

Salty Christians

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[0 : 0 0] Now I'd like to do this evening what I haven't done for quite a long time, which is simply preach from one verse. And it's part of the Sermon on the Mount, and it follows the section and the Beatitudes at the beginning of the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew chapter 5, and it's verse 13, you are the salt of the earth, but if the 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 in many ways it goes a couplet with the next verses, which is you're the light of the world, but I'm going to focus simply on this verse this evening.

Now over this last number of months we as a leadership team have been, what we've kind of entitled gearing for growth, we've been looking at longing for and working towards under God growth in the city.

We live and we've talked a lot about this and it was mentioned on Wednesday evening about Paul and Acts and where he went that we live in a huge, comparatively huge city, certainly in Scottish terms, a big city and an influential city, not just for Scotland but for the world because of who comes here.

And I can't stress enough how much we should be praying about that and praying about who we are in the city and why God has placed us here, both as a community and as individuals.

[1 : 4 4] And we've spent a lot of time seeking to develop a missional outlook and an attitude in our life and in our work and in our ministry so that we care about people who aren't Christians and we love them and we seek to share the gospel with them.

And I'm sure many of you pray for the Lord of the Harvest to work in bringing a harvest to the city and to see a spiritual, a powerful spiritual work being done.

But in that prayer, remember, the prayer is for workers, isn't it? And when we pray, it's a kind of dangerous prayer because when we pray that work, we are inevitably brought with the question, well, who's he going to send?

And who does he send? Does he send angels? Does he send preachers? Well, generally speaking, he sends people and he sends you to live your lives for him in the world in which you live to bring salt and light to that world.

Recently, I watched two really great films. They were both based on true stories and they were both very powerful films.

[3 : 1 2] One was called The Changeling and it's set in 1920s in Los Angeles about a mother called Christine Collins who goes out to work, she's a single parent, she goes out to work and leaves her son at home and in the course of the day, he's abducted.

And it's a long story about his abduction and how she searches for him and the LA police a few months later bring back another child to her and say, we found your son and she immediately looks at him and realize it isn't her son.

They try and persuade her and it goes into all kinds of detail about what happens. But what's really significant is that her whole life is changed by this one event and she spends the rest of her life with the identity of that moment of change in her life and it was completely transformative and it becomes a lifelong search.

And the other film is, similarly, it's a film called Unbroken, which you may have heard of and it's based on a true story about a US Olympian again in the 1920s, Louis Zamperini, who ended up fighting for the American forces during the war and was shot down, ended up in a dinghy for 48 days before he was picked up by the Japanese soldiers or navy and taken to a Japanese prisoner of war camp when he was brutally beaten and it's a terrible story in many ways.

Yeah, interestingly, in that moment when maybe the 40th day or something on that dinghy, where the two that were with him had died by this point on the dinghy and he prays to God and says, if you take me from here, I will serve you the rest of my life and he was true to that.

[5 : 14] He went home, he was in the prisoner of war till the end of the war, the camp and then he was released, he went home and he served God, he became a missionary preacher and he lived till he was 90 and it's an amazing story and again his whole life was changed by a sequence of events, a number of events in their lives that transformed what they did and gave them a whole new identity and a whole new way of thinking in their lives.

Their lives were dramatically changed by their experiences which then shaped how they went on to live their lives and dictated what they did with their lives. Now in a less dramatic way obviously, at one level for us, that should be the same for us as Christians because we have been rescued by Christ, our whole lives have been changed by him and our identity is formed by that relationship we have with God and by what he's done for us and we are given a focus and a direction and a change in life and a mission to share that experience of Jesus Christ with others and it should mark every aspect of our life.

It should mark everything that we think, everything that we do, everything we decide, everything that we consider in our lives should be marked by this mission, this ambassadorial role that we have in Jesus Christ and there's nothing, there is absolutely nothing that individuals in this city or this world needs more than Christians who recognise that.

There will be a revolution, a quiet revolution as we see God working when we appreciate more and more all of us as individuals that we are the salt of the earth.

In many ways that's our mission statement, we are the salt of the earth. That is a role in life which Jesus speaks of and Jesus has given us and is therefore part of your identity, it is your identity as you go from here and live your life and as I live mine.

[7 : 28] So he uses this illustration of being salt and being salt of the earth. Now, great thing about Jesus is that he gives very simple everyday illustrations which his audience would have understood fully what he was meaning.

For us salt maybe has some different connotations than it would have had for Middle Eastern readers and listeners at the time because salt for us is a pretty bad press in the society in which we live, it's kind of like the new tobacco salt, it's not a good thing.

Primarily because we overuse it in our processed foods a great deal and it has become a substitute for bland, flavourless food that is produced in great quantities in our society.

So we maybe have a rather jaded view of salt in a way that Jesus' original hearers wouldn't have had but he used it and it would have been a great illustration for Jesus to use because then, and you know these things, I'll just repeat them quickly for you, it was something that was both a preservative and what brought flavour to food.

So lots of phrases that we use today come from these days and come from these times so we talk about something, you listen to something, you hear a fact and you say you'll take that with a pinch of salt.

[8 : 58] What is that? Well, that just simply means it makes it easier to swallow, swallow gave something a bit more taste made it easier to take and to believe.

There was no fridges in Jesus' time so it became a real preservative, things were rubbed in salt and there was salt in many foods, not just in the ancient Near East but in the West Highlands, that would have been the case when my dad was growing up.

He never ate herring when he grew up because he spent his childhood having to eat salt and herring which his father would have caught off the West Coast in Glenelg and would have taken and it would have been putting a big barrel of salt and it was rubbed in salt to preserve it from becoming rotten and they would eat that all winter and all summer to the point of repulsion.

It was also a disinfectant, you would rub salt in wounds, we've used that phrase often rubbing salt in wounds because it would be painful but it would also have healing qualities, I believe new babies were washed in salt.

It was a staple item, an important item in Jesus' time so much so that it was compared with payment so that Roman soldiers either got money which enabled them to buy salt as a staple or some believe that actually they got paid sometimes in salt so that a Roman soldier would need to be worth the salt which is again a phrase that is coming to our own vernacular today.

[10 : 35] And so really when Jesus is speaking about being salt of the earth he is taking a specific quality from salt and recognizing and applying it spiritually and the illustration is about the quality, the quality of the salt, the basic fundamental quality of the salt, he goes on to say if it's not salty anymore, if it's unsalty salt is of no value and it was important that salt had its fundamental characteristic of saltiness to be pure, to be distinctive, it needed to be salt, it was no good as sugar, it needed to be salt and if it became impure, if it lost its basic fundamental flavor then as Jesus says it would be thrown out, it would be tossed out, it would be disregarded, it would be unsalty salt, incredible salt, it would be disrespected because it was of no value, it didn't do what it was bought to do and what it was created to do.

Now Jesus applies that to our lives as Christians and wants us to be the salt of the earth. This is Jesus calling to us as Christians and these reminding us of who we are, our distinctiveness, our inherent quality, our inherent flavor as those who have been touched by grace and set apart to live in the world with that identity, with that deep-seated, transformed life of saltiness as Christians is reminding us of who we are.

And the temptation I guess for us is that sometimes we don't like the character and the fundamental identity of belonging to Jesus Christ because it does make us distinctive.

Sometimes we'd rather be sugar, it's much easier to be sugar than it is to be salt, particularly in this site in which we live in many ways and we struggle with that calling to be distinctive, to be Christ-like.

We feel that it would be much easier to blend in, to be indistinguishable, to love like the world in order to reach the world.

[13 : 14] But we know that Jesus is saying to us that we are to be like Him and to love like Him with the unique grace that has transformed our hearts and is the challenges to live that grace as believers with each other and in the world.

So we're called to be salty Christians. What exactly is a salty Christian? Well, I think you go back to the previous verses, we look at it in context.

So it's to be a, in other words, it's to be a beatitudinal Christian. It's to be a Christian that reflects the beatitudes of the previous number of verses, which is simply a grace unpacked, it's grace made practical, it's grace understood for us and grace that challenges us.

We are driven as salty Christians by the love of Christ to be broken, to be broken and molded and reformed in His likeness into our true selves, into the selves that He created us to be and constantly to becoming more like Him.

And the beatitudinal Christian is the one who, it is people who know their own hearts, who understand their own, are understanding their own hearts and are, as we mentioned over the last couple of weeks, continually turning back to Jesus, continually repenting and seeking forgiveness and being forgiven.

[15 : 02] It's people with an appetite for the character of God and for showing the mercy that they themselves have received.

Because a salty Christian is far from being characterized by an outward morality, which you may think that the beatitudes speak about.

But the beatitudes speak about a deep seated heart change. Salt is salt by its very nature and the Christian must be Christlike in our very nature as from right from the inside out so that we become people who are wrestling to be peace-loving, uncompromising in a dynamic growing relationship with God.

People who know and who battle for peace and joy in their own hearts in the battles that we face from day to day and becoming more salty as it were as life goes on.

So in many ways the key for us of a growing church is not going to be the external Sunday worship experience, however significant and our much energy and effort we put into the Sunday worship which is right and good.

[16 : 39] Not as it's going to be our strategy that we've been working on and wrestling with and the organisation that goes with it. Nor will it be our methodology, significant though that is our DNA and the important things that make us what we are as a people, it is you dying to yourself for Christ's sake and taking up your cross to follow Him.

And it's you seeing and me seeing His absolute beauty. That is what is going to transform the church is when we see His absolute beauty and when we are not driven by guilt or by failure or by popularity or by legalism, when we are driven by His absolute beauty, I love you.

A very, very powerful illustration that Corey finished with this morning. His radical grace and your worth because of that, your great worth because of that.

If we are driven by a desire to succeed or by a performance mentality or by fear or guilt, we are abandoning our nature, our saltiness which is to be mimics and imitators of Jesus and His great love.

So we are the salt, the calling is to be salt, a salt of Christians and we are to be the salt of the earth. In other words, we are to be valuable in the world that we live in by our Christ-like influence, by the flavour of grace that marks our life.

[18 : 45] I read that passage about Jesus because it reminds us how radical Jesus was in His day and in the things that He did and in the attitudes that He had that He rubbed people up the wrong way and particularly religious people up the wrong way because of His incredible love.

Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners? Why does He do that? Jesus says, because I desire mercy.

Learn what that means. I desire mercy, not sacrifice. I came not to call the righteous but sinners. Isn't that amazing? Our tendency is always to self-righteousness and to a judgmental spirit and yet Jesus came to bring His grace flavour to those who recognised and needed it most to the sinners and to the public as those who were rejected and those who were constantly being judged, constantly having the finger pointed at them, constantly being rejected and yet He did so with His moral distinctiveness and His great preservative power.

We take that into our own lives, into how we are and into the society in which we live. And I think there's opposite dangers in being salt of the world or our attitude to the world and again a bit similarly to what we mentioned last week.

One is that we are afraid of the world as Christians and we become monastic and we separate ourselves from unbelievers and it's like the salt that remains in the cupboard that it's not poured out as some of you might occasionally now and again slip into comedy and like Michael McIntyre and he's got a great sketch about five spices that he speaks about different condiments that are left in the cupboard and some of them never get out of the cupboard, they never get out of their packet, they never get onto the table, they're never poured out in food and he just personalises them and speaks about them and the five spice is this very, I'll not go into it, you listen to it sometime, okay?

[21 : 08] But he gives this illustration of so often the spices, you know you go into your spice rack and they're there for years and they're never poured out and really they have no effect therefore they're just remaining in their, the cellar or in the little glass container that you buy them in and the illustrations there for us isn't it that we are the same as Christians that we stay in our spiritual cellars and don't mean prison cells there but as in salt cellar and we only surround ourselves with other salt and we're just at a pile of salt together and we're like soldiers who never leave the billet room to go onto the front line or sports people that never leave the changing room to go onto the field, we can talk a good game from the safety of our little containers and we kind of dam the world from the position that we're in but even within that which is not really what salt is about, salt is useless in a cellar on its own, often within that even with, if

I could, you can mix your illustration and recognise that even within that often as Christians when we think like that and we're afraid of the world we actually leave Christ out of our Christian subculture and ironically we become more worldly, our guards go down and we act almost more un-Christian when we're in our Christian bubble, that's a bit paradoxical speak, maybe you don't know what I mean, I know what I mean when I think of that, that often we simply lower our standards as we distance ourselves from the realities of the world in which we live.

So that's one extreme, the other extreme is being not afraid of the world but in love with the world, involved up to our next in the world but again without bringing Christ into our experience and our interaction with the world.

We enjoy its pleasures but we have no thankfulness to the Christ of these pleasures and no thought for the Christ who's redeemed us from a wrong perspective towards these pleasures, freed from the moral parameters and accountability and conscience and simply loving the world without recognizing how He seeks us to be salt and light within the world.

So a salt of the earth, briefly how does that reveal itself? Well it reveals itself I think and as I've hinted at being poured out, being poured out and the picture is very much of being in the world, you know, salt is poured out, in Jesus time it was rubbed in, rubbed into the meat to protect it, part of the dish.

[24 : 25] It's not a pleasant food item, if you call it a food item on its own, its beauty comes from it being broken from where it is and rubbed into whatever food substance it goes into and the beauty of grace in our lives, the perfume, the flavor, the loveliness is only understood as it's practiced, as it's rubbed in, as it's used and as we strengthen and mature the characteristics of Jesus Christ, the sacrifice, the acts of love, the neighborliness, the prayer, the using of opportunities, the doing of life.

That's where our strength comes from, that's where the grace muscles are flexed and become strong and are challenged. We never find that in a bubble, we never find that when we remain just simply unchallenged in our lives.

We can never defend Christ if we don't hear the arguments and the thinking of people who don't believe in Christ and we will never love these people if we don't see them as broken image bearers of the living God.

So we are poured out into lives and that's really been all our philosophy, isn't it, right from the beginning for city groups that not that we bring unbelievers to the Bible studies in the sallag, you know, that's not easy, but that we introduce our friends to the Christian community in which we're apart and we do life with them.

So it's been poured out, it's enriching the world in which we live. You all go into very often a difficult workplace or maybe a different study environment tomorrow, or a different difficult neighborhood.

[26 : 28] You're to enrich that neighborhood and that community in which you live by your grace flavor, by the taste of Jesus that you bring into it, by the joy and the wholeness, the innocence and the energy and the thankfulness and the grace that is attracted, that is attractive and that is appreciated most where it is needed most.

You saw it as best used where it is most needed and so the flavor of Christ where forgiveness and forgiving is powerful.

We're good deeds as Jesus goes on to say, being the light of the world. It really powerfully worked out. You see Jesus life, don't you?

And we see Jesus life. He had meals, he went to weddings, he had dubious company that he kept, accusations were made, yet he brought something that was so attractive to people who had known a life of rejection from the church and from religious authorities.

They were attracted by him and he didn't compromise when I ought on his perfection and yet the flavor of his life was such that it had a powerful effect.

[27 : 59] Therefore we are to change the ethic of the company we keep by the flavor of grace that we share.

We have an influence for good in other words in the company we keep and we can do that. And can I tell you, it's more powerful than any placard to go into a staff room or to go into a workplace and to enrich that workplace with grace will change the ethic because Jesus says you are the salt of the earth.

You're the light of the world. You're the light of the world to bring his flavor and that flavor will create a thirst. Just as surely a salt creates a thirst, so will the flavor of grace create an attraction in people to know about the Savior that makes you fundamentally different because of his grace in your life.

Therefore it's to enrich, to be poured out and to engage with people, there is a cost to living for Christ because as we've seen salt both cleanses and as it cleanses it also hurts.

And we know, as Christians we know that the message we have and that we share of Jesus Christ is both graceful but also provocative and it's an exclusive love and it's a love that speaks of change and it's the deepest challenge to people's sinful selfhood.

[29 : 30] But we should never just be obnoxious, ever. So often we hide behind the truth in a very commas but actually we're just being obnoxious, proud, judgmental, self-righteous.

It's not the offense we are to give of self-righteous churchgoers but the offense of stumbling, grace-filled willingness not to abandon the truth of Jesus whoever we're with and whatever we're with.

And that's a challenge. And the reality is Jesus' scary alternative and he speaks of it here where he says, if it's loose, it's salty, it's social, it's no longer good for anything, it's set to be thrown out and trampled under people's feet.

If we are Christians that don't reflect the humble dependence on Jesus Christ and the grace that has transformed us, if we choose to hide that or suppress it, Jesus is saying that really our lives are, as Christians are worthless that they have no use, they'll be unnoticed, they'll be trodden underfoot, they'll not be respected.

I think often we as Christians have not been respected because we've been foolish and we've been arrogant and we've been proud and we have brought disrespect to Jesus.

[31 : 02] I think it's hugely significant that we seek to recognize in our lives the motive of our soul, what evokes our loves, what redeems our day, what is it, what is the flavor that we go out into the world with, what is our identity.

And as Christians, Jesus challenges us to be beatitudinal and all that that means in our lives.

We don't want to be unnoticed by the one eye that needs to see you. We spend much of our time maybe self-examining for various reasons or looking for acceptance by many others, but there's Jesus is the eye that is on us in great love like a father.

And if we are hiding our relationship with Him, we're hiding our true self and the Christ who redeemed us.

And our lives will not be filled with doing His good works which are of lasting value and that's what He is encouraging us to do and to recognize that in our lives.

[32 : 29] You are all ambassadors and messengers on the front line and we believe that as we are salt of the earth and living out grace, we don't need to be burdened about saving people.

That's His task. That's His work. He will transform. Our task is to be salt, to have that glorious flavor that is unique.

There's nothing like it in this world. It is not moralism. It is not cold obedience. It is not dragging our free obedience.

It is out of gratitude and love, recognizing and following Him for who He is. That is life to the full and it's important, I think, that we don't settle for anything else or anything less, nor shift responsibility to others.

We praise God for Jesus Christ who promises to empower us, who promises that the impossibility of living by grace as salt of the earth is His gift if we will come to Him, if we will continue to rely on Him to daily seek His strength and will and Holy Spirit in our lives to live for Him.

[33 : 56] I do think that's the simplicity of the gospel and that it involves all of us to be salt of the earth and the city.

May that be our calling and may the Spirit apply that to us as we go into this week that He gifts us. Amen.

Let's pray. Father God, we ask and pray that you would help us to hear your word, to be convicted, encouraged, challenged, moved, repentant under it.

We would see the simplicity of your pictures and yet the great depth of reality that they express, the profundity of these truths.

As we throw up our hands sometimes in despair and say, who is worthy or who can do this? May we find great comfort from your smile and from your acknowledgement that that is exactly where you want us to be as we simply come to you and seek to be people who live out what we've experienced and know your forgiveness and your unconditional love in our lives.

[35 : 26] So help us God, we pray, guide us into this week. We long for fruit, we long for a harvest, we long to see days when our friends respond to the truth that we have shared with them maybe many times and they seem to reject it and we are frustrated by that rejection.

Lord help us to keep praying for our friends, to keep praying for the days that we live, the contacts we make, the God appointments that will come our way day to day and may we use them gently, respectfully, humbly, courageously, stumblingly but may we use them to God's glory and with God's grace and help in our lives.

For Jesus' sake, amen.