

Salt paper, first draft of June 7 1992, LeGrand Baker

I am convinced that the whole meaning of all the ordinances can be found in the Beatitudes (III Nephi version) beginning with blessed are those who follow the general authorities and continuing to "let your light so shine ...." Of all the scriptures, this single-paged passage is among the most precious, concise and beautiful - and complete - keys to our eternal meaning. The wholeness of it made nearly perfect sense to me except for the part about being "the salt of the earth." My question was, "Why is the notion of having salt on food so the food will taste better a concept which is central to the temple?" The answer I discovered is: The taste of the salt is important, but the primary meaning which makes it temple-related is smell. Throughout the Bible, "savor" means smell, not taste.

The word "savor" (spelled savour) appears many times in both the Old and New Testaments and only in the Sermon on the Mount and Luke 14 (quoted below) is it even possible that the word might also refer to taste. Strong says the word translated "savor" in the Sermon on the Mount means to become insipid (that is, to be without taste or smell); figuratively: to make one a dullard or simpleton, become a fool, make foolish or lose savor. Every other time the word savor is used in the Bible it has to do with smell or fragrance. (Still using Strong.)

Throughout the book of Leviticus, sacrifices are described as "an offering made by fire, of a sweet savor unto the Lord." There is no suggestion in Leviticus that the Lord somehow actually collects the things which people burn upon the altar. All He claims to receive - the physical thing which is pleasing to Him - is the "sweet savor."

Paul uses this same idea in talking about the sacrifice of the Lord.

Be ye therefore followers of God, as dear children; And walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us, and hath given himself for us an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweetsmelling savor. (Eph. 5: 1-2)

All this gets better, so let's go back the first two chapters of Leviticus:

The first two sacrificial offerings described there are 1) the burnt offering for atonement which is an offering of blood and 2) an offering of broken bread. (If that didn't remind you of the sacrament and what it is supposed to remind you of, try again.)

First the "burnt offering:"

And the Lord called unto Moses, and spake unto him out of the tabernacle of the congregation, saying,

Speak unto the children of Israel, and say unto them, If any man of you bring an offering unto the Lord, ye shall bring your offering of the cattle, even of the herd, and of the flock. If his offering be a burnt sacrifice of the herd, let him offer a male without blemish: he shall offer it of his own voluntary will at the door of the tabernacle of the congregation before the Lord. And he shall put his hand upon the head of the burnt offering; and it shall be accepted for him to make atonement for him.

And he shall kill the bullock before the Lord: and the priests, Aaron's sons, shall bring the blood, and sprinkle the blood round about upon the altar that is by the door of the tabernacle of the congregation.

... and the priest shall burn all on the altar, to be a burnt sacrifice, an offering made by fire, of a sweet savor unto the Lord.

(Leviticus 1: 1-9)

The bread offering (called "meat," but meat means food rather than flesh) is in chapter two. It contains a recipe for unleavened bread:

And if thy oblation be a meat offering baken in a pan, it shall be of fine flour unleavened, mingled with oil. [Notice that the recipe contains no salt.]

Thou shalt part it in pieces [break it], and pour oil thereon: [Remember this is "pure olive oil" (Exodus 27:20), the same oil which is used in seven branched candlestick (which was topped with seven oil lamps rather than seven candles, Exodus 25:31-40). Olive oil (tree of life) was used to anoint the sacrifice, to give light to the tabernacle and to anoint both kings and priests. Remember, also, the Saviour's pre-earth life anointing in Isaiah 61 which talks about temple work for the dead.] .... and shall burn it upon the altar: it is an offering made by fire, of a sweet savor unto the Lord. ....

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. (Leviticus 2: 1-16)

The idea of salt and sacrifice is not limited to the temples of the ancient world. When the Lord showed Ezekiel the temple of the future, his vision included both. The Lord also told Ezekiel something more than we otherwise knew about how the salt is used.

... thou shalt offer a young bullock without blemish, and a ram out of the flock without blemish. And thou shalt offer them before the Lord, and the priests shall cast salt upon them, and they shall offer them up for a burnt offering unto the Lord. (Ezekiel 43: 23-24)

Salt seems to represent the sealing or ratification gesture or ordinance of a covenant, a sacrifice or an anointing. How and why it was used is not described in the Bible (and the commentators are no help at all!), but it was also used in the anointing of both kings and priests.

Examples:

... the Lord God of Israel gave the kingdom over Israel to David for ever, even to him and to his sons by a covenant of salt? (II Chronicles 13:4-5)

And the Lord said unto Aaron, Thou and thy sons and thy father's house with thee shall .... keep your priest's office for every thing of the altar, and within the veil...: it is a covenant of salt for ever before the Lord unto thee and to thy seed with thee. (Numbers 18: 1-19)

Paul also suggests salt (or rather that which has replaced it in the new covenant) consecrates or gives sanctity to the words one speaks. In this passage, note the parallel use of "grace" and "salt."

Continue in prayer, and watch in the same with thanksgiving; Withal praying also for us, that God would open unto us a door of utterance, to speak the mystery of Christ, for which I am also in bonds: That I may make it manifest, as I ought to speak. Walk in wisdom toward them that are without, redeeming the time.

Let your speech be alway with grace, seasoned with salt, that ye may know how ye ought to answer every man.  
(Colossians 4:2-6)

Luke tells how the Saviour pulled together the ideas of salt, savor and sacrifice when he spoke to

a multitude:

...he turned, and said unto them, If any man come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also [i.e. whomever is not willing to sacrifice everything], he cannot be my disciple. And whosoever doth not bear his cross, and come after me, cannot be my disciple....

[The next three verses end with the signal that these words are only meant to be understood by those whom Nibley calls "the initiated." - "He that hath ears to hear, let him hear."]

So likewise, whosoever he be of you that forsaketh [sacrifices] not all that he hath, he cannot be my disciple. Salt is good: but if the salt have lost his savor, wherewith shall it be seasoned? It is neither fit for the land, nor yet for the dunghill; but men cast it out. He that hath ears to hear, let him hear. (Luke 14:25-35)

The Joseph Smith Translation adds an interesting clarification to that passage:

Then certain of them came to him, saying, Good Master, we have Moses and the prophets, and whosoever shall live by them shall he not have life?

And Jesus answered, saying, Ye know not Moses, neither the prophets; for if ye had known them, ye would have believed on me; for to this intent they were written. For I am sent that ye might have life. Therefore I will liken it [the life which is the subject of this conversation] unto salt which is good;

But if the salt [which here represents the life which the Saviour offers to us] has lost its savor [taste and smell - same word as used in Sermon on the Mount], wherewith shall it be seasoned? [That last "it" must refer to the sacrifice which is seasoned with the salt.] (Bible p. 807)

Mark quotes another time when the Saviour used the same imagery:

... if thy hand offend thee, cut it off  
... if thy foot offend thee, cut it off  
... if thine eye offend thee, pluck it out

[These ideas sound very like: sacrifice everything, however this time it seems to convey more the idea of a "broken heart and a contrite spirit"]

... For every one shall be salted with fire [This reminds me of the Isaiah statement (I Ne. 20:10) "I have refined thee, I have chosen thee in the furnace of affliction."], and every sacrifice shall be salted with salt. Salt is good: but if the salt have lost his saltness, wherewith will ye season it [sacrifice]? Have salt in yourselves, and have peace one with another. [Same idea as Paul's, about speaking with grace and salt.] (Mark 9: 38-50)

In the D&C the Lord again pulls together the ideas of salt, sacrifice and savor -- but this time to apply them to latter-day saints.

When men are called unto mine everlasting gospel, [There are three callings: first, before our fore-ordination (Alma 13: 3); second, when, in this world, we hear and adhere to the gospel; third, when the original calling is "made sure."] and covenant with an everlasting covenant, [There are also three covenants: first when we took the oath and covenant of the priesthood which is partially described in D&C 88 (v. 39, "This is according to..."); second, accepting the covenants and ordinances of the priesthood in this world; third, when "the Father teacheth him of the covenant which he has renewed and confirmed upon you..." (D&C 84:48)] [By this time I have inserted so many ideas into this scripture that I have entirely lost any chance of retaining its continuity. So let's start over.]

When men are called unto mine everlasting gospel, and covenant with an everlasting covenant, they are accounted as the salt of the earth and the savor of men; They are called to be the savor of men; therefore, if that salt of the earth lose its savor, behold, it is thenceforth good for nothing only to be cast out and trodden under the feet of men. (D&C 101: 39-40; see also D&C 103:7-12)

I refrained until the end to put in another []. It would have been this:

Those who are so called, and who so covenant, are the "salt" in that they are the thing which makes the sacrifice work. That is, the Saviour's sacrifice would have been of little worth had it not been for those who teach the gospel and have "the right whereunto [they] should be ordained to administer the same." (Abraham 1:2)

Those same valiant servants are the "savor" in that they are the fragrance - the pleasant part of the sacrifice - the reason for doing it all in the first place.

The phrases "savor of men" and "salt of the earth," seem more relevant to me when I recall that the "war in heaven," and its perpetuation here on earth, is being fought over two issues: 1) the

souls of men, and 2) the possession of the earth itself - the eternal home and ultimate temple of the gods.

Having gone through all that, I now understand more of what the following passage means, and why the Saviour said it in conjunction with the Beatitudes:

Verily, verily, I say unto you, I give unto you to be the salt of the earth; but if the salt shall lose its savor wherewith shall the earth be salted? The salt shall be thenceforth good for nothing, but to be cast out and to be trodden under foot of men.

Verily, verily, I say unto you, I give unto you to be the light of this people. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hid.

Behold, do men light a candle and put it under a bushel? Nay, but on a candlestick, and it giveth light to all that are in the house;

Therefore let your light so shine before this people, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father who is in heaven.  
(3 Nephi 12:13-16)

If the salt, those chosen ones, have lost their savor:

- a) have become dullards
- b) have become ineffectual for taste - do not make the gospel palatable to others
- c) are no longer the sweet fragrance of sacrifices - both their own sacrifices for others and the Saviour's for them - to give those sacrifices relevance and a sure promise

Then they are good for nothing.

The calling to which they were called,  
the ordinances which they have received,  
and even the sacrifices which they have made  
are rendered meaningless, inoperable  
and without eternal worth.

If, on the other hand, their lives are a sweet savor

they give credence and verification

to their own sacrifices in behalf of the Father and of his children  
and to the atoning sacrifice for themselves,

They become, for all eternity, "a sweet savor unto the Lord."