



PARABLE OF THE SOWER

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Every Society has its dream of a better world. The classless society, the American dream; Utopia. Martin Luther King spoke about having a dream where black and white would no longer be segregated.

We hear our politicians when it's coming up to election time talk about a fair and just society. The former British Prime Minister David Cameron talked about the 'Big Society'. Not sure whatever happened to it.

The Jews of the first century were no different to us in wanting a better society and a better world. In the Old Testament, we can read from Judges on through to Kings and Chronicles all about the different rulers and kings Israel had and what sort of society they tried to create.

But as time went on it became clear that it would take an extraordinary intervention on God's part to transform this present evil world into the sort of world where God's people would really feel at home.

A decisive victory over the power of evil would have to be won, a victory no ordinary human being could ever achieve.

The people looked forward to the arrival of a supernatural deliverer, the one who would be anointed like the mighty heroes of the past; a new David; but greater even than David was. They waited for The Messiah.

Don't worry said the prophets; things look pretty bad for us Jews in this present wicked age.

But soon the Messiah will step out of the wings of history; and then at long last the kingdom of God will begin.

Can you imagine the shock that must have gone through the population of Galilee when Jesus, a young carpenter from Nazareth, started to wander around their towns and villages saying it had happened? 'The kingdom of God has Come'. Its arrived. 'Repent and believe the good news that I bring'. That's what he said.

Many as we know were naturally very sceptical. They were not unfamiliar with lunatics who indulged their megalomaniac fantasies by pretending to be the Messiah.

But this man did not just make messianic claims; he cast out demons, he healed the sick, he raised the dead. He feeds 5000 plus people with a few fish and some loaves. He forgave people. And he taught. He wasn't just all talk.

There was a charisma about him that had not been seen in Israel since the days of the greatest prophets 500 years before. There was even a rumour than he was Elijah or Jeremiah back from the dead.

The word 'kingdom' in that part of the world meant a great deal to the Galilean masses. The mere mention of the kingdom fired up their most fanatical zeal, and inspired their most passionate commitment.

All Jesus had to do when confronted by this vast multitude was to work a miracle or two and deliver a suitable firebrand speech and the whole of the Galilean countryside would have erupted enthusiastically for his Messiahship.

He could easily have whipped up the crowds to march on Jerusalem. As some political leaders try to do even today.

But the extraordinary thing is, he didn't. Instead he told them a story.

He had power greater than every nation combined together on planet earth at his disposal. But instead he tells the people a story. Can you imagine this great crowd coming to him from town after town, full of expectancy, hanging on to every word and ready to do as he commands? Then He sits down and tells them a Story.

Not a straight forward type of story; but a bizarre perplexing riddle of a story called a Parable. People are more open to stories; but not everybody; this is the strange conundrum.

Even his closest friends were utterly bewildered by this kind of approach. What on earth are you doing Jesus they asked him. What is this parable business all about?

Then he explains to them; 'the knowledge of the secrets of the kingdom of God has been given to you, but to others I speak in parables, so that though seeing, they may Not see, through hearing they may Not understand. What does he mean? These are unpopular and controversial words.

What Jesus says here clearly seems to contradict the popular view of parables as moralizing stories told to aid the understanding of simple rural people.

On the contrary; Jesus says he speaks in parables not to make it Easier for people to understand, but to make it Harder. Though seeing, they may Not see, though hearing, they may Not understand. Whatever you make of that, its quite clear that Jesus was not as impressed by these crowds, streaming out of Galilee to see him, as we might have been, if we had been there.

Jesus was not convinced that they were on his wavelength.

You see Jesus grew up with these people; he knew perfectly well what their ideas of the kingdom of God were; and that they were as different from

his own ideas..... as chalk and cheese. As day to night. He had to take a different way with them. The last thing he wanted to do was to foster their mistaken notions by courting popularity with them. He was going to make things difficult for them.

He hints in fact that he feels rather as the prophet Isaiah did, when he was told to preach to a people whose hearts would be Hardened against his words.

Yet At other times Jesus speaks to the crowds and challenges them; he who has ears to hear, let him hear.' Verse 8. So how do properly assess what Jesus is saying here.

This particular parable acts as a type of filter. You know what a filter does. It sifts.

Among the thousands who come to see and hear him for all the wrong reasons; he believes there are Some, just some who are genuinely Open to the truth.

A tiny minority maybe, amid that vast spiritually deaf multitude; but though few, they Did have ears to hear.

His parables were like a type of Filter that identified those True disciples.

They identified those who came to Jesus looking for just a political leader, a nationalist revolutionary, or a spell binding miracle worker, they went away disillusioned. Or I want you Jesus to give me the wow factor; take away all my troubles and tribulations, then I can get on with living for myself.

They found to their disappointment a teller of stories. But those who

were drawn to him by some deeper magnetism stayed. In their hearts God's spirit was working. They were being inwardly called to follow him.

Though they were perplexed at first, just like all the others, they were also intrigued, longing to understand what he was really getting at, sensing that somewhere buried in the obscurity of his parables lay the clue to that kingdom of God for which their hearts longed.

To you he says to them; 'the knowledge of the secrets of the kingdom of God has been given'. But for some you have to take it a step further.

You will never find the kingdom, or Jesus for that matter if you do not allow your mind and heart to be opened. You need to move closer to him.

This is in fact, a fundamental characteristic of all Jesus' ministry. You don't get to grips with his message from the safe distance of a detached curiosity.

Unlike so many orators and some preachers of today; Jesus' head was never turned by the flattery of the crowds.

He wasn't fooled by the illusion of success that big numbers conjure up, he saw through all that hype. Instead he was perfectly content to invest himself in just Twelve men and the handful of women Luke names for us. Provided they were real listeners, real learners, and real disciples, he was prepared to give the whole of himself to such a tiny band.

The parable of the Sower acts as a sifting process because

behind this imagery of the sower and the seed is the solemn and serious truth that only some who hear his words

are ultimately blessed by him and saved.

You know the way when people joined the Gold Rush in America back in the 1800's. You see the prospectors sifting through a pile of dirt and stones from the river bed as they look for gold. And then they start to gradually wash all the debris away, until there is just one or two gold nuggets left.

Though there may be many whose initial response to the gospel looks promising, the path of being a follower of Jesus proves too demanding. They can't hack it.

Different people view the meaning of parables differently. Some feel that parables are deliberately mysterious and elusive. But by drawing us into this particular story Jesus brings home some truths that we were not aware of which can strike home and leave us uncomfortable, perplexed and wanting more.

No matter whether we understand this parable, this story; at the first or second or third or fourth attempt; it can take years; Jesus still gets his message across. He wants us to hear it; to think carefully about it; and respond to it.

The *photo* shows the icon, "Christ the Sower of Seeds."

