

Salt and Light

Our last study was about the eighth and last beatitude that Jesus gave in the Sermon on the Mount, “Blessed are those who have been persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when people insult you and persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of Me.” (Matt. 5:10-11). The beatitude reminded us that Christians will suffer when they stand for truth, righteousness, and when they witness about Jesus. If we are not suffering, then we may not really desire to live a godly life (2 Tim. 3:12). The followers of Jesus are also to live in peace with others as much as they can since they are to be peacemakers too!

Every true follower of Jesus Christ since He walked this earth has wanted to be able to live “a tranquil and quiet life in all godliness and dignity” (1 Tim. 2:2). No one wants to be physically persecuted or insulted. Yet, every follower of Jesus has a decision to make at some point in his/her life. Every follower of Jesus must ask himself/herself the following question, “Do I live a godly life, share my faith, and get insulted or physically persecuted or do I hide?” There are only two types of followers of Jesus - those who are secret followers of Jesus and those who display their faith.

YOU ARE SALT. So it is not surprising that after talking about persecution and insults, Jesus’ next words were ones of encouragement not to hide.

You are the salt of the earth; but if the salt has become tasteless, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled under foot by men.
(NASB) Matt. 5:13

Salt was common at the time of Jesus Christ. Those who were sitting there on the grassy hillside listening to Him would have been familiar with salt. Salt could be obtained from the Dead Sea. In those days it was used to add flavor to food (Job 6:6), preserve meat, and even help in the construction of buildings. For exam-



Salt Flats

ple, ancient writers tell us that the roof of the average home was layered first with tree limbs, which were covered with leaves, then dirt, and finally salt. The salt was used to make the roof harder and reduce erosion of the dirt on the roof from running off during rain. Newborn babies were bathed in and rubbed with it (Ezek. 16:4). Salt was also used in the sacrifices (Ezek. 43:24).

The salt of Jesus’ day was not pure sodium chloride as it is today, but was a mixture with other minerals. Consequently due to water and moisture, it could lose its flavor and quality because it was not pure sodium chloride.

So when Jesus told them that they were the salt of the earth and that they could lose their salty taste, they understood because from their experience

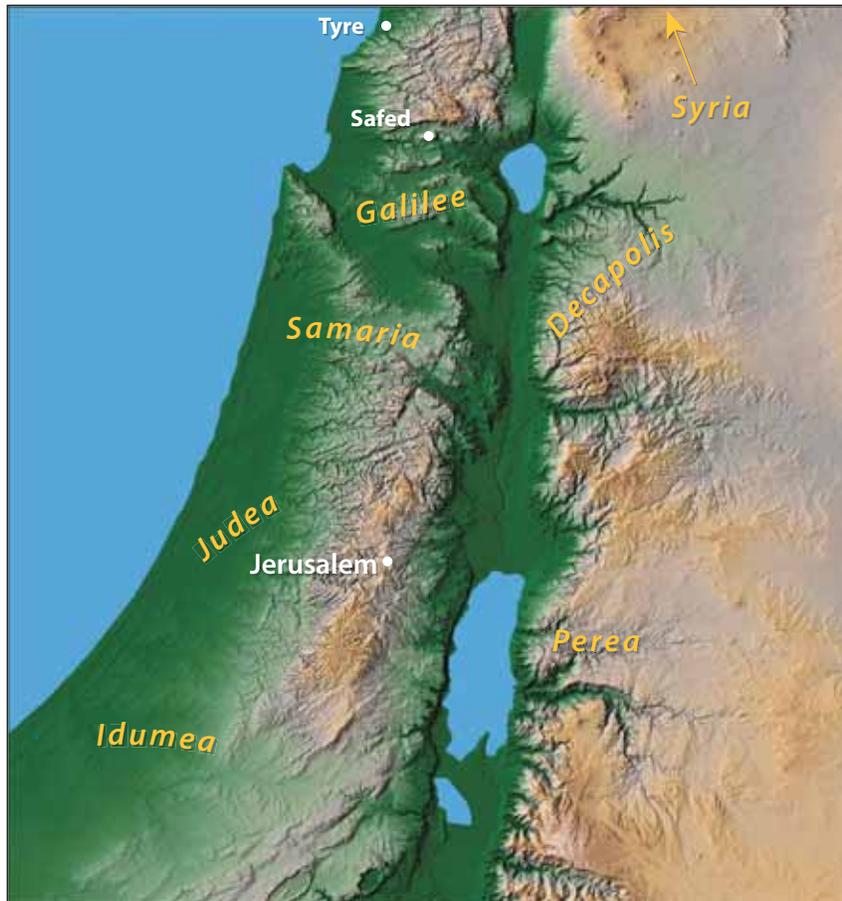
salt could lose its taste. Some have accused Jesus of making an error when they remind us that from a scientific viewpoint pure sodium chloride cannot lose its saltiness. In response, we must remember that Jesus was not giving a lecture in science. He used an illustration of something that was familiar to them in order to teach them a spiritual truth.

When their salt became tasteless, they could not make it salty again. “It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled under foot by men.” Tasteless salt was good for nothing. Historians tell us that one could walk down a street and find salt that had been thrown into the street because it was not “good for anything.” So they tossed it into the street. It was useless in cooking. It was useless as a preservative, for sanitization, or for flavoring in food. Tasteless salt is worthless. As a result those who walked by would “trample” on it.

Dear follower of Jesus, are you tasteless? Do you make a difference in the world? Jesus said that His followers are the salt of the earth. Are you “good for something”?

YOU ARE THE LIGHT. Then Jesus painted a fascinating illustration.

You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden; nor does anyone light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house. (NASB) Matt. 5:14-15



He begins with the world, moves to a city, and concludes with a room in a house. He starts large and ends up in something smaller. He started this illustration by saying that His followers are the light of the world. How many people consider the followers of Jesus to be the light of anything? Today some are saying that Christians caused the so called Dark Ages. But the Encyclopedia Britannica makes

this comment about the “Dark Ages,”

Specifically, the term refers to the time (476–800) when there was no Roman (or Holy Roman) emperor in the West; or, more generally, to the period between about 500 and 1000, which was marked by frequent warfare and a virtual disappearance of urban life. It is now rarely used by historians because of the value judgment it implies. Though sometimes taken to derive its meaning from the fact that little was then known about the period, the term’s more usual and pejorative sense is of a period of intellectual darkness and barbarity. (Encyclopedia Britannica 2005).

Contrary to the belief of some, the followers of Jesus are the light of the world.

Then Jesus expands His illustration to include the light from a city that sits on a hill. During the time of Jesus there was a sacred city that had been built on a high hill northwest

of the Sea of Galilee. The city was called Safed. Today it is called Tsfat or Zefat. The lights of the town can be seen far away. The Talmud says that in Jesus' day the Safed was a signal station to announce the arrival of the new moon. Safed was one of four sacred cities. Therefore, the crowd could understand Jesus' illustration since they were familiar with such a famous example. Jesus' point is simple. A city built on a high hill cannot be hidden at night when lights are glowing.

The third part of His illustration is about a lamp that is burning at night. In those days they did not have electricity. The only way one could see at night was by candle or an oil burning lamp. No one lights a lamp and then covers it to hide the light. That is Jesus' point. This last part of the illustration is a favorite one of Jesus (Mark 4:21; Luke 8:16; 11:33).

SHOW YOURSELF.

Jesus' illustration started with the world, then moved to the idea of a glowing city at night on a hill, and finally to a lamp in a home. Notice what Jesus did not say. He did not say that His followers were the light in the house, or that they were the light of a city. No, they are the light of the world! They are the light of the entire world. So Jesus concludes His illustrations with a command.

Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven.
(NASB) Matt. 5:16

Go, shine!

Jesus did not command them to go and hide as many monks have done in monasteries down through the centuries. He did not command them to live like hermits in various degrees of solitude. Jesus did not encourage His fol-

lowers to become ascetics and practice self-denial, fast, live in poverty, or become celibate. No, Jesus commanded them to show their light to the world. A follower of Jesus might be the light of the world, but we will not be seen by others unless we show ourselves.

If you are a follower of Jesus, are you showing yourself to the world? Jesus has not asked us to play secret Christian agent. We are not to be Spiritual Secret Agent 007 - a spiritual James Bond. The Greek word that Jesus uses for "before" is EMPROSTHEN. The Greek word has the idea of "in front of." That is, the lives of followers of Jesus are supposed to be on display in front of everyone.

In 1 Thessalonians 5:5 the followers of Jesus are called "sons of light and sons of day" and in Eph. 5:8 they are called "children of Light." They are light and the light of

the world because God is Light.

This is the message we have heard from Him and announce to you, that God is Light, and in Him there is no darkness at all.
(NASB) 1 John 1:5

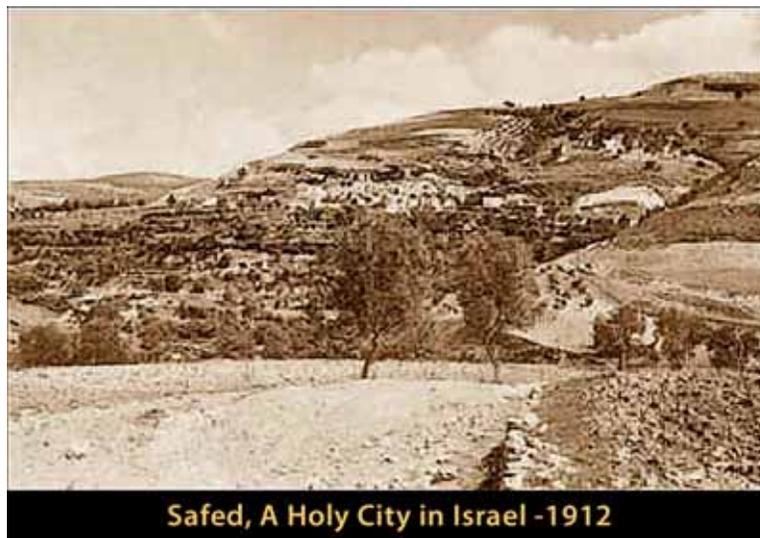
SHINE HOW? So how are the followers of Jesus supposed to

shine? What are they supposed to display? The answer is found in Ephesians,

... for you were formerly darkness, but now you are Light in the Lord; walk as children of Light (for the fruit of the Light consists in all goodness and righteousness and truth), trying to learn what is pleasing to the Lord. (NASB) Eph. 5:8-10

The fruit of the Light is goodness, righteousness, and truth. The followers of Jesus are supposed to show these virtues.

CONCLUSION. We, who are followers of Jesus, are to be salt and light to the world. But some have become tasteless. Some have hidden their light. Some are not shining in the



Safed, A Holy City in Israel -1912

city. Some are not even shining at home. How can they shine in the world?

Some Christians become preoccupied with the politics of homosexuality, abortion, prayer in the school, and creationism or intelligent design versus evolution, and are not sharing Jesus with those who are spiritually dying. Yes, Christians should take a stand on these issues when their government grants them the freedom to do so. But goodness, righteousness, and truth are not the marks that are always being displayed in public discussions. Instead some Christians are displaying anger and unkindness to the world. Some have become preoccupied with wrong priorities to the neglect of evangelism. As a consequence, some in the world know that the followers of Jesus are against abortion but do not know that Jesus died for their sins. Many have never been asked about their relationship with God. Do they want their sins forgiven? Do they believe that Jesus is God? But the one thing they do know is that Christians oppose certain moral and cultural agendas, or want to impose a Christian agenda upon them. The great commission is to make disciples (Matt. 28:19-20). Then the culture will be transformed. We must be salt in the political discourse when allowed, but we must share Jesus! We need to stand for righteousness and share Jesus too!

If goodness, righteousness, and truth had been glowing before the eyes of the world, would our world be in its present condition? In some homes and churches the light has been almost completely covered. Some churches have become a place for “us and no more.” It is easy for a church to become a sacred club for “us and no more” - simply a social club. For some, goodness and kindness have become a motto among Christians and not others (Gal. 6:10).

In other churches truth is being minimized when there is no Sunday School, Sunday evening service, or mid-week Bible study. Some churches have small groups or home Bible Studies where the study of the Bible is minimized in favor of a social time. In some churches the pulpit ministry is maybe only thirty minutes long, the Bible passage is read, and then the pastor quickly moves to the application. As a result, some followers of Jesus do not understand their Bible or their faith with depth. Should we be surprised that some believers are

not salt and light? Even the world can have a great social time, but Jesus and the ministry of the Word of God is what makes the followers of Jesus Christ unique. Some followers have forgotten that the Holy Spirit encourages us to be like hungry, newborn babies who long for milk.

... like newborn babies, long for the pure milk of the word, so that by it you may grow in respect to salvation . . . (NASB) Pet. 2:2

So should we be surprised that some followers struggle with what is truth? It is hard to stand for truth when the followers do not know their Bible - The Word of Truth. It is difficult to be salt and light when the followers do not know what God has said about salt and light.

It is difficult to be salt and light when the followers are not kind, do not stand for righteousness, and do not know truth. The followers of Jesus need to display their faith in front of everyone - in front of their eyes. Jesus said, “Let your light shine *before* men . . .”

How is your light shining? The keeper of a lighthouse at Calais was boasting of the brightness of his lantern from the lighthouse which could be seen ten leagues at sea. A visitor said to him, “What if one of the lights would go out?” - “Never, - impossible!” He cried, horrified at the thought. “Sir,” he said, pointing to the ocean, “yonder, where nothing can be seen, there are ships going by to all parts of the world. If tonight one of the my burners went out, within six months would come a letter, perhaps from India, perhaps from America, perhaps from some place I never heard saying on such a night, at such an hour, the light of Calais burned dim, the watchman neglected his post, and vessels were in danger. Ah, sir! Sometimes in the dark nights in stormy weather, I look out at sea, and feel as if the eyes of the whole world were looking at my light. Go out? - burn dim? - NEVER!”

Are you salt and light?