

# Salt of the Earth

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Date: 21 February 2011

[ 0 : 00 ] Let us now turn to the passage that we read. The Gospel according to Matthew in chapter 5, and at verse 13, You are the salt of the earth, but if 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. Christ, in this passage, is using two different illustrations to highlight the role of the Christian in society. He is using the illustration of salt and the illustration of light. And I believe that there ought to be a distinctiveness about the believer in the Word, a distinctiveness that ought to characterize the life of the Christian in society.

It would be easy to adopt the attitude of the scribes and Pharisees and look with disdain upon society, self-righteous disdain.

Jesus does not advocate nor support such an attitude. We could, on the other hand, adopt the attitude of some who advocate a kind of monastic life and seek to withdraw altogether from the world, not realizing that the world follows you into your monastic state.

[ 2 : 04 ] Jesus does not encourage or promote that attitude either. He encourages as well as exhorts his disciples on the wider church with these metaphors describing the role of believers in the world.

And for a few moments this evening, I should like to consider with you the first of these. You are the salt of the earth. Salt, for some of us, is something that our GPs want us to moderate very greatly our intake of salt and perhaps even use a substitute of some kind.

But as I am sure most, if not all, are aware, salt has useful functions. It was used, at one time, in the healing of wounds, as an antiseptic.

It may be used, and still is, to flavor food. The health conscious would immediately shout in moderation, or perhaps not at all, as too much salt can be harmful or even deadly.

But for many, food without being seasoned by salt is bland and lacking in taste.

[ 3 : 38 ] In the hands of a good cook, salt continues to be as subtle yet invaluable in bringing out the flavors of the food.

Personally, I happen to like porridge every morning. And without salt, for me, my porridge is totally unappetizing.

I cannot eat it. Salt is a preservative, too. It is used to preserve meat or fish from rotting.

And those who are connoisseurs of salt meat or fish will tell you that the food that is actually salted becomes sweet when it is an appropriate time in the salt.

Salt may be inexpensive, yet it has tremendous value and function. And Jesus, in addressing the church here, in effect is telling his disciples, although they are small in number, although they may appear to be largely ineffective when contrasted with the world and with society at large, you are the salt of the earth.

[ 5 : 07 ] That might appear on the surface to be a statement of great presumption coming from anyone else but Jesus and telling this small group, you might be forgiven for thinking that it was presumptuous to make such a statement.

Jesus is telling this group, you are to keep the world from rotting. You are to bring light into darkness. In some ways, it is strange to find these words addressed to this group who to all appearances appear so ineffective and also because they drew their power from Christ himself. But if you reflect upon what Christ says and you look back over the passage of history, you will find that these words are borne out, that they are confirmed by history, despite all of the apparent inconsistencies, yes, unreal inconsistencies in the life of the professing church ever since this time, much that has been progressive, much that has been enlightened, much that has been moral, has been brought to bear upon the history of the world through the influence and the witness of the church.

Yes, people may view believers with deep disdain and may look at them, you, the salt of the earth, but that is indeed what Christ wants the believer to be in society.

And I should like this evening just to raise a few thoughts, simple but solemn, simple but solemn and deeply searching, I believe.

[ 7 : 23 ] And I hope that as I bring them before you, that I bring them before my own heart too. First of all, the duty are the function of the church and of each individual member of it.

As described in these words, you are the salt of the world. It's easy to think of the church as some kind of huge body and blame the church, but we have to remember that we are the members of the church.

We are the members of that body. we are responsible for how that body is perceived and seen in the world because we are the church in some ways.

And so, the function or the role of the church in society, you are the salt of the earth. And then secondly, the solemn possibility of being dysfunctional in the world.

If salt has lost its taste. And thirdly, the serious question that arises from our text, if salt has lost its taste, can such a loss ever be restored?

[ 8 : 51 ] How, says Jesus, shall its saltiness be restored? And finally, the end of the saltless salt.

It is no longer good for anything except to be thrown out and trampled under people's feet. First of all, then, the role of the church or of the believer, you are the salt of the earth.

Now, the metaphor itself, I believe, requires very little explanation. I believe it needs a lot of emphasis, though. It may require little explanation, but a great deal of emphasis.

And it seems to me that in saying this, Jesus is saying two things in particular. First of all, he is giving his assessment of the state of society in general.

And secondly, he is ascribing a particular role or function to his followers in the world.

[ 10 : 01 ] And his assessment of society, and his assessment is worth taking on board. His assessment of society in general is that it is unhealthy, in fact, that it is rotting, that there is moral decay and spiritual deterioration.

You do not salt a living thing, you salt a dead thing, that it may not rot or decay. And Christ says by implication here, what he says plainly again and again in other places of scripture, human society without divine influence, is a carcass that is rotting away and disintegrating.

And you, he says, you who are faithful, you who are trusting in me, you who have partially grasped the meaning of my mission and have got something of the spirit of my life, you are to act and to function as salt in the world.

that is the role and the duty that he is placing upon the lives of his followers. You are there to arrest decomposition, to prevent corruption, to give flavor, to save it from disintegrating the salt of the earth.

death. Now, I don't believe that the believer is to do this just merely because you are the carrier of the truth or of the scriptures, but you are to do it by your influence, by the influence of your conduct, by your character.

[ 11 : 59 ] it's easy to speak words, but what Christ is asking us here is to live the Christian life, to live it in such a way that the evidence that is seen daily in our lives supports the profession that we make.

Amen. And you know how, as one writer puts it, the presence of a good man hinders the devil from having elbow room to do his work.

How the influence of a Christian can have a restraining influence upon the lives of their fellow men. For example, perhaps, in the place of work, if you are in an office, in a large office, you are amongst a large group of fellow workers.

Perhaps the conversation is not the kind of conversation that would be approved by the scriptures. And you walk into the room and whatever is being spoken of immediately stops.

Because they recognize that you are someone who would not approve of that kind of lowered language that has been used.

[ 13 : 38 ] They know that you do not speak and live in that kind of way. And from that point of view, yes, being salt in society takes on a visual, a highly visual role, but it's a necessary one.

Where your life, as it were, rebukes the spirit of rebellion and anti-God that may arise in hearts and minds.

But, you know, the influence of the Christian is not just to be one of restraint. It ought to encourage and to stimulate a desire in the hearts of your fellow men to be such as you.

Not in the sense that people, you would want people to emulate yourself because you know your own heart and your own life better than anyone else.

but living for Christ. And how many times do you hear people say, when they come to make a public profession of faith, oh, there were times in my life when I envied the lives of those whom I considered to be serving the Lord.

[ 15 : 11 ] I believed that they had something which I did not. and yet such is the grip of sin upon the mind and the heart of men and women and boys and girls.

Oh, we are so reluctant to make that admission at the time that we are living at the height of our rebellion. But where the Christian is living in a right relationship with God and they are fulfilling their role in society not so that they will be admired by their fellow men.

In fact, at times they may be hated, they may be scorned, they may be derided, they may be mocked for the stand that they take upon the word of truth.

but they are asked to function as salt in society. People that have Christ in their hearts, they have something that others do not.

In fact, just last night, in our own congregation, we were having our monthly congregational fellowship and one of our office bearers was giving his testimony and in the course of his testimony he spoke of the life of someone whom I never met and who had gone from the community before I went there but who apparently in the eyes of everyone was such a marked person for godliness within the community and he was going back many, many years and yet in a pre-converted state he recognized the saintliness and the godliness of this particular woman who died at a relatively young age and left a young family behind her.

[ 17 : 28 ] Salt in society in society. Now, the next thing that comes out of this is, you know, when salt is effective, it has to be brought into close contact, doesn't it, with what's been salted.

If you've ever salted meat or fish, sometimes in the meat you cut it with the knife and you put the salt into the cups, you press it in.

The same with the fish, you make sure that the salt gets into every area to do its work. And we, in our walk through life, we are brought into contact with the world in general.

our we are brought into contact with the world by our associations, by our friendships, through family or business or neighbours or the locality we live, and so on.

What do we do? Well, if we're like Jesus, we fraternise with those who are the outcasts in society.

[ 18 : 47 ] you see, the only way that we can have an influence is by being, that the salt can be used is by being rubbed, as it were, into the corrupted thing.

And there is a peculiar sense in which we have to go out into society, not withdraw from society, but get into the lives of those who may be rebellious, who may not want you, who may wish not even to be associated with you.

But that is exactly what Jesus did. Where did you find Jesus when he was in this world? He was amongst the sinners and the tax collectors, the despised in society, those who are at the bottom end of the social scale, as far as the Orthodox Jew was concerned.

That's where you found Jesus. That's where the salt was put to work. And what was the influence of the salt? They were drawn in so that you find Jesus in the house of Levi, the tax collector.

How audacious was that? How absolutely revolting in the eyes of the Orthodox Jew that Jesus should be in the home of Levi, collaborator, one who associated with the Roman power, one who was involved in the gathering of duties and taxes.

[ 20 : 26 ] But there's something else about salt. You know, when you salt something, you don't see it actually doing its work. It works silently.

It works inconspicuously. gradually. It works gradually. And Jesus says to his disciples, you are the salt of the earth, you are the lights of the world.

Well, lights are something that you see. There are different types of lights, some brighter than others. But one thing about lights, they can't be seen.

They're conspicuous. but what Jesus is saying first here, there's a humbler work to be done, a useful work to be done, to be a salt in the earth.

And it is my conviction, may not be yours, that you'll never be as a light in the world. until you come, first of all, to be a salt in the earth.

[ 21 : 50 ] In other words, fulfilling the humbler, inconspicuous, silent role of restraining corruption by the example of your life before you come to radiate light into the darkness.

Well, what's the first part of our text? And ought we not to be asking ourselves hard questions? Are we like salt in the earth?

And then secondly, the possibility of the salt losing its taste? waste? Now, I'm not sure whether physically this happens.

I know that salt can be contaminated. I know that other things can be mixed with salt and the salt lose its saltiness when other ingredients are put into it.

Some would suggest that because they use the salt from the Dead Sea area and if the homes were damp and water dilute salt and the dampness took away from the saltiness of the salt.

[ 23 : 11 ] I don't know if that is true or not, but some would suggest that. But the point is this, without pushing the metaphor too far, that those of us who call ourselves Christians and believers in the world, that it is possible for us to lose our penetrating spiciness for want of a better description which prevents corruption, so that our influence is not as it should.

and when you look at the broader picture, and at the wider church, and even in our own country, how the influence of the church is shrinking, shrinking, I don't mean here necessarily, but throughout our nation, there is a shrinkage, and then you look round into your own heart, and that's where most of all we have to look.

It's all very well looking at the wider picture, and being critical of the wider picture, but we have to come home, and we have to come to ourselves, and we ought to be asking ourselves, Lord, is that me?

Not saying, oh well, maybe the cat fits someone else, but it doesn't fit me. we have to come and begin at self.

And sometimes I wonder whether the distinction between the Christian and the non-Christian is being obliterated, so that in business practice, there's no difference between the Christian and the non-Christian.

[ 25 : 31 ] Things in relationships that are ongoing in the world, and there ought to be a world of a difference. the scripture encourages it.

If the salt has lost its saltiness, there ought to be unethical code and unethical conduct about those who make a profession of Christ in the world.

you know, you know, these smokeless fuel, when it burns, it's very attractive, and you have a red glow of smokeless coals.

You take one of these smokeless coals with the tongs out of the fire. Place it on the hearth. Two things will happen. It will lose its heat, and it may temporarily heat the hearth where you have placed it.

There are two ways of equalizing the temperature of a hotter and a colder body. cold. The one is by the hot one getting cold, and the other is by the cold one getting hot.

[ 27 : 16 ] And I want to suggest, if we are not heating the world, then the world is freezing us. hot one will rot us.

Is there any difference between our ideal of happiness and the world's conception of happiness? happiness? Is there any difference between our notion of pleasure and the world's concept of pleasure? Is there any difference between our conception of morality and the world's conception of morality?

morality? Is there any difference in the way that we view things from the way in which the world views it? Yes or no?

Yes or no? because these are searching questions and I believe the text is asking us to ask these questions of ourselves.

[ 28 : 48 ] Let's put it in another way. Is it true of you? that your Christian life today is less zealous, less warm than it was years back?

Oh yes, I know that as people mature and grow older, their feelings will not be so vibrant and their feelings give way to principle.

But is it true true that the zeal that once possessed you is not as lively as it did, as it was? Perhaps like the composer of the elegy, perhaps you can follow some of the experiences that he had when he said ever salty as his word was, living feelings fresh and good, but that he should live on feelings.

They could never serve as food. It's worth remembering that. Only Christ can satiate the needs of the soul.

But even as you mature, why should enthusiasm become less? Why should the warmth of your love to your master, diminish? Why should your zeal become less?

[ 30 : 27 ] Should it not become more? As you seek others to come to know the blessing, Savior, who has embraced you?

You are to be salt in the world. What was it that made the disciples salt and light in the world? Was it not the fact that they lived in close fellowship with Jesus Christ? was it not the influence of Christ himself that made them salt and light in the world?

That's not some kind of vague exercise of the mind. It is something that is to be cultivated, and it is to be cultivated, I believe, in this way, by the study of the scriptures, by meditation and reflection on the scriptures, and by private prayers.

And these three, in my view, are essential for cultivating this fellowship with Christ in order to be salt and light.

[ 32 : 02 ] And to get back to the composer of the elegy, through faith, he journeyed onward, steady, peaceful, earnest, true, watchful over words and motives, calm and all he had to do.

So his inward life and outward was communion with the head. Christ's own people loved him dearly, and their love with love he paid.

That brings me to the third thing. How shall its saltiness be restored? And again, it would be dangerous to push the metaphor too far here, because for you and me to have our saltiness restored, it is going back to Christ.

there is no other way of having our saltiness restored. And I do not believe that Christ is pushing the metaphor to the extreme of asserting that if salt loses its savor, if a man loses the strong influence of Christianity in his life, that he cannot win it back.

in other words, that the person who backslides cannot be restored. He is not saying that at all. But he is urging us to reconnect with himself, because that is the only way that we shall retain our saltiness in life.

[ 33 : 55 ] And if we don't do that, then at our peril, we are ignoring the message of Christ. And we are liable to hear said to us what was said to the church at Ephesus, I have this against you, that you have abandoned the love you had at first.

Remember therefore, from where you have fallen, repent, and do the works which you did at first. And you notice the emphasis on repentance in returning.

So that you regain not just the nature of the fellowship, but that you regain the savor, the sweetness that characterizes lives that are lived in the shadow of Jesus.

And the final truth is this, and Luke expresses it slightly differently in his gospel. It is of no use either for the soil or for the manure pile.

It is thrown away. if the salt has lost its taste, if it has lost its saltiness, you cannot use it on the soil.

[ 35 : 21 ] There is no, it is of no use for fertilization. You cannot throw it on the rubbish heap. it is only fit for discarding, for being thrown away.

God has no use for it, man has no use for it, if it has failed in doing the only thing that it was created for.

You know, if you're going to cut something with a knife and it's blunt, it's not much good. If you have a beautiful table lamp, and the bulb is fused, it doesn't matter how nice the lamp or how artistic or ornate the lamp might be, with a fused bulb it doesn't give any light.

It's not much good. Remember, even with a bulb it has to be connected to the source. Oh, that's important. It has to be connected to the power plant.

we have to be connected to Christ. And you look around the world.

[ 36 : 41 ] We had one of our lady members for a time worked in Turkey. She was there with a mission school.

And when she came back, she was telling us how small the percentage of believers in that large country. Minute almost, in comparison to the size of the population.

But you remember what area of the world that is? Asia Minor. What was true of that area of the world once?

the church flourished and prospered in that area of the world. And you go through other countries that once flourished and the gospel flourished in them.

And today they are spiritual deserts with few believers there. Do we think that we are any different? [ 37 : 51 ] perhaps in our self opinionated way we do, but we are not. We are no different. We have no more claim upon the privileges of the gospel than they had.

left. And if we let slip the blessings and the privileges that have been given to us, then we too could become a spiritual desert.

Oh, God forbid that that ever happened to us. us. But you know, in the animal kingdom and even in the lives of humans, very often it's those who are sickly that get ill first.

if you're a shepherd with woolly sheep as distinct from the sheep of the scriptures, it's a sickly sheep from which the birds will first take the eyes.

and there are, if I can put it like this, there are those that are birds of prey who are only too glad to pick off the weak churches in the world, the weak members of churches, because unless we live close to the Lord, we will go further away, and the deadness will deepen, and the coldness will become icier and dicier.

[ 39 : 49 ] We will lose more of the life and show less and less of the likeness and the purity of Jesus. And when that happens, we are on the same danger as the church at Sardis, that we have the reputation of being alive, but you are dead.

Oh, may God grant that through the influence of the truth, through the instruction of the Holy Spirit, that we are prevailed done, to keep a closer walk with Jesus, that it may be stimulated in our hearts and minds, the prayer of the hymn writer, oh, for a closer walk with thee, that we might reflect this Christ, that we might reflect him in our daily living, in our homes, in our streets, in our communities, that we might be known and recognized as the followers of Jesus, and that it might be said of us, as was said of the disciples, they were recognized, you remember how it says in the book of Acts, that they had been with Christ, so that we might be used of God as real salt in a dark world, in a world that is putrefying, a world that needs salt, and will continue to need it until the end of time.

Let us pray. O eternal and ever blessed one, help us to be humble before thee, and to seek that needed grace that would enable us in truth to be salt in the earth.

O forbid that we lose touch with thee, forbid that we be unconnected to the living head, but O that we might know something of this live connection with thyself that would indeed be reflected in our walk and conversation, and the glory shall be thine.

In Jesus' name we ask it. Amen. Amen. So life in Jesus' need the to go and