

Destination: Kingdom of God

For the past week, we have been talking about finding your location. I want to talk about something that lies right at the heart of what that means and who we want to be as a church, and that is the idea of being “Kingdom Bringers.”

Someone who makes a difference for the Kingdom of God.

- Nobody is picked to be on a team and then wants to sit on the bench.
- Nobody gives a gift to somebody else and then hopes that it is never opened.
- Nobody devotes years of service to a company and then plans that when they retire, nobody will notice.

We want to make a difference...and not just for ourselves.

Nobody hopes that at their memorial service someone will stand up and say,

“He worked hard to be successful; he did a good job of acquiring power and money. He was anxious and driven and self-preoccupied and polite and respectable.”

We want to leave the world a little changed. When it's time to go, we want someone to say... "My life is a little richer, my world is a little bigger, my faith is a little stronger, I'm a better person because this person walked the planet for a while. She made a difference. He changed my life."

We don't want to be space-takers. We don't want to be resume-builders. We want to be Difference Makers for God.

This is one of the most important things about you- You were made by God to want to count—to want to matter.

But at times, that plan gets "junked up" by sin and ego, but we were created by God to make a difference.

Did everybody here get some salt when you came in? Just hang onto it for a little bit, if you would.

If you're visiting, you might be wondering, is this some kind of Autumn Ridge thing? Do they give out a different condiment every week?

We all got this to help us remember what Jesus said one day to a group of His followers:

You are the salt of the earth. (Matthew 5:13)

And to understand what Jesus meant by this, you have to understand that salt played a much more central role in Jesus' world than it does in ours.

Does anyone know what the number one use of salt in the United States today is? More than 51% of all salt that is produced here is used to de-ice roads.

That was not true for Jesus. When He came to earth, He did not come to a place where roads were covered by ice and snow, because He knew that it was not God's will that people should live in such places. These are stupid places to live! But I'm getting off track.

Only 8% of all salt produced in America is used as table salt and, even then, we're a little hesitant about it.

Some of you avoided this when you came in, because it might cause health problems. You're on a low-sodium, salt-substitute diet.

My wife jokes... because I'm from a "Real" Midwestern Scandinavian family, and we always avoided salt because it might give food flavor.

Ketchup is a spicy food to my family of origin!

But in the ancient world, salt was a different story. People discovered that there was something about salt that was a preservative.

It kept decay and corruption from setting in. In the ancient world, dead bodies laying around were much more common than they are in ours, and decay was a horror.

There's a verse in the Psalms that says:

You will not allow your holy one to see decay. (Psalms 16:10)

People discovered that there is something about salt that arrests decay and corruption, and so it was almost like magic.

They found that if they used salt, they could preserve food for times of famine, so that it literally contributed to an outcome of life or death.

They discovered that it was a purifying agent, because it destroys bacteria.

They discovered that it brings delight to people who are eating, because there are special taste buds on your tongue that are designed to respond to salt.

So salt became highly prized.

Most of the ancient cities in Italy, including Rome, were founded on salt works. Romans used it to pay soldiers with salt.

Some of you may know that the Latin word for salt is the word “sal.” That’s where the word “salary” comes from, because salt was used to pay soldiers.

That’s where we get the expression, He (she) is worth his (her) salt.

In *Salt: A World History*, a book that was actually on the *New York Times* bestseller list at one time, Mark Kurlansky :

“In the ancient world, salt was one of the most common factors that provoked and financed wars.”

People went to war over salt. In fact, that’s why we say, when one country is attacked, that it has been “assaulted.” (I actually just made that up... sorry!)

We can’t understand what Jesus is saying unless we understand that in the ancient world, salt was prized.

Plato said that salt was “Dear to the gods”.

Homer said that it was “A divine substance”.

It was prized stuff—currency. They went to war over it. Empires were built around it.

And Jesus, when He's talking to an ordinary group of people—says that God's plan to protect the world from decay and corruption, to purify it and bring whatever flavor and zest it's going to have, is... you.

“You are the salt of the earth.”

. That's what Jesus says. That's staggering Good News! That's hard for most of us to believe.

We are the salt of the earth. But there are sobering implications to this, one of which is: Salt does not exist for its own sake.

When was the last time that you went to someone's home for dinner and said to the host, “This is great salt! I wish we would have salt like this at the Emmaus Dinner? We definitely have to switch brands of salt!”

Salt doesn't call attention to itself. I don't have great abilities in the kitchen, I used to think that all salt was the same, but in my preparations for this talk, I've found out that it's not the same.

There is gourmet salt, rock salt, and sea salt—special kinds of salt. But in Jesus' day, salt was just salt.

It doesn't call attention to itself. Nobody gets hungry and says, I think I'll go home and have a bowl of salt.

Salt's calling is to lose itself in something more glorious than itself, and then it has fulfilled its destiny.

But, if you're salt, you've got to get out of the packet.

And if you do, one Kingdom Bringer can change the world.

In the Book – “Through the Valley of the Kwai”, by Ernest Gordon, Gordon tells about his life as a British army officer captured by the Japanese in WWII. He was put in a labor camp that was forced to build a railroad through the jungle in Thailand under unbelievable conditions.

Has anyone ever heard of the movie “ *on the River Kwai?*” That was actually a true story, and that movie was based on the setting in which this story happened.

- The prisoners had to work in 120° heat;
- their bodies were stung by insects and ravaged by disease;
- their feet were bare and cut by stones;
- if a prisoner appeared to be slacking off, a guard would beat him to death or decapitate him in full view of the other prisoners.

Otherwise, they would be worked until they were too sick to go on. Then they would be placed in a shack called “The Death House,” where they would just lay down and roast until they died.

These conditions were so brutal that 80,000 men died trying to build this railroad—393 corpses for every mile of track. This really happened.

The prisoners who survived lived like animals. The strong would beat the weak for a few grains of rice. In fact, it was commonplace.

The only thing that kept them alive was hate. It was a culture of death until one day—one man changed the culture of his location.

A work detail had finished for the day when one of the guards shouted that his shovel was missing and demanded to know who had stolen it.

Nobody confessed, so he screamed that everybody on the work crew was going to die. He took his rifle, aimed it at the first guy in line, and was going to kill the whole work crew. And, at that point, one of the enlisted men stepped forward and said, I did it. I stole it.

The guard took him out of line and beat him so severely that he died.

That evening, when the tools were inventoried again, the work crew discovered they had made a mistake. No shovel was missing. No one had stolen anything.

And that night, one of the prisoners remembered a verse from the Bible—

Greater love has no one than this, than a man lay down his life for his friends. (John 15:13)

And something happened in that camp. Prisoners started to treat the dying with respect, started giving them funerals, started marking the graves with a cross.

And people who were strong began to give their food to people who were weak.

Ernest Gordon himself had been paralyzed with fever. He had been laid out in the “Death House.” He had written his final letter to his parents and was waiting to die.

Then some men came in and carried him out. Some prisoners gave him their food, massaged his leg muscles and cleaned his latrine.

He had not thought about God for a long time, but now he did.

And they formed a little church in this camp where people were dying by the thousands. Eventually, Ernest Gordon became the unofficial pastor.

They planted a garden there to grow medicinal plants to help people who were sick.

This is an amazing story. They formed what they called “The Jungle University.” And they started teaching courses in History and Philosophy and Science in nine languages.

They created an alternative culture to the culture of death.

Jesus had a name for that culture and that location: It was called - “The Kingdom of God.”

The Kingdom of God pops up in the most unlikely locations—.

These prisoners became so transformed that when the liberating armies finally arrived, instead of taking revenge on their guards, they treated the guards with kindness and mercy and respect and forgiveness.

And Gordon's own life was turned upside down and much to his surprise, he ended up becoming a minister.

All of this started with a single Kingdom Bringer—one man who wanted to make a difference—and then it started to spread.

Never underestimate the power of a Kingdom Bringer, because one Kingdom Bringer can change the world.

And you are the salt of the world. You're it.

You know, this church, we are not here just to hold services.

We are not here just to run programs.

We are not here just to meet in classes that feel safe and comfortable.

Salt doesn't exist for its own sake. It doesn't exist for itself.

We are here to permeate a dying world in the way that salt permeates food.

By conservative estimate, more than a quarter of the population of the United States claims to have had an evangelical conversion experience.

Author, Jeffrey Iverson writes:

“A pound of meat would surely be affected by a quarter pound of salt.”

So, my question is... If this is real Christianity, the salt of the earth, where's the effect of which Jesus spoke?

And I realize in some ways, it's almost harder to be salt here than it is in a prison camp. Our culture is so seductive here.

Our culture promotes a “Me” first mentality.

It’s out of alignment; we have become enslaved by this introspective culture, where the first question is – What about me!

The danger is—the temptation is—to become confined by this culture and then we just add church on top of it. And Jesus says,

NO. God never intended people to live their lives in that kind of slavery to self. You’re the salt of the earth. Don’t get sucked into that.

He’s not giving a command here. He doesn’t say,

Try to be salty, or work hard to get saltier.

He’s making an observation:

You’re the salt of the earth.

We don’t make the salt. Anytime that someone becomes so immersed in Jesus and His presence and love and goodness...anytime someone is so immersed in Jesus that they start

to be liberated by those things that keep them enslaved to their little individual culture...they start to get free.

And when people get free, they start to get salty.

You're the salt of the earth, Jesus says.

But then Jesus goes on,

You are the salt of the earth, but if salt loses its saltiness, how could it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything except to be thrown out and trampled on by men. (Matthew 5:13)

Now why did Jesus have to go and say that? It all felt so good up 'til now.

This is the kind of thing that made people uncomfortable when Jesus said it.

Our culture will try to seduce you to serve "it" rather than God.

It will try to seduce you to spend your life being too busy, too driven, too preoccupied with: career, money, status, self.

And I'll tell you what my concern is in this. It will try to seduce you into making the church just kind of a "stress-management" tool. Like a bottle of aspirin, or better yet - Solarcaine, you know, what you use for a sunburn?

Do you remember the tag line for solarcaine?

"Fast, soothing, temporary relief from pain."

Our culture will try to seduce you to bow down to it and then, if it can't keep you away from God and His community and your call to make a difference, it will turn the church into a "fast, soothing, temporary relief from pain."

But then we go out, and we're still enslaved to all the things that everybody else in this crazy culture is still enslaved to.

That's not the plan. You're the salt of the earth.

I see people sometimes who go to church year after year and stay on the same crazy treadmill, they stay in this same dysfunctional location—overworked, over-committed, over-extended financially, still praying about the same stuff they were praying about ten years ago.

And the real reason underneath, if we're honest about it, is that we've never made the decision that we're going to die to the culture of self.

So our prayers tend to be along this line:

“God, relieve me of all the stress and pressure that I'm under, but let me keep chasing after all the stuff that everybody else is chasing after.”

I wonder if there is anybody here today who needs to say...

“Jesus. I will die to this culture, this madness and be totally sold out to you.”

The good news is that when someone in God's community gets salty, it becomes contagious.

When you become a Kingdom Bringer —because it’s really Jesus at work—other people look at you and are reminded that they want their lives to make a difference too.

That’s what we all want.

So where do we make a difference?

We have two different ministries that will help you get connected in being Kingdom Bringers to our world. The first is “Reach” which is our International missions ministry. You can be part of a short or long term missions team around the world.

The other is – A Call to Serve – which is the ministry that helps you make a difference in our local community.

To illustrate how Kingdom Bringing is contagious, watch this video about one of our partners in the ACTS ministry - Interfaith Hospitality Network...

VIDEO

When someone says,

I want to make a difference. God, I am not going to be in slavery to this culture any more. God, I want to be salt.

When it happens, God starts to work, and it gets contagious. And you never know what God's going to do when one person says,

Let me introduce you to some Kingdom Bringers in our church family.

- ***Diane Brown (College girls)***

- ***Carle Larson & Patrick Davitt(CEH)***

- ***Redalan girls (Lemonade stand for kids to go to camp)***

- ***Mike Murray***

Because Jesus is in it, when somebody says, I want to be a Kingdom Bringer, I want to make a difference for Him, something just happens.

It just does.

And Jesus says,

You are the salt of the earth.

We do not come here just to put on services or to run programs, although those can be very important and very helpful.

You are the salt of the earth.

You are it. You're part of God's plan to fight the decay and corruption of this sometimes sorry, dark world and to make it appealing and attractive.

This is it.

And Jesus is looking for someone who will say, I will die to this culture.

I will not live in slavery to its values and spend my lifetime and energy according to it and then use the church as an occasional temporary stress-management pain reliever.

I will live as the salt of the earth, Lord. I will allow You to flow through me in it. I will be completely sold out to You.

One of the amazing things to me is the early church—the salt of the earth.

And the people who were opposed to it thought they would stop it by persecuting it and sending the leaders to prisons.

Guess what happened? The prisons started to get salty.

They said, We'll stop the church by kicking everybody out of Jerusalem.

The believers get kicked out of Jerusalem and guess what happens.

The whole region, first of which Asia Minor, starts to get salty.

The idea that you could stop the early church by spreading Christians around...that was just getting the salt out of the shaker!

You are the salt of the earth.

All you have to do is get out to where the world is!

It starts to permeate your home, your work, your neighborhood, somebody else's neighborhood, your school, and somebody else's school. Your city, your state, our country and the world.

You are the salt of the earth.

It doesn't matter how old or young you are; it doesn't matter what your title is, or whether or not you've got one.

You are the salt of the earth.

Do you have any idea what Jesus could do with a church full of people who say, All right, God. The number one priority of my life—what I want to do between now and my last day—is to be a Kingdom Bringer, to make a difference for You.

Everything I've got—my time, my gifts whatever they are, my money whether it looks big or small—whatever I've got, it's Yours. I'm fully sold out to You.

I'm not going to play the game; I'm not going to stay on the treadmill that gets me no-where.

I will lay down everything, because I serve the biggest Kingdom Bringer who ever lived.

As a matter of human history, Jesus Christ made a difference, an impact on this world, like no one ever had.

He was an innocent man who said, I'll pour my life out, and then He started this community, and it's still spreading today. He's still pouring salt out of the shaker.

I want to encourage you to go out into the lobby and talk to other Kingdom Bringers at the "REACH and ACTS" tables about the opportunities they are involved in and how you can join them.

One way is for Families/Small Groups/Individuals can sign up to care and encourage an Autumn Ridge supported missionary.

There is an informational booklet available and missions council representatives to help you get started. Encouragement and prayer is the number one request from our missionaries: they are in need of encouragement and uplifting from home.

If they have a specific missionary in mind they can let us know, if not, we'd be happy to introduce them to a family that needs their prayers.

So, here's what we're going to do. My job and your job is to grab a hold of this little packet of salt and put it in your pocket.

Put it some place where you're going to see it for the next several days, and when you do, take a look at it for a moment and say to yourself, I'm the salt of the earth. Because, that's what Jesus says.

With all of your flaws and fallen-ness, that's what you are.

You are the salt of the earth.

Carry this packet around and remember what Jesus said.

Then sometime this week, break it open and pour all of it out! All of it out! On your French fries, if you're a French fry kind of person. Or on your egg substitutes if you're an egg substitute kind of person. Or wherever you feel led to pour it out. And just say a little prayer,

Dear God, I pour my life out. Whatever location You want me to go, it doesn't matter, I'll go wherever You want me to go. I am committed to bring your Kingdom to this world for your Glory.

My friends, we are the salt of the earth, let's get out of the shaker and make a difference.