

Salt and Light from the Old Testament Part 1

07/12/26

Every generation has individuals who many people will look up to during great trials and sufferings. During the 60's many of the black community looked up to Martin Luther King Jr for leadership and guidance during the Civil Rights movement of that time period. Dr. King wrote a famous letter in 1963 from Birmingham City Jail. He wrote this letter because a group of white clergy had written him a letter questioning the time and methods of these marches and protests that were planned for the city of Birmingham. This long well written letter reveals in many ways the character of Martin Luther King Jr. Here is an example of his character in this letter, "There was a time when the Church was very powerful. It was during that period when the early Christians rejoiced when they were deemed worthy to suffer for what they believed. In those days the Church was not merely a thermometer that recorded the ideas and principles of popular opinion; it was a thermostat that transformed the mores of society. Wherever the early Christians entered a town the power structure got disturbed and immediately sought to convict them for being disturbers of the peace and outside agitators. But they went on with the conviction that they were a colony of heaven and had to obey God rather than man. They were small in number but big in commitment. They were too God – intoxicated to be astronomically intimidated. They brought an end to such ancient evils as infanticide and gladiatorial contest (Hillsdale College)." We may disagree with some of the methods of protest that happened in many of the cities, but his character in trying to help the black community was well know and it shows in his letter. He saw a need and he meet it head on. Letters we write or post on Facebook or social media can shine light on our true character. Our true character can be revealed in our speech as well. During WWII, the people of England looked up to Prime Minister Winston Churchill for leadership. His character was revealed during the dark days of WWII when it seemed like Germany had the upper hand in the fight against England. Winston Churchill made a speech in 1940, right after the Dunkirk

incident where England had to rescue their military, to the House of Commons. At the end of his speech, he stated this that revealed his character, “We shall go on to the end. We shall fight in France, we shall fight on the seas and oceans, we shall fight with growing confidence and growing strength in the air, we shall defend our island, whatever the cost may be. We shall fight on the beaches, we shall fight on the landing grounds, we shall fight in the fields and in the streets, we shall fight in the hills; we shall never surrender, and even if, which I do not for a moment believe, this island or a large part of it were subjugated and starving, then our Empire beyond the seas, armed and guarded by the British Fleet, would carry on the struggle, until, in God’s good time, the new world, with all its power and might, steps forth to the rescue and the liberation of the old. (Martin Gilbert)” Churchill’s character was revealed here – he didn’t give up against the enemy. Martin Luther King and Winston Churchill guided their people through difficult times and their character was showcased for all to see.

We may think we are lucky we don’t have this daily pressure in making sure our character is good because of being under the spotlight – like King and Churchill’s character was on a daily basis. However, as a true follower of Jesus, isn’t our character under a spotlight every day? Are we, as members of our generation, tasked in having a good character so others may use us as an example? We go about in our daily business never entertaining the thought that we are an example of Jesus daily in everything we do. We can’t run from this thought because our Savior had left a command to His disciples, which includes us in Matthew 5: 13-16, ¹³ “You are the salt of the earth; but if the salt has become tasteless, how ^[d]can it be made salty *again*? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled underfoot by people.” ¹⁴ “You are the light of the world. A city set on a ^[e]hill cannot be hidden; ¹⁵ nor do *people* light a lamp and put it under a ^[f]basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house. ¹⁶ Your light must shine before people in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven. (NASB – www.biblegateway.com)

If you look up the Greek terms used for “light”, different Greek terms are used. The Greek term used in verse 14 is a strong Greek term for light. It means a daylight type light, a firelight (Strong’s Concordance). Jesus tells us that we are to

be a daylight type of light in the world we are living in. Not a lightbulb type of light, but a daylight type of light. We are to be visible for all to see. We don't hide it, but let it shine for the people around us. This means whatever you say, type, or do physically is to be a light for the people around us because this light becomes salt that flavors the people around us if they allow the light to shine on them. This glorifies our Lord. Our character plays an important part in the lives of others. We can't take this lightly. I looked up the AI definition of character and it is this: refers to the core moral and ethical qualities that define a person. Think about that for a moment. You are daylight to those around you no matter where you're at. Our character is part of the daily daylight that the people see on a daily basis. It is our core moral and ethical qualities that the people see if we have any. Our moral and ethical qualities are to bring glory to our Lord on a daily basis. The Church of today in America has allowed the culture to tell us what is moral and ethical. This is why the Church in America is becoming more and more lukewarm because the Lord's standards of moral and ethical qualities are being watered down daily and most Christians don't even realize it. People looked up to Martin Luther King and Winston Churchill for examples of a good character, but they were flawed. Winston Churchill's hatred for the German people grew stronger and stronger during WWII to the point where he, at times, lost his focus. An example is his lack of involvement for the Jews in German concentration camps. He wanted Germany destroyed at all costs. Martin Luther King Jr only addressed the issue of violent protests with non-violent words only. Did he really make an effort to stop protests becoming violent or was the thought that violent protests help to advance the cause? We have to be careful on who we use as an example. This goes with the human characters in the Bible. We have King David, who had a heart for God, but he had a lust issue that caused him to sin against God, which caused trouble for those around him as well. His son, King Solomon would have lust issues as too. We can look at Peter in the New Testament who discriminated against the Gentiles and Paul had to call him out on it. Even the human characters in the Bible had trouble at times in having a good character all the time. However, we can't use these sin issues as an excuse to continue in sin because that does not reflect the character of Jesus Christ. Sin does not bring light to the people around us, sin brings darkness. However, we can use all the people in the Bible as teaching tools for our own lives. King David sinned and he was greatly punished for it. King Solomon sinned and it would divide Israel after his death. Peter sinned, but was forgiven and the Gentile Church grew beyond measure. You see, we have to go back to what Jesus said to His disciples about

being light and salt in the world during their time. We are to be light and salt now. What type of character are we to have now? What are we allowing to shape our moral and ethical qualities? Maybe we should say what is powering our light and favoring our salt? What powered the light and salt of Martin Luther King Jr? Was it the mission of Jesus Christ or did that light become replaced with a cause only? Did Winston Churchill let the burden of war start to shape his character? I'm not putting these men down; I'm just asking a question we need to ask because it is a real struggle at times in being salt and light for Jesus all the time. These two men went through events that I would not want to go through. Events can start to shape our character and thinking and we don't even realize it. However, we can't allow this to scare us from being salt and light today. Too many Christians want the easy road and mixing our sinful culture into our daily lives will influence and shape our character to the point where our salt and light is watered down. We need to count the cost. This reminds me of the time Jesus told His disciples how it was going to be. Jesus didn't sugar coat it for His disciples. In John 6, Jesus tells them that they have to eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood. Jesus also stated that those who did this, had eternal life and would remain in Him and Him in them. In other words, His life was to become their own. We would see the example of this from the Church in Acts. There was true love for God and for the people around them. However, this was too radical for many. In John 6: 66, we read, "At this point, many of his disciples turned away and deserted Him. Then Jesus turned to the Twelve and asked, "Are you going to leave, too? (NLT)" The disciples that left didn't want to go that far in their relationship with Jesus. The pressure was too great for them. Their love for themselves and their culture was too great. The pressure today is too great, but instead of walking away, many pick the easier road, which is watering down our relationship with Jesus so that it isn't as hard. This is why many non- Christians don't see much difference in Christians today. Many Christians today curse, drink alcohol, smoke, get involved in sexual sin, lie, cheat, and other types of sin. Their character has become a worldly character that mixes in Jesus when it is convenient, like on Sundays. We're good on Sundays, but the rest of the week we're not. Peter tells the New Testament Church, which we are a part of, this in 1 Peter 1: 13-16, "So think clearly and exercise self-control. Look forward to the special blessings that will come to you at the return of Jesus Christ. Obey God because you are his children. Don't slip back into your old ways of doing evil; you didn't know any better then. But now you must be holy in everything you do, just as God – who chose you to be his children – is holy. For He Himself has said, "You

must be holy because I am holy. (NLT)” How many Nazarene disciples have turned away from this command and have chosen to be like those disciples who left Jesus? How many have made the choice to take the easy road and try to be good at times and do some good deeds once and awhile. Then, before they know it, they’re not much different than the non-Christian. They are void of compassion and Christ- like love which is part of His holiness. Peter tells us that we are His children. Look at all the character traits we have picked up from our human parents. Those who know Jesus as their Savior has the Holy Spirit in their lives that can reshape their character so that it will be holy. This is why so many Christians don’t want to be holy. They try to do it on their own and the pressure is too great for them. They can’t do it, so they’re ok with choosing second best. If we ask for help from Jesus to help us to have a holy character, Jesus will tell the Holy Spirit and He will help us to have/develop a holy character no matter where we live at or what time period we are living in. It is only then, can we become true salt and light in this world. We don’t need to be scared of having a character that is holy.

How can we have a holy character that is pleasing to Jesus so that we can be good salt and light to the people around us for Jesus? First, we need to ask Jesus to help us to want to be holy. Then, we need to ask Jesus to help us to make our character holy. Finally, we need to study Scripture of the men and women who had their character shaped and molded by God. We’ll be spending several weeks on this. God, through His great wisdom, has given us the Word of God that contains many people who have struggled to have a holy character and we can learn from them. We can learn from their mistakes, but most of all, we can learn how they lived out the will of God for their lives. I don’t know about you, but I want my character to be holy for Jesus. I want to be better salt and light in this dying world. Let’s not shy away from this sometimes difficult task, but embrace it because it’ll help us to get closer to Jesus. Remember, you are His children. Do you really believe that today?

Gilbert, Martin. *The Churchill Documents*. Hillsdale College Press: Hillsdale, 1994

Letter from the Birmingham City Jail – American Heritage A Reader. Hillsdale College Press: Hillsdale, 2011

The Strongest Strong’s Concordance. Zondervan: Grand Rapids, 2001.

NLT Life Application Study Bible. Tyndale House Publishers, Inc.: Wheaton, 1996