

# Salt Preserves

*Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.*

Date: 12 January 2025

Preacher: Sam Bunnell

[ 0 : 0 0 ] All right, would you take the Word of God with me and turn to Matthew chapter 5. We're starting a new series this Sunday, so you're here for the first one. You haven't missed anything, Matthew chapter 5. As you're turning there, I'd like to talk to you for a moment about this concept that we find in this passage about salt and light. Salt and light. What do y'all think of when we talk about salt? First thing that comes to mind, somebody yell it out. Food? Pepper. Somebody said pepper.

Iced roads, there you go. That's real after the weekend we just had. What else? Sodium chloride. Yeah. What's that? Preservation. I like it. Your personality? A little salty? All right.

Everybody avoid David this morning. Just kidding. Just kidding. All right, we're going to look at Matthew chapter 5 and see what the Bible has to say about this. In honor of God's Word, if you're able to, would you mind joining us in standing? If not, that's totally fine. But I want to invite you to stand. In Matthew chapter 5, verse 13, I'm reading from the Christian Standard Bible. Verse 13 says, Jesus is speaking. This is his most famous sermon, arguably, the Sermon on the, what is it? Mount.

The Sermon on the Mount. We get so much of our theology from Jesus' teaching in this sermon. Let's see what he has to say about salt. You are the salt of the earth, but if the salt should lose its taste, how can it be made salty? It's no longer good for anything but to be thrown out and trampled under people's feet. Pretty extreme there. You are the light of the world. A city situated on a hill cannot be hidden. No one lights a lamp and puts it under a basket, but rather on a lampstand, and it gives light for all who are in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others so they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven. Let's pray together. God, we ask you for your elimination to the teaching of this passage. I pray that you would get across the point that you wanted to make and help us to have understanding, wisdom to apply it to our lives. It's in Jesus' name we pray. Amen. You may be seated. Thanks for standing. So I want to talk to you for a minute about salt.

Did you know that for a long time in the history of our world, salt was known as white gold? Anybody know that? I didn't know that until I did research on this. Now you might be more educated than I am in that way, and you might be already familiar with that, but salt was so rare in the ancient world that it became a valuable currency. They used it like money. It was essential for preserving meat. Somebody said preservative a little bit ago. And for general health, you need sodium chloride. Roman soldiers were often paid in salt. How would y'all like that? Payday comes and you're expecting a check to hit the bank. And instead your boss calls you in and said, hold out your little paw there, buddy. Takes a salt shaker. How great would that be? Roman soldiers were often paid in salt.

[ 3 : 5 3 ] We actually get our English word salary from the Latin word *salarium*, meaning salt money. See how it all works together. So did you know that this is actually where we get our expression, you're worth your salt? That was an aha moment for me. I hope it is for you this morning. I hope you're enjoying that as much as I did. But the whole idea here is that salt was incredibly valuable.

Salt was right up there with gold. Salt was desirable. We think of salt as something that flavors our food.

It enhances our food. It contains nutrients that we need. Back then they certainly used it that way, but it meant so much more to them. So when Jesus is saying that you are the salt of the earth, wow, that means something. That carries some weight, some impact. So we look back at verse 13 and in this series on salt and light today, we're just going to be focusing on salt and we'll get to the light part in future weeks. But right now, I really want us to lock into this idea that Jesus sees us as the salt of the earth to provide flavor, to provide preservation, as highly valuable and essential to what God wants to do on this earth. John Stott was one of the greatest the greatest theologians of the 20th century. And he wrote a famous book on Jesus's sermon on the mount. And in this book, he wrote this. It's way too small for you to see, but I have it here. I'm going to read it to you. God intends us to penetrate the world. Christian salt has no business to remain snugly in elegant little ecclesiastical. That means has to do with church, elegant little church salt cellars. Our place is to be rubbed into the secular community as salt is rubbed into meat to stop it from going bad. When society does go bad, what do we do? We Christians tend to throw up our hands in pious horror and reproach the non-Christian world. How could you do such a thing? But should we not rather reproach ourselves? One can hardly blame unsalted meat for going bad.

It's what it does. It cannot do anything else. The real question to ask is, where is the salt? That really stood out to me. As we see this world get worse and worse in a lot of ways, the question we should probably be asking all of us is, where's the salt? Why isn't the salt doing its job? I want to take you now to Colossians chapter 4 and verse 2. Colossians chapter 4 and verse 2. Paul writes this to the church at Colossae and he says, he's challenging them, says, devote yourself to prayer. Stay alert in prayer with thanksgiving. At the same time, pray for us so God can open a door to us for the word, preaching the word of God, to speak the mystery of Christ. The mystery of Christ, man, let's not skip over that. What's he talking about when he says, we want to speak the mystery of

Christ. You guys pray for God to open doors for us so we can go speak the mystery of Christ. The mystery of Christ is the gospel. It's so mysterious. It's so hard to wrap our heads around that we are fallen people. We are all sinful people. And God, the creator of us and everything else in this world, loved and cared and was so devoted to our well-being that he sent his only son, God himself, Jesus, down to this world to become one of us, to walk this world with us, to walk through this life with us, to show us how it can be done, and then willingly lay down his life as a death sacrifice to pay the punishment for all this sin that we have committed. But then he didn't stay dead because he is God. God raised him up from the dead. He is still alive today, hears us when we pray, loves it when we sing these songs of worship to him, and wants to have a relationship with us.

[ 8 : 54 ] That's this gospel. That's this mystery of God. See, that's crazy. Who would do that? That's what's so weird about it. That's what's so mysterious about it. It doesn't make any sense in our mind that someone would make such a sacrifice for people who were so far removed from them and even hated him. So he said, this is the message we want to preach. Pray that God opens doors for us to preach, then speak the mystery of Christ. And it's because of this gospel, this mystery, that I'm even in chains right now. Paul's writing this from prison.

He'd been locked up for preaching this message. Man, thankfully, we don't live in a country today where it's illegal to do that. But throughout much of the world, for much of human history, it's been illegal to preach this mystery, this gospel of Christ. So he says, pray that I would have a door open to do this so that I may make it known as I should. Isn't that interesting?

Paul says, I should do this. Why? Because he was something special? He was something better than we are. No. Because he was a born again, hard to understand that concept, regenerate, remade, reborn, new life, child of God. So because God had initiated such a radical transformation in Paul's life, he believed, as I think most of us should get to this place, that we should make this mystery known, that we should speak this gospel. And Paul got there, and then he continues on in verse 5 of Colossians 4.

So he said, I want you to pray for me that I can speak this message as I should. Now I've got something to say to you. Act wisely toward outsiders, making the most of the time. What does he mean by that? Could it be that people, even back then, were suspicious of outsiders? Could it be that they had kind of circled the wagons and put up their walls? And understandably, because back then, I mean, it was illegal to be a Christian, right? But could it be that Paul was challenging them to not just be Christians for their little bunch, but that they were challenged to be the salt of the earth? That they were challenged to speak that same message that Paul had given his life to speaking so that others could hear it. So he said, act wisely toward outsiders, making the most of the time.

Don't lose the time you have on this earth, wasting it on yourself. And as you interact and engage with outsiders, so to speak, those who maybe don't believe the same way you do, those who don't feel the same way about God, those who haven't given their lives to him and accepted his grace, he goes on and says, let your speech be always gracious. Because he understands the temptation to argue. He understands the temptation to stand up for what you believe, and everybody else is wrong, and I'm right.

[ 12 : 49 ] Now, our society never does that, right? You can log on social media or political discussions, and nobody ever has strong opinions and kind of gets a little bit rude in those engagements, do they?

Of course they do. But apparently, that's human nature. It's what we do. So if the divine nature, if God's nature is going to replace human nature, our nature, then we're going to start acting a little bit differently. And he says, let your speech, let your interactions with those outsiders always be full of grace, gracious, seasoned with salt. So in context here, we understand what he's saying when he says seasoned with salt. He's not talking about being salty, okay? He's just saying, let it be a preservative. Let it be incredibly valuable. Let it be essential as you interact with those outside of your faith. Let it be gracious, and let it be valuable, healing, preserving as you interact with these people. So then you will know how you should answer each person. Why?

Because if we don't engage people this way, then we're going to lose our opportunity. We're also not going to listen to them. We're not going to hear them. They could have all kinds of reasons why they struggle with church, why they struggle with God. And let me tell you, there's some valid reasons out there. You know why? Because God's people have not always behaved godly.

And a lot of people have been hurt in the name of Jesus. You go back to the Spanish Inquisition, you look at what the Catholic Church did back then. That's just one example. You could go throughout history and see how many wars, how much hurt has been caused in the name of God.

So just because you claim to be a follower of God, that doesn't instantly tell the world around you that you're a nice person, that you're going to be nice to them, that you're worth listening to.

[ 15 : 33 ] So sometimes you have to figure out how you should answer each person. You have to learn their hangups. You have to learn their experiences. You have to learn sometimes the hurt they may have gone through.

But Paul is encouraging them, listen, as you engage people, do it with grace. Do it with compassion. Do it in such a way that what you lend to this conversation is incredibly valuable.

It's incredibly preserving and healing and doesn't just stir the pot. So number one, salt preserves.

What does salt do? Salt preserves. As we are encouraged to be salty, so to speak, out there, what does that mean? What are we doing? We are preserving. Salt preserves. How does it preserve? Well, most commonly it preserves meat. You can coat meat in salt and it will last so much longer than if it were left to its own.

Back in the book of Acts, where we read about the beginning of Paul, we read about the beginning of the New Testament church, as we read about it, as we experience it today.

[ 16 : 59 ] Paul preached in Acts 13 a powerful, bold gospel message to both the Jews and the Gentiles.

He was calling out the Jews. He was calling out the Jews unbelief and he was calling them to repentance. He was trying, doing his best to spread this gospel message so it would be a preservative to the people around him. He was born into a world that was far from God.

He was born into a world that was anti-God. Well, you can look around today in the world that we live in and you can see a lot of similarities there, can't you?

We can see a world that is often positions itself as anti-God. We can see a world which is certainly far away removed from God.

So Paul was seasoning his speech with salt. He recognized that he was salt of the earth and he had a role to preserve the world around him, not by fighting every political battle he could fight, not by going and lobbying against Rome and lobbying against the Pharisees and trying to change everything around him in his own strength and power.

[ 18 : 30 ] Instead, he used the gospel message as the preservative. And he preached this powerful message in Acts 13 in Antioch.

What does preserving do? Seems very simple. But preserving keeps something from going bad. So my challenge to you today is, if you're not happy with how bad things are out there, what are you doing to keep it from going bad?

And you might say, some of you, I'm not doing anything. Truth is, I'm all talk and no action. Some of you might say, well, I'm doing this.

I'm talking to the people I know. I'm telling them how they need to vote. I'm telling them what they need to do on the school boards. I'm telling them how they need to change society. And I'll say, wow, that's a new concept with you.

No one's ever figured that out before. No, of course not. And I apologize for the sarcasm. But the truth is, people have been doing that for centuries. And they come to blows over it.

[ 19 : 45 ] And usually very little actually gets changed. Has anyone's mind ever been changed by an argument, losing an argument on the internet? Oh, wow, you have converted me from the error of my ways.

And through your gracious speech, you have brought me over to your side. I don't think that's very common. Do you? So you say, I'm fighting the good fight.

Well, if your goal is to change other people, you're fighting a losing battle. So what do we do then? Well, we can throw up our hands, kind of like John Stott said earlier, and just say, can't believe how bad it is.

World's going to hell in a handbasket. Or we can actually take the power that was given to us by God and speak the mystery of Jesus. And he says that can keep this world from going bad.

Now, ultimately, this world's going to go bad, and God's going to end it, and he's going to begin a new world. And we see that played out in the scriptures. So then why are we here? Why doesn't he just bring us all home to heaven, and he can start it right now?

[ 20 : 53 ] Because it's not time yet. And you actually have power to fight back darkness enough so that all of God's children can come home. All of God's people can be brought into his kingdom.

And that is the job that we have. So preserving something keeps it from going bad. And that's one of our roles as salt.

I want to share this quote from you. I'm not sure who said it first, but I read it, and I'll just call it Author Unknown. But it says, The church cannot be the salt of the earth if it keeps sugarcoating the gospel.

The church cannot be the salt of the earth if it keeps sugarcoating the gospel. Do salt and sugar look similar? Yeah.

Has anybody ever substituted salt for sugar or sugar for salt, maybe even worse, in a recipe? Yeah? Maybe you're baking a cake, and you put salt in instead of sugar.

[ 22 : 01 ] How'd that cake taste? Yummy? As Austin says, Scrum Diddlyumptious. That's Austin's highest compliment. So if Austin ever tastes something that y'all have, and he said it's Scrum Diddlyumptious, that's like peak deliciousness in his mind.

Yeah, it is hard to swallow something that has salt in it instead of sugar if that's what it needed.

Unfortunately, the opposite is also true. We are meant to be salt in this earth and not sugar.

What do you mean by that? Well, God didn't call us the sugar of the world. He called us the salt. So if we substitute that for something else, we're doing not only disobeying what our master commanded us to do, but we're also doing a disservice to the world that needs salt.

You can pack a piece of meat in sugar and expect it to act like salt and preserve that meat, and it's not going to work, is it?

[ 23 : 17 ] It's just going to go bad. So here's my challenge. Let's go to 2 Corinthians 4 and verse 5.

When we say, don't sugarcoat the gospel, be the salt of the earth, I think this is the best explanation of that. What we proclaim is not ourselves.

Paul is writing this to the church in Corinth. It's his second letter to them that we know of, and he says, what we proclaim is not us. It's Jesus. Jesus as Lord.

And we, ourselves, we are your servants for Jesus' sake. Because of Jesus, who made himself a servant, who humbled himself, was obedient to God, laid down his life for the good of all of us, to be our rescuer, he was the example.

So because he did that for his sake, we are your servants too. And we're your servants of bringing you the gospel, the salt that will preserve you.

[ 24 : 29 ] It will keep you from all the crazy out there. It will keep you from the darkness. And it will deliver you home safely to God someday.

So that is not sugarcoating the gospel. You know how we sugarcoat the gospel? We make it about us. People without God look at the people who call themselves God's followers, and they judge God based on us.

Isn't that a scary thing? But it's true. See, that's not fair. I'm not God. How are you going to judge God based on me? Because you call yourself his children.

Because you say you're his followers. We call this his house. You say we're the temple of God as we walk around everywhere.

We say God lives inside of us. We say we take him with us everywhere we go. Okay. Well then God should have made a profound impact on each of us, right? Changed us.

[ 25 : 36 ] But instead, we go through this life so often making it all about us. Oftentimes, Christians can be some of the least generous, least kind, most stingy, cold-hearted people out there.

I'm not trying to make you feel bad about yourself. Okay? Okay? How many of you ever worked in the restaurant industry, maybe as a server, who depended on tips? How many of you know that Sunday is often one of the worst days for tips?

Because Christians be stingy. It's a real thing. And that's sad, right? Should be leading the way in that.

Should be setting the standard. Jesus should have made such a transformation in our lives. But we proclaim with our actions, with our talk, with our emotions, with how we interact, we proclaim ourselves.

And that is sugarcoating the gospel. It's substituting something else for the salt that it's supposed to be.

[ 26 : 58 ] And the meat doesn't get preserved. And the salt doesn't do its job. And the world gets worse and worse and worse.

And here we are, centuries, after Jesus died, after Jesus left us this command, after Paul wrote these letters. And how much better are we?

How much closer are we to what Jesus intended? Or how often do we make it about ourselves? Sometimes we water down the truth of the gospel.

Sometimes we change it and say, oh, whatever you want to believe is fine. That's sugarcoating the gospel. Sometimes we say, man, everybody's just trying to find their own path.

Everybody's just trying to get to God. Whatever you believe, that's a little different than what I believe, but it's okay. Guys, there is truth. And everything else is false. There is light.

[ 27 : 54 ] And everything else is darkness. Jesus is the light. He is the truth. He is the way. So if we don't point people to him instead of us, instead of themselves, instead of everything else out there that's trying to pull them back into the darkness, pull them away from the truth, then we are not being the salt.

We're sugarcoating that gospel message. So, we don't proclaim ourselves. We proclaim Jesus. Question is, do you dilute the salt with sugar?

Whatever that sugar is for you might be different for you than for me, for somebody else, but I promise you, we all do it. We all do it to a certain extent. Some of us probably more than others.

But we all water down that gospel message with us, with our fears, with our inconsistencies.

I'm not telling you you've got to be perfect, but I'm telling you you've got to point people to Jesus and let them see the grace of God in your life, not how impressive of a person you are.

[ 29 : 11 ] Right? That points people to us, not to Jesus. Let's go to Acts 13. I was talking about earlier, Paul was preaching that bold and powerful message. We'll be done in just a moment.

Paul was preaching that bold and powerful message to Antioch. He was declaring the gospel. Man, you can read it, but let's pick it up at the end here. Acts chapter 13. The end of the chapter.

Let's look at verse 48. This guy preached a powerful gospel message.

We get to see it in action. He's saying, I'm declaring the mystery of the gospel. Here he's doing it. He's doing it right here in Acts 13. You can read this whole thing later. What happened?

What was the result? He called out their unbelief, the unbelief of the Jews. God's people, right? The religious people. The people who were supposed to be carrying on the truth of the gospel of Jesus.

[ 30 : 15 ] God's chosen people. He's calling them out. He's calling them out for their unbelief in Jesus. And he's calling them to repentance.

And you know what the crazy part of it is? That just threw them for a loop. He's also preaching to the Gentiles. And that means the people that were not Jews. Basically everybody else.

If you're Jewish in here, then that would be the rest of us who are not. Okay? We're considered Gentiles. And back then, man, you would not think of God bringing in the Gentiles to be his people as well.

That was just unheard of for them. They would have resisted that like crazy. And that's what Paul was doing. He was saying, God has opened this up for the Gentiles to also be his people.

He died for them too. He loves them too. And I thank God for that because I am one of them. So, he's calling the Gentiles to repentance.

[ 31 : 13 ] What's the response? We read it in verse 48. When the Gentiles heard this, not the Jews, they rejoiced and honored the word of the Lord.

And all who had been appointed to eternal life believed. The word of the Lord spread through the whole region. But the Jews, what did they do? Incited the prominent God-fearing women and the leading men of the city.

And they stirred up persecution against Paul and Barnabas and expelled them from their district. That's what they did.

The Jews resisted it. And they got all the religious ladies and men, the leaders of the community to get together and kick Paul out.

Said, uh-uh. You're not preaching that kind of stuff around here. We've got God figured out. We've got this religious stuff figured out.

[ 32 : 19 ] We've got God's word figured out. They did not honor God's word. The Gentiles honored the word of the Lord that was preached to them by his servant Paul. The religious Jews, God's people, rejected it.

And they didn't get the mob to kick Paul out. They got the well-respected, church-attending, religious people to band together and kick Paul out.

How many times has that story repeated itself across America, across this world, in small towns just like ours? You've got somebody preaching God's message of love and hope and forgiveness and redemption, saving from sin, beginning a new life with Jesus, available to all, not just the important people, not just the wealthy people, not just the people who look like me, that kind of thing.

God's mystery of the gospel. You've got somebody preaching that and what happens? Feathers get ruffled. People get upset. And God's preacher gets pushed out by the leading community, community, people, the leaders of the community, the leading church people.

people. Why? Because the gospel of Jesus is not meant to be sugar-coated. It's the salt that this dying world desperately needs to preserve and build the kingdom of God until he comes again.

[ 33 : 56 ] That's what the salt is. That's what the gospel is. It's going to look real good to those who are hopeless. It's going to look real good to those who don't think they're all that.

who those don't think higher of themselves than they should. It's going to be a lifeline, a life preserver to the people who need it.

But to those who think we're fine, they'd rather have sugar. So, the question is, are you worth your salt?

Talked about it at the very beginning. The Roman soldiers used to be paid in salt. It was so valuable.

And in the context of that world, Jesus called his followers salt. salt. So, he has made you the salt, this valuable, precious, important, essential substance on this earth.

[ 35 : 22 ] Are you worth that? Are you being salt? Are you preserving? Or are you diluting it? salt? You know, salt doesn't go bad.

Pure salt never expires. Never goes bad. Now, if you look at your table salt, you might see eventually that there's an expiration date on it.

You might see it eventually go bad. You know why? Because it's been diluted with iodine, with other minerals, with other substances that have a shelf life.

They can go bad. When we dilute the gospel message, when we dilute what God called us to do on this earth with our own agenda, with our own feelings, we get in the way of it and we make it ineffective.

We make it go bad. It's not bad. The gospel isn't the problem. Jesus wasn't the problem. We get in the way. So are we worth our salt?

[ 36 : 40 ] Or have we begun to dilute the gospel message? I want you to know that God considers every one of us worth it. God considers every one of us worth his blood, worth his pain, worth his suffering, worth his time, worth his energy.

But we may not be fulfilling our mission as salt of the earth and he's calling us to come back and say, be the salt. This world needs preserving. You've got relationships that need preserving.

They need the salt of Jesus. You've got people that in your circle, people in your life that need you to be salt, be salt for them. Would you bow your heads with me in prayer?

God, I pray right now that you would speak to us from your word, that you would convince us of the need to be preservatives in this world, to bring healing to this world.

You chose that word salt carefully. You knew the impact that it would have on those who heard you speak. You knew the importance of what it is.

[ 37 : 45 ] It's almost like saying you are the white gold of this world, but in some ways you're even more valuable than gold because you can preserve. And that's what this world needs.

It needs the gospel to preserve. Until you come again, let your people be the preservatives in this world.

It's in Jesus' name we pray. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.