

Have you ever met someone and known almost instantly that they were special – that you were in the presence of not just an ordinary person? That's the effect Jesus had on people.

It became clear early in his ministry that, even though he was the child of a humble carpenter, he was not just an ordinary man. When he spoke, people noticed right away that he spoke with authority. And he was a teacher like no other teacher.

People at that time were accustomed to hearing their rabbis read from the Book of the Law, telling them what they should eat, and what they should wear, and how to structure their lives. But when they heard Jesus teach, he captivated them with stories and parables, and preaching unlike any they had ever heard because he came from the Father full of grace and truth.

And Jesus used metaphors from their daily lives like the parable about the farmer who went out to sow seed.

We find this parable right at the beginning of Chapter 24 in *The Story*.

“Listen! A farmer went out to sow his seed. As he was scattering the seed, some fell along the path, and the birds came and ate it up. Some fell on rocky places, where it did not have much soil. It sprang up quickly, because the soil was shallow. But when the sun came up, the plants were scorched, and they withered because they had no root. Other seed fell among thorns, which grew up and choked the plants, so that they did not bear grain. Still other seed fell on good soil. It came up, grew and produced a crop, some multiplying thirty, some sixty, some a hundred times.”

Then Jesus said, “Whoever has ears to hear, let them hear.”¹

If you visit Israel today, you would see many places where seeds could never grow. It's like certain spots in our lawn, where the sprinkler has a hard time reaching and during the hottest, driest, days of the year you'd have a hard time getting any seed to germinate.

Jesus is telling those who would listen, how the seed of God's Word grows. But standing in the way of that growth are many obstacles. All kinds of things try to steal God's Word from us. The Devil doesn't want us to experience the joy or peace that comes from living in Christ. Another obstacle is shallow roots.

Sometimes we don't take advantage of opportunities to grow deeper in God's Word. We go in other directions when God is calling us to grow – which causes our roots to be shallow, and when trouble or hardship come our joy in Christ is stolen away. And we become easily discouraged and lose faith.

At other times, we can be going to church, and growing in faith, until we get sidetracked. It's amazing to me to think that 2000 years ago, the things that sidetracked people and took them away from God are still the same as today.

Jesus mentions three things:

- the worries of life
- the deceitfulness of wealth
- and the desire for other things (things that take the place of God)

Does that sound like some archaic list from 20 centuries ago?

No?

You're right. All those things, still choke out God's Word today. Anything that we put in God's place, becomes our God.

But the kingdoms of this world do not have the last word.

Jesus came to announce that the Kingdom of God has drawn near.

And everything Jesus does in his preaching, and teaching, and healing, Jesus is bringing us God's new kingdom.

My two favorite sermons that Jesus preached

demonstrate how Jesus brings that new kingdom hope to those who are burdened by this world.

When you face life's deepest disappointments take your Bibles out and read these two sermons.

The first one comes right after Jesus had been tested in the wilderness and Luke tells us that he returns to Galilee in the power of the Spirit.

And so he goes back to his hometown of Nazareth, and he goes to the synagogue, and he's handed the scroll of the prophet Isaiah.

And he begins to read:

“The Spirit of the Lord is on me,
because he has anointed me
to proclaim good news to the poor.

He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners
and recovery of sight for the blind,
to set the oppressed free,
to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.”²

And he rolls up the scroll, and with the eyes of everyone fastened on him, he announces:

“Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.”

This is Jesus way of announcing that the kingdoms of this world do not have the grip on us we think they do.

Draw near and listen.

Don't let the worries of this world steal this Good News.

Put your hope in me, says Jesus, and the good soil of God's Word will produce a harvest of blessings. The good soil of God's Word will give you a peace that passes all understanding.

Have you ever gone through one of life's crushing experiences,
a time of bitter disappointment,
and instead of comfort all some people wanted give you was advice?
“Do this. Try that.”

Was that what you needed?

Jesus knows what we need.

Jesus didn't come simply to give us more advice.

While the Bible is filled with wisdom Jesus knows that we need more than wisdom.

We need world changing Good News.

My second favorite sermon of Jesus, is his Sermon on the Mount.

At the beginning of his ministry,

Jesus announces the world-changing Good News of God, in this way.

To those weighed down by life's burdens he proclaimed:

“Blessed are the poor in spirit,
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are those who mourn,
for they will be comforted.

Blessed are the meek,
for they will inherit the earth.

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness,
for they will be filled.

Blessed are the merciful,
for they will be shown mercy.

Blessed are the pure in heart,
for they will see God.

Blessed are the peacemakers,
for they will be called children of God.

Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness,
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.³

Jesus doesn't say,
 "Here's some good advice, do this and do that and you will be blessed."

He says, "You are blessed." "You already are my beloved."

This week I was reading N.T. Wright's new book entitled, "Simply Good News" in which he made this comment about many sermons today:

"In many churches the good news has subtly changed into good advice: Here's how to live, they say. Here's how to pray. Here are techniques for helping you become a better Christian a better person, a better wife or husband. And, in particular, here's how to make sure you are on the right track for what happens after death.

Take this advice, say this prayer, and you'll be saved.
 Here's how to do it."
 "That is advice," he says, "not news."

And then he concludes with this thought.

"The whole point of advice is to get you to do something in order to get a desired result. Now there's nothing wrong with good advice. We all need it. But it isn't the same thing as news. News is an announcement that something significant has happened."⁴

That's what we hear when Jesus preaches,

"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has appointed to preach Good News to the poor."

Matthew tells us that when Jesus saw the crowds, he had compassion on them,

"because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd."⁵

And in the Sermon on the Mount, he didn't begin by giving them advice or God's wisdom. That's woven in later in the sermon.

Rather Jesus begins with the world-changing Good News that God looks at us, and He counts us as His Beloved and Blessed children.

Nothing that happens to us in this world can change that reality.
 - not cancer, or unemployment, or grief, or the betrayal of a loved one, nothing.

Nothing can change God's love for you and me.
Put your hope in me, says Jesus and the good soil of God's Word
will produce a harvest of blessings.

The good soil of God's Word will give you a peace that passes all understanding.
and a joy that is deeper than the circumstances of your life.

Have you ever experienced that peace?
Have you experienced that joy?

Then you have tasted, the first fruits of the Kingdom of God.

That's the Kingdom Jesus has ushered in
through his life, and death, and resurrection.

It's already here and yet is still to come.

Just before Jesus went to the cross, he looked to heaven and prayed:

"Father, the hour has come. Glorify your Son, that your Son may glorify you.
For you granted him authority over all people that he might give eternal life to all those
you have given him. Now this is eternal life: that they know you, the only true God, and
Jesus Christ, whom you have sent."⁶

I close with a quote from Dallas Willard,
"the gospel isn't about 'getting into heaven after you die'
but rather it's about "getting into heaven before you die!"

May you experience that kingdom life – that eternal life
that God gives us now,
through faith in Jesus our Lord and Savior. Amen.

¹ Mark 4:3-9

² Luke 4:18-19

³ Matthew 5:3-10

⁴ N.T. Wright p. 4 *Simply Good News*.

⁵ Matthew 9:36

⁶ John 17:1-3