



Voice Ministries

THE SALT OF THE WORLD

Reading: Matthew 5: 10-16 and Luke 14: 25-35

You are the salt of the earth; but if the salt has become tasteless, how will it be made salty again? It is good for nothing any more, except to be thrown out and trampled under foot by men. (Matt. 5:13)

Whilst I was at College, a decision was taken in the kitchens that altered the quality of the meals tremendously, for it was decided that salt would not be a part of the preparation of the meals but rather that those who wished to could add it on the plate. This action was done to satisfy the needs of anyone - should indeed there have been anyone - who was not allowed salt in their diet. Yet, to the great majority of people there, the food developed a blandness that took away the delights of taste.

Salt is used to add much more than savoury taste to a meal, for it's used to preserve foods as well. The analogy for followers of Jesus is that they must be like salt, preserving their environment from corruption; they must be *the light of the world* dispelling the surrounding darkness. If salt has lost its essential saltiness then it is useless for any other purpose, and what is the good of an invisible light? The theologian Kierkegaard said, 'If the New Testament is to decide what is meant by a true Christian, then to be a true Christian in all secrecy, comfortably and enjoyably, is as impossible as firing a large canon in all secrecy.' Jesus condemned the scribes and Pharisees who went to great lengths to convert pagans to Judaism, saying that they made the proselyte, twice as much a son of hell *as yourselves* (Matt. 23:15). What Jesus urged was that his followers should *Let your light shine before men* (Matt. 5:16). Paul reiterates this theme in his letter to the Philippians, confirming that by living godly lives in a corrupt society they would *appear as lights in the world* (Phil. 2:15).

When Jesus referred to His followers as the salt of the earth he paid one of the finest compliments that can be paid to any individual. If we are speaking of someone and wish to emphasise their value, we will often refer to them as being *the salt of the earth!* In using this - expression, Jesus un-



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derlines and emphasises the value of Christian influence on society.

Christ seems to be stating quite clearly that the source of our influence is found in the persons we are! Rather than saying that You *have salt* or You *dispense salt*, He was quite specific in that You *are salt*. Only as Christians are salt in their lives and character, can they exercise the influence of salt in their society. None of us can influence people by our words if we do not back them up by the way that we are. It's the influence of our personality that will produce changes in others. The purity of our private lives has everything to do with the purity of our public influence. When we hear of influential people, such as politicians, being caught out by some sleazy allegation or other, then any influence that they might have had on our life is wiped out, for we have no desire to be associated with them in any way, even by inference. Centuries ago the Romans contended that salt was the purest of all things because it came from the purest of all elements, the sun and the sea. Thus, if Christians are to be the salt of the earth, they must be an example of purity. Christians who want to be spiritually influential must hold high standards of purity in speech, conduct, thought, and action.

The presence of salt can't be ignored. It's a positive influence. If it's present, then we can't fail to recognise its presence. If it is absent, we miss it. Where the salt of the earth is in the form of Christian influence, people will be aware of it. It will not always be welcome, but it will always be recognised. But the impure Christian cannot exercise the power of Christian influence.

Since we, as Christians are the salt of the earth, where are we to unloose our preserving and purifying powers? The answer is found in the word *earth*. That is, we should exercise our influence here and now, in the community where we live, and in the face of the needs that confront us. It's our business to serve as the salt of the earth here in Runcorn, or in whichever place we are living at the time. It's our business to be concerned with the



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cleanliness of our community, that it is a wholesome environment in which young people will have the best possible chance to grow and develop into responsible members of that community. Salt does its most effective work by being brought into direct contact with the substance on which it is to work, so we are not to withdraw from the world, but as the apostle James says, we are to stay pure **and undefiled** (James 1:27).

Salt has been used as a preservative throughout history, being used in ancient times whenever something was to be preserved. If man were left to follow only his own ways with none reflecting the character of Christ then I believe that civilization would ultimately self-destruct. History has shown that humankind does not become increasingly pure, but tends to become increasingly impure. It follows that the presence of Christians in society is therefore an absolute necessity if that society is to be saved from disintegration. As followers of Christ we are called upon to be the preservative in our society, being those who, by our Christian presence, defeat corruption and make it easier for others to do good as we set before them the example of Jesus Christ.

Salt influence flavours our food, and without it our food would have little flavour. What Christ is saying is that the Christian is to life what salt is to food, that we are to lend flavour to life. The tragedy is that so many people have assumed that to be a Christian is to have no flavour in life, wrongly concluding that Christianity takes away the pleasures of living, thereby removing the very flavour from life itself. And perhaps people can often be forgiven in their assumption, for so many people who profess to be Christians live relatively joyless lives, seeing anything that brings pleasure as being of the enemy! Oliver Wendell Holmes is quoted as saying that he might have entered the ministry if certain clergymen he had known had acted a little less like undertakers; and it's reported that Robert Louis Stevenson once entered in his diary the telling comment, 'I have been to church today and I'm not depressed!' People need to discover the joy of Christian life. In a



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world that is so often depressed and stressed out, seeming to have lost the lustre of life, we as Christians are charged with the joyous responsibility of being the salt of the earth, adding flavour and balance to life.

Christ's comment tells His followers how important they are to society, but He did not refer to them as salt in order to inflate their egos. He wanted to impress them with a warning that they could lose their saltiness, or in other words, they could sacrifice their influence. If they did not remain pure then they would no longer be able to preserve society and consequently would be trampled by it. The Palestinians got their salt from the Dead Sea, and that salt was not pure because it was mixed with other minerals that often affected its flavour. In time it could become tasteless, and when that happened, it was good for nothing but to be thrown out and trampled underfoot. None of us are immune to losing our own savour, for if Christians are not fulfilling their purpose as the salt of the earth, then they are on their way to disaster.

Is it possible to restore and regain lost savour, to regain sacrificed influence? Yes it is! Christians who find that they have lost their saltiness can win it back by returning to the source from where they received it in the beginning. God places no obstacles in the path of the repentant sinner that would prevent them from returning to the fountain of all power and purity. When the influence has been sacrificed there is only one recourse, and that is to repent and turn to Christ for forgiveness. When this is done then the repentant sinner will once again be the salt of the earth.

Amen.

(Sermon preached by Rev'd Colin Gordon-Farleigh, at St John's Presbyterian Church, Runcorn, August 3rd 2008)