



*Chuck Orwiler*

Vicky and I make our home in Denver, Colorado. Our children and grandchildren live nearby and are an important part of our lives. For fun and restoration we enjoy walking in pretty places. I serve as the pastor of soul care at Denver Friends Church, a merry band of Friends who have cared for our family most of our lives.

Jesus was steadfastly righteous and yet remained a winsome figure to many who could easily have felt shame, guilt, rejection, or offense in his presence. What might such a life look like today? That is a question that needs an answer. Jesus is alive. How is that reality working out in us?

I am grateful to Mandy Mulliken for thoughtful, worshipful music selections for these devotions.

*BIBLE READING: Matthew 5:14-16*

As cultural norms wander, we feel the pressure of being odd-balls because we accept certain moral standards to be true and good, that we value truth and goodness, that we simply believe in God. Jesus also lived in a morally diverse society. He challenged his followers to live prophetically by living into the character of the God in whom they claimed to believe.

In today's passage from the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus tells his followers to be light in the darkness. Light is both convicting and winsome. Light illuminates the darkness. On a personal level this is a necessary, albeit uncomfortable, step in moving towards wholeness. At the same time, a light in the darkness has a winsome quality about it. It is a relief. It signals safety, welcome, and hope. These qualities of light are well-illustrated in the person of Christ. People shied from his convicting presence even while being drawn to the rightness of his life.

"Gospel order" is imbedded in the early Friends' tradition. The term captured the value that the gospel and the actual presence of Christ demanded a way of life that revealed the kingdom of God. As Jesus said, "...that people may *see*,"—and praise God as a result. This series of devotions invites us to live a gospel-ordered life. This means doing so in a society in which gospel order will not necessarily be expected nor respected. Can we live the life of Christ which is both illuminating and winsome?

*SONG: Shine, Jesus, Shine*

*PRAAYER SUGGESTION: Lord God and Light of the World, please illumine any darkness in my ways that your presence might shine uninhibited in me.*

—Chuck Orwiler

*BIBLE READING: Luke 19:1-10*

Isn't it curious that Zacchaeus, a man who fleeced his neighbors, was drawn to the Good Shepherd? There was something more than curiosity at work in the man. He went to considerable effort to see Jesus. Or, was he hoping to *be* seen? He then eagerly welcomed Jesus to his home. What was Zacchaeus thinking? The thief is host to the judge! Yes, there is more than curiosity at work here. Zacchaeus was the guilty party, and his party with Jesus resolved his guilt. He didn't need to be found out. He needed to be found.

Jesus was the embodiment of righteousness, yet unrighteous people were attracted to him. Let us consider this carefully when weighing Jesus' charge that we are the light of the world. The Winsome Prophet teaches us to seek and save rather than uncover and condemn. We have numerous examples from Jesus' life in which men, women, and children recognized a quality about Jesus that suggested hope and care rather than condemnation and disdain.

Jesus' righteousness and his compassion are inseparably his right-ness. To those whose lives compromised the goodness of God's way, Jesus brought genuine care, the promise of forgiveness, and the hope of a new beginning. I think of those in my life whom I perceive to be at odds with righteousness. Is genuine care the leading edge of the interface between their lives and mine? Do my thoughts and conversations exude the deep love I share with Christ for lost souls that they be found? Am I cause for those who have gone astray to be drawn to the Good Shepherd?

*SONG: Savior, Like a Shepherd Lead Us*

*PRAYER SUGGESTION: Lord, please form within me purity of heart and a heart for the lost.*

—Chuck Orwiler

*BIBLE READING: Matthew 9:35-38; Luke 19:1-10*

A life ordered by the gospel doesn't happen by accident. Growing in Christ is the fruit of grace and effort. God is at work in us and we respond intentionally. Jesus and Zacchaeus show us the way.

There are a number of references in the Gospels describing Jesus' intentionality. His itinerant ministry from town to town was not spontaneous. He explicitly stated that his mission was to go from town to town proclaiming the good news of the kingdom (Luke 4:43). As we read in his interaction with Zacchaeus, Jesus was on a mission to seek and save those who were lost. Similarly, in the Matthew passage we see the Good Shepherd quite purposefully working his flock. Then, using the urgent metaphor of harvest, Jesus declares to his followers, in effect, "Let's get after it, people. And pray God will send help."

Zacchaeus's encounter with Christ turned his understanding of life inside out. His belief in Jesus wasn't tucked into a pocket for future reference. Rather, he wanted to live the kingdom life. *And so he did.* A disciple of Jesus is one who follows him. Zacchaeus was not one of the Twelve, but he was a disciple. As much as the fisherman left their nets, Zacchaeus abandoned his prior way of life to follow his Lord. With an accountant's clarity he purposefully re-ordered his life to the gospel.

In the normal Christian life our Lord is calling us to follow him. Harassed and helpless people are at hand. The work of the harvest is urgent. Let's step intentionally into this day.

*SONG: All the Way My Savior Leads Me*

*PRAYER SUGGESTION: I'm listening for what you have for me, Lord. I will do it.*

—Chuck Orwiler

*BIBLE READING: Matthew 23:23-24; Luke 19:1-10*

The Pharisees were scrupulously religious men. Their lives were dedicated to the righteousness of God as defined by the law of Moses and subsequent Jewish corollaries. In Matthew 23 Jesus shreds the facade of those among the Pharisees who were so religious, and yet, so completely missing the point.

We who read this devotional are religious men and women. Jesus' words are sobering. We must ask ourselves if we, in the sincere practice of our religion, are actually missing the point. The qualities of measure Jesus reveals in today's passage are justice, mercy, and faithfulness. Is that who we are? We misunderstand the kingdom of God if we are missing those rudiments of gospel living.

Let's reflect on the marriage of justice and mercy. When forced to respond to cases of moral failure, we often feel torn between the two. Jesus demonstrated that his way compromises neither. Do you remember how he was justice *and* mercy for the woman at the well, for the thief on the cross, for the adulterous woman, for the cheating tax collector? Let's consider the case of Zacchaeus. He opened his heart to the light of Christ which illumined the darkness of his life. Then he responded in kind with overt acts of justice *and* mercy. Zacchaeus didn't get religion. He got the heart of God, and it was evident to everyone. We can almost hear Jesus saying, "Now, that's what I'm talking about."

We've got religion. Do we have the heart of God? In a pluralistic age in which the righteousness of God is routinely violated, does my life—do our lives—shine the gospel light of justice *and* mercy?

*SONG: Let Your Heart Be Broken*

*PRAYER SUGGESTION: Lord, please tutor me on justice and mercy.*

—Chuck Orwiler

*BIBLE READING: Matthew 13:24-30*

We drove the rolling hills of eastern Idaho admiring the wheat harvest. Great machines pumped rivers of grain into waiting trucks. We reveled in the magnificence of blue skies and golden fields. We did not know if the farmers were getting their hoped-for yield per acre or a decent price per bushel. Nor did we give a thought to why there was wheat to harvest at all. That grain would not have been harvested if it had not been seeded, and perhaps seeded more than once. The sowers rarely make headlines. They live in the shadows. The harvesters garner the glory.

Jesus' parable reminds us that faithfulness is more about sowing than harvesting. Faithfulness is about persevering in God's way. It is generally quiet, steady persistence in gospel living. The effect of that faithfulness is muddled by the complexity and ambiguity of flesh and spirit. Results are hard to pin down. But we sure would like to know that we are making a difference.

We hope for righteousness to flourish. We hope the love of God will abound. We hope that every person's eyes will be opened to recognize the wonder, beauty, and power of the Savior of this world. We long for our nation to humble itself and pray and turn from sinful ways that God might hear our prayers and heal our land. We hope we can make the world a better place.

For the most part the harvest isn't ours to see. Each seed planted is an act of faith. We faithfully sow those gospel seeds.

*SONG: Oceans*

*PRAYER SUGGESTION: Lord God, you can count on me today to sow gospel seeds in what I think, say, pray, and do.*

—Chuck Orwiler

*BIBLE READING: Matthew 20:25-28*

In this series of devotions we are considering the challenge of living in a morally diverse society. Jesus said his followers are salt and light in a world that needs seasoning and illumination. How does that happen? The gospel that Jesus taught and demonstrated is the answer. When we order our lives by that gospel, we will be light that is both revealing and winsome. Like Zacchaeus we can be, and need to be, quite intentional in ordering our lives by the gospel. We yearn for our society to turn God-ward. We recognize our work is more often preparation than completion. We are sowers of seed to be harvested at another time.

One example of sowing gospel seed is the practice of humility. The model to whom we aspire is Jesus Christ. His humility includes a lowly birth continuing into a life lived almost entirely in obscurity. His humility includes genuine care for “little” people who expected to be ignored by the esteemed ones in their society. His humility includes actively loving the very ones who despised or ignored him. He lifted up those who would bring him down. He gave his life for those who were wrong.

What is the strategy for success in the moral contest in which we find ourselves? What does it mean to serve the very ones with whom we disagree? What does it mean to give our lives for those who despise or ignore the way of the kingdom of God?

*SONG: Desert Song (Hillsong United)*

*PRAYER SUGGESTION: Lord, if you will, would you please teach me how to serve those who seem to be so wrong? Please help me to be a haven in the storm of harsh and angry words. Thank you.*

—Chuck Orwiler

*BIBLE READING: Matthew 13:18-23*

Jesus demonstrated his parable of the sower. He lived the gospel-ordered life. He was completely faithful, acting always in harmony with the Father and Spirit. And yet, the true life and faithfulness of God-in-the-flesh did not overcome the “soils” of receptivity. His word and example fell on hardpan, rocky soil; among the thorns; and (only occasionally) in good soil. Using the “results” of his ministry as a decidedly rough illustration, we would be surprised if Jesus “succeeded” with even the one-in-four attempts that his parable suggests. Yet, what he did was beyond improvement. In other words, Jesus never failed, yet infrequently succeeded! How can that be?

Evidently, ordinary definitions of success and failure don’t apply here. Are there life-giving measures of performance for the followers of Jesus? How do we account for every person being in process—being a soil of one kind or another? Have we adjusted our expectations of ourselves accordingly, both as sower and soil?

Again, Jesus helps us at this point. He tells us that despite all these complications, his followers are the light of the world. He unceasingly invites us into his life—a way of living that is both prophetic and winsome. He calls us to be quite intentional in engaging kingdom righteousness. He offers the measures of justice, mercy, and faithfulness to guard against our tendency to lose our way in a tangle of religiosity.

The pursuit of a gospel-ordered life forever brings us to a place of humility. And that is a good place to call home.

*SONG: Speak, Lord, in the Stillness*

*PRAYER SUGGESTION: Lord, I pray I can be good dirt in which your gospel seeds germinate, take root, blossom, and produce fruit.*

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