

Salt and Light

Intro - Superstore this week

I was in Superstore on Tuesday, getting the weekly groceries, and trying to find my way around, as they've been completely redesigning it and extending its size and contents..... Anyway, we finished and came to the checkout and I was packing the shopping into these big orange square bags which have Sainsbury's written all over them.

The cashier at the *adjacent* till noticed all these big orange bags and called out 'where's Sainsbury's?' to which I replied 'actually it's in England – it was my favourite supermarket.' Then she said, "so what made you come here?" and I thought, OK, here we go.....

"God"

"Sorry?" by this time quite a few people had stopped to listen in, so I bravely said, a bit louder – 'GOD'.

Then an interesting thing happened, the lady cashier who asked the *question* turned away, obviously sorry she'd asked and muttering 'each to their own' probably thinking 'crazy woman', but the lady cashier who was **servicing** me brightened up, leant towards me and asked 'Oh, really? And what church do you go to?' So I told her., and we had a brief chat.

At the end of Matt's gospel in ch 28 – the last 3 verses, Jesus gives to his disciples what we have come to call '**the Great Commission**', where he tells them to '*go and make disciples of all the nations*'

This starts with our telling others about Jesus.

In the few verses from the SOTM which we have before us today, Jesus says to his disciples

"You are the salt of the earth..."
and
"You are the light of the world"...

What did Jesus mean when he said that? And how can we **be** those things?

In Jn 8.12 Jesus said '**I am the light of the world**' .

In the *prologue* to Jn's gospel we are told of John's coming to *testify concerning that light*, emphasising that he himself was not that light, but rather a 'witness' to the light, **the light that was coming in to the world to overcome the darkness.**

So how can **we** be the Light, if **JC** is the light of the world?

We'll answer that in just a minute.

Uses for salt

What about salt?

What does it mean to be the salt of the earth?

I'm sure you can think of plenty of uses for salt (in an average week in Calgary)

- some on your sidewalks might be useful to melt the ice, if it's not too cold!
- or to gargle with if you have a sore throat – my mother-in-law was using salt-water the other day as a nose-wash; she was sniffing it up to cleanse her sinuses, she *said*.....
- to flavour food of course – though too much of course isn't good for you! It's in just about every ready-made food you can buy!
- And of course it can also be used as a preservative, especially in the days before fridges and freezers when it was used to preserve meat.....
- There's also a purity about salt too; the Jewish sacrifices were offered with it.....

Disciples, says JC, must be like salt – preserving their environment from corruption. But it's more than that as we shall see.....

If we are insipid Christians, then we are as **useless as salt which has lost its flavour**. There should be a flavour of Christ-likeness, a sparkle of joy and unselfishness about us that is immensely attractive to other people....

Link - beatitudes, vv11-12

From what was a general description of the disciples' **character**, the sermon now turns to a direct address of JC's disciples, and indicates the effect that same character is to have in their life and witness.

V11-12 while linked to the beatitudes in their use of the verb **makarioi** – blessed – it is also distinct; it is an **expansion** of the thought of the last beatitude and is now applied directly to the listening disciples. It introduces them to the contrast between them and other men, which is the theme of v 13-16.

Let me remind you of these 2 verses –

“ Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you
and falsely say all kinds of evil against you
because of me. Rejoice and be glad,
because great is your reward in heaven,
for in the same way they persecuted
the prophets who were before you.”

Insult and slander are the forms which persecution of Christians has often taken from the earliest times,

Since Jesus himself was abused and slandered, it should be no surprise that His followers receive the same treatment '*on my account*'. Indeed, we are told, it should make them **glad** because it shows they are in the theme of persecution '*of the prophets*', (not to say the disciples are prophets). But it puts them, with Jesus, in line with those whose stand for God has incurred the hostility of the world.

This happens in many parts of the world today, most especially in muslim countries, but its coming ever nearer to us.

IN the UK right now, Parliament are debating what is being called the '**Incitement to Religious Hatred**' bill.

Part of the Government guidance about the proposed UK law states “ Christians claiming Jesus Christ is the way, the truth and the life and the only way to God” could be a crime if their words were considered 'insulting' and it was a likely effect that hatred would be stirred up”.

Sharing the gospel – even sensitively and thoughtfully - may thus be deemed to lead to offence. For example, a high-ranking Hindu who had come to Christ wrote in a book that they had come to see Hinduism as a false religion. This was quoted in the house of Lords as an incitable offence. Under the new law someone might allege that this was 'stirring up hatred'.

If this legislation goes through, my understanding is that, if there were someone of another faith sitting in my congregation today in England or Wales, and I preached the gospel, that Jesus is the only way to God, and they were offended by this, I could end up being arrested, and

I believe the maximum penalty would be 7 years in prison.....

V13 .

As we know, salt serves mainly to give flavour, and to prevent corruption. Disciples, if they are true to their calling make the earth a purer more palatable place – you may not agree, but, as we shall see, **if all of us were salt and light as Jesus said**, then maybe there would be a little more **purity and wholeness around?**

But they can do so only as long as they preserve their **distinctive character**; unsalty salt has no value. Strictly, pure salt cannot lose its salinity, but the impure 'salt' dug from the shores of the dead sea could gradually become unsalty as the actual sodium chloride dissolved.

In any case, JC was not out to give a chemistry lesson, which is a relief to me as I failed chemistry at about age 13! JC is using a *proverbial* image.

It is interesting here to note that the Rabbis commonly used salt as an image for **wisdom**....

In Col 4.6 Paul wrote –

*“ Let your conversation be always full of grace,
seasoned with salt, so that you may
know how to answer everyone...”*

which may explain why the Greek word represented by 'lost its taste' actually means “*become foolish*” (JC most probably used the Aramaic word **tapel** which conveys both meanings) ie. **A foolish disciple has no influence on the world.**

Vv14-16

Light, like salt, affects its environment by being distinctive. And **light** is a very evocative image; it can provide a warning like a **lighthouse**. It is often an attraction, like a **candle** in a darkened room, or a **lighted** window looming out of the fog when you are lost. Above all, **light** is visible – you wouldn't think of **lighting** a lamp and hiding it under an inverted barrel; you put it on a lamp-stand. **There is no excuse for secret discipleship.**

“ A city set on a hill cannot be hidden’ said Jesus

The disciple who is **visibly** different from other men and women will have an effect on them. And the aim of the good works is not to bring glory to self but to direct attention to God who inspired them.

What is the H/S directing you to this day?

Do you ever feel yourself compelled to **call** or **email** or **write** to a friend or someone else? Do you ever feel an insistent urge to do something that feels 'right' but you don't know where the thought came from, e.g. *sending flowers, praying specifically for one who's not normally in your thoughts, saying 'hello' to a complete stranger.....or something else*

Phil. 2 says this is like **shining as a light** – listen to these verses from Phil 2.14-15 –

*“It is God who works in you to will and to act
according to His good purpose.
Do everything without complaining or arguing,
so that you may become blameless and pure,
children of God without fault,*

*in a crooked and depraved generation, in which
YOU SHINE LIKE STARS IN THE UNIVERSE....”*

By so doing the disciples will ‘**give light to all**’. As we know, from John’s gospel, **Jesus** is pre-eminently the ‘**Light of the World**’ with a capitol **L** and **W**, and as Isaiah prophesied about the servant in 42.6 and 49.6

“I will make you a covenant for the people and a light for the Gentiles.....’

but then this role passed to his disciples, and so on to us.....we are also to be the **light of the world** - lower case ‘**l** and ‘**w**’, because, when we ask Christ to live in us he does and then **we** have the **light of Christ** with which we can **light** up others.....

Until Christ has illuminated us, we can never shine with His reflected light

A secret disciple is no more use in the world than one who has lost his or her distinctiveness.....v.13

Application

OK, then, so how is it we either **hide our light** or **lose or saltiness**?

Or, conversely, how do we **preserve** our saltiness and keep our lights **shining bright**?

Well, in Mtt 28 and in Acts 1, Jesus calls us to be his witnesses; we are to be evangelists! We are to tell others about him, and not keep him to ourselves.....

Does that sound scary?

Well, it needn’t be.....not too scary anyway!

So, here are some suggestions as to how we could each improve our witness to others –

It all starts with our own personal walk with the Lord

– are you keeping a regular date with him – to meet and talk and listen and get stuck into His Word?

Because everything else will flow out of that personal rel’ship with our Father in heaven.....

#1. Do you know God as your Father in heaven and JC as Lord of your life?
If not, then the rest of this sermon doesn’t really apply – YET

But if you'd like to know Jesus in a deeper way, then please do talk with somebody here after the service – or get hold of myself or Jonathan; **we'd be only to glad to meet with you!**

If your answer to that qn. is **yes**, I *do* know God as my heavenly Father and Jesus as my personal saviour and friend, then.....the rest of this is relevant to you NOW.....

2. Each day we need to spend time alone with the Lord, even if it's only a few mins and even if it means getting out of bed 10 mins earlier each day! These times are precious and important in our ongoing relationship with God and His Word.

#3 During these prayer-times you *could* pray using words similar to the song we sung just before the Gospel reading >>>>>>**put them on the OH please**

This way, you are asking the H/S to already *be working in the lives of people* you'll meet during the day. Likelihood is – He's the only one who knows just who you'll bump into that day! And this way, you'll already be praying the **Light of Christ** into a person's situation, even before you meet them. This type of prayer also asks Christ to be within us and over and under us and beside us

We **each** need to Pray and ask God to keep us in line with His will – that we may be **part** of what he is already doing in His Kingdom.....**where is God working today?** Where is His H/S acting – we want to be a **part** of that.....**Lord show me with whom you want me to spend some time this day**.....and never be afraid to 'waste' time with another, just being with them.....

You could also choose, maybe 2 or 3 particular friends, relatives or work-colleagues and **name them** each day before the Lord – that he will **protect them from evil, surround them with His love** and, at the right time, **make openings for you to share His love with them**.....

Of course - praying and asking our Father to bless loved ones in this way IS part of being salt and light - maybe not **visibly** at this point, but who else will be praying for them if you don't?

It's just possible that you are the only Christian they know!

So, we need to be aware of who God is placing on a hearts at any given time.....

#4. How are you at the office or supermarket or around your friends and family? What is your language and temper like?

And at home; Do you take your turn to empty the trash, or clear the sidewalks of snow, or clean the toilets or do whatever it is people in your house really don't like to do (but needs doing anyway?).

It's an obvious thing to say, but HOW we behave and our attitude towards our work and other people, will tell others a lot about us.

For example –

Whether we take part in **office gossip** or not really matters.

Whether our **language** is clean really matters

Whether we use office equipment for our **own personal use** really matters

How you **use your time** at work too - all these sorts of things will either bring glory to God or give the enemy a foothold into our lives.....

Also, if we hide the fact we are followers of Jesus, then we are **hiding our light**; and that's not what Jesus wants from us. **Once** others know, then we have a responsibility to reveal that **light**; to act in a way which always answers the question '**what would Jesus do?**' You know those bracelets you can get which have the letters **WWJD** on them? A little reminder that **every** thing we think and say and do can either bring glory to our Father in heaven or dishonour Him.....

What's your driving like?

Do you have one of those ICTHUS symbols on your car? The fish that stands for Jesus Christ, son of God, Saviour? Do you speed? Do you cut others up on the Highway? Do you drive aggressively? **Or are you courteous and careful – allowing others in at a 'Merge' for instance?**

Are you a **Salt and Light** driver who drives for God? **Am I?** I have to admit it – I have been known to go above the speed limit.....and just the other day, without quite realising I'd done it, I went through a red light.....I was a bit tired and not quite with it.....but was I driving to the glory of God? No, I don't think I was.....

#5. Church & community >>>>>every day

We need to remember too that, as part of the Body of Christ here on earth we are part of the Church universal – not an institution that just meets on a Sunday – but an *organic community* of brothers and sisters in Christ, who are to be **salt and light** for each other too. So, the way we behave and our attitudes towards each other within that body must come under the Lordship of Christ, acting out of **love**, not being **judgemental**, not **gossiping** etc – in fact, living under the very mandate that Jesus gives us here in the SOTM.....kingdom values for kingdom people. You could also read the book of James, brother of Jesus, who's teaching there fleshes out Jesus' words here in Matthew.

#6. Finally, (for today anyway) being Salt and Light DOES also require us, as Peter put it'

**to “Always be prepared to give an answer
to everyone who asks you to give the reason
for the hope that you have, but do this with gentleness and respect”**

1 Peter 3.15

and you know what he says immediately before this?

“But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord”

And there is our context again: Put Jesus first in your life, as Lord of your life, then be prepared to tell *others* of the hope – the life – they can already see in you because he’s made that possible. Has anybody ever asked you *why* you are different? What it is that *you* have that maybe they don’t?

Well, we have to open our mouths to speak, and yes, it can be a bit scary!

But what else does the Bible tell us? In Matt 10 we are told that, when under pressure, we are not to worry about what to say, for

“At that time you will be given what to say,
for it will not be you speaking, but the Spirit of
your Father speaking through you..”

Matt 10.19-20

When we are asked questions about our faith, or even just if we go to church, we need to open our mouths and trust God to *empower* us to speak for him. **Pray** for the opportunities and then look for them; **don’t let a chance to speak out for God to pass you by.**

Sometimes we may be asked a direct question and we need to do our best to answer that specifically, and that may be **all** that’s necessary for that time. We don’t always need to give them the full gospel – it may not be appropriate, and may even put a person off if they think they are being **hit over the head with a Bible, or bombarded with church!**

On the other hand, if someone *has* clearly been asking faith-related questions and you feel directed by the Holy S to give them the ‘full works’, then go ahead.

What is ‘the gospel’ in a nutshell? Some people find drawing a simple diagram helpful, then they can remember what to say :

1. God made the world – perfect and in so-doing out of love gave us freewill,
2. Mankind chose to do its own thing, and put themselves first – middle letter of SIN.....
sin separates us from God
A relationship with God thus became broken
3. People try to reach God in all sorts of ways.....Religion is man’s search for God
Christian faith is about God’s search for us –
4. he sent His own Son Jesus
Jesus was perfect – man and God; he lived on earth as one of us yet without sin
He was put to death on a cross, a cruel and agonising death of a common criminal
Paul tells us inthat Jesus took all our sins in his body on the cross when he died
That satisfied the justice of God, who loved us so much he sent his Son (John 3.16)

We are told Jesus was buried in a tomb and a stone rolled across the entrance. Soldiers stood guard over it.....

But Jesus didn't stay dead

On the third day he came back to life – and this is the greatest celebration of the church's year!

He appeared to many many people over the next few weeks before ascending to heaven to be with His Father.....

5. So now Jesus has bridged the huge gulf which separated people from God and he has made it possible for us to come back to God, through faith and belief in Him.

You could even tell your own story of how you came to faith in X – and try to answer their related qns.

If you don't have answers to some of them, then just admit that and say '*but I will try to find the answers for you*' then phone Jonathan!!

But in all of this, let's make sure we love people for their own sake - and not just because we want to win them for Christ. Let's be sensitive to their needs and earn the right to speak by listening to them first

Pray for boldness to speak out for Christ at every opportunity where he leads.....

And also be aware of any fear too - God's perfect love casts out fear – and take that little step, even if it's just admitting you go to church, or saying 'yes, I am a Christian'. Remember, his H/S will help you to know what to say

Summary

Jesus said : “ Let your light so shine before men that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in Heaven”

Lets do it!

Summary -21C C'tians - called also to be salt and light.....