

You are the Salt of the Earth and the Light of the World

Matthew 5: 13-16

DIG: What are the two primary purposes of **salt**? How are the beatitudes (see Db - Blessed are the Poor in Spirit for Theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven) related to Yeshua's words about **salt** and **light**? How are believers to influence society?

REFLECT: How effective is the "salt" in your life? Do you keep your "salt" in a shaker or shake it around? Based on the beatitudes, is "the light" of your life shining like a 300 watt bulb? A 100 watt? A night **light**? A match stick? Why? What actions are you taking to allow your **light** to shine so brightly? How can Yeshua enable you to "shine" brighter?

In these four verses **Jesus** summarizes the function of **believers** in the world. Reduced to one word, that function is *influence*. Whoever lives according to the righteousness of the Torah, in contrast with pharisaic righteousness, will function in the world as **salt** and **light**. How **we** live **our** lives, either consciously or unconsciously, influences other **people** for better or worse. The world has no other way of knowing **Messiah** apart from the testimony of **believers**. Rabbi Sha'ul said we should reveal **the sweet aroma of the knowledge of Christ in every place. For we are a fragrance of the Messiah among those who are perishing, to the one an aroma from death to death, to the other an aroma from life to life (Second Corinthians 2:14-16 NASB).**

The figures of **salt** and **light** emphasize different characteristics of influence, but their basic purpose is the same. The world needs **salt** because it is corrupt and it needs **light** because it is dark. **Evil people and impostors will go from bad to worse, deceiving others and being deceived themselves (Second Timothy 3:13).** The world cannot do anything but get worse, because it has no inherent goodness to build on, no inherent moral or spiritual life in which it can grow. Year after year, decade after decade, century after century, the system of evil accumulates a deeper and more perverse darkness.

Humanity is infected with the deadly virus of sin, which has no cure apart from **ADONAI**. Yet unlike their attitude toward physical diseases, most people do not want their sin cured. They love their decadence and they hate **the Lord's** righteousness. They grab onto the steering wheel of their lives and refuse to let go. They love their own way and hate **God's**.

But the congregations of **God** cannot accept the world's self-centeredness, immorality, amorality and materialism. **We** are called to minister to the world while still remaining separate from its lure. Unfortunately today many are influenced more by the world than the world is influenced by us. The **you** in both verses is emphatic and plural. It's the whole body, Jew and Gentile, that's called to be the world's **salt** and **light**. Each grain of **salt** has its limited influence, but it is only as the congregations of **God** are scattered in **the world** that change will come. One ray of **light** by itself is of little value, but when joined with other rays a great **light** can be seen.

Are stresses *being* rather than *doing*. **Messiah** is stating a fact here, not giving a request or command. **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 compelling **light**. The very fact that we are children of **King Messiah** makes us **His salt** to retard corruption and **His light** to reveal the truth. One function is negative, while the other is positive. One is silent, one is verbal. By the indirect influence of the way we live we retard corruption, and by the direct influence of what we say we exhibit **light**.

Both **salt** and **light** have to be different from that which they are to influence. **The Savior of Sinners** has changed us from being part of the problem to being part of the solution; from being part of the corrupted world to being **salt** that can help preserve it.

Christ is the source of our **light**. **He** is the true light, which gives light to everyone entering the world . . . **while I AM the light of the world, I AM in the world** (John 1:9, 9:5). But now that **He** has left the world **His light** comes to the world through those whom **He** has enlightened. We should, therefore, reflect **the light** of **Messiah**. **For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light, for He has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the Kingdom of the Son He loves (Ephesians 5:8; Colossians 1:13).**⁵¹² **Believers** who understand and attain true righteousness through **Christ** become two things:

1. **You are the salt of the earth. Salt in the ancient world was vitally important, so much so that the Talmud states that "the world cannot exist without salt" (Tractate Soferim 15.8). Salt** was an important commodity for trade, as seen in **the covenant of salt** in Torah (**Numbers 18:19**). Our modern saying of someone "being worth their salt" calls us back to the days when **salt** was traded with great value. What is **the Lord** saying when **He** refers to **us** as the **salt** of the earth? Well, **salt** has two primary purposes - it flavors and it preserves.

First, those who attain true righteousness are the ones who flavor life, and make it worth living in this world. They are the ones who give encouragement, blessing and mercy in spite of what the world around them may be like. This is often described in terms of the fellowship among believers. It makes the righteous life worth living.

Secondly, the ones who attain this righteousness are the ones who preserve the earth as well. In this context, **Jesus** was dealing with the Jewish nation under the Torah because it was still in effect. A preservative was a common teaching in the TaNaKh for **the believing remnant** of Israel. **Unless the LORD of heaven's angelic armies had left us some survivors, we would have become like Sodom, we would have been like Gomorrah (Isaiah 1:9)**. The ones who attain the kind of righteousness the Torah demanded was the believing remnant, or the **survivors**. From the beginning of Jewish history until the present time, the **survivors** are the ones who exhibit this kind of righteousness. Therefore, they preserve the nation as a whole. Many times in the TaNaKh the prophets say that the reason **God** did not destroy the entire nation of Isra'el for its sinfulness was because of **the believing remnant** within the nation. In that way the **survivors** are **the salt of the earth**, in that they preserve the existence of the nation of Isra'el.

But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? Much of **the salt** in Palestine, such as that found on the shores of the Dead Sea, is contaminated with gypsum and other minerals that at best, make it taste flat, and at worst, make it taste disgusting. When a batch of such contaminated **salt** was discovered, it was **thrown out. It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled underfoot (Mattityahu 5:13)**. **People** would be careful not to throw it on a garden or field, because it would kill whatever was planted. It didn't become unsalty, but contamination caused it to lose its effectiveness as **salt**. Consequently, it would be thrown onto a path or road, where it would gradually be ground into the dirt and disappear.⁵¹³ **Yeshua** warns us that we can lose our effectiveness in the world around us if we lose close contact with **Him**. We are to be like kosher **salt** that preserves society and draws out impurities.

2. **You are the light of the world.** The lampstand in the Tabernacle (see my commentary on Exodus Fn - The Lampstand in the Sanctuary: Christ, the Light of the World), was to be a constant reminder that **God's light** was to be seen in Isra'el. **A town built on a hill cannot be hidden (Matthew 5:14)**. In fact, this **town built on a hill** is most likely a reference to a common practice in the Second Temple period. It was customary to announce the start of the New Moon festival (Rosh Chodesh), by igniting a fire on strategic mountaintops around Isra'el. Since the new moon needed to be verified by a rabbinic court in Jerusalem, the fires were set to quickly announce to the countryside that the festival had officially begun. Because **Yeshua** spoke these words in Galilee, it is likely that **He** was

pointing to the mountain city of Safed (Tzfat), **designated as one of the places where such fires were to be built (Tractate Rosh Hashanah 2.4).**⁵¹⁴

The **believing remnant** of Jews, those who attain the righteousness of ADONAI, are also to be **the light of the world** in that **they** provide spiritual **light**. They were to point the way out of spiritual darkness. This calling was actually nothing new in the understanding of Isra'el. **Isaiah** the prophet long ago reminded his generation that **they** were to be **a light for revelation to the Gentiles, so His salvation could be spread to the ends of the earth (Isaiah 42:6,49:6 and 51:4 CJB; Luke 2:32).**

Yet, as **Yeshua** clarifies here, what **good** is **the light** if you cover it with **a bowl**? Like **salt, light** can also become useless. A hidden **light** is still **light**, but it is useless **light**. **Yeshua** said: **Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead, they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house (Matthew 5:15).** There was always **light** for anyone in the household who had to get up or find their way home during the night.

This **light** is provided by means of **believers**. To **see good deeds** by us is to **see Messiah** in us. A person who is in pitch darkness and suddenly sees a **light** far away will naturally be drawn toward that **light**. **In the same way, let your light shine before others.** Why is that done? **That they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven (Mattityahu 5:16).** How is that done?

Be faithful to your spouse.

Be the one at the office who refuses to cheat.

Be the neighbor who acts neighborly.

Be the employee who does the work and doesn't complain.

Pay your bills.

Do your part and enjoy life.

Don't say one thing and do another.

People are watching the way we act more than they are listening to what we say.⁵¹⁵

It is important to understand that **good deeds** have never saved anyone, but those who are saved will show evidence of their salvation by means of these **good deeds (James 2:18-26).** When unbelievers see these **good deeds** and respond to **the light** given off by them, they will naturally come to **the Light** and become believers also, joining **the believing remnant**. They will end up glorifying their **Father in heaven**. So those who attain the

righteousness that the Torah demanded are supposed to show it and not **put it under a bowl**. The means of showing it are by **good deeds**. Again, **good deeds** are never the means of salvation; they are the evidence of salvation.⁵¹⁶

*Dear heavenly **Father**, forgive me for the times that I have not taken a stand for righteousness sake, and forgive me for the times that I have responded in the flesh. Enable me to speak the truth in love and to be the **salt and light** that You have called me to be. I renounce the lies of Satan that my testimony and commitment to truth will have no value or will not count for eternity. I announce that my life is significant in **Christ**, that I have been called to be **salt and light** and that what I say and do in the power of **the Holy Spirit** will have eternal consequences. I now commit myself to be a part of the building crew. In **Jesus'** precious name I pray. Amen.⁵¹⁷*