

Congregation, have you ever asked yourself, "What is to be the relationship of Christian people to our current society and the world in general? The answer to that question is really the subject matter of our text this morning. And I sometimes wonder whether some Christians haven't lost sight of their calling in this world. I hesitate to mention it for I know how dangerous this world can be and how easily one can be contaminated by the world. And because of that ever present danger, you sometimes hear Christians piously say, "We're in the world, but not of the world." Well that is true, but I would like you to consider a different emphasis which I think is more in line with Scripture's teaching and our text this morning. It goes something like this, "We may not be of the world, but we're certainly in it!" And with that understanding, we are confronted with the question, "If we are in the world, what would the Lord have us do? What are we called to be in this world?"

Now I have known Christians who have totally withdrawn. The only thing they do with other Christians is come to worship, for the rest, absolutely no contact, not even with other Christians of the same mindset. They are so concerned about being contaminated by this sinful world and sinful Christians, that they totally isolate themselves. But is that what Scripture teaches? I don't believe it does. Jesus makes it very plain in our text that we are to be the salt of the earth and the light of the world. What a tremendous challenging statement for the followers of Christ. And the purpose of Christ's instructions is that others may see our good deeds and praise our heavenly Father.

And for Jesus to even say that we must be the salt of the earth and light of the world means that there must be something wrong with the world. Well, we know that is certainly true. And I would suggest the root of the problem, is that people do not acknowledge God as the Creator nor his Son as the only Saviour! Now that may sound somewhat simplistic, but that is the core problem.

Now you may be inclined to say, "Does it really matter if people in our society or for that matter our society don't acknowledge God as Creator and Jesus as the only Saviour? Can we not just allow people to live and believe what they want so long as they do the same with us and live in peace?" Sure! We don't go around pointing a gun at people's head and force them to make some profession of faith or else they will be shot or deported. Nor should we badger them. However, God's desire is that all who have been elected to eternal life will hopefully hear the gospel and so praise, glorify, and enjoy Him forever! Hence, as God's saved people, we can never say we are done with evangelism or proclaiming the gospel! Or if you prefer, being the salt of the earth or the light on a hill! However, there is more to it than that. For being salt also means we have a preserving influence on our society. It is not just about making the gospel known, but also curbing sin in our societies. Of course, the world doesn't see it like that.

Towards the end of the 19C the great thinkers and philosophers of the age said that we were entering the golden age. The controlling idea was that man was advancing and evolving and advancing in his thinking. People through education would live cleaner lives and would not indulge in drink and drugs. By acts of Parliament and conferences it was thought that man could resolve all difficulties and especially now that man was going to use his mind and reason.

Wars would be no more for man would talk until they resolved their difference! Diseases would be cured and suffering and poverty were going to be eradicated because we can pool resources and our research. Well it has happened, largely because they have left God out of the picture. If the truth be known, not only does creation groan at the result of man's sin, so does society, perhaps more so than ever before. There is still fighting, murder, abortion of unborn babies, incurable diseases, substance abuse, suicides, corruption, poverty, suffering, terrorism, immorality, adultery, idolatry and on we could go. The curse of sin can be seen everywhere and as a result life in the world trends towards a putrid state. Man left by himself tends to go from bad to worse. But unfortunately much of society doesn't see it. Some may see that there is a desperate need but they don't see that the answer lies in Christ and his life changing message that the Creator has provided.

When we pause to consider the world and the evil that is in it then we realize quickly why the Lord Jesus mentions that we, his followers, are to be salt of the earth and light of the world. In the ancient world salt was used to flavour foods as it is today, but mostly salt was used as a preservative. If salt was rubbed into meat it would slow the process of decay. Of course strictly speaking, salt cannot lose its saltiness for sodium chloride is a stable compound. But most salt in the ancient world was derived from salt marshes and not by evaporation of salt water, and therefore contained many impurities. The actual salt from these salt marshes was more soluble than the impurities that came with it and therefore the salt could lose its saltiness.

Sometimes it was so diluted that it was of little worth. In modern Israel, salt that has lost its saltiness, that had become 'savourless' was scattered on the soil of flat roofs. This apparently helped to harden the soil, thus preventing leaks and making it suitable for play areas and public gatherings. Hence the saying that salt is still being trod underfoot. So when the Lord Jesus says to his disciples and to the crowd, "You are the salt of the earth, he means that we are to have a preserving influence on society."

Now we may ask, "How can we be a salting salt?" Jesus has told us in the Beatitudes. When we are poor in Spirit, mourn for our sin, are meek, hunger and thirst for righteousness, are merciful, and are peacemakers, then we are being a salty salt. By being salty in this world we slow down the decaying process and have a restraining influence against evil. And if we continue to be salty, then our heavenly Father will be praised. The very characteristic of 'saltiness' proclaims a difference. You only need a little and it already makes a difference.

I was once involved in moving some cattle about 20 Klm by walking them along some country roads. When we finally arrived at our destination, my friend's wife had a cup of tea waiting for us. She asked whether I took sugar and I said, "Yes, one thanks." But in her hurry, she had inadvertently grabbed the wrong container and instead of sugar I received a teaspoon of salt in my tea. And as soon as my taste buds detected it was something different than sugar, I spat it out.

Salty Christians can have a restraining influence on sin and have a positive effect on society. The Christian is a person who is essentially different from people without Christ and those we rub shoulders with must be able to see that we are different. We should glory in the fact that we are different for there is no shame in that we are chosen to be salty. In fact, if society cannot see that we are different, then we may need to ask whether we are salty enough? And congregation, may I add, that more than ever before perhaps in human history, these words apply to us. We are called to be a preserving influence on society, or if you will, to negate the evil in society. To put the brakes on sin!

Another function of salt is to provide savour, to make something tasty. Believe it or not, but life without Christianity is tasteless. Look at the world. There are more ways to entertain and be entertained than ever before, and yet there are more lonely people around than ever before. There are more ways to communicate with each other – txt messaging, chat rooms, social media, yet more people are lonely than ever before. In our western societies we have more income, better life styles, better welfare, greater means of travel, yet there are more drugs, more alcohol abuse and more people who cannot cope!

But the Christian has a flavour in life and that is their Christian faith. For Christians are not forever inward looking and finding something to praise in themselves. On the contrary, they are other people centered, following the example of their Saviour! They have a reason for living for they have been given a wonderful sure hope. And that sure hope is eternal life because of what Christ has done. Even when things go sour around them, they can have a smile on their face, because nothing can rob them of their secure position in Christ! And that's why a Christian can be salty in this world.

Now there are many ways to be salty. Some people suggest that the church must make statements about the decaying morals in society, or the general situation in the world. Others see their role in denouncing certain regimes. Neither is illegitimate. But is that the way we should be salt according to this text? In the NT the church is not identified with a nation or nations. You never see Paul getting on social media and denouncing the Roman empire. In fact, you never see any of the Apostles' commenting about the performance of the government.

Now, I am not saying this is bad or that we shouldn't be involved in these circles. We are in the world, and the church does have a responsibility in this area, as do individual Christians. And I am thankful for Christian political parties and parliamentarians. But I suggest that this text is to be applied far more individually than that. We as individuals are to function as salt by being the person that belonging to Jesus has made us in every area of our life. Just think what a difference it would make when you could remind your fellow worker or neighbour, not only that you are a Christian but that you and the Lord are offended by their foul language, or their blaspheme, or the sneaky way they are robbing their employer or neighbour.

Sure, it is not easy, and it may even result in some ridicule, but usually the foul language and other wrong behaviour does slow and hence evil is being restrained and morals and society are being preserved. That's what happens when you are functioning as salt. And this applies across the board. It applies in the playground, it applies in the classroom, the building game, wherever! And if evil is restrained then God is praised. I like to emphasize this 'individual' application. In the last fifty or so years, churches have paid more attention to politics and to social and economic problems than ever before. Pronouncements have been made and resolutions from Church Assemblies and Synods to various governments. But with respect, what good has it really done? Doesn't mean it shouldn't be done, but I suggest, the saltiness starts with us, in

the normal run of life. Today are living in a society where vice and law breaking are rampant. Adultery has become common. Same sex relationships were frowned upon back on the 1960 - 70s. Now they are promoted and blessed on social media! You can hardly watch a film where the name of our Lord isn't ridiculed or blasphemed or where there isn't nudity or sex scenes. The church can and must make pronouncements about unjust war and social issues, but the average man is not affected by that all that much. However, on a one to one basis they can be, especially if it is done winsomely. That is what it means to be salty!

In closing let me just address that question put by Jesus at the end of our text? How can it salt be made salty again? The question is not meant to have an answer. The point is congregation that if Jesus calls on us to be a preservative in a world where there is so much evil and little or no standards, then we can only discharge this function if we ourselves retain our saltiness. And we can only do that by feeding on God's Word. If we remain in Christ and feed upon him through his Word, then we can remain salty, the preservative that Jesus is calling us to be. This never happens at home, but sometimes when I go to a restaurant, the fries can be a bit too salty. After a salty meal, I always seem to drink. Perhaps if people do not thirst after Christ in this world it is because the salt is not salty enough. If we fail to be **salty**, perhaps we have lost our reason for existence. I pray congregation that God will give us the grace to be effective preservatives and that we indeed may be a salty salt. Amen.