

Gracious Words

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INTRODUCTION

The Bible repeatedly emphasizes the value of gracious speech. Solomon said, “He who loves purity of heart and whose speech is gracious, the king is his friend” (Prov. 22:11). Again, “Words from the mouth of a wise man are gracious, while the lips of a fool consume him” (Eccles. 10:12).

Paul said, “Let no unwholesome word proceed from your mouth, but only such a word as is good for edification according to the need of the moment, so that it will give grace to those who hear” (Eph. 4:29). Again, the apostle exhorts, “Conduct yourselves with wisdom toward outsiders, making the most of the opportunity. Let your speech always be with grace, as though seasoned with salt, so that you will know how you should respond to each person” (Col. 4:5-6).

Elaborating on this theme, Simon Peter said, “But even if you should suffer for the sake of righteousness, you are blessed. And do not fear their intimidation, and do not be troubled, but sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, always being ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and reverence; and keep a good conscience so that in the thing in which you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ will be put to shame” (1 Pet. 3:14-16).

Proverbs 22:11 (NASB95) — 11 He who loves purity of heart And whose speech is gracious, the king is his friend.

Ecclesiastes 10:12 (NASB95) — 12 Words from the mouth of a wise man are gracious, while the lips of a fool consume him;

Ephesians 4:29 (NASB95) — 29 Let no unwholesome word proceed from your mouth, but only such a word as is good for edification according to the need of the moment, so that it will give grace to those who hear.

Colossians 4:5-6 (NASB95) — 5 Conduct yourselves with wisdom toward outsiders, making the most of the opportunity. 6 Let your speech always be with grace, as though seasoned with salt, so that you will know how you should respond to each person.

1 Peter 3:14-16 (NASB95) — 14 But even if you should suffer for the sake of righteousness, you are blessed. And do not fear their intimidation, and do not be

troubled, 15 but sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, always being ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and reverence; 16 and keep a good conscience so that in the thing in which you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ will be put to shame.

The aforementioned passages have clear application to the work of personal evangelism. However, the ultimate example of gracious speech is provided by Jesus Christ, the Master Teacher, who handled every situation properly, saying the right thing at the right time in the right way. The statement, "He has done all things well," is applicable, not only to His miracles, but also to His message, and manner of interacting with mankind. Some were genuine truth seekers, some were hypocrites, others were corrupt, hardened, and rebellious. Yet, our Lord dealt with each in an appropriate manner, speaking gracious words of instruction, encouragement, warning, and condemnation.

Mark 7:37 (NASB95) — 37 They were utterly astonished, saying, "He has done all things well; He makes even the deaf to hear and the mute to speak."

After Jesus spoke at the synagogue in Nazareth, Luke 4:22 says, "All were speaking well of Him, and wondering at the **gracious words** which were falling from His lips." Examining this incident and noting how Jesus handled Himself in this situation yields important lessons applicable to our evangelistic efforts in the 21st century (Matt. 13:53-58; Mark 6:1-6; Luke 4:16-30).

Luke 4:22 (NASB95) — 22 And all were speaking well of Him, and wondering at the gracious words which were falling from His lips; and they were saying, "Is this not Joseph's son?"

Matthew 13:53-58 (NASB95) — 53 When Jesus had finished these parables, He departed from there. 54 He came to His hometown and began teaching them in their synagogue, so that they were astonished, and said, "Where did this man get this wisdom and these miraculous powers? 55 "Is not this the carpenter's son? Is not His mother called Mary, and His brothers, James and Joseph and Simon and Judas? 56 "And His sisters, are they not all with us? Where then did this man get all these things?" 57 And they took offense at Him. But Jesus said to them, "A prophet is not without honor except in his hometown and in his own household." 58 And He did not do many miracles there because of their unbelief.

Mark 6:1-6 (NASB95) — 1 Jesus went out from there and came into His hometown; and His disciples followed Him. 2 When the Sabbath came, He began to teach in the synagogue; and the many listeners were astonished, saying, "Where did this man get these things, and what is this wisdom given to Him, and such miracles as these performed by His hands? 3 "Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary, and brother of James and Joses and Judas and Simon? Are not His sisters here with us?" And they took offense at Him. 4 Jesus said to them, "A prophet is not without honor except in his hometown and among his own relatives and in his own household." 5 And He could do

no miracle there except that He laid His hands on a few sick people and healed them. 6 And He wondered at their unbelief. And He was going around the villages teaching.

Luke 4:16-30 (NASB95) — 16 And He came to Nazareth, where He had been brought up; and as was His custom, He entered the synagogue on the Sabbath, and stood up to read. 17 And the book of the prophet Isaiah was handed to Him. And He opened the book and found the place where it was written, 18 “The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, Because He anointed Me to preach the gospel to the poor. He has sent Me to proclaim release to the captives, And recovery of sight to the blind, To set free those who are oppressed, 19 To proclaim the favorable year of the Lord.” 20 And He closed the book, gave it back to the attendant and sat down; and the eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on Him. 21 And He began to say to them, “Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.” 22 And all were speaking well of Him, and wondering at the gracious words which were falling from His lips; and they were saying, “Is this not Joseph’s son?” 23 And He said to them, “No doubt you will quote this proverb to Me, ‘Physician, heal yourself! Whatever we heard was done at Capernaum, do here in your hometown as well.’ ” 24 And He said, “Truly I say to you, no prophet is welcome in his hometown. 25 “But I say to you in truth, there were many widows in Israel in the days of Elijah, when the sky was shut up for three years and six months, when a great famine came over all the land; 26 and yet Elijah was sent to none of them, but only to Zarephath, in the land of Sidon, to a woman who was a widow. 27 “And there were many lepers in Israel in the time of Elisha the prophet; and none of them was cleansed, but only Naaman the Syrian.” 28 And all the people in the synagogue were filled with rage as they heard these things; 29 and they got up and drove Him out of the city, and led Him to the brow of the hill on which their city had been built, in order to throw Him down the cliff. 30 But passing through their midst, He went His way.

GRACIOUS WORDS ARE ROOTED IN REVELATION

Jesus reminds us that gracious words are rooted in revelation. After being handed the synagogue scroll, He found the place in Isaiah’s prophecy where it is written, “The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, because He anointed Me to preach the gospel to the poor. He has sent Me to proclaim release to the captives, and recovery of sight to the blind, to set free those who are oppressed, to proclaim the favorable year of the Lord” (cf. Isa. 61:1-2).

Closing the book, Jesus gave it back to the attendant and sat down. The eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on Him, and He said, “Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.” For a time (at least), all were speaking well of Him, and wondering at the gracious words which were falling from His lips (Luke 4:17-22).

Luke 4:17-22 (NASB95) — 17 And the book of the prophet Isaiah was handed to Him. And He opened the book and found the place where it was written, 18 “The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, Because He anointed Me to preach the gospel to the poor. He has sent

Me to proclaim release to the captives, And recovery of sight to the blind, To set free those who are oppressed, 19 To proclaim the favorable year of the Lord.” 20 And He closed the book, gave it back to the attendant and sat down; and the eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on Him. 21 And He began to say to them, “Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.” 22 And all were speaking well of Him, and wondering at the gracious words which were falling from His lips; and they were saying, “Is this not Joseph’s son?”

GRACIOUS WORDS RESPOND TO MISCONCEPTIONS

Unfortunately, criticisms were soon voiced. From the response of Jesus, we learn that gracious words also address misconceptions. Note the question of the crowd: “Is this not Joseph’s son?” We know his father and mother, brothers and sisters. We know his occupation. Jesus was a lowly carpenter from a despised city. At best, they were saying, “He’s just one of us!” At worst, familiarity bred contempt (Matt. 13:55-56; Mark 6:3; Luke 4:22; cf. also John 6:41-42).

Matthew 13:55-56 (NASB95) — 55 “Is not this the carpenter’s son? Is not His mother called Mary, and His brothers, James and Joseph and Simon and Judas? 56 “And His sisters, are they not all with us? Where then did this man get all these things?”

Mark 6:3 (NASB95) — 3 “Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary, and brother of James and Joses and Judas and Simon? Are not His sisters here with us?” And they took offense at Him.

Luke 4:22 (NASB95) — 22 And all were speaking well of Him, and wondering at the gracious words which were falling from His lips; and they were saying, “Is this not Joseph’s son?”

John 6:41-42 (NASB95) — 41 Therefore the Jews were grumbling about Him, because He said, “I am the bread that came down out of heaven.” 42 They were saying, “Is not this Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How does He now say, ‘I have come down out of heaven’?”

Offering only a limited response to this question, Jesus said, “No prophet is welcome in his hometown” (Luke 4:23-24). Leaving the glory of heaven, the Son of God came to this earth, living as a common man, lowly and without pretense (Luke 9:57-58; Phil. 2:5-8); yet, this gracious act of solidarity with His subjects (Heb. 2:17-18; 4:14-16) engendered disdain and derision (Isa. 49:7; 53:1-3).

Luke 4:23-24 (NASB95) — 23 And He said to them, “No doubt you will quote this proverb to Me, ‘Physician, heal yourself! Whatever we heard was done at Capernaum, do here in your hometown as well.’ ” 24 And He said, “Truly I say to you, no prophet is welcome in his hometown.

Luke 9:57-58 (NASB95) — 57 As they were going along the road, someone said to Him, “I will follow You wherever You go.” 58 And Jesus said to him, “The foxes have holes and the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head.”

Philippians 2:5-8 (NASB95) — 5 Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, 6 who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, 7 but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men. 8 Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.

Hebrews 2:17-18 (NASB95) — 17 Therefore, He had to be made like His brethren in all things, so that He might become a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people. 18 For since He Himself was tempted in that which He has suffered, He is able to come to the aid of those who are tempted.

Hebrews 4:14-16 (NASB95) — 14 Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. 15 For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin. 16 Therefore let us draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

Isaiah 49:7 (NASB95) — 7 Thus says the Lord, the Redeemer of Israel and its Holy One, To the despised One, To the One abhorred by the nation, To the Servant of rulers, “Kings will see and arise, Princes will also bow down, Because of the Lord who is faithful, the Holy One of Israel who has chosen You.”

Isaiah 53:1-3 (NASB95) — 1 Who has believed our message? And to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed? 2 For He grew up before Him like a tender shoot, And like a root out of parched ground; He has no stately form or majesty That we should look upon Him, Nor appearance that we should be attracted to Him. 3 He was despised and forsaken of men, A man of sorrows and acquainted with grief; And like one from whom men hide their face He was despised, and we did not esteem Him.

Response by Jesus

Looking beyond the immediate question, our Lord addressed the real, underlying issue. He wasn't sidetracked; He didn't follow his critics down some rabbit-hole. Instead, Jesus controlled the agenda. When engaged in religious discussions, we should endeavor to do the same thing.

He said, “No doubt you will quote this proverb to Me, ‘Physician, heal yourself! Whatever we heard was done at Capernaum, do here in your hometown as well.’” In thought, if not in word, they charged Jesus with hypocrisy. He offered no defense to this accusation because it was manifestly baseless and false. No beam existed in His holy eyes; no bad fruit was found in His

righteous life (Luke 6:41-45). No blasphemous behavior could be charged against Him (Rom. 2:22-24). Jesus committed no sin (2 Cor. 5:20-21; 1 Pet. 2:21-24).

Luke 6:41-45 (NASB95) — 41 “Why do you look at the speck that is in your brother’s eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye? 42 “Or how can you say to your brother, ‘Brother, let me take out the speck that is in your eye,’ when you yourself do not see the log that is in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take out the speck that is in your brother’s eye. 43 “For there is no good tree which produces bad fruit, nor, on the other hand, a bad tree which produces good fruit. 44 “For each tree is known by its own fruit. For men do not gather figs from thorns, nor do they pick grapes from a briar bush. 45 “The good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth what is good; and the evil man out of the evil treasure brings forth what is evil; for his mouth speaks from that which fills his heart.

Romans 2:22-24 (NASB95) — 22 You who say that one should not commit adultery, do you commit adultery? You who abhor idols, do you rob temples? 23 You who boast in the Law, through your breaking the Law, do you dishonor God? 24 For “the name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you,” just as it is written.

2 Corinthians 5:20-21 (NASB95) — 20 Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were making an appeal through us; we beg you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. 21 He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.

1 Peter 2:21-24 (NASB95) — 21 For you have been called for this purpose, since Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example for you to follow in His steps, 22 who committed no sin, nor was any deceit found in His mouth; 23 and while being reviled, He did not revile in return; while suffering, He uttered no threats, but kept entrusting Himself to Him who judges righteously; 24 and He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross, so that we might die to sin and live to righteousness; for by His wounds you were healed.

Instead, Jesus focused upon the real, underlying issue: Do the miracles you performed at Capernaum! From their carnal perspective, the circus had come to town, and they wanted a front-row seat in the big-top! Like some of the scribes and Pharisees, and also King Herod, they demanded that Jesus perform a spectacular sign, but had no interest in His message (Matt. 12:38-42; Luke 23:8-12).

Matthew 12:38-42 (NASB95) — 38 Then some of the scribes and Pharisees said to Him, “Teacher, we want to see a sign from You.” 39 But He answered and said to them, “An evil and adulterous generation craves for a sign; and yet no sign will be given to it but the sign of Jonah the prophet; 40 for just as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the sea monster, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth. 41 “The men of Nineveh will stand up with this generation at the

judgment, and will condemn it because they repented at the preaching of Jonah; and behold, something greater than Jonah is here. 42 "The Queen of the South will rise up with this generation at the judgment and will condemn it, because she came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon; and behold, something greater than Solomon is here.

Luke 23:8-12 (NASB95) — 8 Now Herod was very glad when he saw Jesus; for he had wanted to see Him for a long time, because he had been hearing about Him and was hoping to see some sign performed by Him. 9 And he questioned Him at some length; but He answered him nothing. 10 And the chief priests and the scribes were standing there, accusing Him vehemently. 11 And Herod with his soldiers, after treating Him with contempt and mocking Him, dressed Him in a gorgeous robe and sent Him back to Pilate. 12 Now Herod and Pilate became friends with one another that very day; for before they had been enemies with each other.

As a result of their unbelief, Jesus did not do many miracles at Nazareth (Matt. 13:57-58; Mark 6:4-6). Their faithlessness did not render Him powerless; rather, their sinful attitude made supernatural signs superfluous. Miracles carried a twofold purpose: revelation of the Word, and confirmation of the same. Rebuking those who followed Him for a free meal, Jesus said, "Do not work for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to eternal life" (John 6:26-27, 35).

Matthew 13:57-58 (NASB95) — 57 And they took offense at Him. But Jesus said to them, "A prophet is not without honor except in his hometown and in his own household." 58 And He did not do many miracles there because of their unbelief.

Mark 6:4-6 (NASB95) — 4 Jesus said to them, "A prophet is not without honor except in his hometown and among his own relatives and in his own household." 5 And He could do no miracle there except that He laid His hands on a few sick people and healed them. 6 And He wondered at their unbelief. And He was going around the villages teaching.

Luke 4:24-30 (NASB95) — 24 And He said, "Truly I say to you, no prophet is welcome in his hometown. 25 "But I say to you in truth, there were many widows in Israel in the days of Elijah, when the sky was shut up for three years and six months, when a great famine came over all the land; 26 and yet Elijah was sent to none of them, but only to Zarephath, in the land of Sidon, to a woman who was a widow. 27 "And there were many lepers in Israel in the time of Elisha the prophet; and none of them was cleansed, but only Naaman the Syrian." 28 And all the people in the synagogue were filled with rage as they heard these things; 29 and they got up and drove Him out of the city, and led Him to the brow of the hill on which their city had been built, in order to throw Him down the cliff. 30 But passing through their midst, He went His way.

John 6:26-27 (NASB95) — 26 Jesus answered them and said, "Truly, truly, I say to you, you seek Me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate of the loaves and were

filled. 27 “Do not work for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give to you, for on Him the Father, God, has set His seal.”

John 6:35 (NASB95) — 35 Jesus said to them, “I am the bread of life; he who comes to Me will not hunger, and he who believes in Me will never thirst.

GRACIOUS WORDS ARE RESPECTFUL OF TRUTH

Our Lord’s encounter at the synagogue in Nazareth reminds us of the fundamental nature of truth.

Truth is confrontational. Elsewhere, He said, “Do not think that I came to bring peace on the earth; I did not come to bring peace, but a sword” (Matt. 10:34-36; cf. Luke 12:51-53). Carnal-minded individuals hate God the Father and Christ the Son, along with all that they represent, including gospel truth, the Lord’s church, faithful disciples, etc. (John 15:18-25; 17:13-19; 1 John 3:13).

Matthew 10:34-36 (NASB95) — 34 “Do not think that I came to bring peace on the earth; I did not come to bring peace, but a sword. 35 “For I came to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law; 36 and a man’s enemies will be the members of his household.

Luke 12:51-53 (NASB95) — 51 “Do you suppose that I came to grant peace on earth? I tell you, no, but rather division; 52 for from now on five members in one household will be divided, three against two and two against three. 53 “They will be divided, father against son and son against father, mother against daughter and daughter against mother, mother-in-law against daughter-in-law and daughter-in-law against mother-in-law.”

John 15:18-25 (NASB95) — 18 “If the world hates you, you know that it has hated Me before it hated you. 19 “If you were of the world, the world would love its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, because of this the world hates you. 20 “Remember the word that I said to you, ‘A slave is not greater than his master.’ If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you; if they kept My word, they will keep yours also. 21 “But all these things they will do to you for My name’s sake, because they do not know the One who sent Me. 22 “If I had not come and spoken to them, they would not have sin, but now they have no excuse for their sin. 23 “He who hates Me hates My Father also. 24 “If I had not done among them the works which no one else did, they would not have sin; but now they have both seen and hated Me and My Father as well. 25 “But they have done this to fulfill the word that is written in their Law, ‘They hated Me without a cause.’

John 17:13-19 (NASB95) — 13 “But now I come to You; and these things I speak in the world so that they may have My joy made full in themselves. 14 “I have given them Your word; and the world has hated them, because they are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. 15 “I do not ask You to take them out of the world, but to keep them from the evil one. 16 “They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. 17 “Sanctify them in the truth; Your word is truth. 18 “As You sent Me into the world, I also have sent them into the world. 19 “For their sakes I sanctify Myself, that they themselves also may be sanctified in truth.

1 John 3:13 (NASB95) — 13 Do not be surprised, brethren, if the world hates you.

Truth is uncompromising (John 8:31-47; Eph. 4:11-16). Had He so desired, Jesus could have used His powers for selfish ends, giving the people what they wanted (i.e., loaves and fishes, miracles and mammon). Having thus won over the multitudes, He could have created an earthly movement, sweeping aside all political and religious rivals. Yet, His kingdom is not of this world (John 18:33-37; Col. 1:9-12), and His proffered blessings are not (primarily) physical but spiritual (John 6:26-27; cf. Isa. 55:1-3).

John 8:31-47 (NASB95) — 31 So Jesus was saying to those Jews who had believed Him, “If you continue in My word, then you are truly disciples of Mine; 32 and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free.” 33 They answered Him, “We are Abraham’s descendants and have never yet been enslaved to anyone; how is it that You say, ‘You will become free’?” 34 Jesus answered them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who commits sin is the slave of sin. 35 “The slave does not remain in the house forever; the son does remain forever. 36 “So if the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed. 37 “I know that you are Abraham’s descendants; yet you seek to kill Me, because My word has no place in you. 38 “I speak the things which I have seen with My Father; therefore you also do the things which you heard from your father.” 39 They answered and said to Him, “Abraham is our father.” Jesus said to them, “If you are Abraham’s children, do the deeds of Abraham. 40 “But as it is, you are seeking to kill Me, a man who has told you the truth, which I heard from God; this Abraham did not do. 41 “You are doing the deeds of your father.” They said to Him, “We were not born of fornication; we have one Father: God.” 42 Jesus said to them, “If God were your Father, you would love Me, for I proceeded forth and have come from God, for I have not even come on My own initiative, but He sent Me. 43 “Why do you not understand what I am saying? It is because you cannot hear My word. 44 “You are of your father the devil, and you want to do the desires of your father. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth because there is no truth in him. Whenever he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own nature, for he is a liar and the father of lies. 45 “But because I speak the truth, you do not believe Me. 46 “Which one of you convicts Me of sin? If I speak truth, why do you not believe Me? 47 “He who is of God hears the words of God; for this reason you do not hear them, because you are not of God.”

Ephesians 4:11-16 (NASB95) — 11 And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers, 12 for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ; 13 until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ. 14 As a result, we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming; 15 but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all aspects into Him who is the head, even Christ, 16 from whom the whole body, being fitted and held together by what every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love.

John 18:33-37 (NASB95) — 33 Therefore Pilate entered again into the Praetorium, and summoned Jesus and said to Him, “Are You the King of the Jews?” 34 Jesus answered, “Are you saying this on your own initiative, or did others tell you about Me?” 35 Pilate answered, “I am not a Jew, am I? Your own nation and the chief priests delivered You to me; what have You done?” 36 Jesus answered, “My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, then My servants would be fighting so that I would not be handed over to the Jews; but as it is, My kingdom is not of this realm.” 37 Therefore Pilate said to Him, “So You are a king?” Jesus answered, “You say correctly that I am a king. For this I have been born, and for this I have come into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth hears My voice.”

Colossians 1:9-12 (NASB95) — 9 For this reason also, since the day we heard of it, we have not ceased to pray for you and to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, 10 so that you will walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, to please Him in all respects, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God; 11 strengthened with all power, according to His glorious might, for the attaining of all steadfastness and patience; joyously 12 giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified us to share in the inheritance of the saints in Light.

John 6:26-27 (NASB95) — 26 Jesus answered them and said, “Truly, truly, I say to you, you seek Me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate of the loaves and were filled. 27 “Do not work for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give to you, for on Him the Father, God, has set His seal.”

Isaiah 55:1-3 (NASB95) — 1 “Ho! Every one who thirsts, come to the waters; And you who have no money come, buy and eat. Come, buy wine and milk Without money and without cost. 2 “Why do you spend money for what is not bread, And your wages for what does not satisfy? Listen carefully to Me, and eat what is good, And delight yourself in abundance. 3 “Incline your ear and come to Me. Listen, that you may live; And I will

make an everlasting covenant with you, According to the faithful mercies shown to David.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the Parable of the Sower reminds us that gracious words can only change hearts that are good and honest. The seed/word will not bear fruit in soil/hearts that are hardened, shallow, or cluttered. However, it produces a remarkable harvest in hearers who are receptive, in individuals who have depth of character, and among those who live with singularity of purpose.

One such example is Nathanael, whom Jesus praised as an Israelite devoid of deceit (John 1:43-51). Philip informed Nathanael, "We have found Him of whom Moses in the Law and also the Prophets wrote—Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph." Voicing a widely-held prejudice, Nathanael objected, "Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?" In this regard, his reaction reminds us of the synagogue worshippers: "Is not this the carpenter's son?"

Yet, unlike the rabble who sought to cast Christ over the cliff, Nathanael was open-minded. Philip said to him, "Come and see." He did so, and in the ensuing encounter, Jesus offered evidence of His divine omniscience: "Before Philip called you, when you were under the fig tree, I saw you." Suitably impressed, Nathanael exclaimed, "Rabbi, You are the Son of God; You are the King of Israel." Jesus answered, "Because I said to you that I saw you under the fig tree, do you believe? You will see greater things than these. Truly, truly, I say to you, you will see the heavens opened and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man."

John 1:43-51 (NASB95) — 43 The next day He purposed to go into Galilee, and He found Philip. And Jesus said to him, "Follow Me." 44 Now Philip was from Bethsaida, of the city of Andrew and Peter. 45 Philip found Nathanael and said to him, "We have found Him of whom Moses in the Law and also the Prophets wrote—Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph." 46 Nathanael said to him, "Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?" Philip said to him, "Come and see." 47 Jesus saw Nathanael coming to Him, and said of him, "Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom there is no deceit!" 48 Nathanael said to Him, "How do You know me?" Jesus answered and said to him, "Before Philip called you, when you were under the fig tree, I saw you." 49 Nathanael answered Him, "Rabbi, You are the Son of God; You are the King of Israel." 50 Jesus answered and said to him, "Because I said to you that I saw you under the fig tree, do you believe? You will see greater things than these." 51 And He said to him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, you will see the heavens opened and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man."

Another encouraging example involves the statement in John 4:43-45 which says, "After the two days He went forth from there into Galilee. For Jesus Himself testified that a prophet has no honor in his own country. So when He came to Galilee, the Galileans received Him, having

seen all the things that He did in Jerusalem at the feast; for they themselves also went to the feast." Despite the criticism and skepticism of many, others did, indeed, receive Him.

The gospel is a message of divine origin (1 Cor. 2:6-13; Gal. 1:11-12). It is a message of universal obligation (Luke 4:31-32, 42-44). It is a message that will endure forever (1 Pet. 1:25; cf. Isa. 40:3-8).

Our task is to spread the seed, preach the word, and share the gospel with friends and family, fellow-students and co-workers, neighbors and casual acquaintances. Let us endeavor to be effective laborers. As Paul said, "According to the grace of God which was given to me, like a wise master builder I laid a foundation, and another is building on it. But each man must be careful how he builds on it" (1 Cor. 3:10).