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**Series: Sermon on the Mount, Chapt 5**  
**Sermon: Light and Salt**

**Matthew 5:13-16**

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. You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden. 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. In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.

**Sermon**

There are times when I am working on a sermon that I rack my brain for the right story, the right metaphor to use to illustrate a point. And I wonder if Jesus did the same thing. The night before this sermon on the mount, did he stay up late at night working on this point or that point, wanting to convey the right message. I wonder if he played with something different than salt. Why salt? Why not another common spice? Why not cumin or onion or oregano? Let's play with this a little bit this morning.

You are the Nutmeg of the earth! Nutmeg. When you think of nutmeg, or the season in which you think of nutmeg, what do you think of? Generally, it's a spice used around Christmas time. Anytime I smell nutmeg, or cloves for that matter, I think of Christmas or holidays. It is a special spice. It used to be one of the most expensive spices out there. It come from one island in the Pacific. During the medieval times, it was thought to have brought healing powers. In the Seventeenth Century, England controlled the island. Across the globe, the Dutch controlled New Amsterdam in the New World. But Nutmeg was such a prize that it the Dutch traded New Amsterdam for control of the Nutmeg Island. Of course, New Amsterdam changed it's name to \_\_\_\_\_ (New York). We talk about how the Dutch got Manhattan from the local Natives for beads and necklaces, they gave it up for Nutmeg. And so, to make a very bad and weak correlation, if Jesus would have said, "You are the Nutmeg of the Earth", it could have meant that we miss real worth of who he is. You look at me only at Christmas time! But the real power comes with an ongoing relationship with Jesus. Christmas and Easter are important, but if we relegate him to those two times, we miss the real worth of who Jesus is for us. Are there days that we are nutmeggers? Jesus would have scratched out Nutmeg on his sermon notes, not the kind of followers he wants.

Maybe, Jesus could have used another spice. Let's try this one (Parsley). I drove real careful this morning to church, I didn't want to get picked up with bags of this in the car. How do I explain that this is for a sermon? Parsley. "You are the Parsley of the World!" Parsley: It was once believed that only witches and pregnant women could grow this herb, Sow parsley, sow babes, was an old expression. But beyond that and probably more importantly, it is said to provoke lust and love. On the surface. Surface level love. And we generally use parsley as a garnishment. On the surface. Again, to make a very weak and pitiful correlation, if Jesus would have said, "You are the Parsley of the Earth", he would have been saying, "You are followers of me at a surface level." Skin deep. But when trials and trouble come, you might abandon me. Those who profess with their lips, but their actions do not point to a Godly life. How is your life different than an unbeliever? Are there days that we are Parsley people? Jesus would have scratched out Parsley, not the kind of followers he wants.

Let's try another one. Don't sniff this one: Cayenne Red Pepper. The last thing we want is to someone to sniff this in and have a nasty reaction and ambulance ride. Then the cops would really ask what's going on here!

"You are the Cayenne Red Pepper of the world!" Pepper. The second most common spice. Used to spice things up. We all want a little spice in our lives, don't we? We were in Charleston, South Carolina several years back, working in a homeless shelter and I got on food duty. We were making fried chicken. The head cook told me to add the pepper to the flour mix. I took their jumbo Sam's Club like spice container and added about a cup of pepper to the bowl of flour. The cook looked at me, shook his head, said, "silly northerner" and dumped about half of the jug into the mix. They can't tell how bad the food is when their mouth is on fire. Think Popeye's spicy chicken times ten. Now, I like Pepper, but you get too much, and it becomes caustic and burns. A little Cayenne pepper is used in medicine (it relieves itching and pain), but the same pepper, in higher doses, is the main ingredient to pepper spray and mace. If Jesus said, "You are the Pepper of the world," he would have been saying, "You caustic and judgmental people! You might have good intentions, but too much of you makes people want to spit you out!" It's good to a point, but there is a line when it becomes too poisonous. I know I'm like pepper when I start shoving my own beliefs and biases down the throat of others. Where I more concerned about being right than trying to help people. A little pepper, OK. A lot of pepper scatters people away.

"You are the Garlic of the World!" We're cheating here, garlic is actually a type of onion. You can read about garlic in ancient literature, including the Bible and Koran. It was used by Greeks and Romans and Egyptians building the pyramids. Of course, we associate garlic with superstitions, mainly, what? Keeping vampires away. It is said to work with demons, werewolves, and future dates. Put garlic around your house to ward off evil. If Jesus did say, "You are the garlic of the world," It could be interpreted as "If you're with me, bad things will never happen to you." There are people out there who believe this. Now that I am a person of faith, bad things don't come my way, or whatever bad things do come my way, God is testing me. Why is God putting this in my life? And of course God doesn't put bad things in your life, but he allows bad things to happen. He doesn't cause the bad things, but he can redeem the bad things. He can make all things work for good. There is no magic in the Christian life. We do not put serious considerations in good luck charms or talismans. Lucky numbers are just numbers. The only thing a rabbit's foot indicates is a limping lupine somewhere. If you're like me and garlic, it tastes good for a while, but the taste lingers and you want it gone. And you don't like it anymore. Same with the superstitious beliefs. After a while, you realize that there is no solid foundation of faith and you need it to get out of your system.

OK, we've played with some other drafts that Jesus might have worked on in his Sermon on the Mount, and he chose to use salt. And I wonder why. Let's take a quick look at salt and see if there is a clue. For Jesus' listeners, salt was what it is for us, a seasoning, but lots more. In Jesus' first century world, salt was best known as a preservative. No refrigerators then. Because salt was a preservative, giving long life to all it permeated, it was used as a symbol of God's eternal covenant with the Hebrew people. In the Book of Numbers, you will read of a Covenant of Salt, whereby the priests were to salt the burnt offering. Salt was also used as a disinfectant, as in "salt in the wounds." Salt finds the sore spots and stings, but for the good. You are the Salt of the Earth! We disinfect the world of sin!

It may surprise you to know that during the time of Jesus' earthly ministry salt was used as a fertilizer. Salt was often scattered and worked into the soil in order to enhance the productivity of the land. Indeed as recently as World War II, British farmers compensated for the lack of nitrate fertilizers by once again returning to the ancient tradition of adding salt to croplands for increased fertility. For the salt of the earth to be of value as a fertilizer of the earth, it has to be at work in the earth, moving within and among the soil, making the land more productive and fruitful by subtly changing its very character. You are the Salt of the Earth! We are to be fruitful people.

And, of course, salt was a seasoning. But the trick about salt as a seasoning is to use just a little, just enough to enhance, not so much that it masks flavor. Mashed potatoes need salt and butter or they're as tasteless as zucchini. If you travel with Jesus, you are salt; you enhance the flavors of life. Salt is a seasoning and as such brings out the flavors that are there. But let's face it - lots of Christians have just the opposite effect; they do not

enhance life; instead they are dull, flat, insipid. The great jurist Oliver Wendell Holmes once said, "I might have entered the ministry if certain clergymen I knew had not looked and acted so much like undertakers." The author Robert Louis Stevenson once entered in his diary what he consider an extraordinary phenomenon, "I have been to church today and am not depressed." You are the Salt of the Earth! You enhance the life of others. The earth needs salt; the world needs light. Salt and light do not exist for their own sake, but to make a difference and to give glory to God. To make a difference they need the earth to enhance and the world to brighten. A little thing like salt, a fragile thing like light - that's what Jesus wanted his followers to be in the world. He did not say, "You are a great army marching into the world." He did not say, "You are a loud sound system, blasting my message." And what I find most telling in this scripture is one simple word. It's not light, it's not salt. It's "you." Think about this for a moment. Here is the Son of God speaking. The epitome of righteousness. The pinnacle of Godliness. And he says, "You are the salt of the earth. You are the light of the world." He wasn't just speaking to his disciples. His disciples, the best and brightest up and coming Christians in the bunch. He wasn't just speaking to his close admirers, people who had seen him do wonders time and time again. He was speaking to hundreds, if not thousands of seekers who wanted to hear his message. He could have said, "I am the salt of the earth, I am the light of the world." He could have pointed to his disciples and said, "They are the salt of the world". But he chose his pronoun carefully. You are salt. You are light. You are the salt of the earth...you are the light of the world,"

On this rally day, let us not just rally around the ministries of this church, but let us rally around the idea that Jesus is also speaking to us today, telling us that we have a lot to offer Oregon City. May our ministries continue to be a blessing on a hill. Let's not hide it. And the people of God said, Amen.