

Wouldn't it be great if, as soon as I hand my life over to Jesus, all temptations simply came to an end... That'd be so good (wouldn't it)... But that's not at all what happens... And some people get really discouraged because they've had the hope that:

- Once they commit to Christ, their temptations are going to suddenly disappear; or
- Maybe once they get baptised it's going to get easier to resist sin; or
- Maybe when they get to this new stage in life, their temptations are going to disappear ...

But the truth of the matter is, temptations continue... And often, temptation increases for those who strengthen their commitment to Christ. Why??? You know, nothing makes Jesus look worse, then when one of His disciples is caught out in some terrible sin... And so Satan actually increases temptations... Satan doesn't need to target those who are his. He targets those who belong to God.

We see this in the life of Jesus: As soon as He was baptised, and began his life of ministry, that's when Satan came in hard with his temptations... And we're all tempted by very different things... Satan tempted Jesus with different temptations, to what he's going to throw at me. And he's going to tempt me with different temptations to what he's going to throw at you...

I don't think I've ever been tempted to turn stones into bread, or to leap from a great height, so angels could catch me... You see, they're not temptations for me, but they were for Jesus...

And sometimes we Christians look down on other Christians, and feel that they're weak – “Why couldn't you resist that temptation? That's not so hard to resist”... Well, it might be something that's easy for you or I to resist, but for another person, that could be a very real weakness for them ...

And some sins become so much of a temptation – they seem so irresistible – that we begin to accept it as part of who we are – it begins to define who we are... And sometimes, it comes to the point, where we no longer try to resist that sin... It may become for us, “a habit”; or we might consciously adopt it as part of our lifestyle...

Sometimes it's a secret sin – something we keep hidden away from others; And other times, we take the attitude “*Oh, blow it!!! I don't care what anybody thinks any more... Judge me if you like – this is who I am!!!*”

But you know what, the more I read the Scriptures, the more I understand that living the Christian life, is not about “me being afraid of being judged by others”... You're not my judge, and I'm not your judge... Living as a disciple of Jesus, is about loving Jesus so much, that I want to honour Him with every fibre of my being...

I'm going to say that again, and then I'm going to ask if you agree with it:

“Living as a disciple of Jesus, is about loving Jesus so much, that I want to honour Him with every fibre of my being”.

Do you agree with that???, because if we cannot agree on this, we're not going to have much of a basis for continuing our discussion on living the transformed life of a Christian...

You see, when we give our lives totally over to Jesus, to become His disciples, something significant – something profound, changes.

It's something:

- that people of the world will not understand;
- that an academic study of religion, cannot grasp the experience of;
- It's something so life-changing and so foreign to contemporary culture, that Jesus described it as being born again.

This is what changes:

At one time, we belonged to the world (and some of us fitted right on it) - we were part **of** the world:

- we were living for ourselves;
- we were living to please ourselves; **and**
- we were living to please others...

But **now**, we're the **least** important, and we live for Jesus.

- Jesus has shifted us from darkness into light;
- We've moved from death to life;
- We have put-to-death our old self, and He raises up somebody completely new;
- Everything that once was really important to us::: well, it's not so important any more; and
- stuff that we never used to care about::: could very well become our new life's mission...

Everything changes...

The topic for today, is “Living the transformed life of a disciple of Jesus.”

If you're anything like me, your heart's desire, is to be a whole lot holier than what you are... You see, we do want to live for Jesus; I don't want to be sinning.... Do you??? Of course not...

And at times of temptation, sometimes we **do** manage to stand our ground, but a lot of the time, we don't... I know I've fallen to temptations – terrible temptations, and I've fallen many times... I wish I was stronger... I pray for stronger will-power – a greater resolve... But I fail, and so I thank the Lord my God for his endless mercy and grace...

But does failure mean capitulation? Never...

Sometimes, ‘resisting of temptation’ requires some radical adjustments in our lives.

A couple of weeks ago, we touched on Jesus' use of “hyperbole”. Do you remember what hyperbole is? I'll give you the same explanation I gave a couple of weeks ago, because some of you weren't here, and some others had probably dozed off...

Hyperbole is an over-the-top statement, that is given to make a point (it's not usually meant to be taken literally)... So for instance, we might say:

- That bag weighs a ton... Well yeah, it might be very heavy, but it doesn't weigh a "ton"...
- Yesterday was the worst day ever... Well, it might've been a very bad day, but it's unlikely that it's the worst...
- I cannot live without him... Yes you can... You might miss him, but you're not going to die because he goes away...

Alright, that's a few examples of hyperbole, **but** when **Jesus** uses hyperbole, it's generally a bit different... Yes it **is** an over-the-top statement, given to make a point (and no, it's **not** usually meant to be taken literally), **but** when Jesus uses hyperbole, it **is** actually true.

Alright, so in today's reading, Jesus said: **if your hand causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life crippled than with two hands to go to hell, to the unquenchable fire.**

And he said the same thing about our foot and our eye...

That's hyperbole...

- It's a shocking statement;
- It's an over-the-top statement;
- It's not meant to be taken literally....

But you know what??? It is actually true... If my hand **is** the thing causes me to sin, and that by sinning, I'm going to go to Hell, yeah, I'd be better to cut off my hand and live a few

decades as a cripple, then to keep both my hands and go to Hell for all eternity... It is actually true...

But it's hyperbole... Jesus isn't telling me to cut off my hands – He's telling me to cut off whatever causes me to sin... Sin, is that serious – it has eternal consequences, so cut off the source of temptation... So, for example:

Internet pornography has become one of the greatest temptations and one of the greatest scourges of our society. ... Even for Christians... , (I was going to say Christian men, but apparently some women are tempted by it too)...

And Jesus would say to those who struggle with this temptation and who can't seem to resist it... And let's face it – pornography is only a click (or 2) of the mouse away... And some people feel they're so trapped by it, they cannot be free of it...

Do you know what Jesus would say??? This, is a serious issue, that has eternal ramifications...

*If access to the internet is what's causing you to sin – if your computer; or your tablet; or your smart phone, is causing you to sin,,,, cut it off... You're better off to go through life without the internet – you're better off, to go through life without a smart-phone, then to have these things, and **go to hell, to the unquenchable fire.***

What is the source of temptation that you need to cut off???

- If greed is your temptation, maybe you need to give your money away – you obviously have trouble serving 2

masters.

- If materialism is a temptation, and you're tempted to keep spending money on stuff you don't need, maybe the main thing you need to buy is a shredder, and as soon as the sales catalogues turn up in the mail box, you just drop them straight in there;
- For me, (It's years ago now) I had to give up a dream of having a farm ... It was what I wanted – it was something that I eagerly desired – it was something that could very easily consume me – to have a plan, and to follow that plan, to achieve **my** goal of getting back onto the land... But God was leading me to ministry, and so I had to cut off that dream (because it was distracting me from God's plan)...
- Maybe your temptation is telling rude jokes... What is it that causes you to do this?
 - Is it when you've had a few drinks? Well, stop drinking
 - Is it when you're striving to be noticed or liked? Well stop seeing your identity as somebody who needs to be noticed and liked, and remember your identity as a child of Jesus.
- Maybe you have a problem with anger. What is it that makes you angry? What is it, that stops you from 'keeping your cool'???
 - Is it managing staff? Well, maybe you have to stand down from being a boss (or being a manager).

- Is it because you're not coping with debt... Well, maybe you need to sell up your assets & pay off your debt, and just take a low-stress job.
- Is it anger with your spouse or your family?? Maybe you need to give up pride, and get some help...
- As a pastor of a church, sadly, I'm very aware of how common it is to hear how another pastor somewhere, has committed adultery with a woman in his church...

To guard against this, Robyn and I agreed right from the start, if I needed to visit a young woman, I either took Robyn with me; or I'd take another trusted woman from the church with me; or I'd stay out on the front steps while we talk, or we'd just meet at a picnic table on the river... Before the temptation gets a chance, or before an allegation gets a chance, we cut off any possibility of it...

What is the source of temptation that you need to sever???

One commentary I read said this:

The metaphor of amputation could hardly be more shocking; this is a matter of ultimate seriousness. Nothing less than eternal life or death is at stake. Christians who disparage 'hell-fire preaching' must face the awkward fact that Mark's Jesus (and still more Matthew's and Luke's) envisaged an ultimate separation between life and γέννα which demanded the most drastic renunciation in order to avoid the unquenchable fire, and that he did not regard even his disciples as immune from the need to examine themselves and take appropriate actionⁱ.

Alright, do you get this??? Jesus is using hyperbole, to highlight the **seriousness** of sin, and the **drastic** steps we should go to, to guard against it...

As disciples of Jesus – as His ambassadors in this world, the way we live, matters. Jesus didn't save us from sin, so we could continue to wallow in it... He lifts us up out of the quagmire of sin, to become His pure, holy bride.

Now, at this point, Jesus says 3 things about salt:

v 49 For everyone will be salted with fire.

That is a strange saying, and I can't (with confidence) tell you what Jesus meant by it..., but I can offer you a bit of insight, and a possibility...

In the Old Testament, under the old covenant, (Lev 2:13), the people of Israel, were told to season their offerings with salt. They were told to add salt to **all** their offerings.

And now (in v49), we have this image of salt with fire – And I can't help but tie this to the image of salt with the sacrificial offering... Salt is the seasoning... Christians being salt in the world, is one of the images Jesus uses – we are the seasoning in the world...

But what's it mean, to be “salted with fire”? I think He's talking about a time of testing – I think He's talking about the personal sacrifice it is, to **be** a disciple of Jesus in the world...

The time that we spend on this earth, isn't all beer & skittles – it's a time of testing... As I've said a number of times, "Jesus never promised us a bed of roses – He promised us a cross of nails."

And the early church knew all about the persecutions that Christians went through; And in some countries of the world, this very day, Christians will be jailed, and even executed for their faith... I heard some statistics the other day, that Christians are the most persecuted religion in the world... In our own country, Christians are publicly humiliated and discriminated against, if they dare speak their faith...

Persecution is a normal part of following Jesus... Does that mean that we give up being salt? Not at all...

He goes on to say: ⁵⁰ **Salt is good, but if the salt has lost its saltiness, how will you make it salty again?**

Now scientifically, that sounds like a nonsense... How can salt lose its saltiness? Well, it actually can't... And I think that's probably the point...

Salt, is always salty... *And I'm speaking with a fair bit of authority here – I'm quite the connoisseur of salt... If I was given \$1 every time somebody said to me:*

- *Ah, so you like to have a bit of dinner with your salt*
- *Steak*
- *Few eggs*
- *Chops*
- *Chips*
- *(add almost any food-stuff here)*

I'd be a wealthy man. -well, I wouldn't be wealthy, but I could afford to buy some more salt...

But a few times I've visited people, and (being health conscious sorts of people), there was no salt on the table, and I have asked, "Do you have any salt?" And they've gone to the cupboard, and brought out some kind of salt substitute... And they assure me, this isn't salt – there's no sodium chloride in it – but it tastes exactly like salt (they lie)... I put it on my meal, And it tastes nothing like salt – it's not at all salty... It's probably another salt of some kind (formed by adding an acid to a base), but it's certainly not good old NaCl... It was marketed as being a replacement for salt, but its taste is not right...

Jesus said: ⁵⁰ **Salt is good, but if the salt has lost its saltiness, how will you make it salty again?**

Well, you can't... Salt, is known by its taste. Disciples without the characteristics of a disciple are as false as unsalty salt.

And in the context of what Jesus is talking about here, disciples of Jesus will live by the way of righteousness – they will understand that sin is so serious, that they will do anything to cut off the temptation. At another time, Jesus said "By their fruit, you will know them" (same thing)... If I claim to be a disciple of Jesus, but I'm **not** following in the ways of Jesus – I'm unsalty salt, which isn't salt at all...

And so He says: **Have salt in yourselves, and be at peace with one another."**

In our western culture at the moment, it seems to be all about the individual... But when it comes to being a disciple of Jesus, it's not at all about me – it's all about Jesus, and it's about the disciples of Jesus, together (as the church) with Jesus....

Sadly, in our culture, “the church” has become, almost a dirty word – people tend to think of the worst of human corruption... Do you know why the church has gotten that reputation? It's because it's been unsalty salt... Some salt, mixed with some ‘not real salt at all’, and it ends up a mess.

There's a couple of ways salt can seem to lose its saltiness... Dilution and contamination (both actually the same thing)... It's not that the salt loses its saltiness – it's that the salt is missing, or it's mixed with something that's not salt at all.

You can very quickly tell, if you've forgotten to put the salt into the porridge. Eeww. Horrible, tasteless stuff – the salt's missing... What's an egg-white like without salt on it???
Eeww..

So, salt could be missing, or it could be contaminated:

In my younger years, I used to supplement my low-paying station-hand award wage, by shooting the roos and selling the skins... And so what I'd do, is I'd take the skins to the old shearing shed, where I'd lay one skin down and salt it (etc.)... Then when it came time to take the skins into town, I'd shake the remaining salt out onto an old tarp, and keep it to use it again...

But after using that same salt 3 or 4 times, it just ended up one sticky, gluggy, bloody and fatty mess, that was no good for anything. It was contaminated.

As Christians, if we stop living by kingdom principles, and start living a worldly life, we get contaminated and we lose our saltiness. A disciple of Jesus, who doesn't live by kingdom principles, isn't a disciple of Jesus at all...

Jesus said: **Have salt in yourselves, and be at peace with one another."**

Alright, this isn't just an individual thing...

When a Christian church is all on the same page, there's peace in that church...

But when the world creeps into the church – when the salt is missing, or when the salt is contaminated... the church becomes an ugly, horrible mess... And there is no peace...

Some people want to know, "Why do I have to live up to your ideals to be part of the church?" Well, the answer is, you don't... We **don't** have to live up to ideals to be part of the church... We just have to be salt...

We have to be true disciples of Jesus, who are following Jesus:

- so much in love with Jesus, that we want to honour Him with every fibre of our being;

- Loving Him so much, that we would cut off anything that hinders us –
- that we would take radical steps to remove whatever temptation it is, that we personally struggle with...

Have salt in yourselves, and be at peace with one another."

In the church, peace comes, when together, we are the salt He intends us to be.

Peace, in the Name of the Lord Jesus Christ...

Questions:

ⁱ France, R.T., 2002. *The Gospel of Mark: a commentary on the Greek text*, Grand Rapids, MI; Carlisle: W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press.