

“BEING TAUGHT BY JESUS”
Imagine Meeting Christ Series #4
Deuteronomy 32:1-4, Psalm 78:1-8, Matthew 4:23-5:12
May 2, 2021

I want you to take a moment and imagine what it would be like to meet Jesus – right there in front of you, in flesh and blood, right where you are right now. What would He look like? What would He sound like? Would He talk so that you could understand Him or would it be in another language you don’t understand? Would He listen to you? Would He then speak to you? And would He then touch you, maybe with a handshake, or a hug, or a hand on your shoulder? What would it be like to be with Jesus? We don’t often think about it today, but it is important for us to consider.

That’s what we’re discovering in our series, “Imagine Meeting Christ.” I want you to be able to get to know who Jesus is so much that you have no fear or problem going before Him with your worries and concerns so that you might find peace, and hope, and love, and life. I want you to feel so comfortable with Jesus that you listen to Him, find the wisdom in His words, and then obey His commands. I want you to be able to be such a friend with Jesus that you find Him right there with you, encouraging you, challenging you, and building into your life so that you can be the very best person in the eyes of God that you can be.

But in order to get that to happen, it is important to go deeper in discovering who Jesus is so that we can understand Him even better and grow in our relationship with Him so that we might trust in Him and delight to be in His presence.

Today we look at what it would be like to have Jesus teach us. Once we become comfortable with Him with us, Jesus wants to instruct us in the ways of God so that we might grow closer to Him. Robert Rasmussen tells us this: “Much is said about Jesus being more than a teacher, and the point is well taken. History boasts of many great teachers, and **Jesus was more than that**. But just for a moment consider how important it was that Jesus **could** teach and **do it well**. Can you imagine how different our faith would look if Jesus **hadn’t** enjoyed teaching? If, when called upon to speak, He’d had little to say or had been bashful in front of groups surpassing a dozen in number?

“Or what if people hadn’t enjoyed hearing Him teach? If the crowds had dwindled over time until only His relatives showed up? Or if He had been boring, and yawns had hastened Him toward His conclusion?

“And what if His teaching hadn’t had authority? If He couldn’t muster much conviction? What if His actions hadn’t backed up His words? If Jesus had not been a great teacher, the Gospels would read much differently than they do, **as would the story line** of your life, and mine.”¹

Teaching was an important part of Jesus’ ministry. How else could He tell us about the things of God? He took the wisdom and the truth of the Old Testament Scriptures and brought them to life in new ways for us, so that we could understand more clearly who God is, how God desires us to live and what He expects of us in our daily lives. He taught using great wisdom and truth, putting the complexities of heaven into language that we could understand so that we could trust Him and receive Him as God’s own Son, the Savior of the world. Jesus teaches us so that we can find ourselves in line with God’s will, following His commands, in order to live exemplary lives in our world today to draw others to Him.

And because Jesus teaches us about God the Father, He opens up the whole of the Scriptures so that we might be encouraged by them and trained by them so that we can live within those teachings and be the people that God desires us to be, for Him. So Jesus teaches with authority and speaks with conviction, displaying the truths of God in everyday language that everyone can understand.

In actuality, Jesus’ teaching fulfills Deuteronomy 32:1-2, “*Earth and sky, hear My words, listen closely to what I say. My teaching will fall like drops of rain and form on the earth like dew. My words will fall like showers on young plants, like gentle rain on tender grass.*” The rain and the dew gives life that enables growth to take place in the plants of the earth. Where there is no rain, there is no plant growth. Then after the rains water the earth and the plants grow, all the animals and people of the earth can benefit from that growth of plants, and they, in turn grow, too.

¹ (Robert Rasmussen, *Imagine Meeting Him*, [Sisters, OR: Multnomah Publishers, 1998] pg. 51)

So Jesus' teachings are for us to receive like the earth receives rain, giving us growth as we take them into us and aspire to follow those teachings in our daily lives to become the people of God. And then we are able to pass along those teachings in order to impact the lives of others around us.

As we listen to Jesus, as we hear His words and contemplate the meaning of His teachings, we have the opportunity to grow closer in our relationship with God the Father so that we obey Him and follow His instructions. *"In this way,"* Psalm 78:7 tells us, *"[we] also will put [our] trust in God and **not** forget what He has done, but always **obey** His commandments."*

But why is it so important to learn of the *"mysteries from the past"* (Ps. 78:2)? Why is it so vital that we learn the things that were taught so long ago, maybe from our parents, maybe from our teachers, maybe from those even older than them? What are the purposes of Jesus' teachings to us? Can't we just live any ole way that we desire? Can't we make up our own rules and guidelines to govern us? Can't we make our own laws and follow our own dictates? What's so important in following God's way and abiding by God's commands? Thousands of people are asking these questions today. They want to know the importance of learning and trusting in God's ways.

Well, the answer to those questions is God's ways are much greater than our ways, and if we neglect to follow God's laws, then His truth becomes irrelevant and objective, so that the meaning of the truth can be distorted to the point that it is no longer truth. When we rebel against God's laws and disobey His commandments, then chaos ensues and then every new leader makes up his or her own laws and commands, and we find ourselves a desperate and despised people if we seek to follow the Lord's ways. The whole of the Old Testament gives us multiple examples of how leaders left God's ways and lived according to their own desire, and as a result, the people and nations became enslaved by others, they were ravaged by attackers and oppressors and even by their own leaders, and their ultimate end was destruction. But those who trusted in God's ways found abundance, prosperity, security, peace and life, because God's ways guided them and instructed them in the way that they should live, not only for the glory of God but for their own benefit, too. God's ways are supreme over all other ways.

As people trust in God's laws, as leaders follow Jesus' teachings, we find order in our society, we find God's blessings poured out to us like the rain on the earth, and we find peace and security in them. It is good, then, to learn and to obey God's commands so that we might be able to enjoy life with God's blessings upon us.

And that is why Jesus teaches us, explaining the laws of God and helping us to comprehend the importance of those laws for us, even today. Jesus teaches us so that we might find God's blessings in our lives, for God delights in those who follow His laws and obeys His commandments. "No one's teaching are more quoted or memorized. None have so changed the course of activities on the planet."² Jesus' teachings transform our lives completely **if we follow them**.

Our Gospel lesson today demonstrates the power of Jesus' teachings. Listen to the response of the people when they heard Jesus teach and then listen to Jesus' outline for His total ministry. These are the words of Matthew 4:23 – 5:12. (READ Matthew 4:23-5:12)

How do you receive these words of Jesus? They are completely paradoxical to our society today as much as they were in Jesus' days on earth. They are completely backwards to what people think, and they are not what we would expect, Jesus lifting up the marginalized as being the "blessed people," the ones finding themselves on the short end of the stick, those being deemed by society as the "less than" people. Aren't the rich, the famous, the powerful, or the leaders the ones that are the blessed? Yet, Jesus tells us it is the other way around! And Jesus' teaching is not just words being given to us to consider. They are lessons intended for us to take into our own lives and embrace and actively practice.

So what did Jesus mean when He said that those who are "poor in spirit" would find happiness in their life and be blessed to find themselves as residents of the Kingdom of Heaven? Consider this: when you see a person on the street pushing a shopping cart loaded with belongings, unkempt, wearing clothing that are soiled and stained and torn, what is your reaction? Do you judge them as being lazy, or stupid, or taking advantage of others' generosity? Do you quickly compare yourself with them, reciting

² (Robert Rasmussen, *Imagine Meeting Him*, pg. 51)

to yourself how good you have it, or how blessed your life has been? Or do you just look down upon them as being one of the “reprobates” of society? Yet, Jesus tells us that **THEIR’S** is the Kingdom of Heaven! THEY are the ones who are blessed!

Wait, what? The Kingdom of heaven belongs to those who are on the sidelines of society, not engaged in the game of life, not contributing to the rest of society? Where does that leave us, then? What does that say about the culture of today that strives and presses and drives for success, and popularity, and fame and fortune? Are those who are counted as least in our society closest to obtaining Heaven? Are the “no-bodies” more important than the “some-bodies” in Jesus’ mind?

I talked with a man once who was a street person. In our conversation I asked how he happened to come to be homeless and I was amazed by his response. He said, “I am not what you think. I have a Ph. D. and served as a professor at a very prestigious university. I had a beautiful home, a lovely family, a successful life. But I grew tired of the rat-race, the cry of society to climb the ladder of success, and the daily grind of making myself look like someone important. So I gave it all up and went to living on the street, taking one day at a time, finding pleasure in every breath of life, and relaxing in the provisions of God for food and clothing and housing. It’s so much simpler than all the stress and worry of success!” Could this man be closer to the Kingdom of God than I am? Could all of my hard work really account for little when compared to this man’s very simple life of faith?

You see, Jesus tells us that it is the “poor in spirit” that own the Kingdom of Heaven. It is those who find that their life is nothing without the presence of God in them. They find that they are precious children of God, so they don’t have to have the most, and the best, and the latest, and the greatest to be someone of importance in God’s eyes. They just need to live in honor and glory to God.

And think of the drive today to find comfort and contentment in our lives. We relate comfort with the abundance of things or the accumulation of wealth in our life. Yet we see hundreds of thousands of **miserable people** unhappy with all that they have, still seeking comfort, still seeking compassion, still craving serenity in their life. They are empty of encouragement, void of relief, and

desperate for tranquility. So they try to fill the gap with more and more stuff, more and more money, more and more power, and they grow more and more desperate for relief of their empty hearts.

But Jesus relates comfort with “*the ones who mourn*” (Matt. 5:4). He opens our eyes to God, the only One who can bring true comfort, and He encourages us to go beyond our own interests to touch the life of another who is desperate for compassion and understanding and cheer. Comfort comes as we get out of our own “security zones” and step into the shoes of another who is hurting, one who is struggling, or one who is grieving to the point that their heart is breaking. Comfort from God comes as we move away from our own desires, to meet the needs of those around us as we follow God’s ways in our life. And in offering comfort to others, our own burdens and griefs become lighter, and we find ease within our own spirit. God supplies comfort to those who are crying out in their lives for meaning, purpose, and rescue and often He uses us to take that comfort to others.

Jesus then teaches us that it is better to *be meek and humble* (5:5) rather than prideful and provocative. How happy are those who are so full of themselves that they are the only ones they can think about? How happy are those who always have to be right and need everyone to know that they are right? How happy are those who bully others into doing what they want? How happy are those who boldly blast everyone else for the things they think are wrong in their life? NO, they’re not happy! It’s the quiet, the mild, the lowly, the gentle and modest who are the ones that have contentment in their lives. They are the ones who receive all that God promises them. They are the ones who have peace within them.

And Jesus teaches us that it is those who seek to do God’s will that find themselves fully satisfied (Matt. 5:6). They strive for living according to the desires of God, and they are blessed as they live within His standards and commands. Why would God bless those who are adamantly opposed to His commands? Why would God satisfy the desires of those who seek their own will and their own way? If God’s ways are the best ways, if God’s commands lead us to abundance and peace, why would God reward those who strive to promote anything else BUT God’s will and His commands?

No, those who strive to put God out of our society and promote everything else except God's commands find themselves constantly searching for fulfillment and satisfaction. They are constantly trying to take the people away from the best that God has to offer by eliminating God from every aspect of the life of the people. These are never happy, never contented, never pleased with anything, but they are left empty, craving even the basics of hope, joy, love and life.

And Jesus teaches us that it is those who are *merciful who will find mercy* from God (Matt. 5:7). Those who do not forgive others are eaten up by their own anger and hatred. Those who refuse to show sympathy constantly criticize others for the "errors" of their life, yet they rarely find sympathy for themselves when things turn up-side-down in their own lives. Jesus tells us to have compassion on the hurting rather than condemning them for whatever brought them into that condition.

Jesus teaches that we are to be kind to others so that we might minister to their lives, even if they are cruel against us. He teaches us that leniency of the punishment that people deserve for their actions shows the true nature of God's love toward us. Not that we do not have to endure the consequences of our own actions, but mercy shown to others when they seek to change their life is the ultimate demonstration of God's forgiveness to us when we change our ways to conform to His ways.

Jesus teaches us that it is best to be "*pure at heart*" (Matt. 5:8) because it is with pure hearts that we see one another as a brother or sister in Christ. When our minds are focused on following God's ways and obeying His commands, we begin treating others as we would want to be treated ourselves. We begin to see others as people of value, no matter what our differences are. When our hearts are pure having followed God's commands and obeying His teachings, then there can be no condemnation given to us. And when our hearts are pure and holy, we see God!

Think of it this way. What police officer would pull you over for abiding by the speed limit? What lawyer could bring a suit against you if you were in compliance to the law? What judge could pronounce you guilty of breaking the law if you lived within it? What military person would imprison you for being true to the constitution? When we are focused on abiding by the laws of the land, obeying

all of the guidelines of the country, there is no reason to punish or condemn us. We are free to live and breathe and have our being without worry of consequence or negative action. There is no need to look behind us, or worry, or fear because we are law abiding citizens.

The same is true when we follow the commands and laws of God. We don't have to watch our backs because God might be angry. We don't need to fear any repercussions of our behavior. We don't have to worry whether or not we will be accepted by God. When our hearts are diligently seeking the ways and will of the Lord our God, He is delighted in us and gives us the desires of our hearts. For me, that is motivating enough to keep me striving after the Lord. Oh, I blow it from time to time, but when my heart is purely seeking the ways of the Lord God, I find His presence with me, I find confidence and strength to continue in His ways, and I find the abundance of His blessings in my life.

And when I learn from Jesus to do all I can for bringing about peace, I find an even closer connection with the Lord. And that comes in handy when the world turns against us because we are following God's ways and not the world's ways. When we stand out as the people of God, striving to follow all His ways, the world will turn against us because we tend to make the rest look bad. When we seek to follow God's ways, He enables us to be so outstanding in all we do, and what we say, and how we treat one another, and it puts the rest to shame. So they seek to put us down, or make us look bad, or somehow eliminate us so that our life isn't so blaringly different than the rest. But when we live according to God's ways, we stand out so that everyone takes notice of us.

You see, we can hear all of these words of Jesus and they might not make any difference in us. But when we learn the lessons He has for us, our whole life is transformed, and we become different people than the rest of those living in the world, and we receive great blessings from the Lord God. When we are taught by Jesus and live His teachings every day of our life, we become so different that the world doesn't quite know what to do with us. But those around us see it, and they begin to want what we have, and they may seek the Lord, too, as we provide different examples of what life can be.

So don't be afraid to live according to the teachings of Jesus, and let the world see what they

might have, too, if they would follow the Lord Jesus also. Let's pray: Father, give us the heart to follow these lessons of Jesus so that we may come close to You and find Your blessings in us. Help us to take His lessons to heart so that we might be people after Your own heart. Give us the desire to follow Your will and Your way, rather than the things of this world. Make us such examples, that we demonstrate the value of having Christ Jesus as Lord of our life. Prepare us now, so that as we make our profession of faith in Jesus Christ, we may live that faith before the whole world and draw more people to You. This we pray in Jesus' precious and holy Name. AMEN