



TITLE

J JOHN CLIP > BLANK SCREEN

"We deal in the area of behavioural alteration". At Speakers Corner a Communist was extolling the virtues of a communist work. A tramp shuffled past. "Communism" said the speaker, "will put a new suit of clothes on that man". A Christian heckler in the audience shouted "yes, but Jesus Christ will put a new man in that suit!"

The Christian faith is a radical faith. It's a faith that radically changes people. It changes their outlook on life, it can change their behaviour, it can transform their health, their family circumstances, their whole attitude and approach to life. It does that. In fact the Christian faith isn't worth its salt if it isn't life changing. If it doesn't do anything for anyone than why are any of us here?

Last time I looked at the difference the Holy Spirit made to the disciples in the days between the death and resurrection of Jesus and Pentecost. We looked at how the Holy Spirit was imparted to them by Jesus, how their minds were opened and how their lives were transformed. This week and on Pentecost Sunday I'm going to have a look at the way in which the Holy Spirit changes lives and how He can change our continuing lives as God's people.

C H SPURGEON

Here's a picture of the young Spurgeon, taken in the late 1850s. What was remarkable about this young man was the way in which people came to Christ as a result of his ministry. In his lifetime it's estimated that Spurgeon preached to 10 million people – remarkable in the days before broadcast media like radio and TV. People accepted Christ in droves. Spurgeon was converted at the age of 16, and by the age of 20 he was appointed minister of New Park Street Chapel in south London. His impact was immediate and significant – the church grew rapidly into the largest Baptist Church in Britain. What was special about this man? Was there something about his eloquence? Well, he wasn't a highly educated man. In fact he was criticised through most of his life for simple and direct speaking. So what was his "secret"? The clue to this comes in Spurgeon's own autobiography of his conversion.

"I sometimes think I might have been in darkness and despair now, had it not been for the goodness of God in sending a snowstorm one Sunday morning, when I was going to a place of worship. When I could go no further, I turned down a court and came to a little Primitive Methodist Chapel. In that chapel there might be a dozen or fifteen people. The minister did not come that morning: snowed up, I suppose. A poor man, a shoemaker, a tailor, or something of that sort, went up into the pulpit to preach. He was obliged to stick to his text, for the simple reason that he had nothing else to say. The text was, 'Look unto Me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth.' He did not even pronounce the words rightly, but that did not matter.

"There was, I thought, a glimpse of hope for me in the text. He began thus: 'My dear friends, this is a very simple text indeed. It says, "Look." Now that does not take a deal of effort. It ain't lifting your foot or your finger; it is just "look." Well, a man need not go to college to learn to look. You may be the biggest fool, and yet you can look. A man need not be worth a thousand a year to look. Anyone can look; a child can look. But this is what the text says. Then it says, "Look unto Me." 'Ay,' said he, in broad Essex, 'many of ye are looking to yourselves. No use looking there. You'll never find comfort in yourselves.' Then the good man followed up his text in this way: 'Look unto Me: I am sweating great drops of blood. Look unto Me; I am hanging on the Cross. Look: I am dead and buried. Look unto Me; I rise again. Look unto Me; I ascend; I am sitting at the Father's right hand. O, look to Me! Look to Me!' When he had got about that length, and managed to spin out ten minutes, he was at the length of his tether.

"Then he looked at me under the gallery, and I daresay, with so few present, he knew me to be a stranger. He then said, 'Young man, you look very miserable.' Well, I did; but I had not been accustomed to have remarks made on my personal appearance from the pulpit before. However, it was a good blow struck. He continued: 'And you will always be miserable — miserable in life and miserable in death — if you do not obey my text. But if you obey now, this moment, you will be saved.'

"Then he shouted, as only a Primitive Methodist can, 'Young man, look to Jesus Christ.' There and then the cloud was gone, the darkness had rolled away, and that moment I saw the sun; and I could have risen that moment and sung with the most enthusiastic of them of the Precious Blood of Christ."

What caused the change in Spurgeon? The man's eloquent preaching? Certainly not! He broke all the rules of what was considered good preaching. Preaching wasn't the man's forte. They were words that

Spurgeon had doubtless heard from more eloquent lips many times previously. But this time the words just hit him and he realised what following Jesus was all about. So what made the difference. Definitely not the man or even the message. It was the Holy Spirit, opening his mind and changing his life.

The change in Spurgeon was remarkable. Within 5 years he had become the talk of the town in London – a young minister on fire for God, being the agent for the Holy Spirit to bring change to the lives of others.

“We deal in the area of behavioural alteration. How? Do we brainwash? Never! Do we use pressure selling? Certainly not! Do we manipulate people with fear? No! Do we have cunning killer arguments! No – Christianity just doesn't make sense to most people. Then how do people change?

It's the Holy Spirit. He's is the mind-changer and life changer. As we get to our passage this morning, the apostle Paul had the same experience of the Holy Spirit. In our evening services we have just come to the end of a series on 2 Corinthians where he defends himself against criticisms that he wasn't slick and eloquent like Jewish “professional” evangelists – he called them “super-apostles”. The criticism was here as early as 1 Corinthians 2. “When I came to you, my friends, to preach God's secret truth, I did not use big words and great learning.” Paul wasn't about slick delivery and fine words. I must say that I've never been convinced with people who use big words. My description of a theologian is a person who takes the simple and profound truths of God and turns them into gobbledygook. Paul was one of the most profound theologians ever, but actually, his words were intended to be accessible to people – he used koine (ordinary persons') greek. There are few specialised words in his writings – which is more than I can say for many of the translators of his words!

That being the case, WHAT MADE THE DIFFERENCE? What had the Holy Spirit done in Paul's life that made a difference to him and was making a difference to the people he spoke to and taught.

CHRIST FOCUSED

His message to them as a simple one, Christ focussed and cross-focussed. *When I came to you, my friends, to preach God's secret truth, I did not use big words and great learning. 2 For while I was with you, I made up my mind to forget everything except Jesus Christ and especially his death on the cross.* To use a very modern phrase, Paul kept the main the main thing. We do a lot of different kinds of ministry as a church. We help people in lots of helpful ways. We have lots of activities. We can make a difference in people's lives. But there is only one difference that can really change them from the inside out; and that's by introducing them to Jesus and introducing them to the forgiveness and new life that finds its focus in the cross of Jesus.

It doesn't matter what ministry you may be involved in as a Christian: if you are in contact with people that don't know Jesus, the focus of what you do and why you do it should always be Jesus. If it isn't then the focus is you. How many lives are *you* going to change eternally? I'll give you a clue, it's a nice round number.

SPIRITUAL WISDOM

If you didn't get that then let me explain. The difference Paul made, which is the difference Spurgeon discovered as has J John, is that the Holy Spirit imparts a different wisdom to which people subscribe to as human beings. Paul calls it spiritual wisdom and Paul says of it: it is not the wisdom that belongs to this world or to the powers that rule this world – powers that are losing their power. 7 The wisdom I proclaim is God's secret wisdom, which is hidden from human beings. People just can't see it.

WORLDLY WISDOM?

If you're not a Christian this morning, then even though you've probably heard all this before, you just don't understand it enough to believe it. It doesn't make sense to you. Why? Because you don't have the mind of Christ. You can't see things this way. Now worldly wisdom can be a good thing. Look at our modern society with all its advances, gizmos etc and it's good. But human knowledge is limited to what we know and perceive. So just because the notion God or the death and resurrection of Jesus defies your personal scientific logic or your way of thinking doesn't mean that it's wrong; it is just that something is missing from your understanding of the world.

CHOLERA

Let me give you an example from medical history. Cholera arrived in the UK in 1830s. It is a fearsome disease – kills people in a matter of hours. People had no idea how it was transmitted. Thought it was through the general stinking air – the miasma – caused all serious diseases. Despite great learning, they had no idea that it was the water.

PHOTOS

A doctor in Soho, John Snow started to map out where cholera deaths occurred and found they all centred around a water pump in Broadwick Street.

At first the medical fraternity took a lot of persuading that cholera was water-borne but when they saw the evidence, it led others to see the wisdom of what he was saying and they found many other diseases were water-borne. This led to the movement in London for the provision of clean piped water and proper sewers.

The problem is that human wisdom only goes so far. That is as true in our generation as any. We think our wisdom is good, but it still leaves God as a mystery. Look at the scientific evidence for the existence of God and we get the answer; maybe He does, maybe He doesn't.

So God is all a mystery. Actually that's the word the NT uses, *mysterion*, a mystery, a secret. But God chooses to reveal that secret to people.

SPRITUAL WISDOM

Here's how Paul describes it. 7 The wisdom I proclaim is God's secret wisdom, which is hidden from human beings, but which he had already chosen for our glory even before the world was made. 8 None of the rulers of this world knew this wisdom. If they had known it, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.

People naturally don't have spiritual wisdom. If the people who crucified Jesus actually knew who He was, then they wouldn't have crucified Him – obviously! So if anyone is going to make sense of the world as God sees it, they need spiritual wisdom. How do they come by that. The early examples I gave you give us that answer.

SPIRIT EMPOWERED

I come to the third element of what I have to say this morning. The message we bring to the world should be Christ focussed and proclaim spiritual wisdom. Both these are excellent things and real necessities if we are to make sense of God and the things of God. But without the empowering of the Spirit, then none of it will make any sense. Paul said: *when I came to you, I was weak and trembled all over with fear, 4 and my teaching and message were not delivered with skillful words of human wisdom, but with convincing proof of the power of God's Spirit. 5 Your faith, then, does not rest on human wisdom but on God's power.*

RECEIVING SPIRITUAL WISDOM

So if we need spiritual wisdom to understand the things of God what do we do? I suggest this is in two ways:

BY RECEIVING THE SPIRIT'S WORDS

we do not speak in words taught by human wisdom, but in words taught by the Spirit, as we explain spiritual truths to those who have the Spirit. When Paul taught these people, he was speaking in words taught by the Spirit. If we want to have spiritual wisdom and see how God sees things, it starts with His words. And where are they. In the Bible. Paul was taught things by the Spirit and we know what was taught because his words and other people the Spirit moved are all collected together in one place – the Bible. If you want to start to know the mind of Christ, then don't wait for some great revelation, because God doesn't re-invent the wheel: He's already given us the sum of things we need to know in this book. Spend time in God's presence with your Bible if you want to start to understand the secrets of God because they are all there!

BY HAVING THE MIND OF CHRIST-FOCUSSED

Having knowledge is one thing, understanding it is quite another. The Bible has the secrets of God as taught by the Spirit, but they only make a difference when the Spirit is present in a person's life. When we decided to follow Jesus then we received the Holy Spirit of God and it is He that causes us to understand.

13 So then, we do not speak in words taught by human wisdom, but in words taught by the Spirit, as we explain spiritual truths to those who have the Spirit. 14 Whoever does not have the Spirit cannot receive the gifts that come from God's Spirit. Such a person really does not understand them, and they seem to be nonsense, because their value can be judged only on a spiritual basis. 15 Whoever has the Spirit, however, is able to judge the value of everything, but no one is able to judge him. 16 As the scripture says, "Who knows the mind of the Lord?

Who is able to give him advice?"

We, however, have the mind of Christ.

We have the mind of Christ. If you are a believer – if you have trusted Jesus as Saviour and Lord, then each of us have the Holy Spirit and have the ability to understand and make decisions on that basis. If you don't know Jesus then as Paul says, most of what I've said this morning is probably nonsense to you. Maybe it's starting to make sense. If it is then the Holy Spirit is opening your mind as he did to Spurgeon and countless opportunities. Take this opportunity to follow Jesus for yourself and allow Him to transform you. I'm going to give an opportunity for that in just a moment.

YOU WERE MARKED WITH THE SEAL

Before I do that I want to look at another description of the Holy Spirit Paul gives in Ephesians. The fact we can understand is because when we trusted Christ, we received the Holy Spirit: In him you also, when you had heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and had believed in him, were marked with the seal of the promised Holy Spirit; 14 this is the pledge of our inheritance towards redemption as God's own people, to the praise of his glory.

We were sealed. Paul is using the picture of a legal document with a wax seal. God has placed His mark on us. The deal is done, the contract is signed. The presence of the Spirit confirms it. We can show everyone the proof that we are believers and what we say is true. Or can we? The problem is that if the wax isn't soft enough when the seal is pressed, it doesn't come out clearly.

THE BEST MARK IS MADE WHEN THE WAX IS SOFT

I said earlier that the Christian faith is life-changing. It is. The problem is that many Christians forget how life-changing it really is and rather than living as people with a different, vibrant, positive transforming view of life, we can be just as cynical, hopeless, pessimistic and flawed as the world around us, with the wisdom of the world rather than the mind of Christ dominating our lives. We've hardened ourselves. The wax is hard, the Spirit's seal isn't as clear as it could be.

The Spirit is as much a mind-changer, a life changer for those of us in Christ as those who need Him. If we've grown cold, cynical, negative, tired, the Holy Spirit is the same Spirit as He has ever been. He's a gracious God, wanting to renew our minds afresh. Ask Him to open your mind afresh this morning and allow the Spirit to refresh you.

TITLE

Challenge to accept Christ – prayer

Challenge for refreshment, renewal.

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