

## **They Came to Hear, but Left Amazed** (Matthew 7:28)

It was the feast of tabernacles when Jesus entered Jerusalem. At this time, the people were wanting to kill Jesus for claiming to be the Messiah, the Son of God. So when word reached the ears of the Pharisees and chief priests that Jesus was in town, they sent officers to arrest Jesus. However, when the officers returned to the chief priests and Pharisees, they returned empty-handed. These religious leaders then began to berate and ridicule these officers for not bringing Jesus with them. But the officers offered as their defense, a brief and poignant response. They said, "No man ever spoke like this man" (John 7:46).

What would it have been like to have heard Jesus speak? What if we had a time-machine like in H.G. Wells story, and we could pull a lever and go back in time to witness any speech ever given, what would you want to hear? Would you go back to 1863 to Gettysburg, PA to hear Lincoln's Gettysburg address? Or would you go back to 1912 to Milwaukee, Wisconsin to hear President Teddy Roosevelt deliver a memorable speech while campaigning for his third term in office?

You don't know about Roosevelt's, 1912 speech? Well, let me tell you about it. Before Roosevelt gave his speech, a delusional saloon-keeper shot Roosevelt in the chest with a .38 caliber pistol from a distance of five feet. The man was immediately subdued and taken away, but instead of Roosevelt being whisked away to the hospital, he walked to the platform, opened his suit jacket to show the crowd his blood-stained shirt, and began his speech by saying, "It takes more than that to kill a bull moose!" and proceeded to deliver an 84 minute speech, with a bullet in his chest! Roosevelt pulled his 50 page speech out of his pocket, which was folded in half, and showed the crowd the bullet hole. Possibly, that speech literally saved his life. Don't you imagine people would have left amazed after hearing and witnessing such commitment and bravery?

But as for me, I wouldn't think twice about it. I would bypass all the great speeches of the ages without a second thought, and would direct my time machine to the first century, so that I could hear Jesus, my Creator and Savior, speak.

Are you aware that more than two dozen times in the gospel accounts, the Scriptures record that people were amazed and astonished after hearing Jesus speak? Three times in the book of Mark, Scripture states that people were "amazed at his miracles," while seven times it states they were "amazed at his words." Think of that! What can possibly surpass one's level of amazement after witnessing a bonafide miracle? In the case of Jesus, it was getting to hear him speak!

When it came to Jesus, people hung on his every word (Luke 19:48). Jesus had a way of reaching our insides. His words would touch our hearts, discomfort our thoughts, and reveal any smug self-righteousness within us. He peppered his preaching and teaching with captivating stories, would make difficult demands, rock our boats with convicting insights, and with fiery condemnation, he would expose religious hypocrites.

We call Jesus the Master teacher, and rightly so. His words continue to be preached, memorized,

and lived out, 2000 years after his death. But I'm convinced that what captured the attention of others was not just what he taught, but how he taught what he taught.

For the remainder of this lesson, I would like for us to explore some characteristics of Jesus' preaching. If Jesus was the master teacher as we correctly say he was, shouldn't we try our best to preach and teach like him? So how is it that Jesus taught and preached?

### **Jesus Spoke With Authority.**

As Jesus finished his sermon on the mount, the text says the people were astonished at his teaching for he taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes. I have always wondered just what that statement meant. What does it mean that Jesus spoke with "authority?" Whatever that means, it is intended to stand in contrast with what the Scribes did.

I don't think for a moment that the Scribes did not have an "air" of authority about them when they spoke. Do you remember what they smugly said to the soldiers who returned empty-handed and confused about the identity of Jesus? They used themselves as a standard saying, "You haven't seen any of us following him, have you (Matthew 7:29)? In other words, they saw themselves to be authorities.

So it wasn't just a matter of confidence or having an air of knowing. The scribes equally possessed that. What they didn't possess was the truth and power that Jesus possessed and embodied.

I can't imagine what it must have been like to stand in opposition to Jesus; to try and find a flaw in his reasoning. Think of how many times the religious rulers of Jesus' day sought to trap him in his words, catch him in a contradiction, or uncover some buried skeleton from his past. How frustrated they must have been by being upstaged by Jesus at every turn. Every trap they set, blew up in their faces (Matthew 22:15).

Not only could Jesus stand toe-to-toe with the scribes, and never be caught in his words, but neither could he be caught in his way of life, for he not only spoke the truth, he was the embodiment of truth. Such a man had to be compelling!

I believe this is what Paul was trying to convey to the young evangelist, Titus in Titus 2:15 when he said, "speak these things, exhort, and rebuke with all authority. Let no one despise you." On the surface, one might think Paul was telling Titus what he told Timothy, in 1 Timothy 4:12, "Let no one despise your youth." In other words, don't let anyone look down on you because of your youth. But Paul is not saying the same thing in both passages. The word, "despise" in 1 Timothy 4:12 is *kataphroneo* which means to "think down on." But the word Paul used to Titus is "periphroneo" which means to "think around." In other words, Paul was telling Titus to speak with authority and do that by not allowing anyone to despise you or "out think you," or literally, "think circles around you." This was the manner in which Jesus spoke authoritatively.

In addition to the truth that he spoke and embodied, he had authority "exousia" or power to perform miracles! Can you imagine how these two three qualities how to have amazed those who

listened to Jesus? Not only did Jesus speak the truth, embody the truth that he spoke, he performed great miracles that helped to validate his claims. No wonder these soldiers returned to the scribes saying, "Never have we heard a man speak like this man!" (John 7:46).

### **Jesus Turned Social Norms on Their Head**

Another characteristic of Jesus' teaching was that his teaching turned social norms on their head. His teaching was radical, unconventional, and challenging. Jesus knew how to offer comfort to the afflicted and afflict those who had become comfortable. He focused on the internal instead of the things people could see. He said things like, "the first shall be last, and the last shall be first and if you want to be great, become a servant (Matthew 20:16,26). He told men and women to hate their father and mother (Luke 14:26). He told a rich young ruler to sell all he had and give to the poor (Matthew 19:21). In the sermon on the mount, he challenged statements that had become truisms to the people...you have heard that it has been said, but I say unto you... and challenged them to a better, more noble, a deeper righteousness. No one could sit through a sermon of Jesus and be bored unless he was asleep. You would either be offended by his message, or unsettled by it, but the one thing you wouldn't be is bored.

I believe that's one of the problems with some sermons today. They're bland. They're watered down to the point they don't offend, and consequently, won't convict either. We do a great disservice to Christ and his gospel when we bore our listeners because we have failed to prepare or when we fail to make relevant application that calls people to change.

I'm not suggesting that we be offensive to our listeners, but there is an inherent offense to the gospel (Galatians 5:11). That offense is the cross of Jesus. That cross accuses us of sin, of being morally bankrupt, of being wholly undone and worthy of destruction. This is why we cannot package Christianity like a product on a shelf in the store. We can't dress it up in a way that makes it palatable, unless we are willing to remove the cross, and if we remove the cross, it is no longer the gospel.

Jesus was not offensive in the sense that he wanted to yank people's chains and rattle their cages, but he was perceived as offensive because he told the truth that mankind was undone. He challenged the acceptable norms of his culture and called people to a better way that required them to change their behavior as well as they way they thought.

### **Jesus Knew How to Hold the Attention of His Listeners**

He was a master communicator. He knew how to hold people's attention. He used hyperbole to grab people's attention; to make them say, "What did he say?" "Did I hear him right?" Things like, "If your right eye offend you, pluck it out. If your right hand offend you, cut it off" (Matthew 5:29-30). Or, "It's harder for a rich man to go to heaven than for a camel to go through the eye of a needle (Mark 10:25). And, "It would be better to have a millstone tied around your neck and to be cast into the depth of the sea than to cause one of these little ones to stumble" (Luke 17:1-2).

Jesus also asked questions. Did you know that in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus asked no less than 14 questions? Questions penetrate and probe. They require us to do some introspection. And

quite frankly, questions are better spoken than written. When we read, we don't pause for questions, and thus often miss the impact of the question. But imagine Jesus asking these questions and with a pregnant pause waiting for an answer before moving on. "How can you say to your brother, 'Let me remove the speck from your eye' and look, a plank is in your own eye?"

You see, how things are said can completely change the meaning and impact of those words. For instance, if I told you of a squabble my son and daughter had and my son eventually said, "I'm sorry" to his sister, you might think all is well. But if you heard the way my son said, "I'm sorry," you would draw a different conclusion.

On one occasion, Jesus said to his disciples, "Let the little children come to me." I have heard that verse read publically many times, but only once do I think I heard it read with understanding. You see, Jesus said this while being filled with indignation (Mark 10:14). Don't you think that would make a difference in the way he said what he said?

Jesus' teaching and preaching was more than just the words we read on the page, it was filled with emotion and timing that must have heightened the impact of his words.

And lastly, Jesus was a master story-teller. He spoke in parables, so much so that his disciples said that he never said anything that wasn't in the form of a parable (Matthew 13:34). I don't know how story-telling has come to stand in contrast with preaching today. I've heard people say, "He's not a preacher, he's a story-teller." What is that supposed to mean? Jesus was the master teacher, yet he was a story-teller.

Maybe if we want to have the impact that Jesus had as a preacher, we ought to start preaching like him. Stories, parables, illustrations are powerful. Everyone loves a story. They help people to understand and their understanding is couched in the context of something memorable.

I was just 10 years old when the preacher was walked to the pulpit. I noticed that in his hand, he was carrying an alarm clock; the wind up kind with the bells on top. When he took his place behind the pulpit, he set that alarm clock in a prominent place in the center of the podium where everyone in the assembly could see it. Then he said the following:

"Prior to tonight's sermon, I asked brother Higginbotham (my dad) to set the alarm on this clock sitting in front of me. I told him to set it for as short a period of time or as long a period of time as he wanted. I explained to brother Higginbotham that I was going to preach until the alarm goes off. I have no idea how long I have before the alarm goes off, but when it does go off, I am going to stop preaching. It doesn't matter if I'm in the middle of a point, a sentence, or a word; I'm stopping. By doing this tonight, I want to reinforce how unexpectedly the return of Jesus will be. When he returns, he returns. There will be no time for conclusions, no last minute arrangements; time will be up!"

This preacher and his alarm clock had my rapt attention that night. I listened as he extended the invitation at the beginning of his lesson in case the alarm went off before he had the chance to tell

people what they needed to do to be saved. I sat “on the edge of my seat” wondering how much time he had left as he preached a sermon on “The Return of Jesus.” Then suddenly, without warning, it happened. The alarm clock rang out. The suddenness of it startled me! The preacher, true to his word, abruptly stopped mid-sentence, stepped out of the pulpit, and the song-leader led the congregation in an invitation song.

Although this preacher’s sermon was only 12 minutes long that night, forty-eight years later, I still vividly remember it. That’s the power of an illustration. Through the years, I’ve listened to and preached thousands of sermons, but this illustration made this 12 minute sermon one of the most memorable sermons I’ve ever heard in my life.

This is why Jesus illustrated his points. Would you like to take a guess at how many illustrations Jesus used in his Sermon on the Mount? 41! Can you believe that? Would you have guessed that Jesus used 41 illustrations in that three chapter sermon? But he did. Illustrations that explain the text and help the text be more memorable are valuable tools that Jesus employed in his teaching.

Yes, if I had a time-machine, I wouldn’t slow down for any of the great historical moments in history. No, I’d send myself back to the time of Jesus so that I could hear him speak. And when he finished, I am sure I would say, Just as those soldiers said long ago, “Never has a man spoken like this before!”