

Salty Christians

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[0 : 0 0] So, what I'm going to look at this morning for a few minutes is one verse, really, from this passage. And I've preached this sermon before, so it's a while ago now, probably quite a lot of you weren't here. But I'm going to preach on verse, what Jesus says in the sermon on the Mount in verse 13, you are the salt of the earth, but if the salt is lost, it's taste, how shall it saltiness be restored? It's no longer good for anything, it's set to be thrown out and trampled under people's feet. And really what I want to do this morning for a little while is just give a little bit of a rallying call as we come out of lockdown and to encourage you and your Christian faith and privileges that you have as a Christian, you may have a degree of fear, the whole idea of things opening up, maybe a bit of anxiety, you may be struggling with the thought as a Christian in your connections with the church of commitment again and what that will look like, what that will mean. And you may just wonder about the social interaction and the demands that are made of you in that. And you may be sensing a lack of the felt presence of God in your life because of the isolation of lockdown and what goes with it. And I really just want to spend a few moments reminding ourselves of what we have as believers. You know, sometimes you watch a film or you hear a story about someone who met someone else and it changed the whole course of their life, this meeting that they had with someone. It's the beginning of a great change in their life.

And I believe that that's true for every one of us as Christians. It might not have been dramatic and it might be developing knowledge and relationship we have with Jesus Christ.

But nonetheless, we have met with and have put our trust in as believers, someone who has undoubtedly and will undoubtedly continue to change the course of our lives and the direction and the focus and the perspective of our lives.

And I also think sometimes that our relationship with Jesus is a little bit like what happens sometimes on the Antiques Roadshow. Now, I'm sure that none of you really watch that very much. But when you get, anytime you kind of go over 50, that's the kind of program you start enjoying watching. So I quite enjoy secretly when no one else is looking watching the Antiques Roadshow. Okay. And what's great about it is there's always a little bit of a surprise. Someone comes up with a clarit jug and it's been in their granny's wardrobe or attic or somewhere for a long time and they just, they were clearing out the house and they found this jug and they wanted to get the price of it. Or an old car, toy car that their children and their grandchildren, their great grandchildren all played with and they were just wondering how much it is worth. It's maybe been on a shelf or it's maybe been in a darkened room or a cupboard or somewhere. And this guy with a posh voice usually says, wow, this is a wonderful piece of work. And it looks at it and says in pristine condition, yes, I think you'll probably get about 10,000 pounds for it. And it's always amazing, their eyes are open wide, 10,000 pounds for something that was just lying in a cupboard. That's amazing. And I always think that's really exciting. And it's sometimes that's a little bit like what we've done with Jesus in our lives. They've kind of stuck him a little bit in a cupboard or he's on a shelf. We've forgotten or we haven't, we don't realize his value and what it means to be followers of Jesus and how that enables us then to be in his own word salt of the earth. It's a great mission statement. And if you're not a Christian this morning, if you're watching maybe for, you just happen to tune in or if you're here today and you're not a Christian, I would really encourage you to listen like you've never listened before. Because I am speaking primarily to Christians, but I would appeal to you to listen and to consider what's being said. Because already, even if you're not a Christian, God has poured out lots and lots of life, just even just your life as you have it. But He also says you're living in the shadows and you're standing on dangerous ground until you realize his calling on your life and the redemption, the salvation that

He lovingly offers to you, infinitely better than anything your life might have at the moment. So I just want to challenge you with that and encourage you to think about that.

[5 : 27] And we're going to think about this picture that Jesus gives of Christians here being salt of the earth and what that means. Because I think we often give, today we give salt a bad press. Our idea of salt is very different I think from an ancient Roman idea in the ancient Middle Near East idea of what salt was useful for. We tend to use it just to pour on flavorless food to give it a bit of flavor. Because salt is salty, it's flavorful, but we're told, you know, again you get to a certain age, you've got a less in your salt intake, you've got to minimize it, it's not healthy, it's not good for you. It'll clog up your arteries and you'll die. So it doesn't get a great press in many ways today, but it's a great substance and it was much more so relied upon in Jesus' day. And so

He uses it as an illustration. And you know the story about salt then, it was a preservative and it did also add flavor. They talked about, you know we talk about, I'll take that with a pinch of salt, meaning that you'll not take, maybe it's either usually something bad that you've heard or maybe something unbelievable and you say, oh I'm not going to believe that.

And they reckon that comes from days when they put salt in poison, either to make it taste better or as an antidote against poison. So it was like it worked against the poison and so the phrase came from that. And it was used very much as a preservative, you know when it wasn't fridges and freezers in these days and it was rubbed into food. Some of the older people here might remember growing up eating a lot of salt herring which was put in a barrel and there was no fridges and so the salt was rubbed into the fish and it preserved it. It was used as a disinfectant, you know, if you're rubbing salt in someone's wounds. That's where that phrase comes from. And again we've got a kind of, that tends to make things worse for us if you say, oh you're rubbing salt in their wounds. But actually it's probably because the salt in a wound would be very painful but it was actually healing of course because it was antiseptic qualities there. It was a staple item so that

Roman soldiers were sometimes paid in salt, in a weight of salt. So if someone was worth their salt then that was because they were worth getting paid, it was valuable. And really all these pictures Jesus is leaning into to remind people that salt properly was valuable, it was useful, it was important. The quality of the salt was important for it to be useful, wasn't it? We would say it's not any old salt, it's Marks and Spencer's salt. It's proper salt, it's really good salt and it's useful for what it's intended to be. And he's saying unsalty salt in this picture isn't of any use. You know, it doesn't do what it's supposed to do. It needs to be pure and distinctive. It needs to be salt and not impure. Because if it's impure it just gets thrown out and people walk in it, it loses any usefulness.

And Jesus is therefore taking that and applying it to how we should be as Christians. He's calling just as salt has to be salt, he's saying so Christians have to be Christians, followers of Jesus. He's calling us to be distinctive. He's saying we're set apart. He's saying that we have a specific flavour and a specific calling and we are to know who we are and we're to know who we follow and we are to know what we have and what we possess in Jesus and we're also to know what we're not as Christians. So our calling is to be salty Christians. And the encouragement is for us to just remind ourselves of that as we are challenged by new times and new perspectives and new way of doing things, coming out of lockdown and the face of the church congregation changing again. We're calling our call to be salty Christians. Well, what does that really mean? Well, I think it clearly comes after what he has taught in the early section of Matthew chapter 5 where he speaks of the beatitudes, you know, a very famous passage, the beatitudes of Jesus, blessed are the poor in spirit, blessed are those who mourn. And then there's context therefore, I think Jesus is saying salty Christians are Christians who are beatitudinal Christians. And the beatitudes are really just reflecting who Jesus is, His character. And so we are to reflect that same character in our lives as Christians. And that's what I want the emphasis of this sermon to end for you or to focus, to be the central part of the sermon for you. I want you to consider and I want myself to consider the worth that we have because of who Jesus is and what He's done for us and His love for us and the reflection therefore of Him in our lives. I want us therefore moving forward to be driven by the love of Jesus Christ for you in your life because

[11 : 30] He has taken you and me and He has broken us and molded us and reformed us and is reforming us into His own likeness to be your true self. You see that? It is so that you become your true self as you reflect the characteristics of what Jesus created you to be and what He is restoring you to be in His redemptive purposes. And sometimes that's difficult, isn't it?

Because we don't sense that. And we don't sense, maybe you don't sense His presence in your life. You know the promises, you know the word, you know what you should think, you know what you should feel, but you don't sense that. Actually, Neil's got a really interesting bit about that sense of absence that we have of God in our society that sometimes reflected also in our own thinking in the church. You know God isn't at the forefront of society's thinking, far from it, isn't he? And that sometimes tumbles into our own mindset and into the mindset of the church so that actually God and His presence is something that's far from our everyday realities. But He's the one who encourages us to know our own hearts, to move from the course we're looking at on Sunday night has got a great distinction, Christian sexuality course that we've been doing. Some of us, the difference between guilt and shame. And He's saying we move away from shame because shame makes us run away from God. But we recognize our guilt before Him and come to Him for His grace and His forgiveness and His acceptance and love because He has paid the price for our sins. And therefore we find that our hearts are being transformed and renewed and forgiven and renewed with a different appetite so that we begin to show some of these beatitudinal characteristics in our Christian life so that we know our own heart and there's that poverty of spirit that drives us to the riches that He gives us, that we are hungry and thirsty for Him, that we show mercy, that we look for a heart change, that we're peace-loving, grace-filled, generous, standing up for the truth even if it means that we're going to get persecuted for it and knowing the joy and peace that comes from Him. And that I think is what we're longing to see and to know and to experience more as we move forward as a church and as a community of believers. So the key to the church growing again and for us growing again is not the external Sunday worship experience primarily, nor is it the strategy, the organization or the methodology. It is you and me dying to Christ, taking up our cross and following Him and coming alive in Him, seeing His absolute beauty, His radical grace and being worth following and being sought for. And it's useless to be driven by fear or by guilt or by performance, but rather it's this growing individual but corporately supported relationship with Jesus Christ and knowing He will not let us go in all the changes and none of us like the changes, none of us like saying farewell, none of us like having to lose people we've loved and who have been important in the work here and who we've been friendships with and the thought of starting afresh and growing and developing and planting more churches and all these things, it's tough, but He will not let us go and it's His great Kingdom work. So we are the salt of the earth and we are to recognize that Jesus wants us to be valuable in this world and that means being like Christ. Now what does that not mean? It doesn't mean that we are Christ's and that we're not going to do the things Christ does or did when He was on earth, but it means that we share the core values of His life, of His life as He showed it to us. The two major principles of His life that He perfectly outworked, He loved God and He loved other people. He loved God and He loved His neighbour and that is how we're salt of the earth. By loving God, by loving one another and by loving our neighbours with our own unique characters, we're not all going to do it the same way, we don't all have the same gifts, we don't all walk the same road at that level, but we are united in these principles, the commands that He gives us that we can only fulfill by grace and by having a new heart, by being born again, by His Spirit that we love God and love one another and do that with your own unique personality.

And there's two dangers, isn't there? In doing that, one we can not be salt of the world by being afraid of the world, by being monastic, by remaining in the cupboard or in the shelf as mentioned earlier, either in Christ there or just being there ourselves and not getting involved. You know that I think I mentioned this before, Michael McIntyre's great sketch about five spice or sage and paprika who never get out of the cupboard, the spice cupboard, who are never used the envious of the salt and the pepper, who are always being used. If you haven't seen that, try and get and watch that, it's one of the funniest things you'll ever see. But we're not to be stuck in a cupboard, we're not to be monastic with our faith, we're not just to surround ourselves with other Christians, heaven before heaven, the bullet room rather than the front line, the changing room rather than being on the field, talking a good game just in theory and so becoming defensive and aggressive and full of fear and guilt, that's not what He wants for us. He doesn't want us to be at that extreme afraid of the world and monastic. But on the other extreme, He doesn't also want us to be in love with the world to such an extent that we find holiness and inconvenience and where sinful selfishness still rules our hearts and our desires, where we love the world without looking at the world with Christ's eyes in a way that is not recognizing the brokenness and the darkness either in our own hearts or in the world around us. Christians without Christ kind of, which is horrible. It's kind of the ugliest thing of all, isn't

it? Christians without Christ, Jesus spoke about it a lot when he spoke to the religious leaders of his days. So as salt of the earth, He doesn't want these extremes for us, but what He does want, He does want us to be poured out. Now that's making it a modern, I'm taking that analogy and modernize it because probably salt in the same way wouldn't have been an assault seller as such in the same way and poured out, but nonetheless, we need to be mixed in, rubbed in part of the dish, the people that we interact with. We are to do so with love and with effort and with sacrifice and with neighborliness and with prayer and using the opportunities, doing life with other people in the name of Jesus, just loving them for the sake of loving them in a world where there's so much division and so much hatred and so much judgment and so much division we seek to love them, being poured out as

Christians serving and living as Christ lived among the world. And you know, this is always difficult to do, but not as that lone grain of sand, grain of salt, you know, one tiny grain of salt is not nearly as effective as a handful of salt. And I think there's the image there that God uses us, not just as individuals, but together there's a powerful influence as we are poured out into community together. And that's always hard to work out how to do. Be poured out and then enrich the world in which we live with the enrichment we've received from Jesus, with the joy, the flavor, the holiness, the energy, the thankfulness and the grace that is so much needed and where it's needed most, you know, we often go and do the things that please us, that make us happy, that give us enjoyment, but He says go and be poured out what is needed most in this broken world. Look at the example of Jesus and the company He kept and the things He did and the people that He cared for. And see His life, the meals that He shared, the weddings that He attended, the dubious company that He kept, the accusations that the religious leaders brought against Him, yet He was absolutely pure. And those who recognized Him were attracted and changed dramatically by who He was. And maybe sometimes having many of us grown up in the church and grown up with the Word and grown up among Christians, we've lost sight of that amazing, dynamic danger of living on the edge for Jesus Christ with His love. It's, He changed the ethic of all the company that

[22 : 04] He kept and we are to strive graciously to do so as we live and love and are committed to others who don't know Jesus and who may be tremendously needy. It's more powerful than any placard. I believe it creates a thirst for the one in whom we trust. Telling people about the love of Jesus Christ that has transformed our lives, not just inviting them to church, because there is a difference. Because what you're saying is, the love that has transformed my life can transform yours. And we're telling people directly, not about a lifestyle, not about something we do on a Sunday, not about a religious observance, none of these things are wrong. But we're saying, can I introduce you to the one whose love has been so deep that my life has transformed and He can transform your. That's very disarming. They may reject that, but it's very disarming. And it comes from your own and my own experience. So be poured out, enrich and just engage as we live as salt, like salt, like Jesus wants us to live. It will provoke a reaction. It will. It will. Jesus' life always provoked a reaction because it was truth. And there is a cost because the salt that tastes and preserves and purifies, and I've only just touched the surface of some of the things that Jesus would have meant by that image. It cleanses, but it also stings a little bit. And therefore, we know that, don't we? Today that the truth of Jesus Christ is provocative, and it will sting a society and individuals that maybe have rejected what they think the gospel is or have rejected religion or the institution or the church. But it is a jealous love. It's an exclusive love. I did a wedding here yesterday and read Mother of the Bride, read from Song of Solomon and spoke there about the love, read about the love that is unyielding as the grave, as jealousy is known. But that's not the negative connotation of jealousy that we often have. It's the protective, precious care of uniqueness and of exclusivity that is reflected in marriage. And Jesus' love is provocative and exclusive. It does demand change in our hearts. Healing change. He's the surgeon who puts the surgeon's knife into our heart, but it's the healing heart that he wants to give us. And there's a deep, deep challenge to our self, selfish selfhood and self-identity. But that engagement and that interaction that sometimes provokes a response should never look for that response. And it should never be obnoxious in order to get that response. And I think sometimes we've gone down that road where we have been provocative to the point of looking to be opposed because we feel that that persecution makes us righteous. That should never be our attitude. It may come. It may happen. We may need to recognize that in our lives. You know, somehow we need to rejoice and be glad even when we're reviled and persecuted in Jesus' name, but not just,

not for being obnoxious, please. Because remember those who were most offended by what Jesus had to say within the church. The self-righteous who believed they didn't need the Redeemer as Savior, it was within the church. The religious people who were most offended by Jesus. And that might often still be the case. And we recognize the importance of not provoking offence for the wrong motives. So we don't want to be bland, do we? We don't want to be tasteless. We don't want to be unlike Jesus. Do we think about and recognize the value of Jesus in our lives? You know, is He on the shelf or is He in a cupboard? Have we forgotten His value so that it isn't what motivates and drives our lives so easy, isn't it for us? But what is it that drives you? What is it that motivates? What evokes your love? What redeems your day? What offers you hope and life and uneness and forgiveness? I pray that as we come out of the pandemic, we may be challenged to revalue our lives and revalue or recognize our worth in Jesus and the mission that He gives us, a mission that subsumes all others and know that it's such a precious thing we have in Jesus and that He will within us provoke that response. He's called us here. He's called us for this, such a time as this as we reform and recreate the work of the gospel and the progress. We'll never live our lives again. Let's live it to the full and be salt and light for Jesus. Amen.

Lord, I thank You for Your Word. I thank You for the pictures You give. I love the fact that You give pictures to us. It makes it easier to understand. I pray that You would bless us. I pray especially for any who might not be Christians who have listened today, who are here or who are online. I pray for them. We pray for them and we ask that You would touch their lives and their hearts with the gospel message today so that they will maybe reassess what they think of Jesus and what He is both challenging and offering and His great love and His truth, that it would capture their hearts and that today they would come to Jesus to redeem and renew and give them new life in Him. Amen.