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Newsletter

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Seed

the salt of the earth is no opiate of the masses

"Happy are you when people insult you and persecute you and tell all kinds of evil lies against you because you are my followers.

Be happy and glad, for a great reward is kept for you in heaven. This is how the prophets who lived before you were persecuted. You are like salt for all mankind. 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. You are like light for the whole world. A city built on a hill cannot be hidden. No one lights a lamp and puts it under a bowl; instead he puts it on the lampstand, where it gives light for everyone in the house.

In 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." (Matthew 5:11-16)

In the common way of thinking, religion is something like a preservative. It keeps you preserved until you get to heaven, and with its hopes of a 'spiritual' nature it allows you to hold on until you get there. Right?

Religion is not so much to do with the daily goings on — rather it is something that you have that makes you feel secure and happy and contented. Something like an extra dimension. And though we would reject the conclusions he came to, Karl Marx wasn't far off the mark when he observed, "Religion is the opiate of the masses." Right?

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Life is so bad and fearful and such a hopeless affair - the most we can do is to hold onto our religion - like Linus and his blanket - while the world crumbles about us. Right?

Wrong! Jesus did not consider life like that.

Although he was truly the man of sorrows, His command of his disciples, forced them to look at life, and their tasks in life, in another way altogether.

"Consider yourself happy, when you are persecuted."

Jesus tells his disciples that part of their reward for following after Him is that they - together - perhaps as a persecuted minority - were going to find it hard to get on with others. In fact he prophesied that those who were his followers would be treated with contempt, despised, wiped off as rubbish (v II, 12). And they were told further (10:17-18),

"Beware of men for they will deliver you up to councils, and flog you in their synagogues and you will be dragged before governors and kings for my sake, to be a testimony before them and the gentiles."

The disciples of Jesus are to do and bring to fulfillment the ancient initiatives of Father Abraham (John 8:31-47). They are to follow on in the same obedience to the heavenly father. And when they hear this word of their Master, telling them that they will be despised for His sake, they are to understand that they in fact are the means by which the LORD'S original promise to Abram would be fulfilled.

"I will bless those who bless you and those who curse you I will curse."
(Gen. II:1-3)

Jesus clearly places his disciples in a central place, indispensable in the fulfilling of His Mission. They are not to hide, shrinking from a big-bad world. Jesus tells his disciples that their following him will be in the open, and precisely because of this the action that the authorities take will be in the open too. The authorities - men like them - will take strong and public action against them.

To follow Jesus therefore has nothing to do with being preserved.

Listening attentively to His Word, we are left with the unmistakable conclusion that to follow Him is to be - preservative. And we hear Jesus' words to his disciples :

"You are the salt of the earth; but if salt has become tasteless how shall you restore its saltness. It is no longer strong enough, and the only thing left to do is to discard it altogether, as it is stamped by men into the ground."

Salt has no expression of its properties unless it is in something. In exactly the same way Jesus' disciples, are nothing, have no effect, and their character remains unexpressed, unless they are in relationship to the world. This New Way is no retreat to the caves of the mountains - no turning to the safe confines of the bedroom to be alone and holy. (Though such retreats have their place - Matt. 6:6, 24:15-28)

Jesus, in telling his disciples that they are salt, refers them to their creaturely existence which some way or another has to be in the world.

Now salt, it will be recognized, cannot be preserved simply because it is a preservative. If it stops preservative-action, then it stops. It ceases being salt. Then it is foolish to talk of salt. Those who listen to Jesus' words don't have to worry about being preserved, they are preservative. That is their existence. That is their mission. Jesus' Word guarantees His followers existence, as salt.

In trying to be preserved, in trying to gain a measure of preserved existence, man goes against that which by God's Grace in Christ he is. Involved are all who hear Jesus' words - even those who turn against Him. They must hear his word to their own destruction.

And Jesus' words always come to fulfillment, e.g. 70 A.D. with the fall of Jerusalem. Salt which has lost its taste is no good for anything anymore except that it be thrown down and trodden under foot by men. The national fibre promised to the Jewish race through Abram (Gen 12:2) had disappeared. Jerusalem was trodden down. Jesus prepares his own followers for the future and to the degree that they truly listen to his words they will be true descendents of Abraham, with a resilience in their life which the authorities will come to resist. The blessing of the Lord to Abraham, will be fulfilled by the disciples who realize the meaning of THE LORD'S command.

Again Jesus shows those who listen. *"You are the light of the world."* And just as they cannot but be in relation, as salt, they are to understand that they cannot but be in the open as light. A city which is placed on such a strategic position as the side of a hill, cannot be hid. The power of the position is evident for all to see. Likewise, those who are followers of Jesus, those who hear his words, are placed, set in office, installed.

Such a setting up has great implications. It cannot be hid. It is a matter of having been placed strategically. A city set on a hill is no easy, secluded thing. It is open. In the same way the life of the Way is to be open, unconcealed, public, shown to all the world, to all of life. Actions and initiatives show who we are. They show the wisdom and insight involved in the original strategic placement. They show whose command it was which got us into our present powerful position.

Constructive action which is taken on the basis of a strategic initiative, will go a long way to bring honour to the One who originated the establishment of the city. The achievements of a city in large measure express the wisdom of its founding father.

In the same way the purpose of a house-light is not solely to allow one to measure the amounts of meal in a container. The light is to light the whole house. The lamp will throw light on the life of the entire household so that men may make their evaluations. It shows the life-style of the inhabitants. Like the light of the lamp stand which shines upon all that is in the house, so this New Way is to work itself out in the details of life.

And the sum of the witness is as follows:

"Let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works; and give glory to your father which is in heaven."

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Those who hear Jesus' words must give the glory to the Father. This is the way that men will come to give glory to the Father, when they see the good works that give glory to the Heavenly Father.

This is no "*you in your small corner*" mentality. It is one corporate light, with 'your' good works and 'your' father. By so doing, this is the way which the Father in Heaven is to be glorified.

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