

Pulpit Series

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by Mario Dučić, August 2005

Have salt In Yourselfes

While reading the Gospel of Mark a few weeks ago, I believe God revealed to me some crucial foundational principles in developing an effective personal Christian life and a Church which desires to enlarge the Kingdom of God in its own city or country.

Jesus Christ, in Mark 9:50, talks to his apostles and gives a warning saying, "Salt is good, but if the salt loses its flavor, how will you season it? Have salt in yourselves, and have peace with one another."*

Salt is mentioned not only in the Gospels but also in the Old Testament. It had multiple uses. It was used as a natural preservative, added to meat to spice up its flavor, or added to soil to improve its quality for growing crops. Salt was so precious to the Romans that even Roman soldiers received one part of their salary in salt sacks.

Salt not only had these mentioned practical uses, but

also had an important place in Hebrew worship. For example, in Leviticus law, we see that salt was included in grain offerings. When giving Moses instructions on this sacrifice, the Lord in Leviticus 2:13 says, "And every offering of your grain offering you shall season with salt; you shall not allow the salt of the covenant of your God to be lacking from your grain offering. With all your offerings you shall offer salt."* In other words, grain offerings were seasoned with salt as a reminder of the people's covenant with God.

Salt was also used in procedures for burnt offerings. When giving instructions to Ezekiel on the Passover celebration, the Lord says, "...you shall offer a young bull without blemish, and a ram from the flock without blemish. When you offer them before the Lord, the priests shall throw salt on them, and they will offer them up as a burnt offering to the Lord." (Ezekiel 43:23-24)*, or with covenant

confirmation, which can be seen in the Book of Numbers where the Lord listed the duties of Levites. "All the heave offerings of the holy things, which the children of Israel offer to the Lord, I have given to you and your sons and daughters with you as an ordinance forever; it is a covenant of salt forever before the Lord with you and your descendants with you." (Numbers 18:19)*

We see that salt provides a good biblical example of God's work in a person's life because it can penetrate into something, preserve something, or help in healing. Simply said, it is the picture of what God wants us to be - active in our Church life, penetrate deeply in each area of our life, preserve us from the evil, which rules this world, and heal us from our sins and downfalls.

Therefore, first, we can turn to the leading principle seen through these verses about salt in the Old Testament.

► **We should know and remember that we are God's covenant people, and as such, we should know our task.**

In Matthew 5:13, Jesus says that we are the salt of the earth. It is our primary purpose as God's people to actively preserve and cleanse ourselves, and salt the world around us. Sometimes, due to confusing theologies and misconceptions, and various circumstances, we simply forget and neglect our actual purpose and role. Just as salt is used to preserve food and taste for various sacrifices to God, we should positively and qualitatively preserve what is good today, and cleanse this world from its spiraling downfall. We are guardians of our cities and our country!

Christianity is not a selfish club where we realize all our needs and wants. The Church is not a place for building our ego or experiencing simply good feelings, solving our financial problems or finding our marriage partners. We believe that the Church and God's people have a more important purpose and mission. Our main purpose is to actively influence the fallen world by witnessing to His truth and the power of the Gospel. Therefore Jesus said to his apostles, "But you shall receive

power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.” (Acts 1:8)* They did not receive power to laugh and rejoice in the Holy Spirit, dance and jump up and down in the Church, or sing aloud, but to actively witness to the world the truth of the Gospel. Unfortunately, today we prefer singing and playing, rather than crying over our sins, praying, and cursing the immorality that seems to be taking over our world. Finally, isn't it written in the Scriptures, that when the Holy Spirit comes, it will testify to the world with regard to righteousness, judgment and sin?

Church in America, it is our responsibility to preserve what is good in this country. We are to be the salt, responsible to actively preserve America from immorality and evil ways, and to introduce the new taste of Christ's true life. This most often requires our careful planning, willing sacrifice, and our entire dedication to God's Kingdom. To be salty is not easy, and if we decrease in this function, we cannot effectively present Jesus

Christ in this country.

This is what our enemy, the devil, would like to see - the Church that loses its effectiveness, saltiness, and closed to the world. The devil would have us form a subculture not relevant or understood by the world; a Church that is withdrawing into its own struggles and misunderstandings, a church not interested in local events. Satan would like this Church to stay in its status quo!

If you have read a little about Protestantism in Croatia, or have read of the activities of protestant leaders, you may have noticed that they had something in common - they actively testified for the truth of the Gospel often at the cost of their lives. They did not withdraw in their little churches but wanted to reach out to their society and change it by the power of the Gospel.

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Reformation in Croatia had spread so much that in some places all inhabitants were Protestants. The Protestantism in Istria was so widespread that according to the Catholic author Paschini, on June 24, 1549, some Ambrosys from Milan testified before the inquisition in Venice, that all inhabitants of Pula and Vodnjan are Lutherans.

When reading the book, "Reformation in Croatia", by Stanko Jambrek, I'm reminded of the boldness of Friar Baldo Lupetina of Cres. As a famous preacher he was often invited, by decision of the city senate, to preach in the country church in the city of Cres during Lent. In 1541, during Lent, he also said, "All sin indulgences are in vain. Masses are used to take money away from the believers. Purgatory does not exist and therefore no mediators between man and God are needed. The Sunday mass should be dedicated to God only and not to the saints also."

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Due to this and similar sermons, Friar Cuzula from Cres accused him before the inquisition, that Friar Baldo had said and done too much, to the extent, that he turned upside down the city of Cres, and that if this continued, it would only take a short time before all the inhabitants would become heretics.

Do you see how Protestants influenced their society? They turned it upside down. And that is what we need today. We need men and woman filled with the Holy Spirit, who will not be afraid to stand for the truth of the Gospel, who will not be afraid to tell people in high positions that they sin, live immorally, or act against the law. When talking about the Gospel, our predecessors risked losing their heads as John the Baptist did, but it is the price such people were willing to pay. They did not withdraw into their monasteries, or have visions and dreams on things like how to buy a new house or car. They did not keep going from church service to church service expecting to experience something new there. Thank God, the Heavenly Kingdom is much greater than

the walls of our churches!

Actually, people like Friar Baldo and many others paid the price for being salt in the world by their blood, as did our Lord Jesus Christ. They did not want to leave the society in ignorance and people in darkness.

It is interesting how our history played a great part in the reformation, whether intentionally or unintentionally. The leaders of Croatian Protestantism were people like Matija Vlačić Ilirik, Ivan Ungrad, Stipan Konzul and the Zrinski family (especially Nikola Zrinski who was killed at Siget on September 7, 1566, in a battle against the Ottomans) who had great influence in our country.

► **Let's look at some Biblical examples of Christian influence on society.**

The apostle Paul, when writing to the Church in Thessalonica, points out their good evangelical influence to the society and people around them, saying, "For from you the word of the Lord has sounded forth, not only in

Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place. Your faith toward God has gone out, so that we do not need to say anything." (1 Thessalonians 1:8)*

Also, when writing the epistle to the Romans, he points to the saltiness of their faith saying, "First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for you all, that your faith is spoken of throughout the whole world." (Romans 1:8)*

History tells us that Roman Christians were highly visible in the western world at that time. It is told that their reputation was excellent, and their strong faith was known around the world. Many Roman officers and citizens even gave their lives to Jesus. The best legion was composed of Christians and in Karlovac during the reformation the best officers were Protestants.

Let's remember Paul's mission to Greece. He was running away from deadly threats in Thessalonica, where the entire city was in riot because of the persuasive witness and testimony of Paul and Silas resulting in a large number of Greek men and also many important women of

the city become converts. Paul took shelter, first in Berea, then in Athens, which was known as the city of educated men, rich culture, wealth and religion. The Scripture says that although he was hiding he could not keep his mouth shut, and continued to preach the Word (Acts 17).

In other words he was full of Jesus' salt and according to the Scripture came before Aeropag (court on the hill of Athens near Acropolis) and started conversation with Stoics and Epicureans, who were considered to be wise men and prominent philosophers in Greek culture, and with other Athenians.

We also know that the Bible confirms that after this, "some were converted". Paul had Jesus' salt, but what about us?

What about churches in Zagreb and Croatia? What about the churches in America? Have we lost our good name? Does anyone hear about us? Have we withdrawn into our little

★ **True awakening changes the moral climate of a society.**

kingdoms, not taking care of anyone else, not interested in the public issues and events around us, being withdrawn from the issues of the world's immorality? Why are we afraid to salt our country? Is there anyone who can stand like Paul, and break through for Christ in this country?

Are we salty, or have we allowed ourselves to become tasteless. Where are we when public activities such as Gay Pride take place in Croatia or in the United States? Where are we when immorality is publicly promoted and assisted by high-positioned people? Why don't we respond? Why don't we do something about the increasing downfall of crucial life structures? When the world reacts and demands that its views be heard, Christians say it is not their business. It is important for us to awaken our communities to God's truth!

True awakening changes the moral climate of a society. True awakening touches every segment of a society. Awakening is not just a feeling. It returns us to obedience to God and his principles, which are to be the

welfare and salvation of society.

Jesus Christ clearly says, "You are the salt of the earth; but if the salt loses its flavor, how shall it be seasoned? It is then good for nothing but to be thrown out and trampled underfoot by men." (Matthew 5:13)*

► **Now we come to one of two problematic issues related to Christ's salt in us of which I was going to talk to you about as well, it is tastelessness.**

I believe that tastelessness primarily comes when we cease to love God with all our heart and when it happens we are useless for Him. If we do not give taste to this world, if we are not the guardians of his holiness and righteousness, then we have no value for Him. Jesus said this very clearly concerning such salt.

Each time the Church wants to be recognized by people, or when it doesn't want to change the human status quo, it is compromising the Word of God. When it gives its extremities to sin, or when it keeps its mouth shut about lawlessness and follows unrighteousness, or when

it is mild and without zeal for the lost, it once again compromises the Word of God. When the Glory of God means less to the Church than the glory of man, then, according to Christ, it is good for nothing except to be thrown out and trampled underfoot as worthless. Tasteless!

The Greek word for becoming tasteless can be translated as becoming "mad". Church, what kind of *madness* is ruling over us? Jesus says if salt becomes tasteless, or mad, it is no good except to be thrown out and trampled underfoot!

If we do not do Christ's work, we should be thrown out and given to the people of the world! Human destructive ideas and philosophies which will make us invalid and disable us from doing our primary purpose - to be the salt and light to the world. Once

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we lose our saltiness, how can we return to it?

When a Jewish rabbi in 1 BC was asked how tasteless salt could become salty again, he answered, "If somebody tries to make it salty again, they should try to make it salty again with the placenta of a sterile mule. If a mule is sterile, then she has no placenta, and those who ask stupid questions get stupid answers!" He says salt cannot lose its flavor, but if it does, what could we do?... put salt on it? Simply, flavorless salt is worthless and we cannot return its saltiness. Therefore, church, we should maintain our saltiness because if we lose it once, we lose it forever, and we could not get it back.

Therefore, I want to put a question to everybody. "Shall we go on with our madness (tastelessness), and become such salt that will be thrown out by God, the salt which God throws us out of His mouth, or shall we be the salt of good quality, to be able to be salt to others? Shall we sit on the fence like the church in Laodicea to which God said, "I know your works,

that you are neither cold nor hot. I could wish you were cold or hot. So then, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will vomit you out of My mouth." (Revelation 3:15-16).^{*} Or should we be equal to the church in Thessalonica for which Paul was able to say, "I thank my God through Jesus Christ for you all, that your faith is spoken of throughout the whole world." (Romans 1:8)?

Have you ever tasted unsalted food? It is so tasteless that you either reach out your hand for the salt shaker, or spit the food out of your mouth (except when your wife cooked the meal). Without salt the church is equally tasteless and ineffective. In Luke 14:35 Jesus Christ says that such salt, "...is neither fit for the land nor for the dunghill, but men throw it out. He who has ears to hear, let him hear!"^{*} Are your ears open to hear what the Holy Spirit sends to the church in America?

I would like to tell you what will happen, or better to say in which kind of tastelessness or madness we shall find ourselves in, that

will separate us from our Lord and the mission He has for His people in America.

There are two kinds of madness that destroy our saltiness for sure. They are not new. They were already known among the Christ's apostles.

First, in Mark 9:49, Jesus gives an interesting remark about salt: "Salt is good, but if the salt loses its flavor, how will you season it? Have salt in yourselves, and have peace with one another." Why is peace mentioned here? If we look at the wider context of this passage, we see that Jesus' apostles fell into a trap which could have made them ineffective and take away their saltiness for God's Kingdom. A common question that we sooner or later think about is, "Who is the greatest?"

In Mark 9:34, we see that the apostles were embarrassed to answer Jesus' question when He asked them what they were talking about. He caught them in their constant struggle for personal success. The Scripture says: "But they kept silent, for on the road they had disputed

among themselves who would be the greatest".* It is not wrong for believers to be ambitious, but when ambition pushes obedience it becomes sin. Pride and insecurity can cause us to overvalue position and prestige. If we are not the most important, then we do not want to participate in God's work. We may answer, "I cannot participate, but I will support you in my prayers."

Such attitudes and lack of compassion surely take away our saltiness, our mission, and therefore our effectiveness for Christ in America.

In 2 Corinthians 10:12-18, the apostle Paul talks about the folly and consequence of apostles who compare themselves with each other and with boasting. He describes such an attitude as unapproved by the Lord. In other words, it is madness leading to tastelessness.

You see, if we do not have salt in

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ourselves, we shall start comparing ourselves with each other. We shall think that we are more spiritual because we speak in other tongues, have better praise and worship, a better pastor, a better denomination, because we raise our hands better, or because we are more humble (real humility is not aware of itself), or we jump more than others (it would be better to lament over sin).

This pride is actually the first madness and creates unnecessary tensions and problems for ourselves and with other people and churches. Unfortunately, we often are completely focused on ourselves and selfish goals, rather than on Jesus and the purpose of His mission. This sinful human pride often appears during events organized by different churches when Christians want to raise ourselves above others and rule.

✦ **When we love God our Lord, and turn to Him, Christ's life will dwell in us, and only then shall we be able to love other people and become salty!**

You see, this attitude of pride destroys saltiness. We start to compete and serve unwillingly, the result of which is loss of precious Christ's salt.

And what happens next? Instead of salting the unsaved and influencing our society we become tasteless, attack each other, cause trouble and disorder. This happens when the church does not do God's deed - it becomes useless.

The second madness or tastelessness we can also find among the apostles. Look at Mark 9:38: "Now John answered Him, saying, 'Teacher, we saw someone who does not follow us casting out demons in Your name, and we forbade him because he does not follow us.'"* This is typical behavior of people in love with their church, denomination or themselves. We become jealous for no reason, an enemy to all non-members of our church or denomination, and start to forbid and stand against God's work that is being accomplished through outsiders. How selfish were John's words. Apostles were jealous of a man who healed in the name of Jesus because they were more concerned about their own group's position rather than in

helping those troubled by demons! In other words, the policy of the local church or denomination becomes more important to us than Christ's Kingdom.

We do the same today when we refuse to participate in good things or projects because other people or groups are not affiliated with our denomination or church, or their projects do not involve the kind of people with whom we feel most comfortable, or others don't do things the way we are used to doing them, or when our efforts won't receive enough recognition, etc. Either our logo is not the same or our church is not on the list. Are we still in Kindergarten? What kind of warriors are these?

Jesus said: "Have salt in yourselves, and have peace with one another." (Mark 9:49)

Finally, what should we do? How do we retain our saltiness, which will bring peace and effectiveness to God's people in America?

First, we should return to God. Christ said to the proud church in Laodicea: "I counsel you to buy from Me gold refined in the fire, that you may be rich; and white garments, that you may be clothed,

that the shame of your nakedness may not be revealed; and anoint your eyes with eye salve, that you may see. As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten. Therefore be zealous and repent... He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. (Rev 3.18-19, 22)*

Bad things always happen to God's people if they don't maintain a relationship with Him. If they do, and love Him with all their heart, soul, mind and strength, they will be able to love their neighbor, too.

There are three basic answers for every problem. In conversation with Jesus one teacher of the Law tempted Him: "He said to him, 'What is written in the law? What is your reading of it?'" So he answered and said, "'You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, and with all your mind,' and 'love your neighbor as yourself.'" And He said to them, "You have answered rightly; do this and you will live." (Luke 10:26-28)*

When we love God our Lord, and turn to Him, Christ's life will dwell in us, and only then shall we be able to love other people and become salty!

Second, serve others without calculation: "And He sat down, called the twelve, and said to them, 'If anyone desires to be first, he shall be last of all and servant of all.'" (Mark 9:35)*

Third, let's stop defending God's work and getting into conflict with God, because Jesus says, "Do not forbid him, for no one who works a miracle in My name can soon afterward speak evil of Me." (Mark 9:39)*

Be wise and leave things and people to the Lord. Listen to the same sound advice of Gamaliel: "And now I say to you, keep away from these men and let them alone; for if this plan or this work is of men, it will come to nothing. But if it is of God, you cannot overthrow it, lest you even be found to fight against God."*

Church in America, if we are all on the same side (and we are), we have to know our common goal, which is to spread and build the Kingdom

✦ **We should not allow our differences to come between us as obstacles to the common goal.**

of Heaven, and be an influence in our country for this purpose. We should not allow our differences to come between us as obstacles to the common goal. Therefore, we should and must cooperate regardless of the name of our church.

This is the only way to be salty, and to avoid God's judgment, and to see experience in our society. Stop fighting with each other! Stop envying each other. Recognize God's work, various gifts and talents. Observe our real common enemy, the devil, and cooperate, because America needs spiritual revival. Let's work together to restore the spirit of America. This is the only way to have peace among ourselves.

**All scripture references have been taken from the New King James Version.*

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