

# It Is What It Was

## What is the Role of the Church?

*You are the salt of the earth; but if salt has lost its taste, how shall it's saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything except to be thrown out and trodden underfoot by men.*

*You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hid.*

*Nor do men light a lamp and put it under a bushel, but on a stand and gives light to all in house.*

*Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven*  
*Matthew 5:13-16*

Some while ago I was challenged by a colleague to answer a very thought provoking question; what is the role of today's church? I must admit what seemed at first to be an easy question, after much thought and prayer, turned out to be more than meets the eye. I remembered an old magazine ad for the 1994 Ford Mustang. It was celebrating its 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary. There was an image of the new 1994 Mustang over a mirror image of the original 1964 mustang and the caption on the top of the ad said "**It Is What It Was**". I realized that was the answer to my prayer. What the Spirit

was showing me was that the role of the church for today is the same as it was from the start. "**It Is What It Was**". Those of us who consider ourselves contemporary minded like to think that as things change in our society we must adapt and change and there a some who believe that the church must do likewise. Their argument is that if the church is going to keep step with this fast pace world it too must be able to adapt.

Radio, television, the movies and social media have greatly influenced our attitudes and our values. What used to be taboo is now common place. There was a time when art used to imitate life and now it is just the opposite. The images that we see on our electronic media show, more often than not, violence, immorality, greed, and corruption. Unfortunately, these are the images that are glorified.

What should the churches response be to this ever increasing worldly influence? Is there something new that the church can say or do that can counter the preponderance of negative images that are programming the minds of this present generation? In times like these, what is the role of the church? "**It Is What It Was**"! If we as followers of Christ

still believe that Christ is the same yesterday, today and forever, If He is still the author and finisher of our faith, then we must believe that what he said over two thousand years ago is still true today! "You are the salt of the earth;" Jesus's intent then was the same as it is now. What Jesus is telling us is that we define by our example what the role and character of the church is. We are / the church is salt. Salt? Could Jesus not find a better image or symbol? Why not, you are the gold of the earth or the platinum or diamonds of the earth. You know something precious, a real treasure. No, Jesus chose Salt. It was not an image of material wealth that Jesus wanted for the church, because wealth is fleeting, here today and gone tomorrow. Jesus wanted the church to be synonymous with the power to preserve and to influence. What better symbol of preservation and influence than salt? The material images would have left the church with its focus on its self, but with idea that the church is the salt of the earth, the focus is on the welfare of others. I know to some the image of salt is out of step, but think for a moment, salt was used in ancient times as a preservative and it is still used in that capacity to day. It was also used to enhance the flavor

of the foods it was applied to. And so is the case still today. It was a preventative measure against decay and corruption back then and it still is today. This was the type of influence the first church had on the world back then and it should still have that power today. It should be noted that the influence of the church back then was not exerted by diffusion of a literature (that is to say the spreading bibles or biblical tracts) or by the performance of prodigies (great orators) or by the hand of authority (some hierarchical body), but simply by the individual and social life of men and women, a few of high degree but far more humble in station who, in fact had salt in themselves. Now look at our society today. Does it not appear to be in a state of decay? Has not our nation's moral center been eschewed? If ever there was a time for the preserving power of salt, it is certainly now! But where is the church? What has happened to its influence? Has the church, in efforts to keep pace with change, lost its identity? Is it no more the role of the church to be the moral compass for our society? Or has it simply become so laid back as an institution (which probably is the response desired by modern society) that it has lost its savoring power? What

was it that Jesus said about salt gone bad? “But if salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything except to be thrown out and trodden underfoot by men”.

“There are two things here insinuated if not foretold by our savior, which deserve serious consideration:

1. That private Christians may, by negligence and abuse of their talents, lose all right sense of religion and virtue.
2. That the Christian church in general should in time become exceedingly corrupted, and that wonderful virtue it had to awaken and reform the world, should be lost and Christianity become very contemptible.”

Contempt is not my idea of what the role of the church should be. But, unless we are positively touching the lives of the people that we encounter, then we have become what Jesus said “good for nothing”! A barrel of salt in the corner of a butcher shop is no more use than a barrel of sawdust; it must be brought in to contact with every inch of the meat in order to prevent decomposition, Spiritual salt is of little value to the community as long as it is

barreled up in a church building however old and prestigious it might be.

The story is told of a woman who had a husband and son who were not saved. This of course was a source of great concern. One day during a family crisis the woman was going around the house filled with despair and weak in spirit. The son went to his mother and said “Mother you wonder why father and I have never joined your church. Well I’ll tell you why. Look at you now in the midst of this crisis how down and in despair you are. And the look at how well father and I are holding up and we don’t claim any savior for help or strength. If the best your savior can do for you is this, then we want no part of your so called religion.

What is the role of the church? **“It Is What It Was”!** To make others’ lives better by the salt preserving power that resides in you. **“It Is What It Was”!**