

You are the Salt of the Earth

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[0 : 00] What Jesus says to his disciples, you are the salt of the earth. You are the salt of the earth, but if salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored?

It's no longer good for anything except to be thrown out and trampled under people's feet. One of the many highlights that I've been privileged to experience this year was attending the National Prayer Breakfast at Westminster Hall in the Houses of Parliament in June.

People from every walk of life were present. Prime Minister, leaders of other political parties, government ministers, past and present.

There were MPs, there were diplomats, there were ambassadors, there were leaders of business, there were church representatives, and I think I'm right in saying there were four free church ministers, three current ones, one retired.

It was a powerful event. Prayer given by Lord Mackay. Songs from the Gettys, by the Gettys.

[1 : 08] And the key address given by Tim Keller, the US minister and evangelist. And his address being what can Christianity offer in the 21st century.

And this evangelical US minister, well, speaking at the epicentre of British political life, and he gave what someone's described as a masterclass in gracious apologetics.

In other words, an example. An example for Christians how to present the gospel. An example to Christians how to defend the gospel before, I have to say, world leaders.

And to do so by grace and conviction. The conviction of truth. And that truth Keller presented, of course, through scripture. As Keller chose to give his address based on the words of our text this morning.

Matthew 5, verse 13. You are the salt of the earth. Now, I'm certainly not going to repeat Keller's address. You can find it and Google it. It's on the National Prayer Breakfast website.

[2 : 16] You can read it for yourself. But what I do want to grasp this morning. I want you to grasp. Here's a man. There's a man who took scripture to the very heart of the British establishment.

Here's a man who took Jesus' Sermon on the Mount to people and was unashamed to testify to the uniqueness of Christ. He was unashamed to testify to the power of the word of God.

He was unashamed to testify to the transforming power of the gospel seen in those who are the salt of the earth in the world.

And if Tim Keller can proclaim Christ, a group of some, we might say, some of the most influential leaders of society, then it's for all who are Christians, unashamedly, to testify to the power of the gospel in our own land and indeed elsewhere.

It's that message that Jesus gives here of Christians, you know, regarding our witness, regarding your impact in society.

[3 : 24] That's what we're considering this morning. Because you see, it is of the greatest importance, the greatest need for the church to listen to the word of Jesus, to the voice of Jesus, and put into practice what he tells, what he exhorts.

Because what we see here in the words of Jesus, even in this verse here, this verse that you're the salt of the earth, what Jesus is saying is at the core of what a Christian's about in his life, in her life, in his witness, in her witness to the world, to be the salt of the earth, to be that salt that Jesus tells his hearers that they are.

But then, of course, the question has to be asked, what did Jesus mean by these words? You're the salt of the earth. And then, as he gives an extended word, if salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored?

I think we need to look at the context of the words. I mean, Jesus doesn't just throw this verse in at random. There's obviously a connection between what he said before. So we need to look at the

context, where Jesus places these words.

Then, of course, we've got to understand the words themselves. What are the properties of salt that Jesus is bringing out to teach, what it means to be a Christian in the world? Then, of course, the consequences have been salt placed, as we see in the second part of verse 13.

[4 : 54] So, first of all, the context of Jesus' words. As we see, it's no coincidence that Jesus is speaking to his followers, telling them that they're salt and light, and doing so immediately following the words, well, that we read there in the first 11 verses, and the blessedness of those who are his.

And particularly, you know, that end note that Christians are, as Jesus tells his disciples, Christians are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake.

Now, remember what Jesus has been teaching already, the beatitudes, the blessings. Because the blessings concern the Christian, well, the Christian privileges, those who know God's favour.

The blessings that are found in those who are kingdom dwellers. Those who have entered the kingdom of God through faith, faith in the Lord Jesus. The kingdom that Jesus came to earth to bring in.

That kingdom, of course, is a kingdom that the world's opposed to. You know, that constant opposition from those who hate the king. The hatred of the king of the kingdom.

[6 : 05] The hating, yes, of the king and the hating of his subjects, the hating of Christians. And that hate is going to see believers being opposed and reviled and hated by a world that wants to see the kingdom of God destroyed because God's kingdom is opposed to all that the world holds so dear.

All that the world is opposed to in the rule of God in life. So, how are Christians? How are those who are poor in spirit, those who mourn over their sins, how are those who display the grace of the Lord Jesus and display mercy to others?

How are Christians who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, how are Christians supposed to live in the world and live as Christians in the world? Are we going to somehow disengage ourselves from the world?

Are we going to live as hermits in the wilderness? Are we going to cut ourselves off from engaging with the world? Are we going to say that the world is so corrupt that I'm just going to live in a cocoon, live in a kind of bubble, and I'm not going to be contaminated by anything that the world can throw at me?

Is that what Jesus is saying here? Absolutely not. Not at all. You engage with the world. And emphasizing that truth, Jesus uses metaphors.

[7 : 29] He uses word pictures, if you like, to bring home the crucial importance of engaging with the world, of impacting the world. He uses these well-known metaphors, salt and light.

And God willing, we'll look at salt this morning and in a fortnight's time, look at light. So, why salt? Why does Jesus say, you are the salt of the earth?

What are the properties? Well, before we come to that, let's just look what Jesus specifically says. You, he says, you, looks around, you are the salt of the earth.

You just see Jesus' finger pointing to his disciples. You are the salt of the earth. You know, when recruitment was underway in Great Britain in 1914, you know, the many methods that were used to attract young men to fight in the war.

And one of these methods was posters. And you know, the one, the most famous poster of all, the picture of Lord Kitchener, the Secretary of State for War, and his pointing his finger. And with the big, you know, the single word, you, you.

[8 : 30] Your country needs you. And the finger pointing, and the very, the optical illusion that wherever you went, the finger was pointing at you, whether you went left, centre, or right. But the point being, the you was emphasised.

You know, this unmistakable reference to you, you, the individual. There was no escape from Lord Kitchener's message. It was directed to those who were living in the kingdom of Great Britain, who were opposed by the, well, what were known as the central powers.

Now, look at the passage here, where we see Jesus, the Lord of Lords, telling his disciples, he's telling you are the salt of the earth.

There's no mistaking who Jesus is speaking to. He's speaking to his disciples. And of course, by inference, he's speaking to those who are within the kingdom of God. He's not speaking to those who are outside the kingdom.

He's speaking to those who are within the kingdom. Those who are opposed. Not by central powers, but by hostile powers, by a hostile world.

[9 : 33] He's speaking to you. There's no escape from the responsibility you have as a Christian in this hostile world. You, Jesus is saying, you are the salt of the earth.

Notice, again, the tense that Jesus uses here. You are the salt of the earth. It's not the command, you be the salt. Of course, that's truly inferred in there.

But you are the salt of the earth. You know, there's no get-out clause here for the Christian. You are what Jesus says you are. You are the salt of the earth.

You are what Jesus says you are as a Christian. That's what you are in relation to the world. A world that's opposed to the king of kings. You're not something that somehow has been forced against your will.

But God has blessed you in Christ. You are a Christian who knows that the Lord Jesus is your saviour. You have been granted that grace and the power of God to live in this world, to have an impact in the world around you.

[10 : 39] What does it mean? What does it mean to be the salt of the earth? Well, I think it's very important that we realise how first century disciples, how first century people would have taken in this picture of them being salt.

And of course, as we understand that, we can derive principles from the metaphors that Jesus uses here to describe and to tell what a Christian is. And I think we need to look secondly at the properties of salt.

Why Jesus uses this particular word picture, you are the salt of the earth. Two things. I'm sure you know yourself that salt is a preservative and salt gives taste or gives flavour to food.

We'll deal with the preservative aspect. First of all. So, we're in the first century. First century Israel. And Jesus is speaking these words true to first century Israel, but of course they have a very present application.

And we know of course even until very recent times and in fact I think even in some parts of the world still today that salt is used to preserve food decay. And you know the scientific reason for that.

[11 : 48] Salt slows down the bacterial growth in food. So, salt helps to stop food decay or certainly make food decay slower. To make food last longer.

To make food fresher longer. And certainly in Jesus' day, you know, salt was used to preserve particular foods, especially, well, fish, meat.

Very, very common. Very common occurrence. Using the most common of minerals. And so, you know, the disciples would immediately twig us out to what Jesus was saying to them.

That they act as salt in society. To help prevent decay in society. Now, they might appear ordinary. Ordinary common human beings.

But you know, just like the ordinary common salt around. The effect that ordinary common salt has on food. So, these ordinary followers of Jesus to have that enormous impact on the world around them.

[12 : 51] And if that's relevant to first century followers of Jesus, then what Jesus says about salt has relevance to 21st century followers. The same Lord Jesus.

You know, focus on the preservative aspect of salt. You know, needing to be, the preservative aspect to keep from decay. and, you know, bring that to our present context.

The world in which we live in. The decaying world. The world that is, yes, we have to say, spiritually, morally corrupt. Rotten. Because the world out there, as I think we've already said before, the world out there is so hostile to the kingdom of God.

If the world were left to itself without the preserving influence of Christians, then the world would continue to decay and decay and decay.

Now, we can give many, many examples, I think, of the preserving actions of Christians in society. We can do it from the past. We can do it from the present. One thing Tim Keller pointed out at Westminster was the very basis of our Western civilization.

[14 : 05] It's based on the Christian ethic. The Christian ethic of love of our neighbours, love of others. That ethic, as Keller said, that displays the Anglo-Saxon ethic of might, of power is right.

And it's that love for others, for example, that drove the Christian abolitionist William Wilberforce. Remember what he did. First of all, he persuaded Parliament to recognise the dignity of man made in the image of God and therefore the slave trade was abolished first of all and then slavery itself

abolished in the British Empire.

William Wilberforce, that Christian, that man, for good. Or bring it to the present day. We see Christian organisations. Think of organisations such as the Christian Institute or Christian Concern taking their stand for the protection of Christians in the public arena to prevent, for example, the erosion of Christian speech, Christian action in the world.

What did we learn last Sunday evening from Lewis who was here telling of the work in a particular deprived part of Edinburgh? That the preservative work of Christians, if it were, halting or simply reducing the decay in the lives of so many people, even the transformation of so many lives touched by the gospel of the Lord Jesus.

You know, we think of the work done by Christians then and the work of family support, social care, the care that feeds body and soul. You know, we could give so many examples of the preserving good of those who are the salt of the earth in preventing decay in society and recognizing the dignity of man made in the image of God.

[15:59] But, you know, let's not hide behind the actions of the past. And let's not suggest that it's only the well-known higher profile, you know, the examples of Christians, the salt, you know, these headline makers, as if to say that's all that counts in this.

No. Jesus said, you, you are the salt of the earth. You are to do the work of Jesus. You are to preserve that which is honorable and true and just and holy.

You are the salt that preserves decay in society. That's a tremendous responsibility if you profess the name of the Lord Jesus. It's a responsibility that each and every Christian has in a society where you live so that you are a preserving influence for good.

And, you know, to be that preserving influence, you've got to be different. You've got to be different. Different to the world around you, just the salt is different to that which it impacts upon.

You know, when Jesus chose this metaphor of salt, salt as a preservative, he chose that metaphor because salt is different to that which, you know, it comes into contact with. You know, salt, it goes without saying, of course, but salt is different to the meat, it's different to the fish in which it's applied to prevent decay.

[17:26] You know, meat on meat, fish on fish doesn't prevent decay. Only the chemically different salt is able to prevent meat from going rotten. And it's that different, that different that a Christian is.

Why? Through the saving grace of the Lord Jesus. That's what enables the Christian to act as that preservative against decay in society. He'll, she'll see God's word upheld when others seek to discard the word of truth.

He'll take a stand for truth when the false accusations of those who hate the word of God scream in vehemence against the word of God. She'll protect the rights of Christians at home and overseas when others desire merely to silence the voice of the Lord Jesus.

That voice heard through his servants. Christians will do all that because of the difference that they are in the world.

The difference because that heart has been changed through the saving work of God. Seek to honour God's name and God's name is blasphemed.

[18:46] You'll seek to preserve the Lord's day when it's dishonoured in the realm of unnecessary work and sport, for example. You'll resist the schemes of the state when the state tries to force Christians to comply with the anti-Christian practices.

She'll speak up when the voices of hatred against Christ are at fever pitch. Fever pitch against believers.

Believers still act as grace, as salt to preserve that which is true and just and holy. You are the salt of the earth. And that means that you're different from the world.

And you're different in order to be that preservative against total decay. So it follows then. It follows that you can't be effective in your preserving the world from decay if you remain at a distance from the world.

The well-known saying has to be taken to heart. You're in the world but you're not off the world. And sometimes I think we make the mistake of saying that we're out of the world as well as not off the world.

[19:57] But you see, you have neighbours. You've got work colleagues, those of you who work. You've got relatives, many of course of whom are not Christians. Christians. How can you be the salt of the earth?

If I, if you as an individual, as a believer, keep away from those whom God has placed beside you. You know, just the salt has to get into contact with the meat or the fish to preserve it from decay. So, you know, you as a Christian, I as a Christian have to get in touch and get in contact with those who are right beside us, who are near us. Because if salt is left just to one side, it's not going to have any effect whatsoever.

And that's why as Christians we do rub shoulders with the world out there. Certainly not to compromise, we're not told to compromise. But we're told that we have that preserving impact that makes a difference.

And that's why there are Christian teachers in the education system rather than keeping out of that system. And that's why there are Christian nurses and doctors and Christian businessmen and workmen who make that impact in the world around them and the context in which God has placed them in.

[21 : 11] That's why there are Christians in every walk of life who do make an impact for good in that particular area where God has placed them. We're not to live our lives like a monk in a monastery but we're to get out there or to be Christ-like and be in the salt of the earth.

So the question that you and I have to ask are we being salt? Are we acting as salt? Are we acting to preserve society from decay?

Are you speaking a word in season? Are you standing for truth? Are you making an impact on others in preventing the erosion even of Christian values?

Or are you just stay away? Do you just keep silent? Do you not engage with the world? No, there's a challenge. There's a challenge for every single Christian to be that salt-like preserver for the glory of God and the good of others.

So salt has a preserving aspect. Bring that into the context of the Christian preserving the society from decay. But of course salt has another property it's seasoning.

[22 : 23] That's flavour. That's flavour to food. To food that needs salt to bring out that flavour. Even in the book of Job. Job knew that.

Job 6 verse 6. Can that which is tasteless be eaten without salt? Well, no. Christians, you're to add flavour to those around.

In other words, to bring that joy and the love of the Lord Jesus into any situation which you find yourself placed. Reflecting the attractiveness of the Lord Jesus.

not to repel others by our words and our actions but to draw others to the Saviour. Isn't it one of the saddest comments on any church?

All that others perceive of a church is of a repelling rather than an attracting. You know, a turning away rather than a welcoming.

[23 : 23] I don't need to say how often even our own denomination has been caricatured as something that's gloomy and sullen and killjoy, bringing misery and caricatured of course.

But the point is this, that we are to be that flavour, to show forth the love of the Lord Jesus to others even by our very words and actions. Live as a Christian to attract others, don't turn people away, glory, but by your witness.

Be that salt giving flavour to all around to bring glory to your Saviour. And we don't need to stray from God's word to show us how we are, that salt to add flavour, the flavour of grace around us. Think of our words, think of our conversations. Straight from Scripture, Colossians 4 verse 6, let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer each person.

Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt. Even the way that we talk with one another, we do so as the salt of the earth.

[24 : 40] And especially in the way that we are with non-Christians, with neighbours, with friends, with colleagues, don't give them an excuse to point an accusing finger when they hear you speak.

The kind of words that you use. No, you know, speech that is not seasoned with the salt of grace. You know, things like gossip, or doing down somebody, or even the very manner in which we address others.

You know, our words have to be seasoned with salt. The grace of the Lord Jesus. You know, think of Jesus, how he spoke. What did someone once say of him?

Never a man spoke like this, that man. But what about the consequences of salt leftness? Because, you know, Jesus doesn't just say, you're the salt of the earth, he adds.

But if salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored? It's no longer good for anything except to be thrown out and trampled under people's feet. Now, again, we have to think of the immediate context in which Jesus is saying these words.

[25 : 47] You know, Jesus is speaking about the salt of Israel, Palestine, the salt taken from the Dead Sea. And the scholars tell us that salt, the salt from the Dead Sea was, and of course still is, often contaminated with other minerals.

And sometimes the salt would, as it were, or these minerals would leak out, and it would leave a very tasteless substance in what was left. And the salt became worthless.

People just threw it away. And, well, Jesus' listeners would know exactly what Jesus was saying there. But we can apply that in the metaphor that Jesus uses here.

Because if Christians don't act as a preservative in society, if we don't give flavour to all around, the flavour of grace, then we'll be utterly ineffective in the cause of Jesus.

Because unless we're impacting society at every level, whether it's law, government, media, business, health, education, culture, you name it, then really we're not being salt of the earth.

[26 : 57] We deserve to be trodden underfoot. You know, when the church abandons being the salt of the earth, then inevitably we do see society show signs of decay.

Laws do become more unchristian. The government does become less God honouring. Our media becomes more anti-Christian. Our culture becomes more godless.

You know, if we're following the Sermon on the Mount, following the words of Jesus and the principles of Christian living, the principles that Jesus brings out here, then we will and do see change in society.

We see that change for good when we are being faithful as salt of the earth. you are the salt of the earth, you who know the Saviour, you who know the Lord Jesus, you who have been blessed with every spiritual blessing in Christ.

You have that equipment as it were to be the salt, to act as that grace filled preservative in society, gifted to be that flavour of Jesus around.

[28 : 07] So what then? Are you going to just stay back? Are you going to engage with the world around you and be effective to be as it were salty for Jesus? Are you going to just do nothing?

Are you going to relate the first century impurities and salt or present day impurities and salt deemed to be of no further usefulness? Pray for the opportunities that God presents to you. Pray for these opportunities to be salt, to be that salt within a decaying world. Seek by God's strength and by God's grace to impact that world around you where God has placed you in his service and be salt with thanksgiving knowing that God still has worked for you to do to his praise and to his glory.

Amen. Let us pray. Lord, forgive us for the many times when we have stepped back and kept silent and not impacted the world around us we ought.

Forgive us Lord, when we haven't acted as preservatives in society. Forgive us Lord, when instead of showing the flavour of grace, we've shown that which is graceless.

[29 : 24] Forgive us Lord, strengthen us we pray. May your people even here in this congregation be that salt of the earth.

Lord, help them so to be for you have placed them for your greater purposes, for the glory of your name. So help us Lord, we pray. Go before us, bless us for the remainder of this your day.

Bless our fellowship one with another. Bless all that you give to us in this your day of rest. Help us then. to glorify you in it. As we seek to honour you in our very lives.

We ask these things in Jesus' name. Amen. Well, let's close on Psalm 85. Psalm 85 on page 113. And the tune, well, apologies to Megan here, but if Tithridal, I always get it wrong, Megan. Psalm 85 verse 8 to verse 13.

[30 : 30] I will hear what God the Lord says. To saints he offers peace, but his people must not wander and return to foolishness. Surely, for all those who fear him, his salvation is at hand, so that once again his glory may be seen within our land.

Verse 8 to verse 13, Psalm 85, to God's praise. Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you.

[32 : 50] Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen.
Amen.