



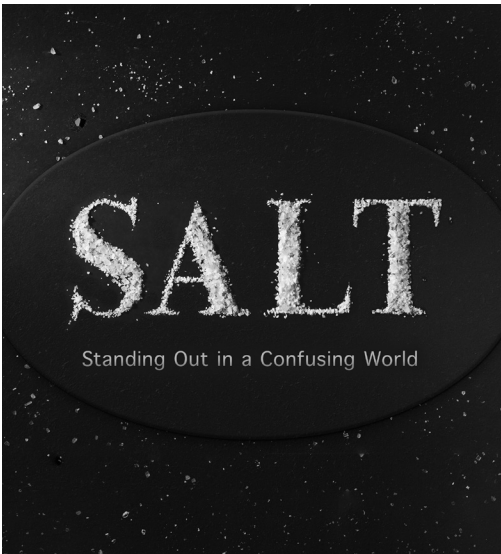
SALT

Standing Out in a Confusing World

Sermon Growth Guide

August 11, 2024

Salty



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Salt - Dissolving Hatred

Matthew 5:17-26

Key Verse: Matthew 5:22

“But I tell you that anyone who is angry with a brother and sister will be subject to judgment. Again, anyone who says to a brother or sister ‘Raca,’ is answerable to the court. And anyone who says, ‘You fool!’ will be in danger of the fire of hell.”

Big Idea: When we practice forgiveness and dissolve

Foundations

Jesus saw people focused on external obedience at the expense of internal decay. These instructions occur within a broader section of six examples offered by Jesus to breathe new life into God’s instruction that guide us in living as God’s Kingdom people. The Greeks had two main words for anger. Thumos described anger like a flame with dried straw: it quickly blazed up and just as quickly died down. Orge was long-lived anger: that of one who nurses it to keep it going. This is the kind of anger that Jesus is addressing in this passage. Dale Bruner observed, “Resentment and hard words kill people more swiftly than cigarettes and alcohol.” Jesus goes on to offer two additional examples of looking down on others. The first questions the mental competence of another; literally, “You idiot!” The second questions their moral competence; the words is closer to “liar.” Jesus’ instruction when a line has been crossed: reconcile, and settle matters quickly. As we do, we move against the grain of the world and demonstrate to those around us lives that offer something better.

Understanding God’s Word

Together, read Matthew 5:17-26. How many different instructions from Jesus can you find within this passage? In 5:23-24, Jesus says that we’re to reconcile not with those we have something against, but with those who have something against us. How does this differ from our usual approach, and what does it mean that Jesus tells us to do this before worshiping God?

Applying God’s Word

Tim noted in his sermon, “Jesus is more interested in the direction of your heart than the limits on your behavior.” Visible behavior tends to capture our attention; what would it look like to focus more upon the condition of our hearts? What behaviors or type of people are most likely to make you angry? How well would you say you let that anger dissipate within rather than allowing it to simmer?

Witnessing God’s Word

Tim stated in The Weekly, “Salt only has an influence if it stays in contact.” Where are you most likely to rub shoulders with those outside the church, where you have potential to be salt? How can you do so this week?

Jesus taught us to love our neighbors. Jesus taught us to love our enemies. Sometimes you can kill two birds with one stone! G.K. Chesterton said, “The Bible tells us to love our neighbors, and also to love our enemies; probably because generally they are the same people.” That’s not my story. Actually, my neighbors are lovely. A lot of them go to First Pres! In this series, Salt: Standing Out in a Confusing World, Dr. Jim Edwards kicked us off last week, and we are learning how to be present and engaged, but also different—a positive influence for Jesus in a fallen world. Jesus taught that His followers should expect to be despised, we should expect to be mocked. What we do with that is the critical thing. Will we return fire? Slap for slap, eye for eye. Or will we be a place where injury and offense dissolves? Dissolving Hatred.

Jesus says be salt. You are salt. For salt to work, it has to do two things. It has to stay in contact; and stay salt. That’s a Christian in a confused world. Stay in contact, but keep your integrity. In her book, Stay Salt, Becky Pippert writes, “Jesus demonstrated that to relate well to people, we must be radically identified with people in love and yet radically different in holiness... He went to weddings and parties; he ate meals with people who were considered to be despicable sinners. He expressed compassion by listening carefully to people, asking questions, responding to their need for healing, and always seeking to understand the person he was talking to. But to identify with others is not the same as being identical to them. If we become identical – if people cannot tell that we are in any way different – we will lose what makes our witness distinctive... Our challenge is to go into the world as Jesus did: identifying with people, without compromising our identity as

God’s people.” (Becky Pippert, Stay Salt) Sometimes we call this being in the world, but not of the world. We are like visitors, aliens. We are here, but we are not products of here. We belong to another place entirely, the City of God. So we express wonder, curiosity, and sometimes concern about what we see.

We are not supposed to dissolve into the culture. We follow a higher law than human law. We are under the Law of God. “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. 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. 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.” (Matthew 5:17-19) Plenty of people, plenty of preachers, will tell you the Bible’s teaching doesn’t matter anymore because with Jesus, it is all grace. But Jesus Himself said to attend to the Law. This can get complicated. We don’t keep kosher; we don’t stone disobedient sons at the gate; we don’t sacrifice lambs for our sins; there seems to be a lot of the Old Testament that no longer applies. In simplest terms, our job is to see how Jesus treats these things. Did Jesus fulfill a sacrifice? Then it is satisfied. Did Jesus reframe a law (like food laws)? Jesus has the authority to do that. Did Jesus sustain a law (like marriage)? Then it is sustained for us. Big picture: stay salt. Don’t dissolve into whatever your contemporary culture demands or prefers. Be different. We have a different way of life.



This difference will produce animosity. Then what? Jesus calls us deeper than simple retaliation. If we are really going to stand out, we are going to be a people who do offense and conflict differently. In fact, as Jesus walks His followers into a deeper understanding of the law, He calls us to a non-retaliatory love, a profound forgiveness, and a confidence that God will put things right and we don't need to win every battle. "You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, 'You shall not murder, and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment.' But I tell you that anyone who is angry with a brother or sister will be subject to judgment. Again, anyone who says to a brother or sister, 'Raca,' is answerable to the court. And anyone who says, 'You fool!' will be in danger of the fire of hell." (Matthew 5:21-22) "You shall not murder" is a good law. Jesus is not erasing that law. But do you know what it is really about? It's about the heart. If you just set out to keep the law, don't murder, you could seethe with hatred. You could capture your enemy, you could enslave them, beat them, humiliate them, strike them 39 times with the whip like the Romans did. You could do anything just up to the point of actually killing them. Right? "I didn't murder him." Deeper is the call to love. Jesus says anger is tantamount to murder. You have already murdered the person in your heart. That matters more to Him.

Now, we have to pause and ask, seriously? How could it be that to call someone an idiot is as bad as murder? Well, for one thing, Jesus is more interested in the direction of your heart than the limits on your behavior. What's better? Hitting someone accidentally you didn't mean to hit, or not hitting someone you would give anything to pummel with all your strength? Where is your

heart? Love God; love neighbor. On these hang all else. But also think of it this way. The person you are calling names is an eternal soul, made in the image of God, living forever either in the glory of communion with God or the horror of separation from God. Your words will send them one way or another. C. S. Lewis wrote, "It is a serious thing to live in a society of possible gods and goddesses, to remember that the dullest and most uninteresting person you talk to may one day be a creature which, if you saw it now, you would be strongly tempted to worship, or else a horror and a corruption such as you now meet, if at all, only in a nightmare. All day long we are, in some degree, helping each other to one or other of these destinations... There are no ordinary people. You have never talked to a mere mortal. Nations, cultures, arts, civilizations—these are mortal, and their life is to ours as the life of a gnat. But it is immortals whom we joke with, work with, marry, snub, and exploit... Next to the Blessed Sacrament itself, your neighbor is the holiest object presented to your senses." (C. S. Lewis, *The Weight of Glory*). That's why it matters.

That's why Jesus teaches us to be reconciled to one another as much as possible. If you are distracted in worship because you have something against a brother or sister, or a brother or sister has something against you, do what you can to be reconciled. Just as it will be hard to love your neighbor when your relationship with God is strained, it is hard to fully enjoy love for God when your relationships with others are strained. Jesus teaches active peacemaking. Sometimes forgiveness and reconciliation are not possible. "If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone."



(Romans 12:18) Jesus still teaches to do what you can. Jesus goes so far as to say “turn the other cheek.” “You have heard that it was said, ‘Eye for eye, and tooth for tooth.’ But I tell you, do not resist an evil person. If anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to them the other cheek also.” (Matthew 5:38-39) In a world of getting what is coming to you, Jesus taught radical forgiveness. In a world of retaliation, Jesus taught that his followers must learn to dissolve hatred as salt dissolves in water. One of the most remarkable contributions of Christianity is the concept of enemy love. Everyone loves their friends and hates their enemies. “You have heard that it was said, ‘Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.” (Matthew 5:43-44) That’s salt. That stands out. That is radically different.

But wait a minute. Isn’t religion the primary cause of violence in the world? Don’t we sing John Lennon’s, “Imagine” every New Years Eve in Times Square, dreaming of a world without religion? Nothing to kill or die for? People think religion is dying off and the dream of a peaceful, non-religious world is coming. Wouldn’t it be better if all the churches just died out? Well, two things. One, the secularist hypothesis of the modern era is not playing out in actual fact. The world is becoming more religious, not less. It may not seem so in the U.S., but globally it is a fact. Christianity and Islam are both growing at a rapid rate. As you envision the future, it is not a question of when religion will die off; it is a question of whether the world will be Christian or Muslim. Second, the most violent philosophies of world history are the ones divorced from God. Atheistic communism, Russia, China, Cuba and others, along

with Nietzschean “God-is-dead” Naziism in Germany killed more people in one century than any prior century, and possibly more than all previous wars combined. Imagine all the people. Keep the salt. Jesus offers a better way.

So, dissolving hatred. The next time you get into a political discussion... (I know! You might have to wait a long time! Politics hardly ever comes up these days!) The next time, remember as you talk and share your ideas and your heart for the future of our country, the United States of America, the nation, it is only dust on the scales of time. The person in front of you is an eternal soul, created and loved by God, who will live either in the glory and peace of His presence, or the terrors of eternal darkness, perhaps by the way you love. My favorite Martin Luther King quote is from his sermon “Loving Your Enemies”: “Returning hate for hate multiplies hate, adding deeper darkness to a night already devoid of stars. Darkness cannot drive out darkness; only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate; only love can do that.” (Martin Luther King) Non-retaliatory love. That’s where hate dissolves. How can it happen? Only because Jesus came and died and rose again. Jesus absorbed the hate. He was despised, He was mocked. He took it all. And He rose again from the dead promising, guaranteeing, that all that is wrong will one day be made right. In that confidence, in that truth, love one another.

