

# The Words of Jesus #5

*by: Ronald L. Dart*

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Over the years a common objection people raised to religion is that it's, well it's pie in the sky. Religion, they think, has some vague promises of benefits in the next life, but it doesn't do much for a person in this life. That's really a pity that those of us who call ourselves Christians have allowed people to think of us that way; for if a person comes to understand the words of Jesus, they'll come away with a totally different perspective.

Take for example one day when Jesus came to a synagogue in Nazareth where He had been brought up. As His custom was, He went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day and He stood up to read. Now Jesus was a Sabbath keeper, He did not work at His job on the Sabbath and He was in regular attendance at the synagogue. Adult men were allowed to read aloud from the scriptures in the synagogue and it was very important in a time when hardly anyone had even a piece of the Bible of their own and a lot of them couldn't have read it if they had it. So anyway, Jesus stood up to read. And there was delivered to Him the book of the prophet Isaiah. When He had opened the book, He found the place where it was written: "The spirit of the Lord is upon me," He read, "Because he has anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor. He has sent me to heal the broken hearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, the recovery of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, to preach the acceptable year of the Lord." He closed the book and He handed it back to the minister and He sat down. And the eyes of everyone in the synagogue were fastened on Him, which is an interesting way of putting this. Something about the way He read it, something about the way He communicated this ancient prophecy, struck people, and He said to them, "This day is the scripture fulfilled in your ears." Not tomorrow, not in the next life, right now.

Now these people have heard a great deal of all that Jesus had done prior to that time. And so when He said that God had anointed Him to preach the gospel to the poor, He had already done that. "He has sent me to heal the broken hearted." He had already done that. "To preach deliverance to the captives, the recovery of the sight to the blind," He had done that. "And to free people who are bruised, bound and held down," He had done all that. A great deal of what Jesus did, and this is the remarkable thing as you read through the gospel accounts, is that He is a man of relatively few words. Jesus is the strong silent type, but His presence and His power was such that He could reach out and touch a man and say be healed and the man would be healed. He could encourage the downhearted. He could lift up people who were hurting and He did it all the time. He did it every day and so He says, "I am not talking about something off in the future. I'm talking about what God has sent me here to do right now. This day is this scripture fulfilled in your ears." Jesus touched the lives of real

people and He made their lives better, right now. And everybody that heard him there bore witness and they really wondered at the gracious words that proceeded out of his mouth. And they said, "Isn't this Joseph's son?" Jesus was very troubling to the men of Nazareth. They had heard of His works in other cities and the words He spoke were gracious and persuasive but you know it was hard for them to give credence to a boy who had grown up in their town. And He said to them, "I know you are going to say to me this Proverb, 'Physician heal yourself.' Whatever you heard in Capernaum, let's see you do it here in your own country." And He said, "Verily I say unto you, no prophet is accepted in his own country."

It is funny, isn't it, how many of the sayings that have passed into our language originated with the Bible? "A prophet is without honor in his own country." But He went on to say, "I tell you of the truth. There were a lot of widows in the land of Israel in the days of Elijah, when the Heaven was shut up for three years and six months and when great famine was all through the land. But God didn't send any prophet to any of these people, except he did send Elijah to Sarepta, a city of Sidon, to a woman that was a widow. No one in Israel got any relief but a Sidonian woman did. And there were a lot of lepers in the land of Israel in the time of Elisha the prophet and none of them were cleansed except Naaman the Syrian. And all they in the synagogue when they heard these things were filled with wrath and rose up and threw him out of the city and led him to the brow of a hill where on their city was built that they might cast him down headlong."

Now reading this today, it is hard to understand what made them so angry. All Jesus had done was to cite two examples from their own history and both examples were not only true, they were well known to these people. The story of Elijah and the prophets of Baal on Mt. Carmel, of Elijah calling down fire from heaven was a part of their personal knowledge of the Bible and of God's will and what God had done. He said during that 3-1/2 year famine that led up to that, there were a lot of starving widows in Israel but God didn't send Elijah to a single one of them. He sent him to a woman who was a gentile.

And there were a lot of lepers in Israel in the days of Elisha the prophet, and God didn't have Elisha heal any of them. Who did he heal? A man named Naaman who was a gentile. What Jesus had done, was to underline their lack of faith. You know there is a saying that familiarity breeds contempt and just as Jesus was familiar to the men of His own town, so Elijah and Elisha were familiar to the people of Israel in their day, and a lot of people knew about them but paid little attention to them and people who knew about God paid little attention to God. God was familiar. It was our God. It was something they took for granted and their faith led to no miracle.

Over the generations, the Jews had developed an exclusive approach to religion not unlike the approach of a lot of Christian churches. The idea is, we have a lock on God. He is our God. He is not your God. Unfortunately, the Jews in latter years lost complete contact with what God had said to the Israelites of old. That He put them in the world to be an example to the gentiles, to be an example to the world. They were to be a blessing to the

world and to all peoples everywhere. They were actually to be the conduit through which God's knowledge would flow into the world. But they didn't do that. They themselves would not even obey God's law so how could they possibly take it to the world? Their own example of obedience was so poor that they could not be a shining light in the middle of all these people.

In the days of the apostles, the Pharisees were still very careful not to associate with gentiles. Their old ideas died hard and even in the early church there were apostles that had a hard time getting their mind around the fact that gentiles could come to God. Paul, in his letter to the Galatians, speaks of Peter. He said when Peter came to Antioch, "I withstood him to the face because he was to be blamed. For before certain came up from James, he ate with the gentiles but when the others came up from Jerusalem he withdrew and separated himself, fearing them that were of the circumcision. And the other Jews dissembled likewise with him in so much that Barnabas was carried away." Barnabas even fell into it and did the same thing that the rest of these people did. Now this was wrong Paul said, but it was the custom of the Jews. It was the way things were, and so it tells us that an awful lot of Christians in Jerusalem at that time still observed the old customs of not being willing to associate in any way with a gentile. Well Paul said, "When I saw that they did not walk uprightly according to the truth of the Gospel, I said to Peter in front of everybody, if you being a Jew live after the manner of gentiles and not like the Jews, why are you going to compel the gentiles to live as do the Jews?" A whole generation later, and leaders in the church were still affected by this old idea.

So the Jews in the synagogue where Jesus was speaking were very likely angered by the emphasis on God's answering prayers for gentiles. We don't want God to answer prayers for gentiles. They are not God's people. God belongs to us. He doesn't belong to them. It's the strangest thing how people think they can have a proprietary lock on God. They can put God in a box and God can belong to them and they can keep Him away from other people. God never intended to be a one nation God. Other gods were gods of nations. God was the God of Israel but that was not where He intended to stop. Israel was to be a blessing to the world, to introduce God to the world, to be an example of God's work in the world and they failed. So along comes the Son of God to set things right. And Jesus begins very early to make His point that we are breaking out of the old mode of religion. God is not going to be satisfied being the God of the Jews. He intends to be the God of every man and every woman on the face of this earth. The scriptures later say that "At the name of Jesus every knee will bow in Heaven above and in earth beneath."

"Jesus left Nazareth and came down to Capernaum, a city of Galilee and he taught them on the Sabbath days. And they were astonished at his doctrine for his word was with power." And this is in Luke 4, vs. 32, I have a bone to pick with Luke. "His word was with power and they were astonished at his doctrine" but just like Mark, Luke doesn't tell us what He said. He passes on from that and says, "In the synagogue, there was a man that had a spirit of an unclean devil and he cried out with a loud voice saying, let us alone, what have we to do with you Jesus of Nazareth? Are you come to destroy us? I know who you are, the

holy one of God.” The demons recognized Him right off. And Jesus rebuked him in saying, “Shut up and come out of him. And when the devil had thrown him down in the midst and came out of him and didn’t hurt him. And every body was amazed and spoke among themselves saying what word is this? With authority he commands the unclean spirits and they come out.” With authority indeed. One really wonders, you know, how, after having seen again and again what this man did, how anyone could have doubted Him.

“When the sun was setting, all they that had any sick with diverse diseases brought them to Him and He laid his hands on every one of them and healed them. . . .” Just a little interesting aside here, as you notice, Jesus was teaching on the Sabbath days, every week and everybody listened to Him. He actually healed this man who had the unclean spirit on the Sabbath day. But it was a continual argument with Jesus, with the Pharisees, that they didn’t feel that you should heal on the Sabbath day. So consequently, all they that had sick and various diseases came to Him when the sun was setting. Once the Sabbath was over, they felt free finally to bring these people to Jesus. And of course, Jesus would have healed them on the Sabbath day just as quickly as He would afterward.

“. . . The devils came out of many, crying out and saying, You are Christ, the Son of God and he rebuked them and would not allow them to speak because they knew who he was. And when it was day, he departed and went away into a desert place and people went looking for him and stopped him and said, Oh, please, don’t leave here. And he said to them, I am sorry, I must preach the Kingdom of God to other cities also: for therefore am I sent. And he preached in all the synagogues of Galilee” (Luke 4:40-44).

Yeah, but what did He say? What was His doctrine? What was this message that He carried around all through the cities of Galilee? Well, that is what we are searching for in this series of program. We are talking about the words of Jesus. And it is fascinating as we get into the gospel accounts, how hard they are to find. How frequently that Luke or Matthew or Mark will tell us that Jesus preached and they will tell us that He proclaimed the good word of the Kingdom of God and they will tell us about all of this but they will not tell us what He said; at least not in those places. We are left to pull the words of Jesus together, wherever we can find them.

Well, Mark tells us in Chapter 1 vs. 39. “He preached in all their synagogues, all around Galilee and cast out devils and there came a leper to him, begging him and kneeling down before him saying, If you will, you can make me clean. Jesus, moved with compassion, put forth his hand and touched him.” Now I suppose you know that is something that you did not normally do. I mean people today worry about hugging somebody with AIDS and they do not really need to worry about that. And people in those days were far more fearful of touching someone that had leprosy and with some justification because there were certain contagious things about the disease of leprosy. But Jesus was so moved by this man who came to Him and said I know you can, what I am not sure is, if you will. So Jesus, very moved touched him and said, “I will, be thou clean. And as soon as he

had spoken, immediately the leprosy departed from him and he was clean. And he strictly charged him and sent him away and said to him. Now I don't want you to say anything to any man about this. You go your way, show yourself to the priest and offer for your cleansing those things Moses commanded for a testimony unto them."

Now this is rather interesting here, because Jesus is telling this man to follow through on the things that were commanded in Moses' law. Now I do not think that this is as well understood as it might be. What many people, I don't think, know is that the priesthood in ancient Israel actually served in many different functions and one of them was, they were the Department of Health. If there was a plague of leprosy in a house for example, they had to go and inspect the house. They had certain guidelines they went by to decide whether or not this was a spreading leprosy. In other words whether it was contagious and likely to cause a problem, a human health problem, or whether it was not and they would make the decision and they would try to do certain things to cleanse the house. If that did not work, they would tear it down. So a man who had leprosy, who was quarantined from the people, they were very strictly quarantined from the rest of the people. If his leprosy went away, if the disease in fact progressed to a certain place where he was no longer contagious, he could go show himself to the priest and the priest had to verify this. There was a sort of a formality, a ceremony if you will, that actually restored this man to the community. Now in this case, the man did not have to wait for the disease to run its course, Jesus healed him on the spot. But He told him, in order to be officially restored to the community, go show yourself to the priest to let him examine you, offer your offerings, go through the formalities to be restored to the people. But the man went out and began to publish it all over the place and the blaze abroad the matter in so much that Jesus could no more openly enter into the city but had to stay out in the wilderness, the desert places where people came to Him from every quarter. It is easy to see why Jesus told him, keep your mouth shut and it is just as easy to understand why the poor guy didn't. You had been leprous, you had been away, you had been isolated from human contact for so long and now you can be among your friends, among your family. You can love and be loved and touch and be touched. I would have had a hard time keeping my mouth shut too.

"Well it came to pass on a certain day, as Jesus was teaching, there were Pharisees and doctors of the law sitting by. And they had come out of every town in Galilee and Judea and Jerusalem and the power of the Lord was present to heal them." That is a remarkable statement. It suggests that there were times when the power of the Lord was not present but it was on this occasion. "And behold, men brought in a bed, a man who had been taken with palsy. And they saw the means to bring him in and to lay him before Jesus." He was on a pallet, a stretcher if you will. They could not find any way to get him in because of the crowds that were around the house. So they went up on the roof, actually began to take tiles off the roof and opened it up and let him down through the tiling with his couch into the midst before Jesus. Imagine this, they are sitting here and all of a sudden dust starts falling from the ceiling. Pieces of tile start falling down. Everyone stops. The word stops. Everything stops, and after a moment here comes this poor guy being let down through a

tiling, lying on his stretcher in front of Jesus. And He saw that faith and He said, “Man your sins are forgiven you.”

Now this is an interesting little by play because the scribes and the Pharisees, when they heard him say that, said now wait a minute. “Who is this that speaks blasphemies? No one can forgive sins but God alone. Now when Jesus perceived their thoughts, He said, Why are you thinking this way? Which is easier to say, your sins are forgiven you or to say, rise up and walk? The only reason for the difference is, so that you can know that the Son of Man has power on earth to forgive sins, and then he looked at the man who was sick of palsy and he said, I say to you, get up, take up your bed and go to your house. And he sat up, and stood up off the pallet, took his stretcher in his arm and left to his own house glorifying God with every step that he took and they were all amazed. And they glorified God and they were filled with fear saying, we have seen strange things today.” Indeed they had.

But let’s stop for a moment and think about the Words of Jesus. He said first of all, “Man, your sins are forgiven you.” And then He explains, “It doesn’t make much difference whether I say, your sins are forgiven you or rise up and walk. The only reason I have done this is so you can understand that the Son of Man has power on earth to forgive sins.” But how did they know that? How could they actually know from what happened here that he had the power to forgive sins? Well they could know it when the poor devil sat up on his stretcher, stood up, tucked it under his arm and walked out.

What is the connection between the forgiveness of sins and healing of a man like this? I think it’s pretty apparent that God never really willed for any human being to be sick. It is not God’s will for people to be maimed and blind and halt. Sickesses, diseases, blind people. These are all in the world because of sin. Not necessarily the sin of the man who is sick, not necessarily the sin of his parents, just because of the presence of sin. And so Jesus makes the connection here between the forgiveness of sin and the removal of the penalties, the consequences, the pain and the suffering that sin brings into the world and his healings demonstrated day in and day out his power over sin.

You know, Jesus’ healing performed an enormous amount of His ministry. So strong was His healing and the message in His healing that all four of the gospel accounts spend great amounts of time telling us about His healing. Much more in fact than they spend it seems telling us about what He actually had to say, which suggests that Matthew, Mark and Luke, thought that His healings were a very important part of what He had to say. Well you see, there are more ways to communicate than words. As modern 20<sup>th</sup> century people, we are very much involved with words. Words are the most important things and words and ideas and rationales and arguments. These are all the important things. But a lot of that stuff dissolves, it just goes away in the face of a man who was born blind and now can see. In the face of a man who had never been able to walk a step in his life and now can run and leap and jump. You know when you understand that Jesus’ power over sickness and disease was a massive demonstration of His power to forgive sin, to remove the consequences, to deliver

people who are in bondage, you begin to understand much more about what Jesus is actually all about.

Shifting to John's gospel, "After this, there was a feast of the Jews and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. Now there is at Jerusalem by the sheep market, a pool called in Hebrew Bethesda, having five porches, and in these lay a great multitude of impotent folk of blind, halt, withered, waiting for the moving of the water. For an angel went down at a certain season into the pool and troubled the water and whoever then first after the troubling of the water stepped in was made whole of whatever disease he had." This is really a remarkable thing. It is hard to fathom why God did this in this way. For it was not going to be the most deserving person who made it into the water first, it was going to be the most able person. If you are there let's say to heal someone who deserved it, you go pick out the most deserving person. If you are there to heal the most crippled, you go heal the most crippled. But when you move the water and only the first person who touches the water is healed, well it's a random healing and it's really the benefit of the most abled and the people who are really able to move. So one wonders, what in the world is God doing here?

"Well there was a certain man there who had an infirmity for 38 years. And Jesus who came down there saw him lying there and knew that he had been a long time in that case. He went over to him and said, will you be made whole? And the impotent man's answer, Sir I have no man when the water is troubled to put me in the pool but when I am on my way, somebody gets down there before me and Jesus said rise, Get up, pick up your bed, walk. And immediately the man was made whole and took up his bed and walked. And the same day was the Sabbath."

You know, it's almost as though Jesus is looking for an occasion to provoke the scribes and the Pharisees on this issue of Sabbath healing. There is no question that Jesus kept the Sabbath in the sense of the 4<sup>th</sup> commandment that He would work six days and He did not work at His job on the seventh day. That was not the problem. The question really has to be asked is why in the world is it perceived work by these people to heal a sick person? Why would that be perceived a violation of the commandment? Well, it was. Well Jesus told him to get up and he did. He got up and carried his bed and the Jews that saw him said, Hey, it's the Sabbath day, it is not lawful for you to carry your bed. He said, "Look, he that made me whole said pick up your bed and walk. I really do not care." And they asked him, "Who told you that? Who said, take up your bed and walk? And he who was healed did not know who it was." It wasn't a question of faith on his part. God almighty in Heaven at random picked a man to heal as a massive demonstration of what He could do and that the Sabbath was His day, not their day. "Afterwards Jesus found the poor fellow in the temple and said, Look, you are made whole. Don't sin any more, lest a worst thing come to you."

Oh, well here once more is the connection between sin and disease. Now that's not to say that just because you are sick means you are a sinner. We already know you are a sinner. We just now know that may be your sicknesses come from it. Well a man departed and told the Jews that it was Jesus who had made him whole. And therefore, the Jews

persecuted Jesus and sought to kill Him because He had done these things on the Sabbath day. And Jesus answered, "My father works hitherto and I work. So the Jews sought all the more to kill him." You know I will be an old man lying on my death bed, feeble and enfeebled before I understand why anyone would want to kill a man who could heal a man so dramatically. It is a testimony you know to the stupidity of men who will elevate the trappings of religion above the real human needs of man. They are a bunch of losers.

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