

The Words of Jesus #7

by: Ronald L. Dart

Jesus was a man of few words. And so we want to pay very close attention to the words He did say. When He spoke He was often enigmatic in what He said. Sometimes it was hard to figure out exactly what He meant. As often as not, He would make His point with a question, or perhaps with a question followed by an action. For example, Jesus was a Sabbath keeper but He managed to be very much at odds with the scribes and Pharisees on their interpretation of Sabbath observance. They were Sabbath keepers too but they had a lot of differences. In its origins, the Sabbath was a liberating law; it set men free. The original commandment for example is found, one version of it, is found back in Deuteronomy chapter 5 where it says, “Keep the Sabbath day to sanctify it, as the LORD thy God hath commanded you. Six days thou shalt labor and do all of your work. But the seventh day is the sabbath of the LORD thy God: in it thou shalt not do any work, you nor your son, or your daughter, your manservant, your maidservant, your ox, nor your ass, nor any of your cattle, nor even the stranger that is in your town. You do this so that your manservant and your maidservant may rest even as well as you do.”

Now why are we doing all this? He said “Well remember, that you were a servant in the land of Egypt and that the Lord your God brought you out of there with a mighty hand and a stretched out arm. And therefore he commanded you to keep the Sabbath day.” Now what's the idea here? Well the idea here is, look you were slaves for all these hundreds of years, and you had to work seven days a week. One of the things that we are accomplishing by getting you out of there is, were going to be able to give you a day off every week you so you don't have to work seven days a week. You are liberated, you are free, and therefore you've got to let your manservant and your maidservant rest just like you do. The commandment is, “Look, give all your people and your animals the day off.” Your boss was no longer allowed to work you seven days a week; he had to give you a day off.

Now the Pharisees had managed quite a feat of logic here. They had managed to turn this liberty into a burden. They had managed to take something that people would have rejoiced over, saying oh hey this is terrific we don't have to work seven days a week anymore isn't this wonderful? And they had managed to turn it into something that was really very burdensome. They had a list of dos and don'ts as long as your arm. Well according to Jesus they had lost touch with what the Sabbath was all about. So how did Jesus then, who was a man of very few words, make His point? Well I'm going to tell you a story and combine the accounts of Mark 3 and Luke 6.

It came to pass on another Sabbath, He entered into a synagogue and taught. And there was a man sitting there who had a withered arm. His right hand was all withered up like a piece of wood, a stick. And I expect that man had been there for years. Everybody in the synagogue knew him; they had seen him this way many, many times. And the scribes and the Pharisees watched Him, whether He would heal on the Sabbath day that they might find accusation against Him. Now, I still shake my head over this every time I read it. I think to myself, why on earth would anyone who would recognize that this man standing up here has the power to heal people who are sick. How would I ever come to the conclusion that I have to watch this man to see whether He's going to heal someone, make someone well on the Sabbath day? Well Jesus knew what they were thinking, and He said to the man with a withered hand, would you stand up? So the man stood up. We haven't done anything bad here yet have we? No, we just asked this here old boy to stand up. And Jesus said to everybody sitting there, I want to ask you one thing. Is it lawful on the Sabbath days to do good or to do evil? To save life or to destroy it?

Now I want you to keep in mind that these people would have quite freely untied an animal and taken it down to the water hole to get a drink on the Sabbath day. Or if one of their animals had fallen into a ditch or a pit and couldn't get out and was struggling, they'd get some guys together and on the Sabbath day and they would go down there and get that animal out of the hole. Fair enough? They would have done that. So Jesus said let's ask the question here, this poor guy is standing up here with a withered arm, that everybody knows. Is it lawful on the Sabbath day to do good or do evil? Save life or take it? Well which is it? And they wouldn't answer Him; they all sat there and stared at Him like a bunch of statues. And He looked around at them with anger, being grieved for the hardness of their heart. The fact that these men wouldn't even answer Him, it made Him angry. He didn't say anything about the anger, He just looked at the man and He said, "Stretch forth your hand." Now what has Jesus done? Tell me, what has He done that anyone can possibly accuse Him of? He asked the man to stand up, then He says "Is it lawful to do good or evil on the Sabbath day," When no one answered Him He just said to the man "Stretch out your hand." And he stretched it out. And his hand was restored whole as the other.

You are sitting there, let's imagine you are sitting there in the front row in that synagogue and you saw that. If you conclude that Jesus did that, that He actually healed a man, that He was the one that did it, well then, haven't you seen a miracle from God? Haven't you seen someone who is full of the Spirit of God and is able to do a work of God? Or if Jesus didn't do it, well then there certainly is no reason to be mad at Him. But the account tells us that they were filled with madness. And they communed with one another about what they might do to Jesus. Oh He really got in their face this time, and He did it on purpose. He was determined not to accommodate this foolish doctrine that one can't heal on the Sabbath day. Bear in mind though, how low-key Jesus was in doing it; He didn't argue doctrine, He didn't quote scripture, He just asked a question and then asked the man to stretch out his arm.

Then the Pharisees went out and held a council against Him, how they might destroy Him. It's not easy to fathom this response. You know you would almost conclude that these men were insane, plain crazy. They had seen this man in the synagogue for years with that arm and they had seen the arm healed with their own eyes. And they still wanted to kill the man that did it. Go figure, I don't understand the attitude. But it went very deep; it went very deep to the structure, the social structure of the time. Who's in charge here? Who does this Man think He is? And of course Jesus was a very great threat to the religious establishment of the time and, they wanted Him dead.

When Jesus knew it, He withdrew Himself from there and great multitudes followed Him. And He healed them all. He was healing people all over the place, from these crowds that would follow Him around. But He charged them that they would not make Him known. Why would He do a thing like that? Well, He did it, according to Matthew, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Isaiah the prophet, saying "Behold my servant whom I have chosen. My beloved in whom my soul is well please I will put my spirit upon him and he shall show judgment to the Gentiles." Excuse me? To the Gentiles? The word in Greek means nations, in other words the nations of the world, not the Jews. All of a sudden here is this thing about Jesus going to the Gentiles again. "He will not strive." What He means by this is that He is not going to argue, He is not going to be involved in debates. He's not going to be struggling with people over ideas. He's not going to cry, no one is going to hear His voice in the streets. "A bruised reed he will not break and smoking flax he will not quench, till he sends forth judgment unto victory."

He is gentle, a reed that is already bruised, He's not going to do anything that is going to break it. He is not going to pour water on the smoking flax, which is probably getting in your nose and your eyes and becoming an irritation. That's not what He is here for. And He goes on to say in His name shall the Gentiles trust. It was time for the knowledge of God to break out into the nations of the world. The time had long since passed when God was content to be the God of the Jews, in fact the New Testament is the story of that break out.

At this point we come to the great Sermon on the Mount. And there are two versions of the sermon in the Gospels, one in Matthew and one in Luke. They differ a little bit in what is included in them, and they differ somewhat in the wording, and the sermon in Luke seems to come a little later in Jesus' ministry than the one in Matthew. Now the reason for this is really very simple, Jesus was an itinerant preacher. He didn't give a new message everywhere He went. He gave the same message over and over again with variations of course. And as a result we have different versions of what He said in different places at different times but it all basically says the same thing, it's just that the wording is different. This is why we have the Gospels telling us in so many places that Jesus taught but without telling us what He said. The message was included elsewhere in the accounts and they didn't think they needed to include it here.

The Sermon on the Mount is Jesus' most comprehensive teaching. His longest recorded discourse, this is the place where He kind of pulls together the general message that

He is telling people, that is how Luke and Matthew pull it together. I was talking to my wife last night about it, and I said how long do you think the Sermon on the Mount was? How many words, if you were going to guess, are actually in the Sermon on the Mount? And she thought about it awhile and corrected herself once and said, I think maybe around 3000 words. Well I ran a thing through a word processor, cut it out you know as it were out of the electronic Bible and had a word count done on it, 367 words in the Sermon on the Mount. You know when you think about it, I would have liked to have had 3000. I would have liked to have had more words of Jesus but, that being the case, we had better pay all that more attention to the few words this man used.

When Jesus saw the crowds He eased up a mountainside and when He had settled himself there His disciples gathered around to listen to what He had to say. And He opened His mouth and taught them. At last, at last we're going to hear what Jesus doctrine was, at last we're going to get to hear what He taught when He settled down to really explain to people what He wanted to say. He starts off with a simple little section called the "Beatitudes." Because it starts off with "Blessed are the poor" and that's related to in terms to Beatitudes or blessings that He gives to people. These are familiar to most Bible readers and churchgoers for the simplest of reasons, every preacher when he starts out cutting his teeth will go to an older preacher and say, "Well what sort of thing should I preach about?" And he'll come back and say son, you can never go far wrong if you just go to the Sermon on the Mount and preach on the Beatitudes. So every one of us I think, sometime within our very first few times to stand before people and preach from the Bible, will preach from the fifth chapter of Matthew.

Well, Jesus opened His mouth and taught them, and here's what He started out to say. "Blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." Blessed, you know is a familiar word, it may be too familiar. What does it mean? Some translations in order to get to something that you might understand will say happy is the man, but that doesn't even come close to what this passage means. In the Bible man blesses God and God blesses man. The central idea is approval. Man approves of God and God approves of man. That is, God approves of the man who does these things. Now beyond that the idea of blessed or blessings seems to have to do with the idea that good things happen to people who are blessed. Being blessed means good things happen to you, so good things happen to people who are poor in spirit for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Now what these sayings are about, these blessings that we are going to be reading about sequentially here, these are the kind of people of whom God approves. And these are the kind of people that He sees to it that good things happen to them. To be poor in spirit is simply to be humble.

There's a proverb back in the book of Proverbs that says, "The poor use entreaties while the rich answer roughly." Yeah I can understand that, the man who is poor will come to you with his hat in his hand, he needs help, he needs guidance, some advice, maybe even some financial help. The rich man who has everything he needs will tell you where to go. Now this doesn't require for man to be poor to be approved but what it does require is for him to have the attitude of the poor as opposed to the attitude of the rich. So good things are

going to happen to the person that is humble, who has the attitude of a poor man no matter how much in terms of this world's wealth that he may have.

Next Jesus said, "Blessed are they that mourn for they shall be comforted." Now this is kind of strange in a way, because it almost sounds like Christians should go around dressed in black, and they should be miserable all the time and mournful all the time. But I don't think that's what He's talking about here. There's a passage in James 4: 8 that says, "Draw near to God and he will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands you sinners, purify your hearts you double minded. Be afflicted and mourn and weep, let your laughter be turned to mourning. And your joy to heaviness, humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord and he will lift you up." But you see this is in the context of cleansing your hands and purifying your heart. In other words, when the awareness comes that you're a sinner, when the awareness comes that you have done wrong, he says be afflicted. It means to fast, which is a sign, an outward sign of humility, and mourn. Humble yourself before God, be sorry for what you have done. Humble yourself in the sight of God and He will lift you up.

Blessed, that good things are going to happen to the man who is sorry for what he has done. "Blessed is he who mourns, for he will be comforted. Blessed are the meek for they shall inherit the earth." Now that's interesting. Because meek may not mean what you think. To be meek is to be humbly patient, even under provocation. And this is the kind of person of whom God approves. "Blessed are they who do hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled." Now what does that mean? Well it means to me that, blessed is the man who really wants to live a good life, who wants to live a cleaning life, really hungry and thirsty for getting his life straightened out, on the straight and narrow and to live a life that is pleasing before God but also is even righteous in the eyes of man. We all would like to have a good reputation. The man who wants it, the man who is hungry for it, he says will be filled. "Blessed are the merciful for they shall obtain mercy."

Jesus will elaborate on that theme later on in His ministry, and it's a sobering thought. I mean, I say it's sobering; it's encouraging in one way. That is if you can find it in yourself to be merciful to other people, God says it's going to come out well for the man who does that because he is going to obtain mercy himself. So whatever it is that you want to come back to you, give it away. Give it to other people. If you want severe judgment to come upon yourself, give it to other people. If when you're in trouble you want mercy, well, show it to other people. Life will work better He says, for the people that do this. "Blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God." Pure in heart, I wonder how a man gets there. Well of course we repent of our sins, we turn to God, we're forgiven of our sins, Jesus Christ's blood cleanses us from all of our sins and we are made righteous with God. And yet which of us, having come to God, even through the waters of baptism, who have tried to live before God, do not at times feel rather impure in heart? How do you get from here to there? In a way I suppose you do it by hungering and thirsting after righteousness as He said earlier. But I really think probably the most important aspect of this is truth, truth, being really honest about what is going on in your heart.

For if you go to God in prayer and pretend that you are not angry with your brother when you are, that's not pure in heart. In one sense of the word the man who is angry with his brother and furious with his brother and goes to God and says God I'm angry with my brother, I want you to punish him. He's honest with God; he's more pure than the man who denies it. You know I remember once being really angry with a brother, I remember once being furious and getting on my knees and starting to pray that God would really punish him for what he had done and I couldn't do it. Once I was really honest with God about what I wanted about the man, I came to realize that what I wanted was wrong. The way to purity of heart is truth. "Blessed are the peacemakers" says Jesus, "for they shall be called the children of God." I want to tell you something that you might not think about on this, being a peacemaker is not necessarily getting in between two people who are fighting and trying to make peace between them. There's another proverb that says, "He that passes by and meddles with a strife that doesn't belong to him, is like a man who takes a passing dog by the ears." You are going to get bit. And a lot of times people use this idea of being a peacemaker as an excuse for meddling in things that are none of their business.

I think what Jesus is talking about when He talks about the peacemaker is, blessed are the people who make peace with their own brother, who makes peace with the person they are at war with, in other words it is one of the parties of the dispute who has the capacity for being the peacemaker not a stranger, not a third party. Now if you want to be approved of God this is the kind of person you want to be. And you can be, all these attitudes are within your grasp, they are well within your grasp, you can reach them. However there may be some consequences that come along with them.

So you have tried to have these attributes in your life, He said "Blessed are they who do hunger and thirst after righteousness for they shall be filled." And that's good. We all want to live a righteous life and a clean life. But later He says "Blessed are they who are persecuted for righteousness sake for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." Now I can understand being approved of God for thirsting after righteousness and living a righteous life. Then the question is, are good things happening to you when you are persecuted for righteousness sake? Well Jesus went on to say "Blessed are you when men will revile you and persecute you and say all manner of evil against you falsely for my sake. Rejoice and be exceeding glad for great is your reward in heaven for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you." Now you would think that a person who met all these attributes would be approved by men as well as by God. You would think, my, these are good people, we would like to have these people as our next-door neighbors, we would like to have these people as our co-workers at our job where we work. Well apparently not. Jesus met all these qualifications and they wanted to kill Him.

Human nature is strange and sometimes it is hard to figure people out. And Jesus did say, all who would follow Him, and one of the apostles said all who would live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution. And Jesus said if they persecuted me they will persecute you, and I guess that He's telling us that when men persecute us for having His attributes, we should rejoice because we have a great reward coming in the future. Well I

guess it takes faith doesn't it? Somehow or other you've got to look down inside yourself and find out, yeah it really is worth it because I know that He is and I know that He lives, I know that He's coming back and I know that I can live forever with Him. He went on to say, "You are the salt of the earth but if the salt has lost its savor what is it good for, it's good for nothing but to be cast out and trodden underfoot of men." You can put it on your sidewalk to melt the ice. "You are the light of the world; a city that is set on a hill cannot be hid. Men don't light a candle and then put it under a bushel, they put it on a candlestick and it gives light to everyone that is in the house. Let your light so shine before man that they may see your good works and glorify your father which is in heaven."

You know it's interesting; He does not give us the option of hiding out. He doesn't give us the option of going out and living in a cave and living our righteous life. He said that we are the salt of the earth, you take a salt shaker and you sprinkle the salt around your food, and a grain falls here and grain falls there, you don't put it all in one place. And apparently He intends for those blessed people who meet all these attributes that He's talked about up here, He wants them to be salted around the world that they might in turn be a blessing to the community. Then they might in turn being light in the middle of the darkness that exists in so much of the world and so much of people's lives. He says "I'm going to light you like a candle, and I'm not going to let you hide, I'm going to put you on a candlestick and I'm going to set you up high where you can be seen. Because when I do this you will then glorify your father which is in heaven. Even in the persecution that will come upon you because you do the right thing, it will be a condemnation to those men who persecute you and a glory to God." So now we're beginning to get an idea of what Jesus really taught after all. He taught about attitudes, about the kind of people that we ought to be. About the way we ought to live our lives and of the way we ought to respond to the people who are around us all of the time. What Jesus is doing, whether we realize it or not, is defining the difference between the winners and losers. But that's not all He had to say, the Sermon on the Mount is rich. Until next time this is Ronald Dart and you were *Born to Win*.

This article was transcribed with minor editing from a message given by
Ronald L. Dart titled: "The Words of Jesus #7" (WOJ7) 3/17/98
Transcribed by: kam 1/3/03

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