society.

Luke 14:35b (outlined in purple): Jesus then ends the parable of the salt of the Earth and says, “**He who has ears to hear, let him hear!**” This is an expression often used by Jesus. Quite plainly, Jesus is telling us to “**pay attention!**” Jesus uses this saying in several his parables.

We hope this in-depth summary of the Salt of the Earth provides a deeper understanding of Jesus’ teachings of The Salt of the Earth.