

Be Salt and Light

By John Lin

“Sociologists tell us that dissonant groups within a larger society react to reduce the potential for friction in two predictable ways. One is to compromise their distinctive beliefs and way of life and so reduce their conflict with society. The other is to keep their dissonance and tribalize, retreating within their own group and thus losing contact with society.” [Keyes, Chameleon Christianity]

Growing up in an immigrant community, I often see this behavior in action. On the one hand, like a chameleon to protect itself it changes color to blend in with its surrounding, we try to blend in with the majority community. For example, some people change their family name to avoid prejudice in order to find a better job. On the other hand, like musk ox, which protects itself by grouping together, we try to congregate or isolate into like communities for protection such as Chinatown or Little Italy. Interestingly, this is exactly what Jesus was warning about in today’s passage. The reason for this tendency is self-protection. But, our call to be the salt of the earth and the light of the world is to move us away from this self-protection tendency.

The function of salt is to preserve and season food. As salt of the earth, Christians are called to live differently from the secular worldview and to have the ability to preserve society from deterioration. However when Christians conform to the worldly standard that ability is lost. The tendency to conform is what Jesus meant by the tasteless salt. If we are just like the world around us, we will have no power to preserve it. If people cannot see the difference in our life in comparison to the people around us, then we have no taste. They will not ask: “what is the secret of your life?” Paul reminded us in Romans 12:2 that “do not conform any longer 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.”

The function of light is to reveal what is hidden in darkness and to guide for proper path to avoid danger. As light of the world, Christians do reveal the sins of this world and have the ability to guide people to live a righteous life. However, when Christians hid their light the ability to reveal and guide is compromised. Jesus commended, “You are... and let your...” to let us know how important our tasks are as ambassadors for His kingdom. We should let our lights shine.

The reason why Christians fail to be salt and light is because the world is a dangerous place. Jesus said, “We are like sheep among wolves.” But Jesus also said, “I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world, you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.” The way to avoid these extremes is to be mature in Christ Jesus. Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but also do not isolate from it. We are called to engage and transform the world with the Word of God, with the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Let’s be faithful to walk in the truth and be salt and light so that we can preserve, season, reveal and guide the people around us.