

## We Are to *Be* Salt and Light ~ Part 2

### Sitting at the Feet of Yeshua



In my last post, we began to look at Yeshua's instruction that Believers are to be salt and light. In this post, we will conclude our study with a deeper understanding of what it means to be salt and light.

*"You are salt for the Land. But if salt becomes tasteless, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything except being thrown out for people to trample on. You are light for the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden. Likewise, when people light a lamp, they don't cover it with a bowl but put it on a lampstand, so that it shines for everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before people, so that they may see the good things you do and praise your Father in heaven."* ~ Matthew 5:13-16 (CJB)

In both verse 13 and verse 14 the pronoun **you** is emphatic. The idea is, **"You are the only salt for the land"** and **"You are the only light for the world."** The world's corruption will not be retarded and its darkness will not be illuminated unless God's people are its salt and light. The very ones who are despised by the world and persecuted by the world are the world's only hope.

The **'are'** in both verses stresses **being** rather than doing. Yeshua is stating a fact, not giving a command or request. Salt and light represent what Believers *are*. The only question, as Yeshua goes on to say, is whether or not we are tasteful salt and effective light. The very fact that we belong to Yeshua makes us His salt and light in the world.

We are God's salt to retard corruption and His light to reveal truth. One function is negative, the other positive. One is silent, the other is verbal. By the indirect influence of the way we live we retard corruption, and by the direct influence of what we say we manifest light.

In verse 13, Yeshua provided us with an expression, which has become one of the greatest compliments that can be paid to any person - *"People like that are the salt of the earth."*

In the ancient world salt was the commonest of all preservatives. It was used to keep things from going bad. Salt was connected with purity. In Greek history, salt was considered divine. The Romans said that salt was the purest of all things. Salt was indeed the most primitive of all offerings to the gods, and at the end of the day the Jewish sacrifices were offered with salt. We read in B'midbar 18:19 about the eternal covenant of salt. So then, if the Believer is to be the salt of the earth he must be an example of **purity**.

The Believer must be the person who holds aloft the standard of absolute purity in speech, in conduct, and even in thought. No Believer can depart from the standards of strict honesty. No Believer can think lightly of the lowering of moral standards in a world where the streets of every city provide their deliberate enticements to sin. No Believer can allow himself the racial or suggestive jokes, which are so frequently a part of social conversation. The Believer cannot withdraw from the world, but he must, as James said, keep **"oneself from being contaminated by the world."** (James 1:27)

Perhaps the greatest and the most obvious quality of salt is that salt lends flavor to things. Many foods without salt are sadly tasteless. Believers are to life what salt is to food. Believers lend flavor to life. The tragedy is that so often people have connected Believers with precisely the opposite. They have connected Believers with that which takes the flavor out of life.

Yeshua went on to say that, if the salt had become tasteless, it was fit only to be thrown out onto the roadway and be trodden under foot. If a Believer is not fulfilling his purpose, then he is on the way to disaster.

Yeshua also calls us to be light. ***"You are the light for the world."*** This repeats the teaching of Isaiah when he declared that the Jewish people were to be a light to the nations, so God's salvation can spread to the ends of the earth (Isaiah 49:6). Whereas salt is hidden, light is obvious. Salt works secretly, while light works openly. Salt works from within; light from without. Salt is largely negative. It can retard corruption, but it cannot change corruption into incorruption. Light is more positive. It not only reveals what is wrong and false but helps produce what is righteous and true.

God's light is to walk by and to live by. In its fullest sense, God's light is the full revelation of His Word - the written Word of Scripture and the living Word of Yeshua. God's people are to proclaim God's light in a world engulfed in darkness. Yeshua is the true light, and we are His reflections. By its nature and by definition light must be visible in order to illuminate. Believers must be more than the largely indirect influence of salt; they must also be the direct and noticeable instruments of light.

Both in the daytime and at night, ***"a town built on a hill cannot be hidden."*** It is exposed for all to see. By day, its houses and buildings stand out on the landscape, and at night the many lights shining out of its windows make it impossible to miss. A secret Believer is as inconsistent as a hidden light. Lights are to illuminate, not to be hidden; to be displayed, not to be covered. Believers are to be both subtle salt and conspicuous light.

When Yeshua said that the Believer must be the light of the world, what did he mean?

A light is first and foremost something, which is meant to be seen. Consequently, our influencing faith is something, which is meant to be seen. As someone has well said, *"There can be no such thing as secret discipleship, for either the secrecy destroys the discipleship, or the discipleship destroys the secrecy."* A man's faith should be perfectly visible to all men.

Faith should not be visible only within the Kehilah. Believers who leave their faith at the congregation's door are not much use to anyone. We should be even more visible in the ordinary activities of the world. We should be visible in the way we treat a sales clerk at the mall, in the way we order a meal in a restaurant, in the way we treat our employees or serve our employer, in the way we play a game or drive our car, in the daily language we use, in the literature we read. Yeshua did not say, "You are the light in the Messianic Community"; he said, "You are the light for the world."

A light is a guide. We know how difficult it is to find a street address at night when there are no streetlights. A light is something to make clear the way. So we must make the way clear to others. We must of necessity be an example.

One of the things, which this world needs more than anything else, is people who are prepared to be lighthouses. There are many people in this world who have not the moral strength and courage to take a stand by themselves, but if someone gives them a lead, they will follow. It is the Believer's duty to take the stand and provide leadership.

A light can often be a warning light. A light is often the warning that tells us to halt when there is danger ahead. It is sometimes our duty to bring that necessary warning. That is often difficult; but one of the most

poignant tragedies in life is for someone to come and say to us, "I would never have been in that situation, if you had only said something to me."

Before closing, I do want to look a little closer at verse 16. ***"In the same way, let your light shine before people, so that they may see the good things you do and praise your Father in heaven."*** (Matthew 5:16)

There are two key points here.

People are to see our good deeds. In Greek there are two words for good. One word simply defines a thing as good in quality. The second word means that a thing is not only good, but that it is also charming, beautiful and attractive. That second word is used here. The good deeds of the Believer must be not only good; they must also be attractive. There must be a beauty in our goodness. The tragedy of many so-called good deeds is that in them there is an element of hardness, coldness and austerity. There is a charm in a true Believer's goodness, which makes it a lovely thing.

It should also be noted that our good deeds ought to draw attention, not to ourselves, but to God. The Glory belongs to the Lord!

In conclusion, our qualities as Believers are to be as ***"the salt for the land"*** and ***"the light for the world."*** Our mission is the hope of the Kingdom. Salt is a preservative element; light is a life-giving one; but the world is not eager to be preserved or willing to receive life. Therefore, we must expect opposition and persecution. By our character and deeds, we are to make our influencing faith a force for good in the lives of our neighbors.

Yeshua's teaching in these verses challenges us to ask: How are we engaging our neighborhoods? What spiritual corruptions are we fighting to overcome? What positive changes are we trying to promote? What impact for God are we having through our work? Have we lost our saltiness? Are we standing like burned out lights, ineffective and waiting to be replaced? Or, are we shining brilliantly with the love and truth of the Messiah?

In my next post, we will continue to sit at the feet of Yeshua in our study of Matthew by examining what I call the Eternal Torah.