

LEADER'S GUIDE

Discussion Questions: Salt of the Earth

- 1) Salt of the Earth. (Read the verse outlined in red: Matthew 5:13a) Matthew is the only one who records Jesus stating this verse to his disciples. **What have you heard about what it takes to be the salt of the Earth? Moreover, what are we supposed to do about that?** In many cases, preachers only use Matthew's version. This allows everyone to voice their opinion of what they have heard from preacher's and pastor's interpretations of this meaning. Many preachers suggest we are to 'sprinkle' the good news of the Lord's message throughout the world. Later we will learn that it is Luke's version where Jesus defines what this means.
- 2) **What is salt?** Pure salt is sodium chloride (NaCl).
- 3) **Where did the people in Jesus' time commonly obtain salt?** Salt was scraped up from the shores of the dead sea. A vendor would collect the salt and sell it with many impurities. The concentration of dead sea salt was about 28% salt solution. A popular concentration was 'Potash' potassium chloride (KCl).
- 4) **What is salt used for?** There are hundreds of uses for salt. The two most common uses of salt were flavor enhancer and preservative.
 - a) Essential for life. Helps maintain fluid balance in the human body.
 - b) As a preservative to make food, such as meat and fish, keep longer.
 - c) Adds flavor to make food taste better.
 - d) Used as a component for fertilizer to help make things grow.
 - e) Excessive salt will inhibit the growth of plants.
 - f) It promotes healing such as skin conditions, relaxes muscles, and nourishes hair.
 - g) Used as a disinfectant to clean wounds drawing out fluid and moisture
 - h) It may have been used as payment. When Rome was low on currency, it may have been used as wages. This may have created the saying, "that guy is not worth his salt."
- 5) The most challenging verse in the New Testament. (Read the verse outlined in green: Mark 9:49) **What does this mean? Is everyone going to be burned up in the fire?**

Since this is the most challenging verse in the New Testament, we have copied the whole section of this question from the "In Depth" version of this study. Nearly every well-learned theologian throughout history struggled to come up with a definite answer; consequently, there have been multiple 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. In

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

- 6) Salt is good. (Read the verses outlined in black: Matthew 5:13b, Mark 9:50a, Luke 14:34). Jesus states, “salt is good.” **What are some good qualities of salt?** The most common are flavor and preservation. It also purifies, disinfects, and cleanses wounds. Salt affects its environment just by being what it is.
- 7) Salt loses its flavor. **How can salt lose its saltiness?** Salt loses its saltiness not by stopping being salt but by being contaminated with other compounds. The quality of the salt is diminished and eventually ceases being salt. When the contaminants outweigh the amount of salt, in essence, salt loses its ability to flavor.

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- 8) The metaphor for Christians. **How can Christians lose their saltiness?** 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.
- 9) Luke defines "You are the salt of the earth." (Read the verses outlined in blue: Matthew 5:13c and Luke 14:35a). **What does Luke mean when Jesus states, "It is neither fit for the land nor for the dunghill?"** There are two aspects of putting salt in direct contact with the soil. (1) as a positive, salt can be used as a fertilizer in the correct proportion with Nitrogen, Phosphorus, and Potassium. This would improve and promote things to grow. (2) as a negative with excessive salt; salt can be used to sterilize the soil and inhibit the ability of things to grow. The dunghill would be a place where you would not want things to grow. 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.
- 10) Have salt within yourselves. (Read the verse outlined in orange: Mark 9:50b). **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." The Spirit of God cleanses the soul with the truth of Jesus Christ. Our hearts are opened with a greater understanding of His word. To improve the strength of our salt we need to exercise it like our muscles. 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.
- 11) What three things must salt have to affect the Earth (soil)?**
- a) Salt must be used in a certain quantity.
 - b) Salt must be used in direct physical contact.
 - c) Salt must be of high quality.
- 12) What three things must Christians do to affect the world?**
- a) Christians must be a minimum quantity of the group to be effective. 5-10%
 - b) Christians must be in direct contact with the private and public sectors.
 - c) Christians must have a high quality of being Christian, not being adulterated by society.