

Service Transcript

7th August 2022

Welcome, Notices, Birthday Box

Responsive Prayer

Lord God, creator of all things,
for your love for humankind:
for your love for each person:
for the great and mysterious opportunity of life:
for the life of your Spirit within us:
for the gifts of your Spirit:
we praise and worship you; through Jesus Christ.

Lord God, creator, we praise you
for the earth and the wonder of its life;
for the beauty of landscape and sky;
for the variety of seasons, animals and plants;
for their intricate interdependence;
and for making us to be part of it all, shaping landscape, affected by seasons,
interconnected with the whole of nature.
We praise and worship you; through Jesus Christ.

Lord God, inspirer, we praise you
for human history and the magnificence of our inheritance;
for the heights of human artistry with brush, pen,
or chisel, fixing visions and ideas for others to share;
for the depths of human understanding expressed
in science, politics and daily living, enriching life and re-shaping society.
We praise and worship you; through Jesus Christ.

Lord God, redeemer, we praise you
for Jesus Christ and the glory of your work in him;
for his life in all its fullness of doing and being;
for his following through of your way to the end;
for your raising of him and all who follow him.
For our world and all of you that it contains,
and for our life and the opportunity of living with you that it offers,
we praise and adore you; in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen.

2249 Come, people of the risen King

SALT

Salt. For the non-Chemists, we usually think of salt as Sodium Chloride. We all have some at home and use it every day, mostly as a seasoning agent for food. It's something that can be very bad for us if we have too much, but it has benefits too. As a seasoning agent, it brings out the flavour of food. It can be used as a preservative; many foods that would perish rapidly can be kept for many

months salted, and that was important before the invention of canning and refrigeration. Another use is as a water softener in dishwashers. We also use it to clear the roads in winter.

ROMAN SALINAS

Right from the dim and distant past, salt has been produced from evaporating salt water from the sea or from saltwater springs. Here are some Roman salinas; evaporation pans, in Spain (and they are still in use). In the desert around the DEAD SEA, there are huge natural salt pans where the sea has evaporated, leaving salt on the surface. Another main source of salt is ROCK SALT and here is some nice pink looking stuff. Why is it pink? Rock salt is full of impurities that give it this colour. Sea salt is also full of impurities when produced from salt pans – and is usually refined before it reaches us as pure white salt for use in cooking.

Why am I talking about salt? This morning I am going to focus on something Jesus said on more than one occasion. Here it is from The Sermon on the Mount in Matthew's Gospel: *"You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled underfoot."* Matthew 5:13

More precisely it's this sentence VERSE *If the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again?*

Before we look a bit further how we should do the spiritual version of adding salt into our relationships, let's celebrate further what Jesus has done for us and what He means to us.

1015 Thank You for saving me

1084 We bow down

Reading & Reflection

Luke 14: ²⁵ Large crowds were travelling with Jesus, and turning to them he said: ²⁶ "If anyone comes to me and does not hate father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters—yes, even their own life—such a person cannot be my disciple. ²⁷ And whoever does not carry their cross and follow me cannot be my disciple.

²⁸ "Suppose one of you wants to build a tower. Won't you first sit down and estimate the cost to see if you have enough money to complete it? ²⁹ For if you lay the foundation and are not able to finish it, everyone who sees it will ridicule you, ³⁰ saying, 'This person began to build and wasn't able to finish.'

³¹ "Or suppose a king is about to go to war against another king. Won't he first sit down and consider whether he is able with ten thousand men to oppose the one coming against him with twenty thousand? ³² If he is not able, he will send a delegation while the other is still a long way off and will ask for terms of peace. ³³ In the same way, those of you who do not give up everything you have cannot be my disciples.

³⁴ "Salt is good, but if it loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? ³⁵ It is fit neither for the soil nor for the manure pile; it is thrown out. "Whoever has ears to hear, let them hear."

JUST ADD SALT

VERSE

"Salt is good, but if it loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is fit neither for the soil nor for the manure pile; it is thrown out. "Whoever has ears to hear, let them hear."

In modern salt manufacturing, salt is refined in order to remove impurities so we get a pure product. In Jesus' day people didn't tend to bother about refining, and used impure rock salt or material from salt pans. The sodium chloride in these impure salts tends to dissolve easier than the impurities, so if the salt became damp, the sodium chloride is washed out to leave the impurities behind. These residual deposits may be white, even look like salt but they are other chemical compounds of no use to anyone and as Jesus said are only good for road fill at their very best. So for those users of rock salt or unrefined sea salt, don't let it get damp, or it becomes useless because it loses flavour and becomes no good as a preservative.

Jesus uses this phrase about salt losing its saltiness in three different but not unconnected contexts in the Gospels to describe the effect that His disciples should have on the world around them in a way that honours God and extends His kingdom. We should be a people whose words and actions should season ours and others' relationship with God. We seek to deepen our understanding, relationship and worship of God, understanding that He preserves our lives spiritually and draws us more closely to Himself. The impact should be like salt on food and that impact should be life-changing.

ROCK SALT DUMP

What if we ignore the commands and will of God, not care about our relationship with Him or others on the church. What if we fail to reach out to others who don't know Jesus? Then, God will not be able to use us and we will rob ourselves of the blessings that God so wants us to have as His children. The consequences of Christians not living and acting as the people of God – not being spiritually salty - are potentially dire as we shall see. This sentence sums it up. VERSE *"Salt is good, but if it loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is fit neither for the soil nor for the manure pile; it is thrown out.*

Does that really happen? Can our actions mean that God will effectively leave us to our devices? Will He "dump us? Does God really do that? Yes. God always finds our sin abhorrent and although He is long-suffering in a way that goes beyond our imagination because of what Jesus has done on the cross, He can and does draw lines when His disciples and church fail continually. Really? Take a look at all the closed churches up and down the land. The work of God has not finished in those towns and villages, but churches may have declined and closed whilst others have thrived. Why? Because those churches lost their saltiness to a point where they were totally ineffective. It happens. We know it happens. Of course the work of God continues anyway through other fellowships, but it's always a sadness to witness churches declining out of existence, particularly when we know that there were opportunities to change not taken.

LOSING SALTINESS VERSE

These words of Jesus are a warning to Christians and churches not to lose their saltiness: quite the reverse. So how can we avoid losing our spiritual saltiness? We can explore this in three different contexts by looking how Jesus uses this phrase in each of the three synoptic gospels.

MATTHEW'S GOSPEL - BEING SALT AND LIGHT

You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled underfoot. "You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven." Matt 5:14-16

This is part of the Sermon on the Mount and Jesus is challenging the disciples about their witness in the world. We should be salt and light. We are the salt of the earth – we bring Good News that will season people's lives, words that save, words that prevent loss. We introduce them to Jesus, and show to the world what God is like by the way that we live.

That is our call. If we cease to be that, then we will start to lose our saltiness personally and as a church. As I've already said, we've seen closed churches that failed; but we also know of Christians who struggle to run the race of faith. Our failure to bring the seasoning of God, the wonderful taste of life and hope into their lives has a high cost – and that cost is not only reflected in the lives of those who are not being reached with Good News, it's borne by the church and by that I mean the people that make up the church. *It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled underfoot.* There's a warning here that we need to heed. It gets worse.

LUKE'S GOSPEL - COUNTING THE COST

In Luke 14 which we read earlier, these words appear again; this time in a challenge to follow Jesus, but as we do, to count the cost of what following Jesus will mean to our lives. They are challenging words:

If anyone comes to me and does not hate father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters –yes, even their own life—such a person cannot be my disciple.²⁷ And whoever does not carry their cross and follow me cannot be my disciple...

Those of you who do not give up everything you have cannot be my disciples.

Jesus reminds us that being a Christian is difficult, costly and uncomfortable if we take Him seriously. It's not a part of the gospel we like to repeat too loudly. For Christians in North Korea, in Iran, in China, in much of the Middle East, following Jesus is not for the faint of heart. Yet so often Christians in opposed and persecuting situations have such a strong experience of the presence and power of Jesus in their lives. They understand how God seasons up difficult situations and preserves them despite pressure and persecution. What they have in Christ is more precious than life.

But this principle is the same here in the relative peace of the UK. Being a Christian may not be easy either - that's one for the items for discussion and reflection this week. When we recognise what it costs to be a Christian, it has an impact on others as they see how we cope with suffering, pain, sickness, a falling out with others, bereavement and death or whatever.

I have met many Christians who no longer serve and follow Jesus. It was often the most difficult of times and they just stopped trusting Jesus, rather than finding the presence of God's Spirit and the strength He brings. The salt has lost its saltiness for them. Are you going through a difficult time as a Christian and you are finding being a Christian difficult and costly? Don't lose your saltiness. Ask someone to pray with you that you may find God's strength in the challenges you face. Listen to what God is saying to you and act.

MARK'S GOSPEL – PRESERVING THE PEACE

Finally we come to Mark's Gospel. We get the the saltiness statement again, this time in the context of our conduct; both of our own behaviour and our relationships with our fellow believers: *Mark 9:42-50*

"If anyone causes one of these little ones—those who believe in me—to stumble, it would be better for them if a large millstone were hung around their neck and they were thrown into the sea. If your hand causes you to stumble, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life maimed than with two hands to go into hell, where the fire never goes out. And if your foot causes you to stumble, cut it

off. It is better for you to enter life crippled than to have two feet and be thrown into hell. And if your eye causes you to stumble, pluck it out. It is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye than to have two eyes and be thrown into hell, where “the worms that eat them do not die, and the fire is not quenched.” Everyone will be salted with fire. “Salt is good, but if it loses its saltiness, how can you make it salty again? Have salt among yourselves, and be at peace with each other.”

This is a passage about clearing stuff out of our lives that is spiritually destructive. Jesus uses a literary device called hyperbole – exaggeration for the purpose of strongly making a point. So he isn’t advocating death by drowning, limb chopping or eye gouging. He’s making the point that the things mentioned here just definitely shouldn’t be part of our lives.

VERSE

This is how a guy called Alan Cole put it: “If this ‘belonging to Christ’ is such an important bond, then nothing is too precious to sacrifice (not even hand, foot, or eye), in order that we may retain it.” God takes sin seriously. This communion table reminds us of the massive cost God Himself paid to redeem us. That’s how much He wanted us, so how important is God to us? Jesus is emphasising not only that our own attitude should be one of desiring to honour the God who has loved us, but that should stretch to our fellow believers, particularly those young in the faith. We are people who preserve the peace and encourage others.

VERSES

This is how Jesus concludes the passage, again with the sentence on saltiness: *Everyone will be salted with fire. “Salt is good, but if it loses its saltiness, how can you make it salty again? Have salt among yourselves, and be at peace with each other.”*

Now it’s in the context of judgement. We know from passages in 1 Corinthians that all our actions will come under God’s scrutiny and be tested and fire is often used in this context. In verse 49 the reference of salted with fire goes back to Leviticus 2:13 where the Israelites sacrifices in the tabernacle and temple were to be seasoned with salt. Because salt improves flavour, the idea was that God was to be offered the very best like an honoured guest at a meal which would have been seasoned, to taste its very best.

In our relationships with God’s people, they deserve the very best of us and we should be at peace with one another. Our words and actions should be seasoned, our desire should be to bring words that preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace (Eph 4:3). And what happens when our relationships break down? Our relationships are no longer seasoned with salt. How many churches and Christians have you come across who have had their faith shipwrecked by poor relationships? How many churches do you know of which have been damaged or even closed by dreadful behaviour and dissent. Far too many! *“Salt is good, but if it loses its saltiness, how can you make it salty again? Have salt among yourselves, and be at peace with each other.”*

ARE YOU ADDING SALT?

The challenge for each of us today is; are we adding the salt of bringing Jesus into our day by day words and actions? If not, we need to bring that before Him and ask the Spirit to give us strength to do that.

Are we adding the salt of receiving the challenge and encouragement of Jesus into our lives despite the difficulties of life? If not, let’s find power in the Spirit to be overcomers.

Are we adding the salt of encouraging our weakest brothers and sisters in Christ. Are we seeking to honour Jesus in every aspect of our lives? If not, let’s find the strength that comes by the Spirit to be Christ-like in all our words and actions.

What we don't want to do is the reverse of all of that – to lose the saltiness so much that we shipwreck our faith. We have a God who wants us to add salt not lose it. Let's come before Him now

CONFESSION

Father,

As we come before you this morning, we know that we should be the salt of the earth – bringing Your presence and joy into our lives and the lives of others by Your Spirit and that we may bring your preserving power into the lives of others and into our lives, also by Your Spirit.

Your desire is that we should never lose the saltiness already in us because of our faith in Christ. As we come to the Communion table this morning, may we know the seasoning of Your Spirit, encouraging us and reminding us of all we are because of Jesus.

Father we pray for all those here who are discouraged and struggling in the faith for whatever reason and feel their spiritual saltiness is ebbing away. By your Spirit we pray that you will remove all those obstacles in their lives that are weighing them down and restore to them the joy of having Jesus within their lives.

Father, we realise that we so often fall short of the people we should be – whether that be hiding Your light from others, acting without counting the cost or speaking or acting in ways that don't honour You. We ask for Your forgiveness today and pray that your Spirit may fill us anew to be the men and women of God you call us to be in Christ.

We take a few moments to reflect and bring our own silent prayers before God.

As we come around the table, may we know You close to us now

We ask this in Jesus' name

Amen.

2100 We come as guests invited

Communion (Video during wine distribution) At the foot of the cross

Post Communion Prayer

Fellowship Prayers

2244 Christ be in my waking

Blessing

The Spirit of God is upon you and has anointed you.
You are the salt of the earth and you bring light to the world.

You are not too young or too old,
you are not too rich or too needy
to bring good news to the impoverished,
to give a hand to the broken-hearted,
and to live out freedom and pardon
through the gifts you have been given.

So remember to pack peace in your toolbox,
hope in your briefcase,
love in your lunch box,
and may integrity, honesty, and joy be your designer wear of choice.

Do not be frightened, for you are never alone.
The God in whose image you are made
will walk with you and guide you today, tomorrow, and every day.
Hallelujah! In Jesus' name. Amen.

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For Reflection and Discussion

1. Try to think of all the things we use salt for. Jesus used the phrase “*Salt is good, but if it loses its saltiness, how can you make it salty again?*” in each of the Synoptic Gospels. Which of the uses of salt you just identified most useful as analogies in describing spiritual truths?
2. Read Matthew 5:14-16. How do the pictures of salt and light help us in understanding what Jesus’ is expecting of His disciples? How may ignoring that call render the witness of an individual or church worthless?
3. Read Luke 14:25-35. Jesus gives a clear call to discipleship. It seems what He is asking is extreme and this may again be hyperbole for effect. If so, what is the point Jesus trying to make? Why is it so important that we understand the true cost of following Jesus?
4. Read Mark 9:42-50. Jesus uses hyperbole here to challenge the disciples about their personal behaviour and their relationships with younger or weaker believers. Why are these things so important that Jesus uses extreme language to make His point?
5. “*Salt is good, but if it loses its saltiness, how can you make it salty again?*” Jesus suggest in all three passages that there is a point of no return for those who place themselves in position where they are no longer spiritually salty. There are quite a few deep spiritual issues here you may want to reflect on – like what that point of no return actually means for individual Christians and churches. That said, you may want to consider that Jesus said all these things to ensure His disciples pulled up short of losing their spiritual saltiness!