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## Sent ... as Salt and Light

### 1. Horns of Dilemma

- You may have heard of the expression – Horns of Dilemma
  - It's a metaphor used in philosophy to explain the dilemma of having to choose between two things, both of which are unpleasant, or difficult
  - Each horn represents the opposing options that a person is wrestling with
  
- Example – Coronavirus
  - Australian F1 grand prix due to be raced today in Melbourne
    - Victorian Govt spent \$60 million backing the event
    - All the F1 teams have flown in from Europe with 42 tonnes of cars, and equipment
    - Each team has 60-70 people per team they have arranged and paid for flights, accommodation, meals, and transport
    - Multiply that by 10 for the number of F1 teams there are ... and that is a huge, huge operation
  - Yet Coronavirus meant there was very real risk the race wouldn't go ahead for the health and safety of the teams and crowds
    - Dilemma for the Vic government and other bodies running the race ...
    - Do we cancel the race and
      - lose all that money we've invested
      - refund ticket sales
      - send teams home who have each spent 100'000s to get there
    - Or do we go ahead and risk worsening the spread of coronavirus in Victoria and all the other places where people have travelled from
  - Dilemma!
    - Ultimately, they decided to cancel the race
  
- One of the horns of dilemma that the Christian church has had to deal with over the centuries is how it can be culturally relevant to the secular world around it ... but at the same time not become like the world
- And as often happens in circumstances like this ... the church has oscillated between the two horns!
- In order avoid being influenced and led astray by secular worldviews ... one response of Christians in the past has been run away and hide in their Christian ghetto
  - Hermits in the early years of the church were known to live on poles
  - The monasteries of the Middle Ages was an attempt to do this > like this one in Meteora Greece; or

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- Amish church like this > live super conservative > no car just horse and buggy > but own little communities > very isolated and little interaction with the world around them
  - When Christians have done that in the past / do that today ... the outside world sees them as completely irrelevant
    - because while they might be living godly lives and holding to biblical truth ... if they're not present and active in the world around them ... they may well not exist
  - And so, the secular world just ignores them and gets on with their own lives
  
  - On the other hand, ... in order to be culturally relevant to the secular world ... many Christians and churches have swung to the opposite end of the spectrum
    - They become **too** enmeshed in the ways of the world
    - They hang out with and live like unbelievers in order to connect with and reach unbelievers
    - They allow biblical truth to be watered down so as not to offend people in the hope that will lower the barrier non-Christians engaging with them
  
  - When Christians and churches become like this ... they are just as irrelevant as the believers who bunker down in their Christian ghettos
    - Reason is because their message and their life become so indistinct and inseparable from everyone else, the secular world around them thinks
      - "What's the point?"
      - "These guys offer nothing different than what I have has already"
  
  - And so the church is faced with this dilemma
    - How can a follower of Jesus live in way that means they're not irrelevant?
    - What can Christians do to ensure they live **in** the world ... but not **of** the world?
  
  - That's where our passage takes us this morning
  - In Matthew 5, Jesus has been preaching his famous sermon on the mount
  - In it he's outlining what life looks like when people come under the Lordship of Jesus and live for Him
  - In 5:1-12 Jesus teaches these famous Beatitudes
    - Blessed are those who are ...
      - Poor in spirit > mourn over our sin > meek towards God > hunger and thirst for righteousness > merciful > pure in heart > peacemakers

- To live this type of life is counter-cultural
  - And when you live this way you're inevitably going to butt heads with the world around you
  - Which means you're going to be persecuted and slandered as Jesus says in v10-12
- So the temptation for the Christian then is to avoid the world
  - Not to mix with those who have different world views
  - Not antagonize others with this way of life
  - Just bunker down > stick together as a Christian community
- Which is why Jesus goes on immediately after this in v13-16 to say
  - You are the salt of the earth and the light of the world
  - The two metaphors of salt and light show us how Jesus wants his followers to live in the world
    - Not to be so emmeshed in the world that they are no different from the world
    - But on the other hand, ... not to be totally separate from the world
- Instead ... Jesus teaches us that if you're going to be my disciple ... one who is sent out with the life-giving message of the gospel ... then you need to be
  - In the world ... but not of the world
  - That is ... you are to be salt and light to those around you

## PRAY

### 2. Sent as Salt

- So Jesus starts off saying to his disciples ... 'you are the salt of the earth' (v13)
- What's that mean?
- In biblical times salt was commonly used for preserving meat
- In order to preserve meat ... salt would be rubbed into the meat prevent it from decaying
  - Sailors and explorers used to do this on long voyages or expeditions
- Jesus is saying to the disciples ...
  - When you live like disciples of mine
  - When you live out these beatitudes
    - Then ... you are the salt of the earth ...

- That is ... disciples who live for me and the kingdom help preserve the world from rotting & decaying
- And so like salt ... Jesus followers must be rubbed into the world to preserve what is good and oppose what is corrupt
  
- **Application**
- As you live your life ...
  - **in** the world, but not **of** the world ...
  - a life that's characterised by living for Jesus
  - you preserve the good and hold back the decay
  
- As Nathaniel grow up and learns to heed Jesus call, obey his commands and seek to live for him and his kingdom ... then he will be the salt of the earth
- Don Carson writes
  - Throughout history Christians have spearheaded movements for justice and righteousness around prison reform, medical care, trade unions, abolition of slavery, abolition of child labour, establishment of orphanages, reform of penal code, establishment of life insurance companies
  
- You don't have to be a high-powered political leader or CEO or church leader to be the salt of the earth
  - Whatever sphere God has placed you in ... that's the place you've been rubbed into to be its preserving salt
    - a parent at school
    - worker in the city
    - mum in mothers group
    - coach of your kids sports team
    - member of a local club
  - In that place, with those people ... God has placed you to be the salt of the earth
    - In 12 years time when Nathaniel's at high school ... he's be the salt amongst those students
  
- What might it look like to be salt of the earth in your context:
  - Treat people equally regardless of their ethnic background or pay packet
  - Speaking up against sexism
  - Avoiding gossip and be willing to shut it down when it's happening around you

- Watch what you drink so that you don't get drunk ... and so honour God with your words and actions
- No assuming the worst of someone or a situation
- Be generous with your money
- Seeking justice
- Welcoming the refugee
- Loving your neighbour
- Being different to your work colleagues who lie to their boss and take 'sickies'
- Being the encouraging parent on the sideline and challenging those who aren't
- Etc

### **SALTLESS CHURCH**

- However, Jesus not only exhorts his disciples to be the 'salt of the earth'
- v13 – he warns also them ...
  - *'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 by men.'*
- In Jesus day ... there was an unlimited supply of salt in Israel from the shores of Dead Sea (Salt Sea)
  - The salt around the Dead Sea was like a rock salt
  - Often the outer layers contained various impurities ... which made the salt tasteless
  - As a result, ... much of this outer layer was worthless and thrown away
- But if Christians are to be the salt that the world needs ...
  - Then they must remain distinctive / different ... just as salt must remain salty
  - They can't be contaminated by the impurities of the world
- **Application**
- Your influence in and on our world depends on you being distinct from the world ... not identical to the world
  - Because if you and I just blend in and are indistinguishable from the secular world around us ... according to Jesus we're just as useless as tasteless salt
- Michael Hart wrote a book called 'The 100 Most Influential Persons in History'

- He ranked
  - #1 – Muhammad
  - #2 – Isaac Newtown
  - #3 – Jesus Christ
- You want to know why?
- He said
  - If Christians actually lived out what Jesus actually taught them to do ... he said, *"I would have had no hesitation in placing Jesus first in this book."*
  
- So, it's worthwhile asking ourselves ...
  - Is there any difference in my materialism than that of the world?
  - Are there any distinctions between the level of comfort and happiness I chase after than my non-Christian neighbour?
  - Are my ethics any different to secular norms?
  - Is my compassion for the needy any greater than others?
- In other words, ... as Michael Hart put it ... are you and I living out what Jesus teaches?
  
- Your answer to that question will reveal whether or not ... as the salt of the earth ... you're penetrating into this world and having the preserving effect Jesus calls on his followers to have?

### 3. Sent as Light

- Jesus goes on to use another metaphor to describe the disciples influence in the world when they live distinctive, counter-cultural lives
- v14 – says 'You are the light of the world'
  
- Of course, this was how Jesus himself in the gospels
  - *"... I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life."* (John 8:12)<sup>1</sup>
  
- His point was as the Son of God ... be brought light to this world as he revealed the truth about God to those around him
- As people come to
  - See that truth
  - put their trust in Jesus and
    - they are saved

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<sup>1</sup> When you trace the idea of light through the Bible ... God's people are always to be a light to those around them. In the OT ... as Israel faithfully obeyed the Law ... they would be live such holy and distinct lives that they would be a light to the Gentiles<sup>1</sup>. The surrounding nations would see this, and God's name be glorified

- they will not perish ... but have eternal life
- But here Jesus is speaking to his disciples and he says
  - **'YOU'** are the light of the world'
  - "As you live distinctive lives ... YOU bring light into this world"
  - "As you live authentic, God honouring lives ... you expose the darkness > evil > corruption > sin of the world for what it is"
  - "And more significantly ... you shine a light on me - the only hope and light this world has"
- So Jesus exhorts his disciples ...
  - Be the light > shine brightly
  - Let all see you for who you are ... someone who's fair dinkum about calling me their Lord and Saviour
  - Someone whose life mirrors the faith they profess
- And the result of this light in the words of v16 is that people of the world will 'glorify your Father in Heaven'
- This doesn't mean that people will simply say
  - "Gee wizz thank you God for those nice Christians"
- The word 'glorify' literally means – to give glory to / to give praise to
- In other words, ... it means people coming to rightly worship God and enjoy the salvation he offers
- What does Jesus mean by good deeds?
- In general, it means acts of kindness and goodness
- But in the context of the sermon on the mount in which Jesus is teaching at this point in must at least include
  - Being meek
  - Showing mercy
  - Being a peacemaker
  - Valuing marriage
  - Telling the truth
  - Turning the other cheek
  - Loving you enemy
  - Giving to the needy
  - Not judging others
- And so as you do this ... you shine a light into the world that points people to Jesus

- **Illustration - City on a hill**
- Then in v14-15 Jesus gives two great illustrations
- Firstly, he says in v14 ... *"A city on a hill cannot be hidden."*
  - When Jesus talks about a city ... he's not talking about multi-level skyscrapers made of steel and glass
  - He's talking about a town often built out of white limestone or white-washed walls that would gleam in the sun
  - During the night ... its lights make it clear to see
  
- **Illustration – White Towns of Andalusia**
- Liana and I travelled in Spain many years ago
- Explored region of southern Spain called Andalusia > Seville
  - Every 5-10km town appear on horizon
  - Impossible to miss it ... knew exactly where it was and where to go
  - Impossible to hide such a city
  
- So, it is for the person who lives an authentic Christian life
  - It's impossible to hide it
  - They stand out like a city on a hill > there for all to see
  - Its impossible for a disciple of Jesus to be indistinguishable from those among whom they live
  
- **Illustration – Lamp**
- Jesus uses a second illustration in v15 of a lamp
  - v15 –*"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."*
- No electricity in those days > small clay pots with oil in them
  - Light a few lamps > light up the dark rooms of a house
  - Absurd then to light a lamp and hide it under a bowl
  - Because it wouldn't be doing the very thing it was meant to be ... which was lighting up the darkness
  
- Jesus saying to his disciples ... just like a lamp that is hidden under a bowl is useless ... so is a follower of Jesus who does not shine light into the world
  
- Quote – Dietrich Bonhoeffer
  - *'Flight to the invisible is denial of the call. A community of Jesus which hides itself has ceased to follow him'*<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship*, p106



- Jesus exhortation here is ... don't hide your light
  - Live authentic Christian lives so you can BE the light of the world
- **Application**
- What about us here at C@P?
- What are the opportunities for us as a church to be the light of the world to the community around us?
  - Toys n Tucker ...
  - Christmas Food hampers to the needy
  - World Teachers Day morning tea
  - Helping out with Christmas carols here at PSPS
- When we do these things ... get on board, sign up, get involved
  - Help C@P be a light to the world around us here in Peakhurst
- Exploring possibility of partnering with Anglicare Mobile Food Pantry
  - ...
  - Interested see John, Samanthi and Linda
- Because when others see the collective good of Christians at work in the world ... it has the power to draw people to God and the good news of Jesus
  - Show you an example
- **Illustration – Early Church Good Deeds & Plagues**
- Sociologist and non-Christian, Rodney Stark wrote *Discovering God*
- In his chapter on Christianity he writes about the factors that led to the rapid spread of Christianity throughout the Roman Empire
- Stark says one of the main reasons was because of the visible way the Christian church showed genuine love, care and compassion to those in need
- How Christians would do things for others that the pagans wouldn't
- In particular ... how Christians started food programmes, hospitals, orphanages
- Such was the impact of the Christians in their communities ... the church grew from a few thousand followers in Palestine, to a movement of over 31 million believers with the space of 300yrs
- Nothing demonstrates this so vividly as the ways Christians and pagans responded when the plagues struck the Empire as they did in C2<sup>nd</sup> & C3<sup>rd</sup> <sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> AD165 and again in AD251

- The pagan response was panic and retreat
- Those who could, fled to refuge in the countryside
- Ordinary Greeks and Romans who couldn't flee attempted to avoid all contact with victims
- Hence when their first symptoms appeared, victims were thrown out in streets by their own families to join the piles of dead and dying
- But this wasn't how the Christians responded
  - They didn't flee or avoid contact ... but took part in efforts to nurse the sick, not only of their own kind, but pagans as well
  - Some of those who cared for the sick lost their lives as a result
  - But as many as two thirds of those who were nurse who would otherwise have died, lived
- **Application**
- Does that not sound similar to the times we are living in now?
  - Coronavirus is not as deadly as the black plague
  - And we are blessed to have a wonderful medical system now that they didn't then
- But as the world around us reacts to the coronavirus pandemic ... this is a wonderful opportunity to be the light of the world
- Many people in our communities are panicking
  - See this in the way people panic buying toilet paper, hand sanitiser, pasta and rice, and how stock markets are taking a beating
  - As a follower of Jesus, you know that God is sovereign, and he is control ... even of this pandemic
  - You know that sending Jesus to die on a cross for you tells you he's a loving God who seeks after your eternal good
  - That means you can trust him, and you have no need to fear
  - Paul reminds us in Phil 4 ... there is a peace that passes all understanding when we put our trust in Him
  - There is opportunity for you to be the light of the world by being a peaceful presence among those around you who are fearful
- At this time many are speaking and acting in ways that is racist and prejudiced towards people from Asian cultures

- Opportunity for you to shine the light and treat everyone of equal value and dignity because we are all made in the image of God and Jesus died for people of all nations as much as he died for you and me
- We're to love our Asian brothers and sisters even more so at a time when many others are not
  
- Because of the virus, many are having to self-isolate
  - As they do ... you and I have opportunities to love our neighbour
  - This might include phone calls, SMS, meals, visitation if appropriate, picking up / caring for children
  - I love this idea of dropping a note in the letter box of neighbours offering to help
  - A friend of mine is letterbox dropping his street suggesting they start a closed FB so they can remain connected and support each other during this time
  - Here is an opportunity for the community of Christ to shine the light into the darkness of their self-isolation so they don't feel isolated ... but instead feel loved and cared for at a time when they need it the most
  
- Some in our community are fearful of death
  - As a follower of Jesus you have the opportunity to shine light into the darkness about the hope you have in Christ
    - That the resurrection tells you Jesus has conquered death
    - And therefore, death holds no fear for you
    - Because as Paul says in Phil 1:21 – "for me to live is Christ and to die is gain"
  - Therefore, you have the opportunity to point them to the one who can give them hope and conquer their fears ... even in the face of death

#### **4. Conclusion**

- It's interesting that Rodney Stark said that in the days of the Empire, it was impossible for paganism to match the love Christians showed to others
  - Such was the impact that Christians were having on the Roman Empire, Emperor Julian became fearful that Christianity might take over the world by stealth of good works
  - And so he tried to implement a programme of social welfare through his pagan priests and temples ... throwing vast amounts of money, food, wine and other resources at it

- He tried to match the Christians in setting up orphanages, hospitals, food programmes, and visitation programmes
- He wanted to beat the Christians at their own game
- But it failed
- Paganism was utterly incapable for generating the commitment needed to motivate such behaviour
- Why?
  - Because without a doctrine of grace in Greco-Roman religion ... it was almost impossible to convince people to love the unlovely
  - The Christians however had a highly developed idea of God's grace
- What's going to motivate you and I to be salt and light in a decaying and dark world?
- As for those in the plague, so for us ... it's the gospel of grace
  - It's knowing you and I were lost in the darkness of our own sin and brokenness, unable to get out
  - And that Jesus Christ came into the darkness of your life and shone his light of forgiveness and salvation so that you and I might be set free ... so you could come into the light and have eternal life
  - Jesus didn't hide under a bowl in heaven
  - He came to us ... and let his light shine
- And his good deeds weren't just limited to showing compassion, love, kindness, honesty, meekness and humility
- He performed the ultimate deed ... he sacrificed himself on the cross so you can be forgiven and have eternal life
- In this corrupting and dark world ... Jesus sends his followers out to be salt and light of the world ... that people might see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven
- May his grace to you in Jesus move you and sustain you to do that this week

## **PRAY**