

Matthew 5:13

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Ye are the salt of the earth: but if the salt have lost his savour, wherewith shall it be salted? it is thenceforth good for nothing, but to be cast out, and to be trodden under foot of men.

Analysis

Jesus declares 'Ye are the salt of the earth' (Greek: ὑμεῖς ἔστε τὸ ἄλας τῆς γῆς, 'you are the salt of the earth'), using emphatic pronoun construction. Salt in the ancient world served three primary functions: preservation, flavoring, and purification. Disciples as salt preserve society from moral decay, enhance life's goodness, and purify through righteous influence. The warning 'if the salt have lost his savour' (μωρανθῆ, 'become foolish/insipid') presents the tragedy of ineffective Christianity - worthless and discarded. Saltiness cannot be restored once lost; disciples must maintain distinctive character.

Historical Context

In first-century Palestine, salt came primarily from the Dead Sea and was essential for food preservation before refrigeration. Salt could become contaminated with other minerals, losing its effectiveness. Jesus' audience, many from fishing villages around Galilee, understood salt's practical importance. Roman soldiers were sometimes paid in salt (origin of 'salary'). The metaphor would resonate deeply - disciples must maintain moral distinctiveness to fulfill their preserving function in society.

Related Passages

James 2:17 — Faith and works

Romans 1:17 — The righteous shall live by faith

Revelation 20:12 — Judgment according to deeds

Matthew 25:31 — Final judgment

Study Questions

1. In what specific ways are Christians called to be preserving influences in society?
2. What causes believers to lose their 'saltiness' or distinctive Christian character?
3. How do we balance being 'salty' (distinctive) with being accessible to those who need the gospel?

Interlinear Text

Ὑμεῖς ἔστε τὸ ἄλας τῆς γῆς· ἐὰν δὲ τὸ ἄλας
Ye are G3588 the salt G3588 of the earth G1093 if G1437 but G1161 G3588 the salt G217
G5210 G2075 G217 G1093 G1437 G1161 G3588 G217

μωρανθῆ ἐν τίνι ἀλισθήσεται εἰς οὐδὲν οἰσχύει
have lost his savour wherewith G5101 shall it be salted for nothing good
G3471 G1722 G233 G1519 G3762 G2480

ἔτι εἰ μὴ βληθῆναι ἔξω καὶ καταπατεῖσθαι
it is thenceforth G1487 G3361 to be cast out and to be trodden under foot
G2089 G906 G1854 G2532 G2662

ὑπὸ τῶν ἀνθρώπων
of G3588 men G444
G5259

Additional Cross-References

Colossians 4:6 (Parallel theme): Let your speech be alway with grace, seasoned with salt, that ye may know how ye ought to answer every man.

Leviticus 2:13 (Parallel theme): And every oblation of thy meat offering shalt thou season with salt; neither shalt thou suffer the salt of the covenant of thy God to be lacking from thy meat offering: with all thine offerings thou shalt offer salt.

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