

You cannot do much cooking or baking without salt. We salt our food to make it taste better and bring out the flavor. At the time of Jesus salt was used to preserve food, especially meat, to keep it from spoiling. I remember working years ago in Pottenstein, West Germany at the Forellenhof restaurant. Every few weeks, I would go with my boss in his pickup truck to an area farmers barn, where he would purchase meat for use at his restaurant that had been heavily salted and hanging in the barn. The salt preserved the meat from spoiling.

Salt was expensive. Roman soldiers were paid with salt. The word salary comes from the Latin word for salt. We even have a saying "He is not worth his salt" to describe someone who is not worth their salary. God's Old Testament people added salt to their sacrifices and offerings to the Lord. By salting some of the sacrifices to the Lord the people were saying, "We are giving our best to the Lord."

Our lives have been spoiled by sin. You don't have to look very hard into your life this past week to see evidence of the rot and decay of sin. It is everywhere. Jesus calls on us to be salted, not by anything we produce in our lives, but by the life he has lived for us and the death he has died for us. That is the only way to escape the rot and decay of sin. Consider today, the thought, "Salted in Christ".

Jesus' disciples sure needed the salt that only Jesus could provide. We smell something very rotten in the lives of the disciples. John comes to Jesus and says, "Teacher, I saw a man driving out demons in your name and we told him to stop, because he was not one of us." The disciples have been arguing among themselves on who was the greatest. Jesus had to tell them, "If anyone wants to be first he must be the very last, and the servant of all." How do rotten people try to make themselves smell better? They point to others who are worse than they are or they try to cover up what they have done wrong by pointing to something good they have done.

John thought he was doing something great for Jesus by telling a man who was casting out demons in Jesus' name to stop it. They told this man to stop it because "he was not one of us." John wanted a gold star from Jesus for telling a man who was performing a miracle in Jesus name to stop it because "he was not one of us."

Something similar happened in the lives of Joshua and Moses in Numbers chapter 11. There were two men at the time of Moses who were elders or leaders of the people named Eldad and Medad. It says that the Spirit of the Lord rested on these men and they started prophesying for the Lord just as Moses had done. Joshua came to Moses and said, "Moses, my lord, stop them!" Joshua wanted Moses to have the exclusive position of prophet. He could not tolerate the Lord working out of the box to have these two fellows Eldad and Medad prophesying for the Lord. In these last days in which we live, we need to be prepared for the Lord to work out of the box and even use unlikely people to bring the name of Jesus to other people so they can be saved.

Jesus had to set his disciples straight. Once again the ugly sin of thinking they were better than others was showing itself. "Do not stop him," Jesus said. "No one who does a miracle in my name can in the next moment say anything bad about me, for whoever is not against us is for us. I tell you the truth anyone who gives you a cup of water in my name because you belong to Christ will certainly not lose his reward."

It is not always the big shots in the church who do miracles in the name of Jesus. On judgment day the least likely people will be asking Jesus, "When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?" What was Jesus' answer? "I tell you the truth whatever you do for one of the least of these brothers of mine you did it for me." The little things we do for Jesus do not go

unnoticed. They will be seen on judgment day. Are you ready to see our risen Lord and Savior build his church in the least likely places and with the least likely people?

Salty Christians are the ones who keep this world from becoming more and more rotten. One way we have a preserving effect on this world is by our example. Jesus tells us, "If anyone causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to be thrown into the sea with a large millstone tied around his neck. That's really not a very good translation. The Word for sin is really skandalon - which means a stumbling block - referring to causing someone to fall from faith. Jesus was saying that if you cause a young Christian or a small child to fall from faith, even unknowingly, it would be better for a big millstone to be tied around your neck and for you to be thrown into the depths of the sea. Jesus has zero tolerance for those who would cause someone to lose their trust in Him. Take a look at yourself today. What kind of example are you setting for people who are new to the Christian faith by your life and actions? Do others see Jesus in your life, your words, your behavior? Or, are you causing others to stumble by your behavior?

Not only are we to be concerned about what causes others to sin - but what causes us to sin. In fact Jesus said, that whatever causes us to sin, should be cut off. Jesus' solution to fight sin seems to be that you cut off your hand or your foot or tear out your eye. It sounds like the terrifying examples of Sharia Law that we sometimes hear reported from Saudi Arabia, doesn't it, where thieves have their hands forcibly amputated for stealing a loaf of bread? And some Christians *have* taken this literally. Some have cut off delicate parts of their anatomy to prevent falling prey to temptation. Others have refused to become organ donors in case their eyes were donated to people who would use their eyes for lustful purposes.

Obviously, Jesus is not literally asking us to cut off our hands and feet, and gouge out our eyes today. He is using radical language to get our attention and make a point. The point is that we need to fight against sin. Jesus does not want us to tolerate sin and eventually lose our faith in him. We need to quit selling ourselves out to sin. Our hands can get us into trouble by stealing, hitting, killing, pointing, insulting, holding a joint. We can injure people and kill people with the use of our hands. But the problem is not primarily with our hands but primarily with the heart and head which controls our hands. Our feet may take us to places where we should not be, but the solution is to not cut off our feet. Rather it is our sinful human heart that is the root cause. Your eyes may look greedily, lustfully, or with rage at another person. Again, your eyes don't cause sin, but the human heart and head causes your eyes to wander off in a sinful direction.

My friends, the root cause of our troubled behavior is our sinful human heart. Jesus wants us to fight sin in our lives, not give into its demands. Some of us have taken the slogan 'Everything in moderation' and seem to think we can have sin in moderation. Not in the eyes of Jesus. We can't cherish our favorite sin. It has to come to the Cross. It has to die. There are no exceptions. It isn't acceptable to say, "I drink too much now and then. I don't care really care to exercise my body or keep it in shape. 'I've always had a temper,' or, 'I've always had an eye for the ladies', or 'It's just the way I'm made'. Help and healing are only available from Christ. Jesus wants even more radical surgery. He wants us to come with our sin to him to have it removed and forgiven. Not to come to Christ will lead to serious eternal consequences.

Jesus does not hesitate to warn his disciples about the dangers of hell. He describes hell as the place where the fire does not go out. He describes it as the place where the worm does not die and the fire is not quenched. The word used here for hell is "gehenna." It was also the name for the garbage dump where fires burned and worms ate decaying flesh. Eternal punishment will

be a place for fire where people do not die. It is a place of eternal punishment. Jesus wants no one to spend eternity there. 2 Peter 3 says, "The Lord is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance."

How will we be saved? How will we be preserved? How will we not rot forever? The answer is salt, the perfect salt of Jesus' death and resurrection. This salty talk of Jesus helps us out in a most wonderful way. When we realize that we can't enter heaven with sin, and that sin is in our hands, feet, eyes and heart - it makes us despair. It cuts open a wound and then pours salt in it - making it sting and hurt. It has to hurt and it has to sting. Why? If it doesn't you won't cry out for help. By salting us with fire, Jesus wanted the disciples, and us, to remember why we will stand before the judgment seat of God and be accepted into heaven. It's not because our hands and feet have been cut off, but because Jesus' hands and feet have been pierced. Isaiah said that he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed. (Is 53:5) It's not because our eyes were gouged out, but because Jesus was blindfolded and socked in the face for us. We are going to heaven because Jesus fulfilled his prediction that he would literally be "cut off." Not only was Jesus cut off from the land of the living on the cross, he was cut off from His own Father's love. When Jesus cried out, "my God, my God, why have you forsaken me," it was as if God were chopping their relationship in two. The lifelong friendship and companionship of the Father and the Son was chopped apart. Why? So that God's wrath could be taken away, and the lifelong enmity between you and God would be mended. That's the salve that heals our wound - knowing that we were already cut off - in Christ.

You see, in this big race for greatness, the disciples were losing their saltiness. They were forgetting that even though they were chasing out demons, they still needed to remember what they really deserved. They needed to keep the fire of hell burning in front of them - to remember what they deserved and what they needed salvation from.

Jesus is the good salt. As he talks to his disciples, he is getting ready to go to the cross for the sins of the world. He is the only way to escape the fires of hell and be preserved in this life and for all eternity. Take Jesus out of my life I have nothing. Then the salt loses its saltiness. I want the faith of Martin Luther who says in his catechism, "Christ has redeemed me a lost and condemned creature, purchased and won me from all sins, from death, and the from the power of the devil, not with gold or silver, but with his holy, precious innocent sufferings and death. All this he did that I should be his own and live under him in his kingdom...." The wounds of Jesus, the dying of Jesus, the living of Jesus, the rising of Jesus is what saves and preserves us in this life for all eternity.

This wonderful Savior makes you salty. He says "Have salt in yourselves and be at peace with each other." Stop arguing about who is the greatest. Stop looking down on other believers who are not "one of us." Be peace makers. Jesus said, "You are the salt of the earth and the light of the world." The salt in this salt shaker does no good unless it is shaken out on my food to season it. You are sprinkled out up and down Florida as salty Christians to season the lives of people with the living, loving, dying, rising of Jesus your Savior. Salt is good. Jesus is good. You are so blessed to be salted in Jesus. Amen.

Dear Jesus,

We have a tendency to want to be great, to make a mark in this world. In itself there is nothing wrong with this. However, in our pursuit to make a name for ourselves, to be great, we can get focused on this pursuit, and forget how offensive we really are in your sight. We forget how we have all fallen short of your expectations. That our hands, eyes, and feet are regularly engaged in sinful thoughts or activities. That we deserve the fires of hell, where our worm, our essence, as you have said will not die.

Forgive us for the times when we justify that our behavior is not that bad, that certain sins are not a big deal. Instill in us again how offensive our sins are to you. That we do indeed deserve to be cast into hell for our sins. Only when you hit us over the head with this strong salty conversation, only when you put this type of salt in our wounds, do we cry out for your help.

Thank goodness you have heard our cry. You came into this world to be cut off from the land of the living, so that we would never be cut off or away from God. You allowed your hands and feet to be spiked with nails, so that our hands and feet don't have to be cut off. Instead, our hands, feet, eyes and all our other body parts will oneday be made new again, uncorrupted forever by sins presence. Thanks for repairing our broken bodies. Give us the resolve to fight against sin in our lives, to quit selling ourselves out to sin, and to be good witnesses of our faith to those little ones who believe in you.