

## **He's Just a Carpenter**

In our gospel passage today, we see the crowd struggling to understand who Jesus is. They have witnessed him feeding 5000, and now they hear him say, "I am the bread of life, I have come down from heaven" and they try and put the life of Jesus into a box of their own making, "is this not Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose mother and father we know – how can he say, I have come down from heaven!"

Lew Wallace wrote the Christian novel, *A Tale of the Christ* and he wrote it after a conversation with Robert G. Ingersoll, a renowned public speaker and agnostic.

The author encountered him on a train journey, where the two discussed religious ideologies. The author felt that his new friend knew too little about the Christian faith and became determined to research and write about what Christianity truly means. It was developed for the screen by screenwriter Karl Tunberg who also understood this, and so *Ben-Hur* was created.

In Mark's gospel, we see the crowd also saying – "who does he think he is, we know who he is, he is the son of Joseph, he is the carpenter's son", after Jesus preached. The *Living Bible* translates this, "he's no better than we are, he's just a carpenter."

He's just a carpenter – he's the carpenter's son!

Isn't it wonderful that the gospel writers didn't try and hide Jesus' upbringing and his early life. They weren't embarrassed to say that he was firstly a carpenter, before he was a saviour, that he had humble beginnings, and his life was challenging from the word go. But what we see in Jesus is incredible humility.

*Ben-Hur* became a beloved classic that swept the Oscars in 1960. Its stunning visuals, powerful message, and epic scenes are remembered fondly to this day.

I can remember watching *Ben-Hur* for the first time, in the Christmas of 1981, and being moved by some of the scenes; It was my first Christmas after I committed myself to following Jesus, and the film had a huge impact on me back then.

In 1959, Charles Heston starred as the main character Judah Ben-Hur, but throughout the film we have another character, who remains for the most

part silent, who's face we never see, but who comes into centre stage at pivotal moments in Judas' life.

Someone wrote, "*Ben-Hur* is a Jesus movie as told through the eyes of its first title character—Judah Ben-Hur. Perhaps it can be best described as the story of how Jesus changes Judah Ben-Hur. But it takes its time getting there (almost four hours on the screen) or 5 years in actual time. And in order to be changed, one must begin as—or become—someone in need of change.

It's this key ingredient that the film makes its biggest impact – how the touch of Jesus on one's life can make a huge difference, and one only needs to glance at the gospels, and we see this touch happening time and time again.

As in the story of the woman in Luke's gospel, (chapter 8 verses 43-48 ) who touched our Lord's garment, and when He asked who had touched Him, He looked at her and she trembled with fear knowing as she must surely have done, at that moment that she was a mere woman, looking at the very face of God, which even Moses had feared to do.

What must it have been like for her? To actually have Him talk to you. To meet, not divine wrath but the assurance that you are saved and God loves you! That is the Jesus we encounter in *Ben-Hur*.

I would like us to watch a clip of the film now, I like to think that Jesus stepped out of his carpenter's shop, when he saw the prisoners passing by.

### **Clip of Jesus giving water to Judah Ben-Hur.**

This encounter is spectacular, and life changing for Ben-Hur, for in his cruel and unjust Roman world, he meets with someone who shows courage and compassion; as Judah is lying defeated on the ground, while being led to the prison galley, the Lord's shadow moves over him, and you know that from that moment, no matter what happens next, he is in the presence of, and under the protection of God's son.

Ben-Hur encounters Jesus, who meets him in the lowest point of his life, and who stoops down and gives him water.

Ben-Hur then endures years of slavery, as a rower aboard a Roman prison galley; however, when he meets Jesus, we see a life changing moment for Judah. He has met the Servant - King!

Just as Jesus got down on his hands and knees and washed the disciple's feet on the eve of his own death; so, he bends the knee and gives Judah water. He quenches his thirst. Fiction – yes, Artistic license - yes! But wholly compatible with the life of this incredible person called Jesus – whose very touch and presence can heal the leper, give sight to the blind, make the lame walk and whose death on the Cross brings forgiveness, healing and freedom – a theme that the film also explores.

The carpenter from Nazareth came to serve. We sing often the hymn, “From heaven you came Servant King”. Hold that thought, Jesus - a servant. But isn't he the one who was with God from the beginning? The one who fashioned the universe, the one who places the stars in space? And in the words of the Apostle John 1v3 – “and through him all things were made”

Last week, Prof Brian Cox, in his new series on television, *Solar System*, attempted to describe what's beyond the solar system, and his conclusion, we only see a fraction of all that's out there...a fraction... The Apostle Paul writes in Colossians 1: <sup>15</sup> “The Son is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. <sup>16</sup> For in him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through him and for him. <sup>17</sup> He is before all things, and in him all things hold together.” No wonder the hymn writer pens it, “Hallelujah, what a Saviour!”

This carpenter from Nazareth blows our minds, for he is the eternal God in human flesh; John's gospel announces this loud and clear, “The bread from heaven, the light of the world, the good shepherd” all point to one thing and one thing only - and so we begin to see Jesus not just through the lens of a humble carpenter, but through an eternal lens and realise that what we have here, is something beyond what our tiny minds can hold, and in Jesus, we see the eternal God, coming to us, in a way, that we can relate to and understand and in a way that he can relate to us and understand us.

On Friday, we had the funeral service of Alex Garvie, Elder and Session Clerk in this church; Alex was an academic, who had written books, he lectured ancient Greek at Glasgow University, was an authority on Greek Tragedy and Homer, but you would never have known it with him; he exuded humility and gentleness, and was as comfortable sitting with his grandchildren sticking out his tongue to them at the dinner table, while adults were engaged in serious conversation, as he was lecturing at Glasgow University, where he served for many years.

Humility - Was this merely Alex's nature or did he see something in our Lord which was to be modelled? – perhaps both! He was a follower of the carpenter of Nazareth!

Jesus as a servant, living a humble life but bringing hope to this world.

There is a great verse in the Bible, “Those who refresh others will themselves be refreshed”. Proverbs 11 v25

And this verse leads me to our final clip from *Ben-Hur*, it is now Christ on the way to the Cross, Jesus is going to his galleys and on the way something wonderful happens. We of course know that Simeon from Africa helped Jesus carry his cross, but the producer has added in a beautiful touch of another life changing moment for Ben-Hur.

### **Clip of Judah giving Jesus water**

George MacDonald (1824–1905) author and poet in the 19<sup>th</sup> century wrote these magnificent words...in his poem the Carpenter...

#### *The Carpenter*

O Lord, at Joseph's humble bench  
Thy hands did handle saw and plane;  
Thy hammer nails did drive and clench,  
Avoiding knot and humouring grain.

That thou didst seem, thou wast indeed,  
In sport thy tools thou didst not use;  
Nor, helping hind's or fisher's need,  
The labourer's hire, too nice, refuse.

Lord, might I be but as a saw,  
A plane, a chisel, in thy hand! —  
No, Lord! I take it back in awe,  
Such prayer for me is far too grand.

I pray, O Master, let me lie,  
As on thy bench the favoured wood;  
Thy saw, thy plane, thy chisel ply,  
And work me into something good.

No, no; ambition, holy-high,  
Urges for more than both to pray:  
Come in, O gracious Force, I cry —  
O workman, share my shed of clay.

Then I, at bench, or desk, or oar,  
With knife or needle, voice or pen,  
As thou in Nazareth of yore,  
Shall do the Father's will again.

Thus fashioning a workman rare,  
O Master, this shall be thy fee:  
Home to thy father thou shall bear  
Another child made like to thee.

Beautiful words that speak of his humble beginnings in Nazareth of the carpenter and then speaks of him as the master craftsman. The holy carpenter of people's souls, taking our lives and shaping them, creating within us, his workmanship, that we also might be like him, and do the father's will and walk in his way.

The call of the Gospel is not a call to stand still. It is a call to follow Jesus. It's a call to receive Jesus into our lives each day. That's what the church is here for; a place where the mission of Jesus is discovered. A place where the Ben-Hurs of this world, seekers, and people looking for meaning to life, can come and discover Jesus afresh. Maybe today you are seeking?

Jesus doesn't stay in a box of our making. He can't, he's God! When he is in a box, he's safe. When he's the carpenter son, he's safe; but when he steps out of the box and tells people, "He is the bread of life", then this becomes challenging. When this happens, God exceeds, God abounds, God transcends.

The lowly carpenter of Nazareth, reveals himself as Lord and that I think is the objective of *Ben-Hur*. The carpenter of Nazareth is the saviour of the world and it makes us ask the question – who is he? Which we will sing now.