

# Authentic Christians

Lesson 4 – Matthew 5:13

1. The “Manifesto” is over – the basic properties of God’s rule have been expressed:

- The subjects of God’s kingdom are “poor” (bankrupt, destitute) spiritually – they enter with NO righteousness of their own which can commend them to God
- The subjects of God’s kingdom mourn this fact
- The subjects of God’s kingdom wait for God to vindicate them based on their justification by faith (meek) – the righteousness of God imputed to them commends them to God
- The subjects of God’s kingdom desire more of God’s righteousness to express itself in their lives
- The subjects of God’s kingdom exhibit mercy, purity of motive, and making peace as the essential elements of their expression of God’s righteousness
- The subjects of God’s kingdom will be persecuted for their righteousness

*Without any personal experience with a believer’s pursuit of righteousness, unsaved people become angry and irritated – why do you think that is? (Gen. 3:15 – the “protoevangelium” – God has put enmity [animosity] between the children of God and the children of Satan; see also Rev. 12:7-17)*

2. The First Metaphor - Salt (5:13)

- Salt in biblical times had several functions:
  - Preservative (primary use) – food items needed salt to make them last in storage
  - Payment – the lifestyle of people at that time made it very valuable, so much so that Roman soldiers received part of their salary in salt (See entry “Salt” in Nelson’s New Illustrated Bible Dictionary)
  - Flavoring – tasteless foods were seasoned with salt (Job 6:6)
  - Offerings – Some OT offerings included the use of salt: grain offering (Lev. 2:13), burnt offering (Ezek. 43:24) and incense offering (Ex. 30:35) ... contributions to the priests during Ezra’s rebuilding of the Temple included salt (Ezra 6:9)
  - Newborn Care – See Ezek. 16:4
  - Ratifying Covenants/Agreements – See Num. 18:19 & 2 Chron. 13:5
  - Vegetation Killer – See Judges 9:45
- Who is Jesus talking to – we know from Luke’s gospel that he was speaking to a “crowd” of people immediately following His selection of the 12 (Lk. 6:17-20); the plural “you” of 5:13, then, has reference to the multitude of people following Jesus, which included the 12 Disciples.
- Considering the context (“You [plural] are [present tense] the salt of the earth” & the blessing on the persecuted), there are several possibilities for the meaning of “salt”:
  - Notice how Christ describes the place where the salt functions (earth – “world” is the location of the light’s work) – both terms describe not the rocks, dirt and trees, but humanity.

- The metaphor uses the preposition “of” which could mean out of, or a kind of, or produced by (i.e. “son of God” refers to those people birthed by God and demonstrating His characteristics) or possessed by (i.e. it is the EARTH’S salt & no one else’s)
- Although grammatically both could be true, neither fit the context – disciples are neither products of the earth or owned by it!
- Most likely, the meaning is that the salt (which the disciples have been called) has a function or activity or special relationship with the earth (humanity) – the realm of the salt’s work.
- So ... some gravitate toward the idea of “flavoring”: since salt makes food taste better, disciples are to make Christ/God “flavorful” and attractive.
- In the same vein, salt is also seen as producing thirst, so some take the flavoring of salt to mean that believers are to make the people around them “thirsty” for God, His Word, and His Son.

*Given the reasons for persecution in 5:10-12 (persecution comes as a result of Christians representing God’s righteousness on earth), why do you think this interpretation might not be correct?*

- Others, however, gravitate to the interpretation that salt has a valuable “preserving” function and responsibility to the earth – disciples are essential to the preservation of godliness and righteousness in our world.

*“... Jesus likens his disciples to salt. Implicitly he is saying that apart from his disciples the world turns ever more rotten; Christians have the effect of delaying moral and spiritual putrefaction.” (Carson, The Sermon on the Mount, pg. 31)*

*“As salt preserves things from corruption and decay, so it is the office of Christians to preserve the mass of mankind from utter moral corruption and ruin.” (Broadus, Commentary on Matthew, pg. 95)*

*“Salt is both a preservative and a flavor enhancer. No doubt its use as a preservative is what Jesus had mostly in view here. Pure salt cannot lose its flavor or effectiveness, but the salt that is common in the Dead Sea area is contaminated with gypsum and other minerals and may have a flat taste or be ineffective as a preservative. Such mineral salts were useful for little more than keeping footpaths free of vegetation.” (MacArthur NASB Study Bible on Matthew 5:13)*

- Although both interpretations (“flavoring” and “preserving”) have merit, in my mind the context seems to point to the meaning of “preservation” instead of “flavoring”:
  - a. The most common function of salt in the biblical world was the preservation of meat
  - b. Vs. 13b seems to refer to a loss of intended function, not basic quality (although it could be said that if salt is “tasteless”, it fails in its function to flavor)

- c. Salt can never be anything but “salt” (sodium chloride), so salt can lose an apparent quality (taste) but it can never lose its primary function (preservation)
- d. In context, the “saltier” a person becomes, the more persecution he/she invites – not thirster people who desire to know Christ.

*Have there been people attracted to Christ by the righteous living of Christians, and have conversions taken place as the result of the testimony of those persecuted? Certainly, but the context and wording emphasize the main function of salt – preserving humanity from total moral collapse!*

- e. Salt and light are coupled together to convey a similar meaning – light does not “flavor” the darkness, but stands in contrast and opposition to the darkness, nor does it lose its “flavor” with use or abuse; light is light and it functions with an intensity dependent on its source.

*“Although salt per se cannot lose its saltiness, it can nevertheless be adulterated. If sufficiently adulterated by, say, sand, then salt can no longer be used as a preservative. It loses its effectiveness in staying corruption, and so must be jettisoned as a useless commodity. The purpose of salt is to fight deterioration, and therefore it must not itself deteriorate ... The norms of the kingdom, worked out in the lives of the heirs of the kingdom, constitute the witness of the kingdom.” (Carson, The Sermon on the Mount, pg. 31-33)*

- The “preserving effect” of righteous people was witnessed by Abraham when he interceded for Sodom (Gen. 18).