

Salty Christians

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[0 : 0 0] the sentiments that we were just singing in that last psalm i think will be sentiments and prayers that we all make and we all long for and we all ask for and we all desire as we desire to see the kingdom of god coming in our communities and in our world in the world we live in we long see a harvest we feel that we're plowing really hard ground and there doesn't seem to be much fruit for our labor and i'm sure in your own prayers that you're praying that god would say in the harvest that there would be many people that will become christians maybe some of the older people here will remember days when that has happened in the past when god has sent has come in power in reviving power and we long in many ways for that day and we almost wonder if it can ever happen because we feel the ground uh isn't just hard it's like it's like it's like a second ice age it's unbelievably difficult uh but yet uh we mustn't forget who god is and jesus himself uh recognizes part of what we are to do which is to pray to the lord of harvest that he would uh bring a fruitful period of uh reviving power but he also asks that when we pray we we pray that he will send workers into the harvest so it's actually a very dangerous prayer because as we make that prayer we're the answer to it because we are the ones who are the workers who are to go into his harvest field and so it's a risky prayer to make and in many ways a dangerous prayer because he wants us to recognize our responsibility to be those who are sent and and we are all sent as believers to be his people within this world so what i want to do this evening is look at verse 13 of chapter 5 of matthew you are the salt of the earth but if the salt has lost its taste how shall its saltiness be restored it is no longer good for anything except to be thrown out and trampled under people's feet and i realized probably on the sunday night of a communion it would be traditional to preach a purely evangelistic service that is a call and an invitation for people to come to christ and what i want to say is that i hope and pray if you're not a christian here this evening because i'm not going to do that i'm going to preach uh to the christians about being salt of the earth but i hope and i pray that you will listen if you're not a christian here this evening you'll listen like you've never listened before and that you'll come to the place where you say i absolutely want what has been spoken of and shared with the christians here this evening i want to be part of this kingdom i want to belong to you and indeed i think sometimes we make a false division between the kind of sermons we preach because certainly my understanding is that every time god's word is preached the call goes out for you if you're not a christian to respond to the word and to respond to the teaching and to respond to the revelation of jesus christ as he's given as we saw this morning in his living word and i hope and pray that that will be something you will consider this evening as someone who lives under god's common grace has received so much from god in your life and yet ultimately you have nothing without him in your soul and he is calling you to become a christian

and what he offers is infinitely better than anything you have infinitely better than the life you possess with the dubious safety of non-commitment that sometimes we feel and my prayer and i hope it is the prayer of others here that you will see that the life that jesus christ offers is irresistible and his call is irresistible and the fact that you're here tonight is a great evidence of his longing for you to respond to the word and to the message of the word and even to respond by thinking the message here is not for me but it can be as we come to jesus christ i want to belong as we were talking this morning i want to have that home i want to be with my father and know peace and forgiveness and grace because what we have as christians is a remarkable identity in jesus christ we're children of god and we have a remarkable privilege i imagine most of us are very ordinary people i'm a very ordinary person and most of us will be ordinary none of us will be big shots in the eyes of the world in many ways but we have this great calling and this great significance and this great work and this great identity in jesus christ and it's easy for us to forget that it's easy to make our christian walk and talk very plain and very dull and i don't get the opportunity to watch films very often these days but when i do i like to watch films that are based on true stories and i watched two films recently that were based on true life stories one was called the changeling which was about a mother in 1920s los angeles whose son was abducted and a few weeks later the la police department or whoever it was brought back someone else who they said was her son and it wasn't and the film is about her lifelong struggle to find out the truth and to find out what had happened to her son the second film was a film called unbroken which is a true story about a u.s olympian around about the same time called louis zamparini who ended up in the war being a fighter pilot his plane he was american italian american his plane crashed and he was in the ocean for uh well on on a dinghy for something like 48 days one of the others who was with him died in the dinghy because it was for so long that he was there he was eventually picked up by a japanese warship and taken to a japanese prisoner of war where he was beaten and brutalized until the end of the war when he was in the dinghy he vowed he prayed to god and said said to god if you will take me alive from this i will serve you for the rest of my life and he was true to that he became a preacher he gave his life to the lord and he lived until he was 90 testifying to his god now these two stories are just simple stories but stories that remind us that something dramatic happened in their life something life-changing which shaped their identity and shaped everything else that they did for the rest of their lives and these lives were extraordinary in many ways our lives are very ordinary but as believers something has happened radically happened in our lives that means that our lives should be no different from these people's lives in other words our whole life our whole future should be shaped

and molded by what has happened to us in christ and becoming christians therefore transforms and changes everything that we are we have a new identity we have a new calling we have a new heart we have a new helper in our lives we have a new focus of worship we have good news to share and we have his love and the experience of grace that people who are lost and heading to a lost eternity desperately need to hear about today and i think that's a great hope and i hope this evening to encourage you to look forward in this new day for you to recognize that this community of garibuston surrounding area needs nothing more than that good news needs nothing more than that great message of the gospel and it needs nothing more than a quiet powerful revolution of grace to transform the community and transform the individual lives of those who are deceived and blinded and lost and who need redemption and god has given us this calling in his word through the preaching of jesus christ you are the salt of the earth and that's what i'd like to look at just for a minute or two this evening a great calling that we have to be salt of the earth now i think it's important for us always to understand the context in which these illustrations and pictures were given because what jesus would use as an illustration might sometimes be lost on us in the 21st century or salt for example may have different uses or usage now than it did then i think sadly today well maybe not if there's any doctors or nurses here i was going to see sadly gets a bad press now but possibly because we use in our society far too much salt in our for example in our food it seems to be the new tobacco everything is to be banished that has salt in it is often used as a substitute for flavorless food but it is a great natural substance and it has wonderful qualities and probably much more so in the time of christ than it does for us and so christ uses that everyday illustration to make his challenging point to us in our lives we know that salt in jesus time was both a preservative and used for flavor and many of our modern day phrases come from its usage in the past a pinch of salt made something that was unpalatable easier to swallow and it was rubbed into fish and to meat in order to preserve these things there were no fridges and many in these communities would have known about salt herring for example and things that were put in barrels for the winter my father brought up in glenelg uh so he would never eat a salt herring again having been given it every night uh in his childhood uh right through winter times um it was used as a disinfection uh disinfectant we've heard of the phrase rubbing salt in a wound new babies were washed it was an antiseptic it was a staple item of the society in which jesus lived in so much so that roman soldiers if there was no money were paid and wait the weight of salt so that we get the phrase someone was worth their salt it was an important and a significant and valuable item to have and jesus uses it here

in a spiritual way for a spiritual illustration and he says and what he's saying is that the quality of our lives as christians matters the salt has lost its saltiness it's useless and he is uh challenging us as christians to recognize our identity and our calling and our privileges christians are to be christians the people who follow jesus were first called christians in antioch they were followers of jesus and that's what we're to be we're to be distinctive followers of jesus christ we are christians not in name only but in the lives that we live and what we do we are set apart we are set apart by jesus christ in order to serve him in this world in which we live that's the calling of all of us that is not simply the calling in a specific way of a minister of ordained eldership or of the diaconate it is our calling of all of us to be salt of the world and the temptation for us i think often in our lives is that we'd rather not be salt we'd rather be sugar we'd rather be something much sweeter for much more palatable maybe to us and and to others we struggle with our calling to be salt to be something different to be rubbed in to be involved to be christ-like we want to be accepted all the time we want to be loved we are tempted to blend in at every level to be indistinguishable to love the world but on its own terms we are to love the world in order to reach the world but that can be a double-edged sword and we need to recognize that we are to love with the love of christ and be called as salty christians so that's our calling to be salty christians what does that mean well we recognize where jesus has placed the statement he's placed it immediately after the beatitudes in his sermon on the mount in other words he's calling us to be beatitudinal christians christians that reflect the blessed life that he is uh uh laying before his hearers as those who are followers of him those who believe in jesus christ who have given their lives to christ and whose calling is to be transformed to be like jesus christ so we are those who are driven in the best possible way by the love of christ to be a broken people who are molded and reformed and being reformed into his likeness that's what he's doing with us he's breaking us and he's humbling us in order to be like him and when we are like him we are like our true self the individual self that we were created to be and all of us are individual and all of us have different gifts and all of us have different strengths and weaknesses but we are called to be christ-like and when we are christ-like we are as true to our being as it is possible for us to be therefore a beatitudinal christian is one who knows his own heart her own heart

who knows exactly their need of jesus christ who is consistently repentant and forgiving and forgiven who keeps a short account with the living god remember that was one of the pieces of advice that my first colleague boss reverend kenny mcdonald in roskeen would always say about prayer to people that he would pastor keep a short account with your god always be in his presence speak often to him and recognize the need for his light to shine in the dark recesses of your soul for cleansing and renewal the beatitudinal christian is one who has an appetite for the things of god who has a hunger for god who delights to show mercy who seeks a change in their own heart who as we saw this morning is peace loving you know it's not a soft and gentle and sappy kind of description of the believer this is a courageous strong and grace filled willingness to be wronged willingness to recognize the good and the better of others a peace loving yet uncompromising walk with god in that dynamic and growing relationship with him one which brings joy and as we also saw this morning peace so that our task is not moralistic it's not about jumping through moral hoops in order to be better it is as we saw again sorry for going back to this morning it is relational the salty christian is the one who's in relationship with Jesus Christ not second hand relationship not relationship once removed not relationship through the preacher not relationship through the eldership relationship one to one that's the great privilege you have and I have as Christians this direct contact the curtain being opened and that relationship with the living

[18 : 45] God so the key to the church that you have and the key to moving forward and taking up the challenge of Jesus Christ to be salt of the earth and to grow the church and we long for the church to grow not because numbers somehow are magical but because we are called to growth internal growth maturing growth and numerical growth because that means people are being saved and that is primarily not primarily not an external Sunday worship experience nor will it be primarily strategic or methodological it will be a people a people who see the absolute beauty of Jesus Christ and who are dying to themselves who have taken up their cross crucified with him and who follow him who appreciate the beauty of the radical grace that has redeemed them though unworthy they are though unworthy we are to receive that grace and a willingness to share that with others equally unworthy like us it can't be something that we are driven to do by fear or by guilt or by mere desire to perform the reality is as Christians that is what we are we are salt of the earth

Jesus doesn't say you can be salt of the earth one or two of you with the specific gifts can become salt of the earth every so often you might be salt of the earth he says you are the salt of the earth by nature in redeemed nature that is what we are we are to be Christ's ambassadors Christ's people and to bring his grace and his flavour and his moral distinctive and his preservative and his cleansing and his actions into the community of the church and the community outside Jesus goes on to speak about the good deeds that we do that God may be given glory in heaven and that's the encouragement I give you as you move forward you are the salt of the earth we are the salt of the earth I imagine there are two opposite dangers for us in our lives when we consider this challenge one being that we at either end of the spectrum one is that we are afraid of the earth we are afraid of the world and we want to have no part in the world we feel that

God has called us out of the world which he has spiritually by our distinctiveness but not by our presence look at the person of Jesus and his life so that we are tempted at one level to become monastic because we are afraid of the world in which we are placed and we remain enclosed and separate from the world it's like salt that remains in the cupboard or in the salt shaker it's no good is it it might look good it might appear to be the right thing but if it is not poured out in our own context then it is of no value it's not rubbed in as it would have been as a preservative if we only surround ourselves with Christians now I recognize and know there's a huge significance of fellowship and of good company and of keeping good company and of worship together all vital all important but if we become monastic in that as a church and only insular and only surround ourselves with Christians we are seeking heaven before heaven we are in the billet room when there's a war being fought which Christ wants us to be on the front line we're in the changing room when there is a contest happening outside and we can from that place maybe talk a good game but we leave a world damned untouched and unmoved because we will not share what we have we keep what God has freely given to us with all the divine and astonishing generosity of God and we hoard it to ourselves we do not share our gifts and above all the great gospel message that somebody shared in our lives so that's maybe one extreme that we're afraid of the world the other extreme might be going the opposite way and we often lurch from one end to the other don't we in our lives that we are in love with the world that as

Christians we are involved up to our necks in the world and use it as an excuse because we say we want to be in the world in order to reach the world but we use that as an excuse to simply live out the pleasures of the world without bringing Christ into our situations we like to be freed from the moral parameters and accountability of conscience so we plunge into the world but we do so without the armor of God we do so without recognition of being vitally in prayer and relationship with God and longing for the souls of those to whom we are around so briefly in conclusion the salt of the earth how does that how are we salt of the earth in the world in which we live to use

Jesus own illustration here I think it's hugely significant to recognize that kingdom growth and conversions is God's work he's sovereign we don't have the responsibility of turning someone's heart round that's a wonderful reality that's his work he's sovereign he calls he redeems but we are his under shepherds and we are his ambassadors and in with unfathomable grace he chooses to use us in all with all our faults and failings and weaknesses to reach out to plead and to pray for people and to share Christ with them so as salt of the earth he asks all of us to be poured out to be mixed in to be rubbed in to be part of the world in which we live in order to reflect

[26 : 07] Christ to that world that takes prayer it takes vigilance it takes time and effort and sacrifice and great wisdom it takes grace filled neighborliness and readiness to use the opportunity as we are poured out and giving ourselves in love and in grace to others we will find others will ask us about our faith we wouldn't need to plough into situations and manufacture opportunities that are unnatural and uneasy to share Christ be ready God says be prepared to give a reason for the hope that you have within you because it will come as we live as we are poured out and as we are poured out we seek to enrich the world in which we live with joy and with flavour and with the flavour of people who have been brought from death to life and who come to know

God and who will live life to the full because that's what he promises and that's what he offers us thankfulness a lack of bitterness gracefulness it's attractive and having time for people in this world maybe not so much here because you're still a community here but we find in the city people are slaves to loneliness with all the technology and all the social media that we have people are isolated and lonely and to take time with people to open your home to people to spend time in their company and to regard them as significant

I know it's not deep theological truth but it is look at the life of Jesus look at the kind of life Jesus lived look at the people who were annoyed with him the religious Pharisees of his day were annoyed at Jesus Christ because he went to weddings and because he ate with dubious people and spent time in their company and was constantly being accused of all kinds of irregularity he was absolutely pure he was God and ordinary people were attracted to him ordinary people who recognised their need were attracted to Jesus Christ and were changed by Jesus Christ now I know that the Bible also says that after being with

Christ for a number of months or years that many people turned away because of the hard sayings and that will undoubtedly come will be a time when people will maybe have to make that choice and choose to reject but that is their responsibility and God knows but we have that privilege of creating within the community and the lives and the families in which we live creating a thirst for good things a thirst for God a thirst for something they don't have but something they long for and are looking for and all the deceitful avenues that the devil will bring them down and so we are to enrich their lives by who we are and also engage we are poured out and we enrich people's lives but we engage with people as we live as salt and as we live as

Christians and we're unashamed of Jesus Christ in our lives in a natural and ordinary way it will provoke a reaction salt that is rubbed in a wound provokes a reaction and that reality is there is a cost in other words we can often say well I'm just living quietly for Jesus and I hope my example will be sufficient but Jesus needs to be told they need to hear about Jesus Christ and it will only have any significance or challenge in their lives if they see that what you say matches who you are and how you live there is a cost salt requires to be salty and also salt when it is being salt may sometimes be provocative because we are talking today about an exclusive love we're talking about one saviour we're talking about eternal life and eternal damnation we're talking about a saviour who demands change who demands humility who demands that we come off the throne of our own lives and give him the glory and the authority and that his way is the only way that can be very difficult in our society but as it's done sensitively and gently and yet courageously and sometimes with great trembling and with a salty

[32 : 26] Christ-like life we pray that it will be powerful and I don't think that's ever an excuse to be obnoxious and sometimes we are simply being obnoxious in our maybe self-righteousness or in our judgment of others and we characterize it as being persecuted for Jesus' sake but we're really just being persecuted because we're obnoxious we're to be those who are respectful because God's word tells us that and gentle and yet strong and humble because we are beatitudinal Christians so I close just with this which is the challenge that Jesus leaves us it's what if salt loses its savor or its saltiness what good is it it's useless we're useless if we don't reflect the love of

Jesus Christ through transformed hearts that's a sobering thought it should drive us to the foot of the cross again if we only have an outward veneer of Christ and Christianity that might fool all the people all the time but if we don't recognize that we are to be beatitudinal changed from the inside out then we're living a lie and we're to be those who drive constantly back to Christ to repent for courage and transforming power in our lives or it could be that you're not living for Christ at all and I go back to the very beginning that you're not a Christian you're living for yourself you're keeping close enough possibly as an insurance policy for some time in the future but you're living for your own glory and you're living as your own

Lord and he says you need to become salt you need to recognize that our only hope is in Jesus Christ and the only way is the way of the cross to fall at the foot of the cross and to entrust your life to Jesus Christ hope and I pray and I plead that that will be the case for you this evening if you're not a Christian and for many many people in this community that they will come to know Jesus Christ through the consistent humble gracious courageous radical and godly lives of everyone who professes Jesus in this new congregation spur our heads in prayer and the people in every