

## **THE SALT OF THE EARTH AND THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD.**

**"Ye are the salt of the earth...Ye are the light of the world."  
– Matt. 5:13,14.**

SALT and light are two essentials to humanity, and in nature both are abundantly supplied. Salt enters largely into the composition of both animal and vegetable organisms, and its use as a condiment is much appreciated and to a greater or less extent required by both man and beast. At a very early stage of human progress salt became an important element of commerce, and it is believed that the very oldest trade routes were created for traffic in this needful and much valued commodity. Among inland peoples a salt spring was regarded as a special gift of the gods, and so a religious significance began by and by to attach to it; and it was, therefore, as a precious substance, mingled with their offerings to the gods. Homer voiced this sentiment, calling salt divine; and Plato referred to it as "a substance dear to the gods."

In harmony with its uses and its general appreciation the term salt early came to have a generally recognized symbolic significance (which our Lord utilized and perpetuated) to teach important lessons, both under the old dispensation of the law and under the new dispensation of grace. As a savory article of diet, it symbolized hospitality; and as an antiseptic it signified durability, fidelity, purity. Hence the Bible expression "a covenant of salt" (Num. 18:19), as covenants were ordinarily made over a sacrificial meal in which salt was an important element. – "With all thine offerings thou shalt offer salt." (Lev. 2:13.) The preservative qualities of salt make it, when so used, a fitting symbol of an enduring compact. The purifying property of salt was referred to in its symbolic use by Elisha in his miracle of the healing of the waters. – 2 Kings 2:20-22.

The symbolism of salt, therefore, in the above words of our Lord, is clearly this, – that the influence of the true Christian upon the world is a healing, purifying influence, tending always to the preservation of that which is good from the adverse elements of putrefaction and decay. "Ye are the salt of the earth." How significant the comparison!

These words also indicate a responsibility on the part of Christians toward the world in general. Though they are not of the world, even as Christ was not of the world (John 17:16), but separated from it, a peculiar people, chosen of God, they are not to forget that this very separation and exaltation to fellowship, communion and cooperation with God, is, not to cultivate in them a pride of aristocracy, but for the purpose of blessing the world; for God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son to redeem them (John 3:16), and Christ likewise so loved the world as freely to become the instrument of Jehovah for its salvation. – John 6:51; 10:18; Heb. 2:9; Rom. 5:18,19.

We note further that these statements are in the present tense, – Ye *are* the salt and the light, – even now, before the time for the general blessing of all the families of the earth through the Church glorified. We call to mind also the exhortation of the Apostle Paul, – "Walk in wisdom toward them that are without, redeeming the time. Let your speech be always with grace seasoned with salt," the appetizing salt of purity, righteousness, truth. – Col. 4:5,6.

The proper attitude of the Christian toward the world is thus shown to be, not that of a proud, stoical indifference, but that of a noble, generous, loving benevolence which, while it keeps entirely separate from its spirit, from its unholy aims, ambitions and doings, is ever ready to bless and, by precept and example, to point to the way of life and holiness. It is not that attitude which proudly says, "I am holier than thou," [R2099 : page 36] but which, on the contrary, says, "I am no better than thou, except for the influences of divine grace, which are free to all who will accept them. By grace, I am what I am; yet still my shortcomings necessitate the merit of my all-sufficient Advocate." It is

not necessary that these sentiments should be expressed in words; for actions speak louder than words, and their testimony is much more potent. The testimony of a holy walk and conversation cannot fail to be to the glory of God, to the wisdom and excellence of righteousness, to the reproof of unrighteousness, and to the fact of a coming judgment in which righteousness shall surely triumph. – John 16:8; Acts 24:25.

"Salt is good," said Jesus, referring to its symbolism of purity, righteousness, and to its cleansing, healing and preserving influence; "have salt [purity, righteousness] in yourselves." (Mark 9:50.) If we have not the salt in ourselves, how can we be the salt of the earth? If we are not truly and sincerely righteous, how can we exert upon others the cleansing, healing influence? Mere outward profession of righteousness will not avail as a substitute for the salt of actual and sincere holiness. Mere profession has no healing properties, and can never fulfil our obligations toward the world. Therefore, let us have the salt of actual holiness in ourselves; so shall we be known and read of men to the praise of God.

Under this same speaking symbol our Lord also adds a word of warning, saying, – "If the salt have lost his savor, wherewith shall it be salted? It is thenceforth ***good for nothing***, but to be cast out, and to be trodden under foot of men." So if the Christian who once had the salt of righteousness in himself should turn again like the sow that was washed to her wallowing in the mire; if he should wilfully and persistently fall away from his righteousness, he is "thenceforth ***good for nothing***." (Heb. 6:4-8; 10:26-31,38,39.) How important then that we not only have salt in ourselves, but that we continue to retain its healthful properties!

This same class Jesus also declared to be "the light of the world." Although they do not yet shine forth as the sun in the Kingdom of God for the enlightening of the whole world, they are nevertheless luminous even now, and their light may shine within a smaller radius for the blessing of all who will receive it. And the Lord's solicitude for the

benighted world, as well as for his saints, is shown in his exhortation to the latter to let their light shine. – "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven." He also counsels the setting of our light in a position where it may dispel as much as possible of the darkness of this world. We are therefore not to put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick. Zeal for the Lord needs no further exhortation to this duty and privilege; for, like him, all who have his spirit or disposition in the matter will find in this duty and privilege their meat and drink. It will be their joy to let the light that has illuminated their darkness – the light of God's truth and of his holy spirit – shine out through them upon the darkness of others.

Thus, through the salt and the light of God's people, a measure of blessing comes to the world, even before its day of blessing. And at this end of the age we may with some degree of definiteness sum up their effects. A little observation shows that all the blessings of temporal prosperity included under the term "civilization" are due to the influences, direct and indirect, of those comparatively few people who, during this **[R2100 : page 36]** Gospel age, have been the salt of the earth and the light of the world. Civilization is simply the indirect result of the measures of salt and light that have been in the world up to this present time. The faithful people of God have held up the light of divine truth as prominently as they could; and from it they have reasoned of righteousness and of a coming judgment; they have endeavored to salt the minds of men with as much as possible of the knowledge of the principles of righteousness exemplified in their own characters, and have urged their adoption; and to the extent to which these have operated the world has been profited.

The Lord, who foresaw the end from the beginning, knew that, with all their salt and all their light, his people would not be able to accomplish for the world in general more than this, until the appointed time for their exaltation with himself to power and great glory. But even this work of civilization is of great value as preparatory to the

greater future work of restitution, and also in facilitating the special work of this Gospel age, of taking out a people prepared for the Lord, to be kings and priests unto God and joint-heirs with Jesus Christ.

Then, beloved heirs of the promises of God, to whom it is the Father's good pleasure to give the Kingdom, "have salt in yourselves," and forget not that, being thus salted, ye are the salt of the earth, so that your very presence is a rebuke to iniquity, and its continuance a living testimony to the beauty of holiness and the power of divine grace. Let us endeavor also so to focus the light of divine truth and its holy spirit that from the glowing focus of a chastened and purified character the light may radiate again to the blessing of all who will heed it, to the warning of all who will not, and to the praise of the great center and source of all light – God himself.

MRS. M. F. RUSSELL.

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