

While Aaron Ralston was on a hiking trip in Blue John Canyon near Moab, Utah, a boulder dislodged, crushing his right forearm and pinning it against the canyon wall. Ralston had not told anyone of his hiking plans and knew no one would be searching for him. Assuming that he would die, he spent five days slowly sipping his small amount of remaining water while trying to extricate his arm. He eventually ran out of water and began to drink his own urine, carved his name, date of birth and presumed date of death into the sandstone canyon wall, and videotaped his last goodbyes to his family. After being trapped for five and a half days, he used a dull pocket knife to cut off his arm. He then repelled nearly 70 feet and hiked three hours before he was rescued by a helicopter. Incredible isn't it? If you were in the same predicament with the same set of circumstances, would you be able to do what Mr. Ralston did? It would be a very difficult thing to lose a limb. But consider the alternative. Either lose a limb, or keep it and die. Which choice would you make? Today, we are called by Jesus to do an amputation. The question remains? Are you ready Christian to "Make A Radical Amputation!"

The disciples of Jesus Christ were caught up in wanting to be known for doing something great in their lives. They wanted to be the ones who cast out the demons. They wanted to be loved by the masses. They were the ones who wanted to have special perks in heaven. Since these disciples were so concerned about how many great things they should do for greatness, Jesus wanted them to take a step backwards. He said, "Instead of thinking what you can do to be great, maybe you should think about what you can do to earn hell." He quoted Isaiah 66:24 and said that hell was a place where the fire would never be quenched and the "worm does not die." Imagine living in a place that is eternally hot and miserable, where the stench of decay and the pain never ever stops.

One way a person could earn a place in hell would be to cause a young believer to sin. If anyone causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to be thrown into the sea with a large millstone tied around his neck. That's really not a very good translation. The Word for sin is really skandalon - which means a stumbling block - referring to causing someone to fall from faith. Jesus was saying that if you cause a little one to fall from faith, even unknowingly, it would be better for a big millstone to be tied around your neck and for you to be thrown into the depths of the sea. Take a look at yourself today. What kind of example are you setting for small children or for young believers by your life and actions? Do others see Jesus in your life, your words, your behavior? Are you causing others to stumble by your behavior? Are you a candidate for hell?

Not only are we to be concerned about what causes others to sin - but what causes us to sin. In fact Jesus said, that whatever causes us to sin, should be cut off. Jesus' solution to fight sin seems to be that you cut off your hand or your foot or tear out your eye. It sounds like the terrifying examples of Sharia Law that we sometimes hear reported from Saudi Arabia, doesn't it, where thieves have their hands forcibly amputated for stealing a loaf of bread? And some Christians *have* taken this literally. Some have cut off delicate parts of their anatomy to prevent falling prey to temptation. Others have refused to become organ donors in case their eyes were donated to people who would use their eyes for lustful purposes.

Obviously, Jesus is not literally asking us to cut off our hands and feet, and gouge out our eyes today. He is using radical language to get our attention and make a point. The point is that we need to fight against sin. We need to quit selling ourselves out to sin. Our hands can get us into trouble by stealing, hitting, killing, pointing, insulting, holding a joint or a drink. We can injure people and kill people with the use of our hands. But the problem is not primarily with our hands but primarily with the heart and head which controls our hands. The heart and the head control the hands just as the heart and head control the tongue. A person doesn't cut out a tongue when He curses or swears. The problem is not with the tongue but with the heart and head which control the tongue. Your feet may take you to places where you should not be. Your eyes may look greedily, lustfully, or with rage at another person. Again, your feet or eyes don't cause sin, but the human heart and head causes your eyes and feet to wander off in a sinful direction.

My friends, the root cause of our troubled behavior is our sinful human heart. Jesus wants us to fight sin in our lives, not give into its demands. Some of us have taken the slogan 'Everything in moderation' and seem to think we can have sin in moderation. Not in the eyes of Jesus. We can't cherish our favorite sin. It has to come to the Cross. It has to die. There are no exceptions. It isn't acceptable to say, "I drink too much now and then. I don't care really care to exercise my body or keep it in shape. 'I've always had a temper,' or, 'I've always had an eye for the ladies', or 'It's just the way I'm made'. Help and healing are only available from Christ. Otherwise, we are headed for hell, where our worm does not die, and where the fire is not quenched.

How does Christ help us out? The answer deals with salt. Listen to these words from our lesson. "Salt is good, but if it loses its saltiness, how can you make it salty again?" Salt is also known as a preservative. It keeps food from getting stale. In the same way, this salty talk of Jesus helps preserve us in a strange kind of way. When we realize that we can't enter heaven with sin, and that sin is in our hands, feet, eyes and heart - it makes us despair. It cuts open a wound and then pours salt in it - making it sting and hurt. It has to hurt and it has to sting. Why? If it doesn't you won't cry out for help. By salting us with fire, Jesus wanted the disciples, and us, to remember why we will stand before the judgment seat of God and be accepted into heaven. It's not because our hands and feet have been cut off, but because Jesus' hands and feet have been pierced. Isaiah said that he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed. (Is 53:5) It's not because our eyes were gouged out, but because Jesus was blindfolded and socked in the face for us. We are going to heaven because Jesus fulfilled his prediction in vs. 31 that he would literally be "cut off." Not only was Jesus cut off from the land of the living on the cross, he was cut off from His own Father's love. When Jesus cried out, "my God, my God, why have you forsaken me," it was as if God were chopping their relationship in two. The lifelong friendship and companionship of the Father and the Son was chopped apart. Why? So that God's wrath could be taken away, and the lifelong enmity between you and God would be mended. That's the salve that heals our wound - knowing that we were already cut off - in Christ.

You see, in this big race for greatness, the disciples were losing their salt. They were

forgetting that even though they were chasing out demons, they still needed to remember what they really deserved. They needed to keep the fire of hell burning in front of them - to remember what they deserved and what they needed salvation from.

So Jesus said, Have salt in yourselves, and be at peace with each other.” Unless you have that salt in yourself - unless you remember each and every day that even when you do seemingly great things in God’s kingdom, your hands, eyes, and feet are still sinful - and you still deserve to be thrown in the fire. If it weren’t for God’s grace and Jesus’ sacrifice you would be on your way to hell. It took a tremendous sacrifice of Jesus Christ to take you from God’s condemnation - that’s the ONLY reason you’re here. It’s not because you stopped smoking, drinking, or doing drugs. It’s because the blood of Christ purified you. When you remember that - when you have that salt stinging truth within you, it will keep you from trying to devour each other. It will keep you at peace with one another when you remember we’re all in the same boat. We were all sinners who were saved by the grace of Christ. Period.

So what is this “salt” Jesus wants them to possess? It is the Word of God. Jesus wants them to have this salt within them continually throughout their lives and ministries. The good news of forgiveness of sins and eternal life found in their Savior Jesus would be the “salt” that preserves their faith. That gospel would also preserve something else. Jesus’ disciples would be at peace with each other and with others when they filled themselves up with his gospel. But Christ also explained a warning about this salt. Jesus says, *“But if it loses its saltiness, how can you make it salty again?”*

Is it possible for us, as Jesus’ disciples, to lose our saltiness? Yes. When we stop using the Means of Grace, the Lord’s gospel in Word and sacraments, on a regular basis we risk losing our spiritual preservative. When we misuse God’s Word by adding and subtracting from it, or picking and choosing what we want to listen to from it, we risk losing our spiritual preservative. Our Lord Jesus presents you today with how you can overcome sin. Fill yourselves with the forgiveness that our Lord’s Supper assures you that you receive. Fill yourselves up in your Savior’s life-sustaining Word. There you hear the good news of Jesus’ paying for our sins with his death on the cross over and over again. Continually preserve yourself in the salt of his Word.

Every time I eat a steak I won’t add any sauce because I like the natural flavor of the meats and juices. But there is one thing I do add - and that’s salt. Like different spices, salt helps to enhance the natural flavor and bring it out more to me, so I can really savor every bite as it melts in my mouth. Before the disciples could really enjoy the feast of salvation, they first of all needed some salt. Jesus added some flavor to the conversation by reminding them of the dangers of hell and how they deserved it. It wasn’t for the purpose of sending them to hell, but for the purpose of keeping them out of hell. Don’t forget the salt. It isn’t the main course. But it helps enhance the main dinner. It keeps you aware of how much you need God’s grace, and makes you savor the crucifixion of Christ all the more. The salt of God’s fire enables you to fear and love God, recognizing that we have been saved from the fire. Don’t forget the salt. Amen.