

“Living That Makes Us Salty and Bright”

LaPorte New Church Swedenborgian

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Feb. 5, 2020

Holy Scriptures

Psalms 112

Matthew 5:13-20

Insight for Worship

Heavenly Secrets 9207.2 by Emanuel Swedenborg

[2] This is described by the Lord by “salt,” where he says in Matthew: “Ye are the salt of the earth; but if the salt has lost its savor, wherewith shall it be salted? It is thenceforth good for nothing, but to be cast out and trodden under foot of men” (Matt. 5:13); these words the Lord says to the disciples and to the people. By “the salt of the earth” is meant the truth of the church which longs for good; by “the salt that has lost its savor” is meant truth without any longing for good; that such truth is profitable for nothing is described by “the salt that has lost its savor being thenceforth good for nothing, but to be cast out and trodden under foot.” To long for good is to long to do what is good, and in this way to be conjoined with good.

I imagine many of us have heard these precious words coined by our Lord as a special compliment, “She is the salt of the earth.” Or, “He is such an asset to us all, he is the salt of the earth.” When we want to underline a person's worth and usefulness, these are high words we borrow from the Lord.

It is good to know the origin of this special compliment, that it was indeed Jesus Christ who said it. It is good to understand what it means, and even more so, to add a “pinch” of it into how we live our lives, because doing so helps us co-create with God a savory recipe for salvation!

I'd like to talk with you this morning about several important elements of salt and their inner meaning, so that we can gain greater appreciation for how good it is for the Lord to whisper these beautiful words to us, when He says, “You are the salt of the earth.”

Salt...

- adds purity and cleanses
- acts as a preservative
- adds seasoning and flavor to food and creates thirst

Salt adds purity and it cleanses

Historically speaking, in the ancient world, salt was highly valued. The Greeks called it divine. The Romans had a simple little jingle that went, "There is nothing more useful than sun and salt." In the time of Christ, salt was a highly valued commodity. Along the shores of the Dead Sea, which is fed only by the Jordan River and which sits 1,400 ft. below sea level, one finds mounds of this glistening, white, opaque mineral.

Salt has long been associated with purity. The Romans said that salt was the purest of all things because it came from the sun and the sea. Salt was one of the oldest offerings made to the gods, and toward the end of the day Jewish sacrifices were offered with salt. And so, to bring out some of the symbolic meaning behind why Jesus coined this saying is that a genuine Christian way of life is one of purity.

One of the unfortunate tendencies of humanity is that we tend to enjoy lowering our standards of living. Whether we are talking about standards of honesty, standards of diligence at work, moral standards, perhaps our standards of living rightly according to God's Holy Word, or even standards of cleanliness at home, all are prime targets for the unregenerated human will to lower our standards of living over time.

The truth is, if we want to live in a good Christian way of life, if we seriously want to be part of the human "salt of the earth," then we must hold on high the standard of purity of speech, of exemplary civil conduct, as well as purity in our thoughts as well. This is why God gave us His precious *Ten Commandments*, which teach us, "Thou shalt not take God's name in vain," "Thou shalt not lie," "Thou shalt honor thy father and mother," and "Thou shalt not covet" what belongs to others. And again we heard this morning in *Psalms 112*, "Blessed are those who fear the Lord, who find great delight in His Commands.the generation of the upright will be blessed. Even in darkness light dawns for the upright, for those who are gracious and compassionate and righteous."

When other people witness your example of purity and goodness and high standards of honesty, or your good diligence at work, or your choice to avoid lewd gestures and impolite forms of language, that little "pinch of salt" into their mind can help purify their own standards of living. In a world where many of the streets of any of our great cities provide glaring enticements to the ways of sin, the Lord needs those whose ways remain strong, steady and pure.

Salt acts as a preservative

In the ancient world, salt was often used to help meat and other things to stop from rotting and going bad. Plutarch had a eccentric way of putting this. He said that meat is a dead body and part of a dead body, and [the human] will, if left to itself, goes bad; but salt preserves it and keeps it fresh, and is therefore like a new soul inserted into a dead body. Thus, salt preserves from corruption and putrefaction. In Jesus' day, the fishermen made excellent use of

salt. After bringing in their catch of the day, they would preserve their valuable fish by first putting down a layer of salt, then one layer of fish covered by another layer of salt, then another layer of fish, and so forth. The salt would suck out enough of the juices of the meat that otherwise would rot, which enabled the good meat to stay fresh and marketable.

Thus, salt preserves from corruption. So, if you and I are to act and function in a genuinely Christian way of living, we need to have an antiseptic influence in life. I have witnessed this many times when I get to work and spend time with teenagers. I remember being 15 and 16 years old, and how enticing it seemed to start using foul language, either within team sports and in the locker rooms or on the job doing manual labor. It felt a bit thrilling to "get a rise" out of others by using bad language. But what I find means much more to most people is to offer instead warm, caring eye-contact and a willing spirit to be good and useful. This choice lends warmth to the heart, and facilitates a connection based on love rather than current cultural thrills. And so, a real Christian is one whose presence and example defeats corruption and helps others to be good. As the psalmist wrote so well, the spiritual power we receive to enjoy being this way is because our "hearts are steadfast, trusting in the Lord."

Salt adds flavor and creates thirst

My favorite and most enjoyable facet about salt is how wonderfully it adds flavor to foods. An easy example of this to me is scrambled eggs. Whipping up a lovely, fluffy batch of scrambled eggs in the morning is a fine sight for hungry eyes, but did you ever try eating them without adding a bit of salt to them? Without some salt they are very plain and unsavory. Adding a pinch of sodium chloride, or table salt, makes them flavorful and delicious! Years ago when I began making soups and stews, it was fun to experience the awesome impact of just the right amount of salt to make a recipe complete!

But too much of a good thing spoils the outcome. When too much salt is added to soup, a casserole, a hamburger or steamed corn, the mineral dominates the flavor and diminishes the natural taste of the food in question. Salt is really the humblest of all cooking ingredients. In its proper amount it usually does not stand out on its own, but rather works well underneath the surface of the full flavor of the meat, potatoes, eggs or vegetables one is eating. And so, when we are thoughtful, helpful, kind and willing to be humble and useful to our family by doing the laundry, by cleaning the bathrooms without being asked to do so, or when we volunteer at work to do something that is not on our job description, this goodness adds flavor to life. It makes the daily routine, work and stresses feel more palatable--something that brings satisfaction to many.

Salt also makes us thirsty. After enjoying a pizza, popcorn or a medium french fries, my mouth gets very thirsty. Salt makes us long for water. In this aspect of the symbolism of salt, it stands for "truth longing for good." So, when we are abundantly living life in the ways God

teaches, we find this precious, valuable equation: we enjoy learning new things about God's Word and helpful church teachings, which trigger a deep longing or thirsting for application, for actualizing the new truths we gain within religion into our personal relationships and behavior throughout the day.

As Christians, and especially as Swedenborgian agents working for the Lord, we have plenty of truth to work with, don't we? Learning and reflecting upon great ideas and teachings has a satisfaction to it, which tantalizes our minds, helping us see new ways of understanding who and what God is, and many other fascinating things. However, new ideas or teachings have little or no benefit to us if they do not lead into a better way of living. In order for a good idea to blossom into life, spiritual truth has to lead us into a greater quality of life experience. Applying the truths we find in the Lord's sermon on the mountain at the beginning of *Matthew 5* are meant to guide us into becoming "poor in spirit," to learn how healing it is to "mourn" for those who have died, to feel how calming and good it is to become "meek," giving up egocentric attitudes, to learn the joys and blessings of mercifulness, or to actualize what it means to be a peacemaker within a world that glorifies violence.

Real spiritual salt makes us thirsty or longing to join life-goodness (the good that wise loving does) with the true ideas we gain. If we fall into the trap of simply accumulating shelves full of good books without putting those fine ideas to use, then we are like salt that has lost its saltiness, which Christ said was worthless and needs to be tossed out.

Perhaps you remember Lot's wife. When Lot and his wife were told to take their daughters and flee from Sodom and Gommorah, she disobeyed God's words and looked back at the sinful city where they had lived. She had special insights that others didn't have, because of her helpful angel. Yet it did not occur to her that she might have fallen into attaching herself to the sins of her city, and that her own life was in danger as well. She did not heed God's warning to leave those corrupt ways and never look back at them. She had a lot of salt, but it did not make her very thirsty for making new ways of goodness to replace the bad habits that engulfed her hometown. So she became a dried up pillar of salt in the desert, a perpetual monument for us all to learn from her mistake. The same thing happens to us when we make the salt of doctrine an end in itself, a monument to worship, rather than to use our salty teachings as good seasoning within the recipe of healthy way of life according to God's Word.

A few genuine people of faith, living according to the Lord's wisdom, living in simplicity and integrity can make a real difference in this world. The Lord values you as the salt of the earth, for in you and your good effect upon others God can quietly inspire and lead many toward what is good and true. As Christ said, a little leaven can leaven a whole loaf of bread. Similarly, a pinch of salt can transform an entire stew into a meal that brings joy, happiness and strength to many. A few good people can well influence a whole family, an entire organization or town or city, just as Melvin Wenzel positively influenced many inmates at the Westville Correctional Center as a teacher.

Through you, God can lovingly affect others---He can purify life, preserve higher standards of conduct, add flavoring to daily routine, and inspire new thirst and longing for the good that love does.

Amen.

Psalm 112

¹ Praise the LORD.

Blessed are those who fear the LORD,
who find great delight in His Commands.

² Their children will be mighty in the land;
the generation of the upright will be blessed.

³ Wealth and riches are in their houses,
and their righteousness endures forever.

⁴ Even in darkness light dawns for the upright,
for those who are gracious and compassionate and righteous.

⁵ Good will come to those who are generous and lend freely,
who conduct their affairs with justice.

⁶ Surely the righteous will never be shaken;
they will be remembered forever.

⁷ They will have no fear of bad news;
their hearts are steadfast, trusting in the LORD.

⁸ Their hearts are secure, they will have no fear;
in the end they will look in triumph on their foes.

⁹ They have freely scattered their gifts to the poor,
their righteousness endures forever;
their horn will be lifted high in honor.

¹⁰ The wicked will see and be vexed,
they will gnash their teeth and waste away;
the longings of the wicked will come to nothing.

Matthew 5:13-20

Salt and Light

¹³ “You are the salt of the earth. 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.

¹⁴ “You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden.¹⁵ Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. ¹⁶ In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.

The Fulfillment of the Law

¹⁷ “Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. ¹⁸ For truly I tell you, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished. ¹⁹ Therefore anyone who sets aside one of the least of these commands and teaches others accordingly will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever practices and teaches these commands will be called great in the kingdom of heaven.²⁰ For I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven.