

Grounded in the Gospel
 xv. Have salt among yourselves
 Joshua 24:14–24; Mark 9:49–50

“But as for me and my household, we will serve the LORD!”

This passage in Joshua 24 has always been one that has struck me.

Joshua has led the Israelites into the Promised Land. He has done all that he was called to do. Undertaking much of this at an advanced age.¹ As he is nearing the end of his life he gathers the tribes at Shechem and he addresses them. He does two things: he first recounts what God has done for them, and then challenges them.

And the challenge is one that I go back to time and again, and that I want us to examine.

Joshua describes the history of what God has done, and this is detailed from the time of the flood, escaping from Egypt right up to where they are at that point in time.

They have crossed into the Promised Land, have conquered many nations and taken cities.

Joshua 24:13 : “So I gave you a land on which you did not toil and cities you did not build; and you live in them and eat from vineyards and olive groves that you did not plant.”

And then comes the challenge. Fear the Lord and serve him sincerely. Put away all other gods which your fathers served in Egypt. And if it seems evil to serve the Lord then choose who you will serve, the gods your fathers served or the gods of the Amorites where you are living now.

“But as for me and my household, we will serve the LORD!”

A decision made and declared by Joshua.

But hear again what follows. The people are quick to say that they too will serve the Lord remembering what he has done for them.

Joshua doesn't take this at face value. He warns the people. “Be careful”. God is a holy God and a jealous God. If you say you will serve him but turn and serve other gods he will turn on you.

But the people say they will serve God. And Joshua then says that they are to be witnesses against themselves. And a stone was set to mark this covenant.

Joshua 24:27: “See!” he said to all the people. “This stone will be a witness against us. It has heard all the words the Lord has said to us. It will be a witness against you if you are untrue to your God.”

This passage has struck me because it is easier to say that I will serve the Lord than it is to stick to this commitment.

Can you relate to this?

I am not talking of abandoning my faith or my beliefs. I am talking about living this commitment 24/7. Remembering to pause and to pray. To pause and to give thanks. To pause and to serve those around me. It is often difficult to do this when one is absorbed by the challenge of living and surviving amidst the busyness and the noise of this world.

Can you relate to this?

Joshua recounted to the people what God had done for them to that point. Now - we look from a New Testament perspective. We do that in our Sunday services and wherever and whenever we pause to think on this. In prayer, in fellowship, bible study or in times of serving or being served.

¹ See Joshua 13:1

We come into a saving relationship with Jesus as we respond to what has been done for us.²

But if you are like me, then you and I need reminding of our commitment to be Christ followers.

We need reminding quite regularly.

We need to be reminded that the knowledge of what has been done for us – the Gospel message, and the fact of our commitment to be Christ followers, needs to be shared and to be reflected in how we live.

And we need reminding that we are not alone in striving to do this.

The passage given to me for this week's message was Mark 9:30-50. Some 20 verses packed with a number of events and teachings. It seemed to me as I considered these verses that it was a passage for a series of sermons not a single sermon.

- It starts with Jesus teaching his disciples. Telling again that he would be betrayed and killed but would rise again. The disciples do not understand and they are afraid to ask Jesus to explain.³
- When they get to Capernaum Jesus asks the disciples what they have been talking about. But the disciples remain quiet because they had been talking about who among them was the greatest. Jesus draws a child to himself and says whoever welcomes one of these little ones welcomes me.⁴
- The disciples then say that they stopped a man driving out demons in the name of Jesus because he was not one of us. And Jesus tells them not to do this because whoever is not against us is for us.⁵
- Finally Jesus warns against causing one of the little ones who believe in him to sin. And he describes the terrible consequences. He says it will be better to be maimed and blind in life than to be whole in hell where the fire doesn't go out.

Deep teaching worth digging into.

But what stuck with me was what is recorded in the last two verses, just 33 words:

⁴⁹Everyone will be salted with fire.

⁵⁰"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."

The sentence "Everyone will be salted by fire" stands between the warnings given by Jesus in the preceding verses and the encouragement that follows in the final verse.

What does this sentence mean?

A writer describes this statement as a highly compressed mixed metaphor.⁶ One to be seen as descriptive rather than precisely literal.

It applies to everyone. It says that everyone will be salted with fire. The transitional role between the preceding threats and the encouragement that follows seems to indicate that it contains elements of both.

What are these elements?

² Ephesians 2:4-5. 4 But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, 5 made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions – it is by grace you have been saved.

³ [Mark 9: 31-32](#)

⁴ [Mark 9:37](#)

⁵ [Mark 9:38-41](#)

⁶ D A Carson – NIV Zondervan Study Bible footnote page 2034. The New Matthew Henry Commentary says at page 1592 these last two verses are difficult and interpreters do not agree on their sense.

The first is that everyone who enters hell will suffer its flames. Here salted indicates destruction.⁷

The second is that of being salted with the purifying fire of the Holy Spirit.⁸ “Salted” so that disciples/Christ followers could offer their bodies, themselves, as living sacrifices.⁹

A writer says this:¹⁰

“Our chief concern is to present ourselves as living sacrifices to the grace of God, and to that end ... being corrupt ... (we) must somehow be salted. We must have the fragrance of grace in our souls. Those who have the salt of grace must show that they have it.”

The idea of salting offerings would have been known to the listeners. We read in Leviticus for example:¹¹

“13 Season all your grain offerings with salt. Do not leave the salt of the covenant of your God out of your grain offerings; add salt to all your offerings.”

And then comes the warning and the instruction.

The warning: “Salt is good, but if it loses its saltiness, how can you make it salty again?”

Salt was good, and was used as a preservative and a disinfectant. While it was serving its purpose it was good. But the question is posed “... if it loses its saltiness, how can you make it salty again?”

This I believe is a shift from a consideration of the salt itself, to the salted followers of Christ. Followers who are called to be salt and light in this world.¹² The call is to ensure that Christ followers do not isolate themselves from other people but are disciples in the midst of a fallen world, are lights in a world of darkness.

What good are disciples if they are isolated or their commitment to following Christ wanes?

The warning is that we must not be isolated, nor allow our commitment to wane. Remember Joshua. The commitment is one thing. Persevering in living that commitment is more difficult.

And so the passage goes on to say:

“Have salt among yourselves, and be at peace with each other.”

The call is have salt and to remember this. To make sure that we do not lose that saltiness but live it 24/7.

But it goes further.

We are instructed to have salt among ourselves. I understand this to mean that firstly we are not to be isolated. Secondly we are to encourage each other in fellowship to retain and share our saltiness. To make sure that it does not lose its flavour or its effectiveness.

We can't do this alone. Burning coals together give light and heat. But remove a single coal and place it on its own and it will soon lose its glow and its warmth.

Have salt among yourselves, and be at peace with each other.

Not only are we to have salt among ourselves but we are to be at peace with one another.

⁷ [Genesis 19:24-26](#). Salt land is a metaphorical name for a desolate no man's land, as attested in Psalms 107:34, Job 39:6, and Jeremiah 17:6. The land of defeated cities was salted to consecrate them to a god and curse their re-population, as illustrated in Judges 9:45. See: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Salt_in_the_Bible

⁸ [Mark 1:8](#)

⁹ Romans 12:1-2. 12 Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God – this is your true and proper worship. 2 Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is – his good, pleasing and perfect will.

¹⁰ The New Matthew Henry Commentary at page 1592

¹¹ [Leviticus 2:13](#), [Deuteronomy 29:23](#), [Ezra 6:9](#) and [Ezekiel 43:24](#)

¹² [Matthew 5:15-16](#). DA Carson footnote page 1938

This is to be at peace with our fellow believers as we interact with them. But also with all others we encounter. Our conversations are to be always full of grace, seasoned with salt.¹³

In the context of the times the listeners would have appreciated the link between salt and being at peace.

There are passages that indicate salt as a covenant of friendship.¹⁴

A writer¹⁵ records that

"the salt covenant is much more than a covenant of friendship. It is an irrevocable pledge and promise of fidelity. Those who have taken salt together would rather die before they would break their covenant."

So the instruction was not only to remember to have salt, but to use the salt as the goodwill that preserves and seasons positive and strong relationships.

What do you take from these passages and what is the challenge? The first step I believe is to critically look at whether you are dividing your life into sacred and secular compartments. The sacred is when you are in church, when you pray, and when you read the bible. The secular is when you are at work, socialising with friends, shopping and being on holiday. You may find that you connect your faith and the Holy Spirit with the sacred and not the secular. But pray about this and consider this¹⁶.

I said as I started that we are to live our lives as Christ followers but that we are not alone in striving to do this. And we need to remember this.

Jesus said¹⁷ "And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another advocate to help you and be with you forever."

In the Amplified bible: "And I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Helper (Comforter, Advocate, Intercessor—Counselor, Strengthener, Standby), to be with you forever."

David writes in Psalm 139: "Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence?" And he answers his own question by saying that wherever he goes "you are there".

David is encouraging us to see our lives differently. To see that there is no divide between secular and sacred. That in every encounter whether at home, our work, our community the Holy Spirit is present and active. And the Holy Spirit is there to comfort, to strengthen, to counsel to intercede and to be with you forever.

Trevor Hudson writes¹⁸ this:

"We need to learn to "notice" the movements of the Spirit within and around us. We should never split our spirituality into two compartments. The Holy Spirit is present in every breath we take, every task we do, every bite of food we eat, every hug we receive, and every person we meet, always seeking to bring us more alive to the mystery of God in every part of our existence."

This makes an enormous difference. We are not left on our own to strive to be salt and not to lose our saltiness. We are not alone and we can draw on the strength, wisdom and support of the Holy Spirit.

¹³ Colossians 4:6. *"Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone."*

¹⁴ 2 Chronicles 13:5–13:5. *5Do you not know that the Lord God of Israel gave the kingship over Israel forever to David and his sons by a covenant of salt? And Numbers 18:19–18:19. 19All the holy offerings that the Israelites present to the Lord I have given to you, together with your sons and daughters, as a perpetual due; it is a covenant of salt forever before the Lord for you and your descendants as well.*

¹⁵ Bishop K.C. Pillai, from India.

¹⁶ Trevor Hudson – Pause for Pentecost page 47.

¹⁷ John 14:6

¹⁸ Trevor Hudson – Pause for Pentecost page 47.

And we do this through acknowledging the presence of the Holy Spirit with us and within us 24/7.
God with us here and now at the centre of our lives, not on the fringes.
God with us as we live our lives.

With this knowledge take time to pause and to pray. To pause and to give thanks. To pause and to serve those around you. Pray for opportunities to share the Gospel and to let your life reflect that you are a follower of Christ. We often sing the hymn Speak O Lord as we come to you.

Listen to the words which sum up beautifully what I want you to hear:

““Speak, O Lord, as we come to You
To receive the food of Your Holy Word.
Take Your truth, plant it deep in us;
Shape and fashion us in Your likeness,
That the light of Christ might be seen today
In our acts of love and our deeds of faith.
Speak, O Lord, and fulfil in us
All Your purposes for Your glory.

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