

## **Salt & The Sacrifice Of Christ**

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# CHAPTER 1: THE VALUE OF CHRIST'S SACRIFICE

I want to start this book by talking about value. Here's something to think about as we begin: It was reported that no less than eleven millionaires went down on the so-called unsinkable ocean liner, the Titanic. Major A. H. Peuchen left behind \$300,000.00 in money, jewelry and securities in a box in his cabin. "The money seemed a mockery at that time," he later said. "I picked up three oranges instead." We'll come back to the theme of real value, I assure you, but I'd like to tell you that I was recently reading a verse from the writings of the prophet Ezekiel which grabbed my attention. See if it does the same for you. Here it is:

“... a young bull without blemish and a ram without blemish from the flock. You shall present them before the LORD, and the priests shall throw salt on them, and they shall offer them up as a burnt offering to the LORD” (Ezekiel 43:24).

The obvious question is: ‘Why did the priests throw salt over the animals which were about to be sacrificed?’ It’s a question I started to think about, and it led me, I feel, to a greater appreciation of who the Lord Jesus is, and what he’s done for us. That, then, is what motivates me to share this study with you. To have a greater view of Christ is surely the best possible result we can get from a Bible study, wouldn’t you agree?

So let’s start our Bible study back in Leviticus chapter 2. It’s here we find an early Bible mention of salt – and what’s more it’s a

mention of salt in relation to its use along with the offerings or sacrifices long ago.

“Every grain offering of yours, moreover, you shall season with salt, so that the salt of the covenant of your God shall not be lacking from your grain offering; with all your offerings you shall offer salt” (Leviticus 2:13).

It's usually thought that the last statement there - 'with all your offerings you shall offer salt' - applied to all the animal sacrifices, and not only to the grain or cereal offerings. So what we read before from the prophet Ezekiel was certainly not exceptional – the very opposite, in fact, it was standard practice! God required it throughout the Old Testament in connection with its sacrificial system. Now, even without stating it, I imagine it'll already be an obvious thing for us to accept that all those sacrifices which God specified in the Old Testament were intended to draw people's thoughts to Calvary, to the cross, the place where Jesus Christ, the Son of God died as the ultimate sacrifice about 2,000 years ago. For example, listen to how the apostle Paul opens the fifth chapter of his letter to the Ephesians:

“Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children; and walk in love, just as Christ also loved you and gave Himself up for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God as a fragrant aroma.” (Ephesians 5:1-2)

It's clear then that Old Testament sacrifices and offerings found their answer in the death of Christ. So what about the ancient requirement to add salt – and to make sure it was never lacking?

We'll look, God willing, at various properties of salt in this series, as we hope to clarify what might be thought of as 'the saltiness of the sacrifice of Christ.' The Lord knew in advance the properties that would be discovered in the process of time before ever he commanded its use with the sacrifices. Perhaps, in this first talk, it's only fitting to start with the most basic observation – which is that salt has long been regarded as something valuable – because it was, and is, so useful.

In ancient Greece, slaves were traded for salt – and even today we still find the expression that someone is "not worth his salt." Our English word 'salary' goes back to the old Roman or Latin word that originally meant a 'allowance given to a Roman soldier for buying salt.' This was his '*Salarium*,' coming from the word *sal*, which then meant 'salt.' Roman soldiers were sometimes paid in salt (*salis*) and their *salarium*, as we said, is the origin of our word "salary". Even the word "soldier" actually comes from the Latin (*sal dare*), which means, "to give salt." This shows how salt in former times was a valued commodity over which wars were fought, rather than being taken for granted, as it is today in many parts of the world. So when we read in the Bible of salt, perhaps the first idea that should pop into our minds is that of value. And there couldn't be a more fitting association with the death of Christ – for his death was a sacrifice of infinite worth. One Bible text which springs to mind, as emphasizing that fact is found in First Peter chapter 1, which says:

“... you were not redeemed with perishable things like silver or gold from your futile way of life inherited from your forefathers, but with precious blood, as of a lamb unblemished and spotless, *the blood* of Christ.

For He was foreknown before the foundation of the world, but has appeared in these last times for the sake of you” (1 Peter 1:18-20).

The precious blood of a spotless lamb, making a sacrifice of boundless, matchless worth. The sense of value comes from the identity of the one who hung on the middle cross 2,000 years ago outside the Jerusalem city wall. The Father gave his only Son. The Son of God himself stooped down so low, becoming first a man and then submitting to the shameful death of the cross.

The story is told by the Persians of the great Shah Abbas, who reigned magnificently in Persia, but loved to mingle with the people in disguise. Once, dressed as a poor man, he descended a long flight of stairs, dark and damp, to the tiny cellar where the fireman, seated on ashes, was tending the furnace. The king sat down beside him and began to talk. At meal time the fireman produced some coarse, black bread and a jug of water and they ate and drank. The Shah went away, but returned again and again, for his heart was filled with sympathy for the lonely man. He spent time with him, and the poor man opened his whole heart and loved his friend, so kind, so wise, and yet poor like himself.

At last the emperor thought, ‘I’ll tell him who I am, and see what gift he’ll ask for.’ So he said, ‘You think I’m poor, but I’m Shah Abbas, your emperor.’ He expected a request for some great thing, but the man sat silent, gazing at him with love and wonder. Then the king said, ‘Haven’t you understood? I can make you rich and noble, give you a city or appoint you as a great ruler. Have you nothing you want to ask for?’ The man replied gently,

‘Yes, my lord, I understood. But what is this you’ve done, to leave your palace and glory, to sit with me in this dark place, to share my coarse food, and to care whether my heart is glad or sorry? Even you can give nothing more precious. You may give rich presents to others, but to me you’ve given yourself; it only remains for me to ask that you never withdraw from me this gift of your friendship.’

But even that illustration pales into insignificance alongside the sinner’s friend who in reality was the Lord of glory even as he walked the dusty backstreets of Palestine. The apostle Paul captures this thought in Galatians chapter 2 and verse 20 when he said:

“I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the *life* which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me” (Galatians 2:20).

‘The Son of God who loved me and gave Himself up for me.’ Has that same personal realization dawned on you? I doubt if I’ll ever forget the letter one listener to Search For Truth sent in. It was in the year 2000. It came from an inmate of the Central Prison of the Republic of Yemen. It said: ‘I read your tracts. I get good knowledge, also I accept Jesus Christ as my Saviour and my Lord. Before I am living ...on my own [and] I think nobody want me. But He want me. He is the Son of God [and] lived on the earth to show His love. Now I becoming really Christian. He come my friend. [I] know by His Word that I have eternal life.’

Isn't that special? And so I'll end this chapter by just reminding you once again of what has been our theme, in thinking as we have been doing of the saltiness of the sacrifice of Christ, and the specific topic has been the infinite worth of Jesus Christ and his sacrifice to pay the price of our rebellion so that through faith in Him we can be sure of the forgiveness of our sins before a holy God.

Come, let us sing the matchless worth  
And sweetly sound the praises forth  
Which in the Saviour shine:  
To God our praise of Christ we'll bring,  
The song with which the heavens ring,  
We'll join through grace divine.

How rich the precious blood once spilt,  
The rescue from the dreadful guilt  
Of sin against our God;  
How perfect is that righteousness,  
In which unspotted beautiful dress  
His saints have always stood!

Great are the offices He bears,  
And bright his character appears,  
Exalted on the throne;  
In songs of sweet untiring praise,

We would to everlasting days,

Make all His glories known.

And soon the happy day shall come,

When we shall reach our destined home,

And see Him face to face;

Then with our Saviour, Master, Friend,

The glad eternity we'll spend

And celebrate God's grace.

Samuel Medley (1738-1799)

## CHAPTER 2: SOMETHING LONG-LASTING

In this book we're picking up on the fact that God had given the instruction that sacrifices in the Old Testament were to be offered with salt. He'd said: 'with all your offerings you shall offer salt (Leviticus 2:13). It's probably the case that, to us, salt is a common household – or at least a common kitchen – commodity or ingredient, so common in fact that we may tend to dismiss this interesting biblical association, or at least ignore the significance of what it's telling us.

Let's begin this chapter by reminding ourselves of how the usefulness of salt was discovered in ancient times. Evidence of the impact of salt on human civilization spans recorded history. Early settlements were at salt springs. Caravans trekked across deserts trading salt ounce-for-ounce for gold. Many cultures share traditions such as offering bread and salt to welcome visitors. The economic significance of salt led to trading partnerships ... or alternatively armed combat in past civilizations. And cultures ranging from the Sahara in West Africa to the Himalayan peaks of Nepal still allow us a glimpse back into the salt trading culture of centuries gone by.

Medieval Europe actually changed when fishermen were able to add salt to the cod they caught off North America's Grand Banks. This allowed them to preserve the fish for sale in Europe. In other words, salt became an important food preservative. And it's that last mention that's particularly relevant to what I want to share with you today. While we want bacteria to decompose

dead animals and plants that die in the forest, we don't want bacteria to decompose those animals and plants we plan to eat! The bacteria that so efficiently get rid of dead organisms can also cause disease if people eat rotting food, especially rotting meat.

Although the way in which salt keeps, say, meat from decaying wasn't understood until the early 1800s, people learnt by experience that salt helped them store food for long periods of time. This was obviously important in places where winters are long and fresh food isn't available all year round, or in humid places where food spoiled quickly. In arid climates, food can be preserved by drying. But where the humidity is higher, bacteria can rapidly destroy stored food. Even where food can be stored in ice during a winter, it quickly rots when it thaws in the spring. Salt, which is toxic in high concentrations to food-spoiling bacteria, has long been used as a preservative. So it has a clear association with the idea of something being long-lasting.

Does that hint at another reason, I wonder, why God gave the instruction there should always be salt added to the sacrificial offerings? Remember how we've seen an example of that from something that's recorded in Ezekiel chapter 43: "... a young bull without blemish and a ram without blemish from the flock. 'You shall present them before the LORD, and the priests shall throw salt on them, and they shall offer them up as a burnt offering to the LORD.'" (Ezekiel 43:24)

Of course, we say again, all those sacrifices in the Old Testament pointed forward to the one great sacrifice of Christ in the New Testament. But did their saltiness – in terms of the added salt – did the saltiness of the sacrifices long ago not also serve to in-

dicating the enduring – the lasting - effect of the death of Christ? This is the major difference, of course, between the sacrifices of Old Testament times and the sacrifice of Christ. Old Testament sacrifices had to be repeated again and again year after year. There was no lasting value to them. For it was impossible for them to put away sins. In them there was a passing over of sins, but only the one sacrifice of God's Son, Jesus Christ, could actually put away sin. He came to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself, Hebrews 9:26 says.

I sometimes think of it this way. It's like when we write a cheque to pay for goods. The cheque is a piece of paper that makes the promise that our bank will pay the other person's bank the exact amount of money we owe them. We hand it over and shake hands. The deal is done, and we take immediate possession of our purchase. But in a sense we haven't actually paid for it yet. We've only handed over a piece of paper in exchange. We can write many, many cheques in a single day. And some people do, people who don't have sufficient funds in their bank to cover them all. They're only caught out when the cheques reach the clearing bank. The person receiving the cheques in payment is happy until his bank informs him that the cheques have not been honoured due to insufficient funds belonging to the person who gave him the cheques in the first place.

Now think of the Old Testament sacrifices as being like cheques. Just as a cheque is a mere piece of paper, the sacrifices in themselves were really worthless. But they did have value, because God commanded them, and this value lay in what they represented – they pointed forward to – they, in a sense, promised –

the coming of Christ as the ultimate sacrifice. The letter to the Hebrews says about Christ:

“... He is the mediator of a new covenant, so that, since a death has taken place for the redemption of the transgressions that were *committed* under the first covenant, those who have been called may receive the promise of the eternal inheritance” (Hebrews 9:15).

So Old Testament sins were also finally paid for at the cross! They'd only been passed over by means of the offering of animal sacrifices previously. When Christ died, it was as if all the cheques hit the clearing bank. And from that sacrifice of infinite worth on the cross of Calvary full payment was made. Christ's is the only sacrifice that can take away sins – and it does that forever! That's the point! New Testament writers certainly emphasize that Christ's one sacrifice of himself remains effective for ever. It has a lasting effect. It doesn't need repetition. The writer of the letter to the Hebrews speaks of Jesus:

“... who does not need daily, like those high priests, to offer up sacrifices, first for His own sins and then for the *sins* of the people, because this He did once for all when He offered up Himself” (Hebrews 7:27).

Notice how the death of Jesus Christ for the sins of the people is described as a 'once for all' sacrifice. We find the same thing again in chapter 10: “... we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all” (Hebrews 10:10).

The death of his Son, was God's final answer to the human problem of sin. In our previous talk on the saltiness of the sacrifice of Christ, we were talking about value or worth. The point we need to add to that in this chapter is that we're talking about the fact that there's **lasting** value in the death of Christ. The blood that cleanses us from sin will never lose its effectiveness. Once cleansed, we're cleansed forever. The power in the blood is an everlasting power! It's the blood that makes and keeps us clean - permanently. The apostle Peter tells us in his first chapter that we:

“... were not redeemed with perishable things like silver or gold from [y]our futile way of life inherited from [y]our forefathers, but with precious blood, as of a lamb unblemished and spotless, *the blood of Christ*”  
(1 Peter 1:18-19).

The implication there, where Peter talks about the blood of Christ in contrast to perishable things, is that the blood of Christ is imperishable. This is the aspect of the saltiness of Christ's sacrifice that we praise God for today. Nothing can spoil the fruits of Christ's victory over sin at the cross. God's provision for our need will never lose its freshness. All the spiritual blessings obtained for believers on the Lord Jesus at the cross are preserved eternally! Yes, 'everything God does will remain forever' (Ecclesiastes 3:14). Hallelujah!

Done is the work that saves,  
Once and for ever done;  
Finished the righteousness  
That clothes the unrighteous one.  
The love that blesses us below  
Is flowing freely to us now.

The sacrifice is o'er,  
The veil is rent in twain,  
The mercy-seat is red  
With blood of Victim slain.  
Why stand we then without, in fear?  
The blood of Christ invites us near.

The gate is open wide;  
The new and living way  
Is clear, and free, and bright,  
With love, and peace, and day.

Into the holiest now we come,  
Our present and our endless home.

Enthroned in majesty  
The High Priest sits within;  
His precious blood, once shed,  
Has made and keeps us clean;  
With boldness let us now draw near;  
That blood has banished every fear.

To Him who has been slain  
Be glory, praise, and power,  
He died and lives again,  
He liveth evermore;  
He loves us, cleansed us by His blood,  
Made us a kingdom, priests to god!

## CHAPTER 3: NO GOING BACK ON HIS WORD

You may have heard of the place called Timbuktu, but do you know what it was famous for? The answer is the subject of this series – salt. In West Africa, on the southern edge of the Sahara desert, empires were built on the salt trade. In some trading cities in the region - like the famous Timbuktu - salt could be traded ounce-for-ounce for gold. Even today, something still remains of what was once a global salt trade network in African countries. Salt was obtained either from shallow mines or simply from the soil itself by mixing salt-containing soil with water in large pans. Salt dissolves in the water, but the soil doesn't. Then when the soil settles out, the salty water is scooped off into smaller pans. The water evaporates in the heat of the sun, and so leaves the salt behind. Long ago, the salt crystals were collected, and transported across the desert by camel.

But salt mining wasn't only big business in Africa, the same was true of Europe. European salt mining centres gave names to towns and cities that're still in existence today. The names of cities in Austria and southern Germany, like Salzburg, contain either of two German words, *salz* or *hall*, both meaning "salt." And during the United States Civil War, part of the Union's military strategy included the capture or destruction of sources of salt for the Confederate army. Its usefulness was recognized all around the world. So, yes, it's clear that salt's long been of widely recognized value to humanity.

But, in this book we're picking up on the fact that sacrifices in the Old Testament were required by God to be offered with salt. God had said: 'with all your offerings you shall offer salt' (Leviticus 2:13). Consistent with that, remember how we've seen the same thing mentioned by the prophet Ezekiel in Ezekiel chapter 43, when speaking about: "... a young bull without blemish and a ram without blemish from the flock. [He says] ...'You shall present them before the LORD, and the priests shall throw salt on them, and they shall offer them up as a burnt offering to the LORD. (Ezekiel 43:24)

Of course, we say again, all those sacrifices in the Old Testament pointed forward to the one great sacrifice of Christ in the New Testament. And that, of course, is what makes this observation about salt all the more interesting. So, we're asking the question: 'Why was salt added to the sacrifices?' In the second chapter of Leviticus, to which we've already referred, God also reinforced his instruction about the necessary addition of salt, by adding the command that 'the salt of the covenant' was not to be lacking along with Israel's offerings. Well, that now brings in the idea of a covenant or a binding agreement as well as salt. What's going on here? I want to explore that with you in this chapter.

It seems clear that, in Biblical times, one use of salt was for sealing an agreement or contract - and so we get the expression a "covenant of salt". We get an example of that from the Bible itself in Second Chronicles chapter 13 where in verse 5 the question is asked: "Do you not know that the LORD God of Israel gave the rule over Israel forever to David and his sons by a covenant of salt?" (2 Chronicles 13:5). The use of the wording 'a covenant of salt' is in support of God saying he's given the rule of Israel to

David and his sons ‘forever.’ In other words, as we try to understand what ‘a covenant of salt’ means we should be thinking in terms of it somehow signifying permanence.

Outside the Bible, there are references to a custom long ago, a custom by which men wore a pouch of salt tied to their belt and when they made a promise to someone – when they were about to enter into a contract or covenant with someone - they each put a pinch of salt into the other’s pouch. If a man wanted to break his covenant for reasons that didn’t seem fair, the other could reply by saying “OK, but only if you can take back your grains of salt - and yours only - from my pouch of salt”. Of course, that was impossible, and that’s just the point. When a contract like that was entered into, it was meant to be as impossible for a man to take back his word as it was for him to take back his salt.

Now, God’s covenants are ‘covenants of salt’ for God cannot lie, neither can he break his word. When the apostle Paul wrote to Titus, he spoke of: “... the hope of eternal life, which God, who cannot lie, promised long ages ago” (Titus 1:2). And, in John 10:35, we read of how “... the Scripture cannot be broken.” This is the character of the faithful God revealed by the Bible. When God gives a gift or when he calls a person, he’s not one to change his mind. For “the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable” - that’s what Paul says in Romans 11:29. And that principle would certainly apply to God’s gift of salvation through Jesus Christ, his Son; and to the call of God as it comes to us today through the preaching of the Gospel. This is important, and really relevant, because it again touches on the eternal security of the believer on the Lord Jesus Christ. When Christ came, he made, through his death on the cross, a New Covenant possible between God on

the one hand and men and women on the other. It was this New Covenant he was speaking about on that last evening in the upper room together with his disciples. Matthew writes in chapter 26 and verse 26:

“While they were eating, Jesus took *some* bread, and after a blessing, He broke *it* and gave *it* to the disciples, and said, “Take, eat; this is My body.” And when He had taken a cup and given thanks, He gave *it* to them, saying, “Drink from it, all of you; for this is My blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for forgiveness of sins” (Matthew 26:26-28).

On the first day of every week (Acts 20:7), disciples of Christ do this in remembrance of Christ’s once for all sacrifice for them – they remember their Lord as he’s asked them to do each week using the symbols of bread and wine. As we do this, our thoughts are directed to the New Covenant made in his blood, as shed for the forgiveness of sins. This is the Lord’s own word to us in Scripture. It concerns forgiveness, in other words it concerns the gift of salvation – to which God has called all who believe, calling them into a relationship with himself. Now God cannot lie; his word cannot be broken; and he never recalls his gifts, so this – in the Old Testament language – is a covenant of salt. Listen to how the letter to the Hebrews confirms that, as we read from chapter 10:

“And the Holy Spirit also testifies to us; for after saying, “This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, says the Lord: I will put my laws upon their heart, and on their mind I will write them”, He

then says “and their lawless deeds I will remember no more” (Hebrews 10:15-17).

For God there's no going back, he cannot deny himself. He will therefore never recall to remembrance any sins of the believer who's come to trust in the death of Christ. Just as no man can retrieve his grains of salt from among another man's salt grains – an impossibility! – so neither can or will God take back from us his plain word of promise: ‘their sins ... I will remember no more.’ If you know Christ, that's a truth worth rejoicing in today!

We hear the words of love;  
We gaze upon the blood,  
We see the mighty sacrifice,  
And we have peace with God.  
Tis everlasting peace,  
Sure as the Father's name;  
'Tis stable as His steadfast throne,  
For evermore the same.

We change - He changes not,  
His Christ can never die  
His love, not ours, the resting-place,  
His cross is ever nigh  
Our love is oftentimes low;  
Our joy still ebbs and flows;  
But peace with Him remains the same,  
No change Jehovah knows.

And yonder is our peace

The grave of all our woes;

We know the Son of God has come,

We know He died and rose.

We know He liveth now

At God's right hand above;

We know the throne on which He sits,

We know His truth and love.

## CHAPTER 4: WHAT A (SWEET) SAVOUR!

It's been claimed as no less magnificent than the Egyptian pyramids. Last year I visited it - a subterranean world of labyrinthine passages, giant caverns, underground lakes and chapels – complete with sculptures in crystalline salt and all richly carved in salt rock with amazing detail. Where was I? I was in a salt mine on the southeast outskirts of Krakow in Poland, a salt mine that had been worked for 900 years. It used to be one of the world's biggest and most profitable salt mines in the days when common salt was, in commercial terms, the medieval equivalent of today's oil.

Today, in that Polish salt mine, visitors can walk underground for about 2,000 meters in the oldest part of the salt mine and see its subterranean museum, which all takes about three hours or so to do. Nine centuries of mining have produced a total of some 200 kilometres of passages as well as more than 2,000 caverns of various sizes. The tourist route starts 64 metres deep, includes twenty chambers, and ends 135 metres below the earth surface, where the world's biggest museum of mining is located with its unique centuries-old equipment. Occasionally, concerts take place in the mine's biggest chambers. The unique acoustics of the place have made hearing music there an exceptional experience. And there's even a sanatorium for the relief of those suffering from asthma and allergies – a sanatorium situated 135 meters deep underground – why? Because of the purity of the air in this salty environment.

All this, of course, is testimony to the value - and the health benefits - once commonly associated with salt. Which makes current trends to reduce salt (and its sodium content) in our diet seem a little strange by contrast. We all know that flavour enhancers play an important role in foods and drinks. Rather than adding an artificial flavour, they bring out - or enhance - the existing flavour of products without adding a new taste or flavour of their own. Flavour enhancers are used in a wide variety of foods, both sweet and savoury. For example, they can be found in soups, pork pies, sausages, crisps, snack foods, bread and cakes. Although it's not strictly classed as a flavour enhancer, one of the world's best-known enhancers that's used widely is the humble grain of salt.

Obviously, you can have too much of a good thing - which is where the modern health awareness campaign comes in, pointing out that too much salt in our diet can increase our blood pressure. But it remains true that salt is a terrific flavour enhancer, helping to reduce bitterness and acidity, and bringing out other flavours in the food.

That's the angle we want to come from in this chapter as we bring to a conclusion this little booklet on salt and biblical sacrifices which point us to the saltiness of the sacrifice of Christ. But we begin a long way back, at a time even before God had given a detailed set of instructions to Moses about acceptable kinds of offerings (see the Book of Leviticus). We're going back to the time of Noah, in fact to the very time when he emerged from the ark in which he and his family, and representatives of all kinds of animals, had just survived the year-long flood which had been sent by God to destroy the wicked ancient world (see Genesis chapter

6). Noah, at once, expresses his gratitude to God because we read in Genesis chapter 8, verse 20 that:

“... Noah built an altar unto the LORD; and took of every clean beast, and of every clean fowl, and offered burnt offerings on the altar. And the LORD smelled a sweet savour; and the LORD said in his heart, I will not again curse the ground any more for man's sake; for the imagination of man's heart *is* evil from his youth; neither will I again smite any more every thing living, as I have done” (Genesis 8:20-21).

This is an important verse as it's the first Bible mention of an altar and also of burnt offerings. I'd like you to notice that it says 'the LORD smelled a sweet savour.' We shouldn't confine our thoughts to the curl of smoke that rose from the altar then. God was appreciating – he was savouring – the attitude behind Noah's actions. Had God not taught our first parents that sin required sacrifice? I'm convinced he did – when he made them coats of skin, even as he expelled them from Eden's garden.

Skins imply animals had died sacrificially – such blood had flowed for the first time in human history. It's a biblical principle that for sin to be forgiven, blood must flow (see Hebrews 9:22). Besides, God would later, through Moses, show that when an Israelite wanted to make a vow of dedication - or express his gratitude to God for good things received – he'd bring an animal victim for a sweet savour offering which would ascend as a soothing aroma to God in heaven from the altar.

God savoured Noah's obedience, his godly fear which had moved him in reverent obedience to build the ark at God's command (Hebrews 11:7). He savoured the devotion of this 'preacher of righteousness' as he brought to God his sense of indebtedness, his thanksgiving offering now that God's judgement was past and they'd been brought safely through the water. But there was even more than that, even more that God savoured that day surely. The apostle Paul talks about "Christ ... an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet smelling savour" (Ephesians 5:2).

Did God not even then, in the day that Noah came out of the ark and offered his sweet-smelling sacrifice, did he not then look down through the centuries of time and see the ultimate sacrifice of his Son who'd deliver all believers in himself from the wrath to come, from something even more fearful than a worldwide flood? Noah's godly fear, his reverence, his obedience, were all pale reflections of the coming Saviour of the world – but they brought such pleasure to God in anticipation as he accepted Noah's sacrifice on that day long ago.

You see, we often concentrate on the physical abuse and agony dealt out to Christ as he died for us on the cross. Mel Gibson's film 'The Passion of the Christ' focused on that. And we shouldn't forget the physical side, of course. Praise God for the Lord Jesus Christ who endured the cross, despising its shame (Hebrews 12:2) in all the God-forsaken darkness of that indescribable experience that was his on the cross. But the Bible doesn't really major on that side of things. The apostle Paul talks about glorying in the cross of Christ (see Galatians 6). And that's in keeping with the scene on the Mount of Transfiguration in Matthew chapter 17 where Peter, James and John are privileged

to be on the mountain-top with Christ and see him gloriously transformed as Moses and Elijah appear with him, and the topic of that conversation on the holy mount was all about the death Jesus was soon to experience at Jerusalem. God presented the cross there against a backdrop of glorious splendour. That's God's view of the cross - from his vantage point. It's the pivotal point of history, it's central to all God's eternal purposes with the human race. The countless angelic hosts on high have been educated in the ways and grace of God as a result of it (see Ephesians 3:10).

In the privacy of the darkened scene at the cross, when Christ gave himself utterly to accomplish all his Father's will, he was telling out the deep and eternal secrets of his heart's love for his Father in that unique and testing way – something we can only get a glimpse of as we read of Abraham's sacrificial devotion to his God (see Genesis 22). Was this not a moment in eternity that was priceless to God? Reverently, we suggest it was. God smelled the sweet savour of the love, the willingness, the devotion and utter obedience of his Son amid all that painful rejection by humanity. More than dying for our sins; Christ was offering himself to God (see Ephesians 5:2).

Throughout all eternity, the cross – meaning the sacrifice of Christ on the cross – will never lose its savour. When Paul spoke of the progress of the Gospel, he spoke in terms of spreading the savour of the knowledge of Christ. Here's what he says in Second Corinthians:

“Now thanks *be* unto God, which always cause[s] us to triumph in Christ, and make[s] manifest the savour of his knowledge by us in every place. For we are unto

God a sweet savour of Christ, in them that are saved, and in them that perish: To the one *we are* the savour of death unto death; and to the other the savour of life unto life. And who *is* sufficient for these things? For we are not as many, which corrupt the word of God: but as of sincerity, but as of God, in the sight of God speak we in Christ.” (2 Corinthians 2:14-17 KJV).

Remember the words: the ‘sweet savour of Christ’ - that’s what we’re spreading abroad as we preach of the Saviour’s death to a dying world. It’s the perspective every preacher should have; and ought it not to be the major emphasis of our worship times? Not what Christ has done for us; but what Christ means to God as discovered in the Word. It’s ours to express in words which the Spirit gives, the same sweet savour of Christ that God had anticipated throughout the Old Testament aromatic sacrifices. This is the sweetest aspect of the saltiness of the Christ of the cross. The cross will never lose its savour for God – and needs no enhancement – not that that’s even possible!



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## **About the Author**

Born and educated in Scotland, Brian worked as a government scientist until God called him into full-time Christian ministry on behalf of the Churches of God ([www.churchesofgod.info](http://www.churchesofgod.info)). His voice has been heard on Search For Truth radio broadcasts for over 30 years (visit [www.searchfortruth.podbean.com](http://www.searchfortruth.podbean.com)) during which time he has been an itinerant Bible teacher throughout the UK and Canada. His evangelical and missionary work outside the UK is primarily in Belgium and The Philippines. He is married to Rosemary, with a son and daughter.



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