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Matthew 5:13—Salt of the Earth and the Rolling Stones

In Matthew 5:13, Jesus tells his disciples, “You are the salt of the earth; but if salt has lost its taste, how can its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything, but is thrown out and trampled under foot.”

The British rock group the Rolling Stones recorded a song called “Salt of the Earth,” written by Mick Jagger and Keith Richards. The song appeared as the closing number on the group’s legendary *Beggars Banquet* album, which opened with “Sympathy for the Devil,” but also contained another biblically inspired song, “Prodigal Son” (written by Robert Wilkins).

Joan Baez and Judy Collins have recorded “Salt of the Earth” as a folk song, but it is usually identified as a gospel song and has been recorded by numerous gospel groups, including The Violinaires, whom Jagger and Richards identify as “The Rolling Stones’ favorite gospel group.”

The verse repeated as the third and sixth stanza is sometimes omitted by gospel artists. It seems to express a sense of distance between the singer and those whom the song wishes to honor, as though the composers recognize that they do not themselves belong

to those regarded as “the salt of the earth”—the latter are humble, working-class people, not wealthy celebrities or rock stars.

Jagger and Richards performed a version of the song in 2001 for a concert commemorating those who had died in the 9/11 terrorist attack on New York City. They changed the words of the third line to “Raise a glass to the good, not the evil.”