

# Re-imagining Life



## Session 6: *The Revolution has begun*

The phrase, 'whole-life discipleship', refers to the fact that we choose to bring every area of our lives under the leadership of Christ: no splits between what we think is spiritual and secular, no private areas in which we do not want to allow the gospel to make a difference. Using the words of the gospels, it is recognising that if we are going to be members of the Kingdom of God, then we have to recognise that the King of that kingdom is interested in every area of our lives.

When Jesus came and announced that the revolution had begun, that the kingdom of God was amongst them, people reacted in a wide variety of ways. For some, it was good news: things were going to change. The poor had the most from this announcement and so, unsurprisingly, they were most excited by the declaration. The rich and powerful had the most to lose, so they tried to silence the messenger. The parable we will look at this time, sees Jesus explaining to his disciples why some people respond so well to the news of the kingdom and why others seem so reluctant to embrace change.

The story is a simple one. A farmer sows seed, some of it produces a crop, some of it is wasted. The potential of the seed is lost. One obvious question then would be to ask ourselves about the extent to which the seed, the word of God, is able to find a fertile spot in our lives and so produce the fruit that will last. One of the main areas that cause the seed to be unproductive was the pressures of life in Jesus' day: life's worries, riches and pleasures. If that was true in the first century, how much more is it true today when every area of our lives is pervaded by the effects of consumerism. We will be asking more about this in the study.

As in previous sessions, use the 'notice' comments to get a clear picture of what was happening and the 'reflect' comments to guide your discussion.

## Luke 8

<sup>1</sup>After this, Jesus travelled about from one town and village to another, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom of God. The Twelve were with him, <sup>2</sup>and also some women who had been cured of evil spirits and diseases: Mary (called Magdalene) from whom seven demons had come out; <sup>3</sup>Joanna the wife of Cuza, the manager of Herod's household; Susanna; and many others. These women were helping to support them out of their own means.

<sup>4</sup>While a large crowd was gathering and people were coming to Jesus from town after town, he told this parable: <sup>5</sup>"A farmer went out to sow his seed. As he was scattering the seed, some fell along the path; it was trampled on, and the birds of the air ate it up. <sup>6</sup>Some fell on rock, and when it came up, the plants withered because they had no moisture. <sup>7</sup>Other seed fell among thorns, which grew up with it and choked the plants. <sup>8</sup>Still other seed fell on good soil. It came up and yielded a crop, a hundred times more than was sown."

When he said this, he called out, "He who has ears to hear, let him hear."

<sup>9</sup>His disciples asked him what this parable meant. <sup>10</sup>He said, "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;  
though hearing, they may not understand.'

<sup>11</sup>"This is the meaning of the parable: The seed is the word of God. <sup>12</sup>Those along the path are the ones who hear, and then the devil comes and takes away the word from their hearts, so that they may not believe and be saved. <sup>13</sup>Those on the rock are the ones who receive the word with joy when they hear it, but they have no root. They believe for a while, but in the time of testing they fall away. <sup>14</sup>The seed that fell among thorns stands for those who hear, but as they go on their way they are choked by life's worries, riches and pleasures, and they do not mature. <sup>15</sup>But the seed on good soil stands for those with a noble and good heart, who hear the word, retain it, and by persevering produce a crop.

## Notice

**As you read, notice these features:**

*Luke places this parable after his introduction that emphasised the message that Jesus was proclaiming: the good news of the Kingdom of God.*

*The Kingdom of God was **the** theme for Jesus. Look at Luke 4:13-18. Look at the events of Luke 7.*

*How confusing would Jesus have been to the zealots after he heals the centurion's servant?  
What would the Pharisees have thought about the sinful woman?  
What did the crowds think after Jesus had raised the widow's son?  
Why were John's disciples uncertain?*

*The actions of Jesus demonstrate that the world could change.*

*Jesus teaches in parables knowing that they will confuse people. Does this surprise you? How were people expected to understand the parables? The parables operated in a way that made sense to those who were hungry to receive, and open to change, and ready to chase after the Kingdom. But to those who were not prepared to hear, really hear, they would become the stumbling block that would confirm them in their stubbornness.*

*Notice how widespread the seed is distributed. Not efficiently, that is for sure! The scattering allows for the unlikely to receive the seed and for it to grow into something wonderful. **Cont overleaf...***

## A Lamp on a Stand

<sup>16</sup>"No one lights a lamp and hides it in a jar or puts it under a bed. Instead, he puts it on a stand, so that those who come in can see the light. <sup>17</sup>For there is nothing hidden that will not be disclosed, and nothing concealed that will not be known or brought out into the open. <sup>18</sup>Therefore consider carefully how you listen. Whoever has will be given more; whoever does not have, even what he thinks he has will be taken from him."

**Cont...** *This would not have been expected in Jesus' day at all. There was a clear pecking order, and those that were religious and powerful knew that they were at the head. But Jesus announces something astoundingly different: the seed will make a difference in the lives of those who receive it with joy, who listen well, who add to what they have already received. For this to happen, to change the imagery, you have to be hungry, desperate and aware that you have not found everything you have been searching for.*

## Reflect

This parable is often taken to refer simply to the way that people respond to the evangelistic message of the gospel. Whilst it does involve that, does the parable take on a different meaning if we see the reference being to the whole message of what the kingdom of God meant – as demonstrated by Jesus?

What do you understand the Kingdom of God to be?

What difference can this understanding make to your everyday life?

What would the in-breaking of the Kingdom of God look like in my place of work, my family, my street?

What would hinder that?

Think about those in the parable who lose the potential of fruit because they are 'choked' by life's worries, riches and pleasures. How hard do you find it to be a whole-life disciple in a society that is driven by consumerism? What are the difficult choices you have made in the past because you follow Jesus, and what are the choices you know you will have to face in the future?

Why will the consumer approach to life not satisfy eventually? Is there anyway we can demonstrate a different life together as whole-life disciples? What does it mean to persevere? Give some examples of when you have persevered and what has been the result of that.

Teaching in parables meant that people had to want to be drawn in to the story. They had to think and reflect on what they heard. How can we use music, art, poetry and story today to intrigue people rather than just telling them. Would it work with your friends?



## Word for the Week

### **The Cross and the cross**

**If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. Mark 8:34**

The fascination of a mystery novel is the unexpected twists of the plot. No sooner does the reader discover the key fact than a sudden turn or revelation seems to derail the whole story.

This is what the last part of Mark 8 feels like. Jesus realised that the disciples were finally ready to grasp the key fact. So he asked them, 'Who do you say I am?' (v.29), and Peter came out with the great declaration, 'You are the Christ'. But then immediately came the revelation that threatened to derail the story from reaching its fitting, triumphal end: 'He began to teach them that the Son of Man... must be killed'.

The early critics of *Great Expectations*, who tried to persuade Dickens to give the novel a happy ending, were perhaps missing the whole point of the plot. Similarly, Peter, guided by his natural human sense of rightness, began to rebuke Jesus - only to be soundly rebuked in his turn.

And Jesus didn't leave it at that, but went on to explain that his death had direct implications for his disciples. Ronald Sider has written of this passage:

'Following Christ means living like Jesus... Jesus modelled servanthood, self-sacrifice and special concern for the poor and neglected... All that sounds foreign to our modern ears because we are not accustomed to denying ourselves in order to serve others... Instant gratification is at the core of modern life. Costly self-denial is at the center of Jesus' way. 'If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves, take up their cross and follow me.'...Jesus has a better way, and it leads to far deeper happiness than instant sex and wealth can ever bring. But there is no way round the cross.' (*Living Like Jesus*, 1999)

Christians are called to be counter-cultural, and this involves examining the ways in which we are shaped by the society we live in – our attitudes to work, colleagues, money, time, our aspirations for our family, our feelings about the 'antisocial elements' in our community...

This is how the master story-teller planned the plot of the greatest story ever told.

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