

The salt of the earth

Adapted from the original article which I wrote as an encouragement to farmers on the 7th of April 2002 at the height of the farm invasions in Zimbabwe.

We read that Jesus instructed us to be the *salt of the earth (Matthew 5:13)*. What does that really mean for each of us here in Zimbabwe / South Africa - with a reeling economy, constant threats, and a barrage of other negative things constantly hurled at us? I guess it is here that the *rubber really meets the road* - where we find out *what we really believe!* What is it deep within a person's being that keeps him positive while all else is crumbling around? To answer that, let's look at the story of young David long before he became king.

In *1Samuel Chapter 17* we read of his famous encounter with Goliath. Some may think that was David's first step to leadership and fame. However, this was really only one step along the way, and certainly not his first. You see, it all started with something which happened to David when he was all alone out in the fields with his sheep - something which had *happened in his heart* - something which only God had seen.

When the prophet Samuel went in obedience to God's call, to anoint a new king, God told Samuel that He sees a man's heart, and because of David's *heart attitude*, God had chosen him to be king.

What happened in David's heart?

I believe that possibly, as David had been lying all alone with his father's sheep out in the field night after night, gazing up

at the starry skies, he might have been awed at the majesty of the Great Creator who had flung the stars into orbit. He might have realised how small and insignificant he was in comparison with all that greatness. In this attitude of awe, he might have remembered what he had been taught as a young child - that YHWH personally loved him, and as a part of the great nation of Israel, had called them to be His very own people through whom He would bless the nations of the world.

Whatever it was that had gone through David's mind and heart, we do not know. However, we do know that he had a personal encounter with YHWH, and in that quiet personal encounter, he had gained an understanding of his personal potential as a child of YHWH. He also recognised his own smallness in comparison. He needed a good mixture of these two great truths to thrust him boldly against the Goliaths he would have to challenge in life. He would certainly need to understand the greatness of YHWH God, and yet to remain humble at the same time - realising that *he could do NOTHING in his own strength*.

Having come to that realisation was one thing, but that truth had to be tested - as all spiritual revelation must be tested if it is to be worth anything. And how was it tested? With lions and bears.

When Saul informed David about the impossibility of the challenge he was facing - to fight against the giant, Goliath - his reply was:

1Sam 17:34 "Your servant was tending his father's sheep.

17:35 When a lion or a bear came and took a lamb from the flock, I went out after him and attacked him, and rescued it from his mouth; and when he rose

up against me, I seized him by his beard and struck him and killed him.

17:36 "Your servant has killed both the lion and the bear; and this uncircumcised Philistine will be like one of them, since he has taunted the armies of the living God."

What do we learn from this reply?

- Firstly, we learn that David's tests started in private. He was tested when no one was watching him. His victories only he (and YHWH) saw, and he was tested again and again until he had confidence to pass the test every time.
- The second thing we learn from his private test was that it was all to do with *responsibility and faithfulness*. His father had given the flocks of sheep and goats into his hands to protect. *He* was thus responsible. Of course, it would have been easy for him to come back with excuses to his father - *"a lion ate some of your flock"*. Most people would consider that to be a reasonable excuse for a loss - but not David! *"My father has given this flock into my hands, and if it costs me my life, I will not allow this lion to steal the flock from my hands."* I wish I had workers that were THAT faithful to me.
- In proving his faithfulness as a shepherd, he had no one watching him, no one to say *"Well done. Thank you for risking your life to protect the sheep."* No one - except God Who sees all things - and rewards in public those things that are done secretly in faithfulness.

WE WILL NEVER KNOW PUBLIC VICTORIES UNTIL WE HAVE EXPERIENCED PRIVATE VICTORIES!

So now when David is suddenly - unexpectedly - faced with a new challenge, he can draw from *experienced victories*. What drew David into battle with Goliath? It was Goliath's mocking of God's people. That went against something that was deeply ingrained in David's soul - God's calling on the nation of Israel of which he was a part. He did not seem to be concerned over the fact that an entire army was running away from this giant. He seemed to not even notice that. All he was concerned with, was,

1Sam17:26 "... Who is this uncircumcised Philistine, that he should taunt the armies of the living God?"

I see here a key to our calling to be salt in the earth. David had a good understanding of YHWH's calling and purposes for the nation as a whole, and therefore for him as an individual part of that great nation. Nothing would sway him from that understanding - and even if he had to go it alone, he would make a difference - he would fight this giant.

Being salt is all about making that difference - standing out - being counted. Jesus made the following comment:

Mark 9:49 "For everyone will be salted with fire. Salt is good, but if the salt becomes unsalty, with what will you make it salty again?"

9:50 "Have salt in yourselves and be at peace with one another."

From this I see that it is possible to become unsalty - to lose our savour - to become lukewarm. How can that be? That happens when we lose that essential willingness to risk things

- when we choose the more comfortable, easy way out, rather than to deliberately choose a path of faith in God.

David could have chosen the easy way out and refused to challenge the lion and bear. But then he would never have met Goliath - and he never would have become the greatest king that ever ruled. He would have remained a simple Israeli shepherd boy and faded into insignificance. We would never have known about him.

Will you take a risk for the greater call - for our beloved nation? Will you walk by faith? Will you stand for truth - put your neck out? Remember that you cannot expect to speak out against a corrupt government or stand against violence or whatever if your *own* life is not in order. We must be willing to allow God to scrutinise our own lives with a magnifying glass and gain our own personal victories. We must be willing to risk taking the log out of our own eyes long before we can dare to take the speck (or forest) out of others' eyes.

We must be careful not to be so daunted by the *personal scrutiny* that we give up before we start, and then never rise to anything. There is not one of us who does not make mistakes. Even David himself made some colossal errors. Yet, he always humbled himself when this was pointed out to him, and this humility made him even greater still. If we are willing to hear when we are wrong, and in hearing, really make an effort, by God's grace, to change personally, then we will be able to lead others to change.

So, we are to be the salt of the earth. I see then that in every sphere we are to be a blessing:

- to improve things around us
- to speak out and help

- to uplift and encourage
- to be there for people in their times of need
- to teach and give
- to sacrifice, if need be, for the sake of the common good
- to see a bigger picture, and with hope in our hearts, reach out for that bigger, better picture with all we have
- to refuse to accept the negative impossible
- to see all men as loved by God and part of His eternal purposes
- to have hope, and with that hope in our hearts, by faith, take on the lions and bears and Goliaths that come our way

It is the understanding of that bigger picture that gives us the confidence and hope. I guess my *bigger picture* came from my *study of the end times*, as well as my exposure to the *faith teaching* some 20 years ago. To have a good understanding of God's eternal purposes and our part in it, really helps us to make sense of the chaos we see happening around us.

I had to face my lions and bears when I was pastor of a small assembly in Fort Victoria, Zimbabwe - with very little or no salary. My wife and I had some exciting encounters with the impossible and found first-hand that *God is our source*. I will never forget how we were two weeks away from the end of the month when we would hopefully get some sort of salary, and our baby needed to have milk - Mandy could not breastfeed for some reason or other. I had \$2 in my pocket - that's all I had. There was a knock on my back door. When I

went to see who it was, there was a blind beggar asking for help. I recognised this as a test of my faith and gave him that \$2.

I told Mandy what I had done and she and I went into the lounge, knelt together and prayed. This was our lion we had to face. We were obedient to God (Who said that we were to give to those who ask us) and now we needed a miracle. That afternoon Mandy went to our front door and found wedged under it an envelope stuffed full of money - much more than we were used to getting in a whole month. God, Who saw our deed done in secret, had shown Himself faithful once again.

Even before our Fort Victoria experiences, when we were Bible students in Johannesburg, we had made some small but definite decisions that made a real difference to us. The life decisions we made might seem small and insignificant to you, but as students we were required to do house visitation as part of our training. For this we were allowed to claim petrol money for the trips we made. Mandy and I had decided that we would rather be a blessing to the ministry, and not claim. We wanted to be salt.

We were the only students who never claimed. We had little finance available to us but decided to be a blessing as we were able. Later, we quietly slipped some money to another student on a regular basis - without him knowing who it came from. As we did this, we found that in amazing ways our own needs were being met - and towards the end of our time there, we were being labelled by our fellow students as *"the rich students"*. It wasn't that our income had increased - it was just that God always made things work out for us in most amazing ways.

Our tests became bigger and bigger, and each time God was faithful and saw us through. We have seen so many amazing

miracles of God's provision for us, that I could almost write a book on it. Yet with each of those miracles, there was a test of faith - a lion or bear that had to be conquered - a risk taken. Your faith will not grow without tests. It is in these personal victories, by God's grace, that your saltiness is improved.

Now my needs are much bigger as I manage a large factory through the rough waters of a country's reeling economy. The needs run in the millions, and yet God is just as faithful as He was when I needed milk money for my new baby. I am just as nervous - yet quietly confident - with a need for \$6million worth of orders to keep my company going as I was for \$100 those many years ago.

God is a faithful God. If we are to be salt to those around us, then we will need to personally learn how to walk by faith. That adds the edge to our saltiness. We need to take those deliberate little steps of faith - if we are to ever see the big feats of faith.

To really be salty, I believe that we need to walk in the miraculous daily. There will be many, like Saul, who will inform us how impossible the situation is.

1Sam 17:33 "You are not able to go against this Philistine to fight with him; for you are but a youth while he has been a warrior from his youth."

If you keep listening to those who tell you how impossible things are, and how it will never work in Africa, then you may as well give up now. There is a time when you must, almost defiantly, turn your ear away from such negative talk, and trust YHWH to perform miracles. If you are to be salt in your area - and really make a difference - then you will HAVE TO walk in the miraculous, first in your personal life, then also for the sake of others on a day-to-day basis.

May YHWH help you to conquer your lions and bears and prepare you for the Goliaths that will surely come. May He also help you not to be frightened of them, but, with a simple childlike faith in your Heavenly Father, set your face like flint, and make that difference. May you be the *salt of the earth* to everyone you meet on your life's journey.