

LESSON 3: SALT AND LIGHT (MATTHEW 5:13-16)

The character of those who are in the kingdom of God is radically different from those who are in the world. This has been demonstrated by Jesus in the “beatitudes.” But, they are the ones who will experience true blessedness, as opposed to those in the world. These citizens of God’s kingdom reflect the character of their King, Jesus Christ. Now, Jesus proceeds to demonstrate the impact these people have on the world (Matthew 5:13-16).

YOU ARE THE SALT OF THE EARTH (MATTHEW 5:13)

Salt had multiple uses in Bible times. One use was as a purifying agent (Exodus 30:35; 2 Kings 2:21; Ezekiel 16:4). Another was to season and preserve a sacrifice that was made to God (Leviticus 2:13). Another was to season food for flavor (Job 6:6). Another was involved in making a covenant (Numbers 18:19; 2 Chronicles 13:5). Jesus does not specify the way His followers are the salt of the earth. However, the point is so broad that any of these uses teach a powerful lesson. Jesus’s disciples are at work in this world in a way that makes a difference for the Lord – whether working to purify a wicked world, living as a sacrifice that is acceptable to God on this earth, making this world palatable to God, or living as those who share in the New Covenant through Jesus Christ. Salt makes a difference and has a noticeable impact! Yet, if salt loses its distinct quality (i.e. its taste or saltiness) so as to become defiled, it becomes worthless to accomplish its purpose. Particularly, if the salt was not pure (i.e. mixed with other things to become of an inferior quality), its only use would be to be thrown out and walked on (Luke 14:34-35). So it is whenever citizens of God’s kingdom lose their distinct character Jesus describes. They no longer have the impact in the world God intends for them

to have, even if this one may identify as a “Christian.”

YOU ARE THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD (MATTHEW 5:14-16)

The purpose of light is to shine through the darkness. In doing so, it exposes things that were hidden so that they might be seen. The effects include exposing potential hazards and clearly seeing where you are going. Jesus is described by Scripture as the Light of the world that has come into this world full of darkness (John 8:12; 9:5; 3:19-21). God is also described as being Light in whom there is no darkness and cannot be in fellowship with darkness (1 John 1:5-7). Therefore, darkness is symbolic for wickedness and light is symbolic for righteousness. Furthermore, God’s word is pictured as a light for our paths (Psalm 119:105). As those who are in fellowship with God, being transformed into the image of Jesus, and are following the teachings of Scripture, Jesus’s disciples function as lights in a world full of darkness. Like a city on a hill that gives light that can be seen for miles around or a lamp on a stand that gives light throughout the house, Jesus’s disciples live for what is true and right rather than for the lies and wickedness of the world (Romans 13:11-14; Ephesians 5:8-14; Philippians 2:12-16). So, just as it would be unreasonable for someone to light a lamp and then put it under a basket, it is unacceptable for Jesus’s disciples to refuse to reflect the light of Christ around others. Note there are many “baskets” people can put over their lives – including fear, anxiety, worldly desires, isolation, busyness, etc. Disciples of Jesus must let their lights shine before others in this world, so that they may see their good works and give glory to God! Therefore, the goal is not to be praised by others, but to bring praise to God. In fact, your life will either draw people to Christ (1 Peter 3:1-4) or repel people from Christ (Matthew 23:2-7; Romans 2:17-24).

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN KINGDOM CITIZENS AND THIS WORLD (MATTHEW 5:13-16)

This section clearly shows there is a relationship between citizens of God's kingdom and those in this world. Citizens of God's kingdom are in the world. They are "salt of the earth" and "light of the world," clearly implying their presence. As such, they live among those who are sinners who are under the sway/influence of Satan (1 John 5:19). However, citizens of God's kingdom are not of the world. They are not following the same master as those in the world. Instead, they are living on this earth as pilgrims/exiles/strangers who are passing through this world with the focus of reaching their true Heavenly home (Philippians 1:27-28; 3:17-21; 1 Peter 1:17; 2:11-12). Consider three points concerning this relationship. First, citizens of God's kingdom must not live isolated from those of this world. Just like salt needs to contact whatever it is salting and light needs to shine through darkness, God's people are intended to impact the world by living in the world but not live like the world (Luke 15:1-2; 1 Corinthians 9:19-23). Second, citizens of God's kingdom will stand out from those living for the world as being radically different. God's people must not conform to the world, but be transformed through the gospel of the kingdom (Romans 12:1-2) in every aspect of life (i.e. character, habits, thoughts, words, relationships, beliefs, conduct, etc.). Third, citizens of God's kingdom should expect hatred and persecution from those of the world. This distinctiveness will not be appreciated by everyone, as many will feel challenged and threatened by these things so as to try to harm you (Matthew 5:10-12; John 15:18-21; 2 Timothy 3:12).

CONCLUSION

Citizens of Jesus's kingdom are radically different from the world. This has already been evident with the characteristics Jesus has described in His citizens and will become even more evident as Jesus describes the righteousness that will characterize His disciples. Therefore, those who want to be citizens of God's kingdom must embrace their unique identity as being salt and light in this world.

DISCIPLESHIP QUESTIONS

What were some uses of salt during Bible times?

What does it mean for Jesus's disciples to be the salt of the earth?

How can a follower of Christ be like salt that loses its saltiness?

What is the purpose and usefulness of light?

What does it mean for Jesus's disciples to be the light of the world?

How is it possible for followers of Christ to cover their lights?

What is the purpose of shining as a light and letting others see your good works?

What should the relationship be between Jesus's disciples and the world?

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