

The Appeal of Jesus

It is easy to become anxious about the problems of the modern world. We can however take great comfort from the fact that the power of Jesus Christ, who called men and women nearly 2000 years ago, is still effective today.

The preaching of the gospel by Jesus' followers in the first century led to a revolution in how people thought and lived. What was the reason for such mighty changes? The explanation is contained in the gospel records about his work and mission, where we find that the message of Jesus, which was then carried further afield by his followers, the apostles, met a very real human need.

Men and women have the same needs today and the message of Jesus can satisfy them now as in the first century. There are the same questions on essential things today as there were so long ago; for men and women do not change. What was there about Jesus that drew men and women to him when he moved about among them?

Local Fame

The records that we have of the life of Jesus are almost entirely devoted to the 3½ years of his public work, with emphasis on the closing days which led to his crucifixion. Most of his ministry was spent in journeying from place to place preaching and healing. Both his message and his miracles created tremendous enthusiasm; the whole province of Galilee rang with excited talk about the new preacher. Crowds followed him from place to place, pressing around the houses where he



Galilee at dusk

stayed, and sometimes leaving him little time for rest or food. Numbers were once so great that he got into a boat and used it as a platform from which to address the crowds on the shore. The *"fame of him spread everywhere"*, and Mark describes how the whole country was moved:

And a great multitude from Galilee followed him, and from Judea and Jerusalem and Idumea and beyond the Jordan; and those from Tyre and Sidon, a great multitude, when they heard how many things he was doing, came to him" (Mark 3:7-8).

What is the reason for this widespread interest in Jesus? Without doubt his miracles played a great part. So many were healed throughout the land and we can understand how eagerly those who were sick or whose loved ones were suffering would seek him out. The miracles had even greater significance however; they proved Jesus' claims that God was with him and also illustrated that his work was to bring healing to men and women in an even deeper sense – to heal their minds and hearts and save them from sin.

Personal Appeal

Besides his great deeds, there was a great attractiveness in the man himself. He showed a spirit of kindness and helpfulness to all; he was moved with compassion for the crowd. He cared for men and women and they were drawn to him. He was not like the Rabbis of his day, aloof and unapproachable: women would bring their children to him and he blessed them; in his presence sinners felt their sinfulness and sought to reform; those in sorrow sought him for solace and help.

They marvelled, says Luke, *at the gracious words which proceeded out of his mouth (Luke 4:22). Grace is poured upon your lips*, wrote the Psalmist (Psalm 45:2); and the grace and appeal of Jesus has been an abiding and sweetening thing in human life. As we read his words we can feel their charm.

Foretold in the Old Testament

One Sabbath in the synagogue at Nazareth, Jesus was handed the Old Testament scroll. He read words written some 700 years previously by the prophet Isaiah which truly described him and his mission:

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because He has anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; He has



sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed; to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord" (Luke 4:18–19).

There were, and still are, many poor, broken-hearted, bruised, captive, blind and deaf. Yet there are many more who are blind to life's full meaning, than there are who need help to cross the road. More are deaf to divine instruction than cannot hear human voices. More are captive in the slavery of sin and of death than are captives due to war or oppression. Jesus declared he had a healing work to do; that he is the physician to men. But the need for his help must be felt. The patient must recognise that he or she needs a cure.

"Come to Me"

Those who were self-righteous and self-sufficient found fault with him because he cared for the ordinary men and women and cheered them with his message. With a delicate but searching irony Jesus said,

"Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance" (Mark 2:17).

Sin is like sickness, and in healing physical illnesses and disabilities Jesus showed that he was sent to be a healer of the deeper affliction - of sin. He never minced his words in his teaching concerning sin and righteousness; he spoke plainly yet with appeal. He rejoiced that while men who are wise and intelligent in their own opinion did not respond to his call, yet

those with sincere and honest hearts and childlike trust heard him gladly.

“Come to me”, he said, “all you who labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light” (Matthew 11:28–30).

He invites men and women to come to him, to learn from him. In doing so, we enable him to share our burdens, and to give comfort to hearts and shoulders that carry the load of life’s cares.

The same spirit breathes through many of his sayings; he spoke of himself as the Shepherd seeking out the lost, and as the sower casting the good news of God’s kingdom into

men’s hearts. When his friends were in peril he told them, *“Be not afraid”*; and in the most difficult of circumstances for himself and his followers he could say, *“Be of good cheer”*. His attitude to men and women might be summed up in the words:

When he saw the multitudes, he was moved with compassion for them, because they were weary and scattered, like sheep having no shepherd (Matthew 9:36).

That compassion is there still today, for all who will come to him.

John Carter

*From ‘The Call Of Christ: His Offer Of
Life Beyond The Grave’*

“Learn of me for I am meek and lowly in heart”

The wondrous son of God was born to be King of the earth
Yet never lived in a palace nor had a kingly birth.
He never dressed in costly robes, jewels or gold at all
Nor dined with the rich and famous in castles or sparkling halls.

He walked among the poor and lame, had nowhere to lay his head,
He had no great possessions, it was a poor man’s life he led.
God promised His only son the highest honour of all
Yet by divine design, he was born in a lowly stall.

We see just how God works in His wondrous ways.
To the simple and lowly in heart He will look with praise.
The proud have no place in the things of God, it isn’t how to be,
The Son of God was lowly in heart — he wants the same of you and me.

Peggy Rawson