

Salt and Light

Matthew 5v13-16 ¹³"You are like salt for the whole human race. But if salt loses its saltiness, there is no way to make it salty again. It has become worthless, so it is thrown out and people trample on it. ¹⁴"You are like light for the whole world. A city built on a hill cannot be hid. ¹⁵No one lights a lamp and puts it under a bowl; instead it is put on the lampstand, where it gives light for everyone in the house. ¹⁶In the same way your light must shine before people, so that they will see the good things you do and praise your Father in heaven. (GNB)

John 1v15 The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness can never extinguish it. (New Living Translation)

Losing things. The changing face of salt and light.

Things were different in the 70s when I was a teenager. You might finish putting your photos that you picked up from the Chemist shop, into your photo album, before cycling down to the phone box with a 2p coin to ring a friend, before returning home and writing a love letter whilst listening to the mix tape on your cassette recorder, then watch the snooker on your black & white TV. None of those things happen nowadays, and many other things are disappearing, or attitudes are turning against things we once loved. Jesus spoke of Salt and Light, and there seems to be a shift there too.

Growing up in the 70s, we loved salt. You poured salt in your pans when cooking vegetables etc and all tables had a salt cellar on them when you sat down to eat. I remember my sister putting so much salt on her meals, that we kept the large Saxa salt container, on the table for her. Today, people check food packaging to check how much added salt there is before they buy. They get worried that there is as much salt in a slice of bread as there is in a packet of crisps. Salt has become a bad thing. Why? Well we are told "If you eat too much salt, the extra water stored in your body raises your blood pressure. Which could lead to strokes etc.

We also liked being outdoors in the light, especially in the sun. In fact it was not uncommon for us to get bad sunburn, skin peel off usually in our beds, and then we would probably go out and get sunburnt again, then peel again. Now we are quite rightly worried about too much sun giving us skin cancer.

So Salt and sunlight seem to now both come with its negatives. When it comes to light there are less torches around, because mobile phones have a light on them, which is usually bright enough for most things.

So could the salt shaker and the torch be next things to disappear from modern life? Certainly through modern ears when we hear of salt and light, it does not come across as positive and beneficial as it did to those that first heard his words.

The two purposes of Jesus

As I study the Gospels, there seems to me to be two distinct reasons, why Jesus gave up his place in heaven, emptied himself of divine powers, and came to earth.

The first is as our saviour, and the second is as our role-model.

So first. He is our saviour. We do wrong, it separates us from God, and there is nothing we can do ourselves to bridge that gap, no matter how wealthy, clever, or religious we are. We can not do it by our own resources. Because God is good and holy, and can't tolerate sin, then there needs to be a way to make us clean in his sight, so he can look on the creation he loves, i.e. us; me; you. So we need saving

from ourselves. Jesus came to lead a blameless life, which so that he could die and pay the price for all that we have done wrong. It is in his death that we are saved, if we call on his name. It is John 3v16 For many that **is** the gospel, “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life” but it is only half the story.

He came as the Son of God to save us, but he also came to usher in the kingdom of God. To do this, he came as our example. He showed us how to live, so that if we listen to his words and understand them, we can take those truths into our lives as guidance on how to live. But as well as hearing what he said, we can see what he did, how he behaved, and he can become our role-model. One that is motivated by love, demonstrating a servant life, and empowered by the Holy Spirit.

Beatitudes.

Our passage on ‘Salt and Light’ comes within his famous sermon on the mount, after he has taught on what we call the Beatitudes. Jesus describes the qualities that he is after for Gods people i.e. those who are humble, whose thoughts are pure, who hunger after justice, show mercy to others, and work for peace. They have the full blessings of the kingdom to look forward to. Taken together these qualities give the picture of the perfect disciple of Christ who will inherit all of his promises.

Jesus describes these qualities but then does not immediately tell them **how** to become that type of character, that comes in his later teaching. Instead he immediately stresses the importance of sharing this Christ-like character with others.

Jesus is for sharing

You are salt and light, and it is for sharing. Imagine you have invited a friend around for a fish and chip supper, you arrive back from the chippy and sit down to eat and there is a power cut. You go and fetch your camping lantern, then you sit down at the far end of the table away from your guest with the salt pot and tomato ketchup, with your camping lantern next to your own plate so you can at least see what you are eating. Would you do that? No of course not. You move in close and put the lamp and the condiments in the middle of the table. You share what you have

So the main point in the ‘Salt and Light’ passage is that Jesus is for sharing. He says.. “You are like salt for the whole human race..... You are like light for the whole world.” So if you have Jesus in you, if you are taking on board his character and his blessings, then it is not for hoarding, (its my salt and ketchup – its my lantern!), no its for sharing.

Just as Jesus was salt and light, the expectation is that when we have accepted Jesus into our life, then we too become salt and light.

It’s not the same metaphor. Salt and light are fundamentally different. Salt changes what it touches, where it remains., but light is on the move, penetrating new areas of darkness.

So how do we be salt and light. Well as Jesus came as our role-model, let’s look at how he did it.

Jesus being salt.

Sodium Chloride or Salt, NaCl is a combination of Sodium and Chlorine. Sodium a highly reactive metal and is an essential element for all life, plant and human, whilst Chlorine bleaches, cleans and disinfects. Combined they produce this pure white substance that flavours and preserves.

The Jews, like my sister, loved their salt, and had a great source of salt, which is still there. Near the dead sea there is mountainous ridge (known as Mount Sodom) which is 5 miles long and 750 feet high and is 80% solid salt. Salt was used, as now, as flavouring, but also as a preservative for their meat and fish, and was also used in solution as a healing antiseptic to treat wounds etc. The Romans

sometimes paid their soldiers in salt, and if he didn't carry out his duties well then he "was not worth his salt". So when Jesus spoke of salt it would have been viewed as a precious and valued resource.

So what did Jesus being salt look like? Remember salt to his listeners was a precious commodity. Without salt to preserve it, they could return to their fish and meat and find it had gone off. So in one sense we can see the use of salt getting ridding them of rottenness. But by adding salt into your food, it gives it flavour. Some people can eat chips without any salt and vinegar, but it's not as tasty. Jesus makes life tasty.

What a great image of Jesus, essential for all life (like Sodium), cleans up life (like Chlorine) and produces a purity which keeps you from going rotten, and gives you a distinct flavour or character (like salt)

So let's look at some examples, of Jesus as salt. He crosses Lake Galilee to and gets out in the district near Gadara. There is a mad man with superhuman strength there who lives in a cave, who cuts himself with stones and is so violent no-one goes anywhere near him. He stinks, his clothes are rotting on the floor next to his broken chains. He is howling, he is naked. So what does Jesus do in this dangerous situation. He goes to him. He wants to get involved. The man sees Jesus coming and screams at him to go away.

Salt is a metaphor, so Jesus didn't actually have a salt-shaker, but let us go along with it and imagine Jesus carries his life changing presence in a salt-shaker. So Jesus marches up to him, and metaphorically shakes his salt shaker, here have some of this. You demons can get out of that man right now, I'll let you jump in the pigs if you want too, but leave the man. The salt gets rid of the rot, and that man is left sat there stunned, at peace, with a clear mind for the first time in years. He is healed, he is restored, the rot has gone, he has a new flavour now. He wants to follow Jesus, but Jesus tells him no, you go and tell others of what God has done for you. And he did not just in his hometown, but he went around the Decapolis telling of Gods mercy for him through Jesus. Jesus healed people because he first cared for them, not merely so that they would follow him.

A leper kneels before Jesus "You can heal me if you want to". – 'No don't touch him Jesus, that's too dangerous – oh too late, he's touched him". "Take some of this salt for your sores – be clean – and he was healed.

Philip seems concerned. "This great crowd are hungry Lord, send them way to eat or this situation is going to turn really sour. So Jesus responds "Don't send the people away, let's get involved in their hunger – feed them". "Yeah, but we've had this extensive search now, and the only one in these thousands of people with any food at all (honest?) is this boy with his five little bread baps and two wee little fish, so that idea was a non-starter." Jesus looks at the little offering. "All that needs is a bit of my salt on it." Now go and feed them. No-one went hungry, with baskets of food left over.

He got involved. He got involved. He got involved.

Jesus being Light

Light is made up of tiny packets of energy called Photons. It shows properties of both waves and of **particles**. The Light of the world from Jesus Christ, is made up of particles of truth that come in waves, penetrates into the darkness, and as the truth sinks home it energises new life in all that it penetrates.

Jesus lived in a largely agricultural society, where everyone knew the importance of the sun and rain in growing crops. Everything needs light. However when Jesus spoke of being the Light of the World he was also tapping into the prophecy of the Jews being a blessing to all nations by showing Gods glory to them, by being a light to the World. At the time of Jesus, under Roman oppression, their thoughts were about getting their freedom, rebuilding and defending their own nation under Gods rule, and not being a blessing to all nations, like Abraham had been promised. Jesus had other plans. **He** would be the light of the world, and this light would be reflected through his followers.

The light of Jesus didn't just reach into nice Jewish homes, where the religious teaching normally went, but his light travelled and penetrated much further into the darkness than any other light. It reached the Jewish undesirables and tax-collectors, it reached the hated Samaritans, and even reached the despised Romans

Whose that up in the tree, let me shine my light up there and have a look. It's the man you all hate the most, the chief tax collector Zacchaeus. I want to get involved in your life, come down and I'll come over to your eat and stay of that's okay. Let's do this. Jesus wants Zacchaeus. He is so excited he wants to share with al lhis other low-life friends and invites them all over. Later Jesus is able to laugh declare salvation has come to this house.

At the well in Samaria, the women says to Jesus as a Jewish male you shouldn't even be talking to me, let alone asking me for water. Why are you getting involved. Then Jesus tells her what she is doing wrong in her life, and of the living water she needs. She is so excited at meeting Jesus she goes and tells her town.

Jesus preached in the local synagogue in Capernaum, that was funded by the local Roman Centurion, and no doubt that the words of truth that he spoke there got back to the centurion in his garrison, perhaps via his servants if they were let out for the services. But the truth particles of his his word and his power reached the centurion, such that when a beloved of servant of the Centurion was dying, Jesus wanted to get involved and set out to see the Centurion. He sent a message for Jesus not to come as he was not worthy to greet him but just the say word and his servant would be healed, which he was. What faith this man had in Jesus, what power there was in the truth that emanated from Jesus.

His greatness was not measured by how much he was elevated above others, but by the degree to which he came down and identified with people. One of the chief complaints against Jesus was that he was not religious enough, and the main reason was because he got involved in the mess of other people's lives.

He got involved, He got involved, He got involved.

Happier in the dark

Jesus was salt **and** Light. The very presence of Jesus lit up any situation. Not everyone likes the light. Lift up a rock, and the beetles underneath don't say – oh that's nice, a bit of sunlight we'll take some of that. They scurry off to another dark place to hide. When Jesus came with his light, some basked in it and others scurried off back into the darkness.

John 3v19 says that "The Light has come into the world, but men loved darkness more than light, because their deeds were evil". Some people seek light and others like the darkness because they know what they are doing is wrong and they don't want it exposed.

People live in the dark because the devils a liar. Ever since that first lie, where the Devil is portrayed as a snake in a garden, he has continued to lie and deceive generation after generation to keep people in the dark. He's a liar **and** a robber.

A robber usually operates in the dark, where he can move around without being seen. The devil, is a robber. Do we understand that? He robs people. He robs them of good health, he robs them of their true value and worth, robs them of hope. With his deceit and lies he robs them of their eternal destiny in Christ.

We have the solution to the darkness, we have the light. We have the antidote to the devil, we have Jesus in us. Greater is he than is in us than he that is the world.

Is being Salt & Light – the same as Evangelism

So what holds us back from reaching out to others of being salt and light in the World.

One things many Christians fear is the E word. Evangelism. Before Jesus left his disciples he gave them what we call the great commission that ¹⁸*And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. ¹⁹Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in [the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age."* [Matthew 28v18-20]

We worry that this means now and again we have to make a quick trip outside of our comfort zones, say some awkward words about Jesus to some-one, in a way which makes you both feel uncomfortable , then return quickly back to normal life, thinking that didn't feel good but at least I've done some evangelism. This type of sharing is to some extent guilt driven. That is not what Jesus is talking about here, when he asks us to be Salt & Light.

LOVE: Instead what we are called to is a type of sharing which is more holistic and is driven by love. Like Jesus we must be motivated by love, to get involved in people's lives, help them and support them, enjoy special times with them, whether or not they become Christians.

Before any religious activity, our lives are to bear the stamp of profound love. To be a follower of Jesus is to be dominated by love. We may not know our Bibles well, we might be timid and unsure of ourselves, but we have arms and hearts that were meant to be used. When our lives are characterised by respect and love for those that God puts in front of us every day. One of the challenges in showing Gods love to others, is to look past their emotional baggage and look into their hearts, see how God loves them and values them. When our lives are characterised by the love of Christ, then we can begin to interest them in the Gospel message that we believe in.

We do well to remember too, that when we share what we believe we are not trying to convince someone of our own ideas and emotions, but what we are sharing is the ageless truth about the person and work of Jesus.

CHRIST IN US: Jesus got involved in the mess. Because he got involved, the demoniac was able to chill out in his right mind, the leper could go back to his community with fresh skin, Tax-collectors, Samaritans and Romans could rejoice that their lives had been transformed by the love of Jesus.

The good news is that now Jesus is in us. He can still get involved in the mess of people's lives, but he does it now through **us**. The Holy Spirit makes Jesus alive to **us**, and nourishes him in **us**, so the presence of Christ grows in **us** as we allow the Holy Spirit in to feed his presence.. Because his presence is now in us, he is part of what we do. Whatever our lives intersects with, so does Jesus. Whoever we touch, Jesus touches. We do not simply speak the Gospel, we are the Gospel, we are Good News! When we speak these truths into dark areas, it is **his** light we are shining and reflecting. When we abide somewhere and help some-one, it his salt that we are spreading. God works as powerfully through our non-verbal actions as he does through what we say.

There will be no lasting value in anything we do with Jesus, any ministry we have, unless Gods Spirit is central to do what we do. If the Holy Spirit is not working through the words that I speak today, then I have wasted my time and your time. The truths in the Gospel, make interesting reading, but is the Holy Spirit that brings transformation through those words. We must pray first for a renewal of the Holy Spirit in our lives as we seek to be salt and light, and then for the Spirit to be active in the lives of those we are sharing with. In a mysterious way our prayers free up Gods Spirit to move, and we see lives transformed including our own

When we find ourselves in situations that seem beyond our limits, we must not hesitate because we feel inadequate. We shouldn't need to complain about our limited resources. God tells us he is in our weakness. Just like Jesus putting his salt on a boys lunch pack and feeding a great crowd, Gods spirit can take and multiply what we have. When Jesus touches anything, it is blessed. This presence of Christ through his Holy Spirit brings us his power and ability **to use our limited resources in his**

unlimited ways. . It is as we take on the Holy Spirit, it as we become more like Jesus, it as he let him multiply our feeble efforts, that we become Salt and Light to a hurting world.

RADICAL: The Pharisees understood holiness in terms of keeping strict laws, ceremonial purification and separation from the masses. That is what they thought was Holiness. Jesus demonstrated holiness in a completely different way, by **radical identification** with people but with a life that had a **radical difference**. That is the model for us. We get involved with anyone and everyone that Jesus wants us to reach out to, get involved in the muck and bullets of their lives, whilst being Christ-like, being different to them, by reflecting the love and compassion of Jesus into their lives.

Our lives that we present to them should be ones of **obedience** to God, behaving in the ways that he has shown us. Obedience comes from the Latin root '**to listen**'. We listen to God first, take our lead from him, and get involved. Jesus said as an intro the parable of the wise and foolish men – (Luke 6v46) Why do you call me Lord Lord and yet don't obey me ? Luke 6v46. We need to get involved, but we have standards he wants us to keep. We are to be in the world but not of it.

For me that has meant accepting invites to stag parties in Blackpool, Ibiza, and Dublin and sharing those great times with the lads, but opting out on some activities and locations such as the bars with topless waitresses. I have had some great conversations about faith during those stag dos. The lads accept me and love for me for differences. I always feel privileged to be asked to their family occasions, birthdays, christenings, and weddings etc, but also the hard times and messy times, funerals and court appearances, to have the opportunity to go and share his presence with them whatever the occasion.

A two-way blessing: What happens when you get involved in sharing your life and Gods love with others, is that you are **as** affected by your encounter with them as they are by their encounter with God through you. It is not just their needs that get met, but it is your needs also that are met. Those that I have had long-term friendships with that I met from my street-work, may still regard me as 'the Christian' or 'Kev the Rev', but I always feel that they have blessed me, more than I have blessed them. But none of it would have happened, if I hadn't got involved, if I hadn't tried.

We can not impact people's lives if we keep our salt in the salt-shaker and our light under a bowl

Estate work

I spent nearly 30 years doing voluntary Christian Youthwork, most of it was Church based, and I was fortunate to see saw many young people come to faith and baptised. I regarded that as evangelism,. However through a bizarre set of circumstances I found myself doing what I never thought I would, and that was ministering out on the streets of an estate, and seeing no-one get baptised. I had to re-evaluate and I came to regard this time as a 'salt and light ministry', as I tried to get alongside the underbelly of Cheltenham society and love them in Jesus' name.

One such man was Jonny, who I met through his teenage children. He had had 16 kids, and most had been in some trouble with the Police. I knew his 5 youngest, and attended court with two of them. Week by week I reached out to his teens, and ran errands for Jonny. His door was always open to me. It was a door not many non-family went through, and I even got pulled over by the Police once just for visiting him. I felt so inadequate on those streets, and made many mistakes, Jonny became house-bound with just one half of one lung working, and on one beautiful night in his untidy and strong smelling council house, he sang me Silent Night from memory, not just one verse, but every verse faultlessly. He actually had a lovely voice. Then with tears in his eyes and in mine, Jonny who used to regard himself an atheist, told me that I was Jesus to him, and he meant it. Kevin, you are Jesus.

At the time I felt very uncomfortable with his words, but that is exactly what we are called to be, Christ-like, to look like Jesus on Earth to those that don't know Jesus. God knew my heart, he knew I was not trying to rob him of his glory. I was doing what he wanted and being seen as Christ-like on the estate.

There were times on the streets, when I felt totally helpless and vulnerable, surrounded by crime, hopelessness, boredom and anger. When we let people inside and see us with our pain and our problems they are more likely to sense God, it is when we are false and try to cover up our faults that they only see us and not God. So it is often in our human failures and vulnerabilities that we can shine most for Jesus, when we are just giving it a go despite our weaknesses.

DANCE The Gospel message is not something to listen to, then do nothing. If we are obedient to Jesus, then we will be out there living the Gospel. The Gospel is not music to listen to, its music to **dance** to.

One of my side-lines, is that I DJ at parties. But you get people who turn up to a party and say I don't dance – I let the wife do that. In fact I don't like buffet food, because of the germs, and I'm not really a conversationalist. Wow ! You're the light and soul of the party, so glad you got invited.. They stand there on the dance floor with a beer. I feel like shouting through the microphone – if you are on the dance floor then dance. Just try it. Move your feet , shake your shoulders, wiggle your bottom, do something that vaguely resembles a dance. Just try it. Don't get put off by John Travolta or the winner of 'Strictly come dancing' who are on the floor with you. You don't need their acceptance. I am the DJ. I am in control of this party. I am not playing ambient elevator music as a background for your chitter chatter, this is dance music to dance too. I don't care if you are a great dancer or a rubbish one, I just want you to dance. So **DANCE**

You are not going to embarrass Jesus by trying to be salt and light for him, and not doing it like an expert. He just wants his children, you and me, to be with him giving it a go.

Kids are normally embarrassed by their parents. In fact some say that embarrassing your children is an important part of parenting. There was one family wedding when I was up on the dance floor going for it, pulling some seriously funny shapes. If there was a European competition for Dad dancing I would stand a good chance of a medal. There weren't many dancing, but then I looked around and to my absolute delight my two boys had overcome shyness, and had got up on the dance floor with me and were dancing in an equally silly way, just like me. I was so proud. My children were on the dance floor with me, trying to copy my dance

Jesus puts you on his great dance floor, and he just wants you to give it a go. **DANCE**

You can listen to a sermon, or go to a rousing conference, but unless you let it make a difference to your life, unless you start living it out, then you are largely wasting your time. Similarly you don't just read your bible, you look for opportunities to put it into practice.

TRY – do not fear

I was listening to Jordan Seng a few weeks ago, who runs Bluewater mission in Hawaii. He had a jumper on, because he was experiencing a British summer not a Hawaiian one, and told us that he had his church motto written on his T shirt. He took off his jumper, and there was just one word on it – TRY. I love that as a Church motto. TRY.

It is the fear of failure that cripples us. The bible often says do not fear / fear not / don't be afraid. It is claimed that there are 365 such references in the bible for every day of the year. So every day of the year we can be told in a different way, not to be afraid of failing, not to be afraid of getting embarrassed, not be afraid of finding your words dry up, not to be afraid of letting Jesus down. He just wants you to have a go, to try, to be using what he has given you, your salt and light, on those he has put in your path. He doesn't want to dance alone, he wants you on the dance floor with him

Get out on the dance floor and try some dancing. It does not matter if you look silly. Jesus doesn't mind, he is just proud that you are out that you are out there with him giving it a go.

The disciples were in a boat at the ridiculous time of day between 3am and 6am, when all peoples should really be in their beds. I recently drove back from the airport at that time and the light is weird just before dawn. The disciples were not sure what they were seeing, as a figure appeared in the semi-light on the water. Some-one screams 'It's a ghost'. Jesus said (again), Do not fear. It's me – just strolling across the lake as one does this time of day! " If it's really you" says Peter "You order me to come out on the water and walk to you". I like his thinking – if he does in his strength he'll sink, but if Jesus commands it then anything is possible. I guess Jesus must have smiled. He wanted Peter on the water with him, went along with it. "Come" he commands. Whilst the others thinking – I'm not getting involved with this, I'll just sink back into the shadows of the boat, and hope he doesn't call us all out. If Peter is mad enough to do it then that's up to him. What does Peter do? He tries. He steps out on the water and actually starts walking it. But the wind was stronger than he had thought and the waves higher, and he starts to lose his nerve, takes his eyes off of Jesus and starts to sink – " Aaah save me". Does Jesus let him sink? Of course not. Jesus reached out and grabbed him.

Did Peter succeed or fail? He didn't achieve what he had set out to do, but did that really matter? No, he tried, and he walked a few more steps on water than he had ever done before, and he walked more steps than anyone hiding in the boat. Let's get out on the water.

The world needs us.

We live in a world, hungry for meaning. Many who are seekers, who want to find the truth.

There are those that need his **light** reflected into their darkness, to expose the lies that the robber, the devil, has spoken to them, and kept them all this time from faith in Jesus.

They need spiritual **antiseptic** for their wounded lives, they need his presence in their lives as a **preservative** from going rotten in a world that opposes truth, they need **flavouring** with his freedom, with his joy, with his mercy, with his grace and his love.

They need you, to be Christ-like to them, the Jesus in you calling out to the Jesus working in them, to be in their world, but not of it, giving it a try and ,doing your best to share Gods love with them. Then being ready when the right opportunity arises to lead them into faith.

Jesus is already out there, already working in people's lives around you, but he wants you out there with him.

Don't be afraid, step out of the boat, step onto the dance floor.

Not because you have to, but because you want to in response to all the love that he has shown you and continues showing you.

Go on TRY. That's all he's asking. TRY.

Amen