

“HE NOTICED ME!”
IMAGINE MEETING CHRIST SERIES #1
Joel 2:12-14, 2 Corinthians 3:15-18, Luke 19:1-10
April 11, 2021

In his book, *Imagine Meeting Him*, Robert Rasmussen tells us this. “Meeting Jesus Christ is the single most important event of any and every life. The person who has met Christ is complete, even if everything else in life goes wrong...even if that person never produces anything else of significance.

“The person who has not met Him, no matter what else he or she accomplishes, is empty. Not just empty by comparison, but, on the scales of eternity, *absolutely* empty.

“How can I say that?” Rasmussen asks. “Because of who Jesus is. Jesus is music to a concert. He is air to a deep breath. He is gravity to falling. He is life to living.

“Try life with Jesus, and then attempt it without Him. You’ll see what I mean.”¹ How aptly stated for everyone to hear and understand, that Jesus makes the difference in our lives, not just for today, but for the rest of our lives and for eternity.

So since **Jesus is the most important person** in the life of every one of us, I want to focus the next several weeks in helping us to understand the significance Jesus makes in our life so that we have our own encounter with Him.

As with any relationship, it starts with an introduction and the development of the relationship. Then, as we invest our time and energy into that relationship, we grow deeper in our companionship with that person. And as we become good friends, we become willing to step out with the one to make a difference in the life of the other, to the point that we are no longer the same because of that relationship. Our encounter with Jesus changes our lives, AND as we invest in that relationship with Him, we become transformed by His influence in us to the point that we are new and renewed people.

It is so important for us to become involved in this “getting-to-know” Jesus stage, because unless we come to know who Jesus is, we may miss the opportunity to meet Him, as well as for Him to become a good friend to us. Knowing about Jesus is so different than seeing and meeting with Jesus.

¹ (Robert Rasmussen, *Imagine Meeting Him*, [Sisters, OR: Multnomah Publishers, 1998] pg. 11)

Now, many of us may have already developed pre-conceived notions of who Jesus is, based upon how we were raised or what we were taught as a little child. So it might be possible for us to miss this development of a deep relationship with Him, therefore missing out on the possibility of Him becoming a close, intimate friend that we can count on, and trust in. It is possible that we might see Jesus as a strict taskmaster, giving us next-to-impossible demands, so we remain distant. We may see Him as an angry disciplinarian, always upset by something we've said or done, so we remain afraid of Him. And we may see Him as a disinterested, remote acquaintance who doesn't have much of a concern for us or a desire for any involvement in our lives, so we just ignore Him. These pre-conceived notions put an immediate limit to our relationship to Jesus. So today I want us to start at the beginning, in order to come to know who Jesus is and to find out how much we can truly trust Him and learn from Him.

So we begin with Jesus noticing us, right where we are, initializing the relationship by taking note of who we are and what our needs are. It is much more than just a glance that Jesus gives to us. He looks right at us and says, in essence, "I want to get to know you because you are special." And with that look, Jesus invites us into the relationship with Him, and He enlightens our day, excites our heart for the future possibilities, and enlivens us to see who we really are. That can be scary, especially if we have something to hide, but it also frees us to consider what our life would become if we got to know Jesus even more.

So let me ask right off the top; what would it feel like to have the Son of God notice you? What would it be like for you and Him to look at each other, and for you to realize that He has been watching you for a long time? What would it be like for you to open up your life to get to know Jesus so that you might become His friend? For that, I'd like you to consider a man, noticed by Jesus, from the town of Jericho. Listen to Luke 19:1-10. (READ Luke 19:1-10)

He may have been one of the most known men in all of Jericho, but not in the best way. He was probably one of the loneliest people in town, too. His job as a tax collector didn't afford him many friends. Who would want to be a friend to a tax collector? They were seen as notoriously crooked

people, working for the Roman government, demanding much from the people who could scarcely eke out their own living, much less give money to the government. Oh, but he benefitted greatly from his position, and he was one of the wealthiest men in town.

You see, the Romans allowed him to not only collect tax for Rome, but also to put an additional amount onto the tax as his own commission. So there was very little compassion in Zacchaeus. His heart was as hard as a rock when it came to life among the people. He hated them, and they hated him. It was a mutual agreement. Yet they were his own people, Jews living in the region of Ephraim in the land of Israel. Why would he do that to his own people? Well, the only thing that Zacchaeus really loved was money. That was his first love and his whole life seemed to be focused on the acquisition of more and more money. It didn't matter what people thought of him as long as he could have wealth.

D.L. Moody states it well when he said, "Getting riches brings care; keeping them brings trouble; abusing them brings guilt, and losing them brings sorrow. It is a great mistake to make so much of riches as we do."² But Zacchaeus built his life upon having money and it didn't seem to matter to him how he got it, just as long as he got it. Money was his god, and he worshipped it religiously.

Allan Emery makes a good observation, however. He says, "My parents taught us that all we had must be held in an open hand, that when we closed our fingers tightly over anything placed in our trust, we lost the joy and the blessing. Things acquired as an end in themselves became idols and possessed us."³ And that seems to be the case right there in Jericho, where Zacchaeus had built his whole life around money and things, to the point that they possessed him, rather than him possessing them. He had lost the joy and blessing of other people. They only became the means to his wealth.

Somehow, however, Zacchaeus heard about Jesus. It could have been people at his tax booth, talking about the wonderful things they had heard about Jesus as they waited in line to pay their taxes. It could have been other businessmen asking what he thought about Christ. But none of those things really

² (Robert J. Morgan, *Stories, Illustrations & Quotes*, [Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2000] pg. 574)

³ (Ibid., pg. 576)

mattered to Zacchaeus at that point. They were just a passing fancy, a good act by a person to be someone important. His god was money and he worshipped it with all his heart.

Yet, something must have piqued his interest, because we find him checking Jesus out as He passed through town. Maybe he wondered, “I’ll just check out what the hoopla is all about with this Teacher. I’ll keep my distance, but still be close enough to see and evaluate the one they call Christ.” So off he went to “observe” Jesus as He passed by.

The problem with this was that Zacchaeus “*was a little man and could not see Jesus because of the crowd*” (Luke 19:3). Ever go to a concert or a movie and have this really tall person sit right in front of you? Yeah, you know what I mean. You can’t see anything, so all you want to do is to move to a place so that you can see and enjoy the show. Or, going to a football game with the perfect seat, only to have a big gollute right in front of you standing up every time a good play is made, preventing you from seeing anything of what’s happening down on the field. You get the urge to quickly duct tape him down to his seat so that you can see, too. Anything just to see over the one blocking your view.

Well, that’s what Zacchaeus had to do, too; “*He ran ahead of the crowd and climbed a sycamore tree to see Jesus, who was going to pass that way*” (Luke 19:4). Now, that’s a great way to see over the crowds, but it did prevent him from being able to move around much. And the crazy thing was that Jesus seemed to know just the one person in the whole crowd who needed Him the most, and went directly to that spot. And that’s where Zacchaeus’ plan went haywire.

Not only did Jesus notice him, but He looked right at him focused His attention on him. Like a laser pointer directing everyone’s attention right at him, Jesus “*looked up and said to Zacchaeus, ‘Hurry down Zacchaeus, because I must stay in your house today’*” (Luke 19:5).

“Na, you really don’t want to do that Jesus” he may have been screaming in his mind. But it was too late, he had been found out, isolated from everyone else in the crowd, and spotlighted by the very one whom he had only wanted to “check out.”

Everything in him was probably screaming, “RUN AWAY!” It was his nature to avoid conflict

and attention at all costs, but since he didn't have his Roman guard with him, he was left to fend for himself. Stuck up in a tree, there was nowhere for him to go but down.

But Jesus had stopped for him! He had looked up **at him!** Jesus had shown interest in this little man up in a tree trying to catch a look at him. He even knew his name! Had someone snitched on him to Jesus as they were walking along? But the attention touched something within Zacchaeus and he could not ignore the growing curiosity to see what might happen next.

So tentatively Zacchaeus climbs down the tree. He let go of the branch of skepticism, not really interested in Jesus coming over to his house, but still hesitant. All along the way home, Zacchaeus may have thought, "What is it about this man that makes avoidance seem wrong? Do I feel he knows me – with all my hidden faults, all my shame – yet accepts me? Does he know the kind of person I am? About the number of people I've cheated for years on end? The verbal abuse? He couldn't know how I've gone after those who couldn't afford to sue me. Or could he? Could he possibly overlook my checkered past and forgive. He knows those with a religious exterior. He seems to look past their fronts to see what's inside: the selfishness and deceit. Perhaps he sees past my greedy façade, too. Could he know that deep within I really care, that I really want to do what's right?"⁴

Many in town saw that Jesus was going with Zacchaeus. They did not approve. How could Jesus, this wonderful new Rabbi, go to the home of the biggest scammer of the whole town? How could Jesus stoop so low as to associate with the likes of a tax collector? What was Jesus thinking? Little did they know the difference that Jesus would make in the life of Zacchaeus because He took notice of him, and dared show him the attention he so deeply craved. The people were all so disturbed by what Zacchaeus had done to them there was no way that they wanted him to be shown special interest by Jesus. They all wanted Jesus to condemn the man who made his living off of stealing from them.

But you see, Jesus knows the deepest need that each one of us has. And He longingly looks at each one of us and calls out to us so that He can begin to make those desperate changes in our lives that

⁴ (Robert Rasmussen, *Imagine Meeting Him*, [Sisters, OR: Multnomah Publishers, 1998] pg. 21)

each one of us needs to find value and relevance in our own lives.

Jesus saw Zacchaeus as he really was, YET HE LOVED HIM! And because Jesus had given him the benefit of the doubt, had noticed him, and spent time with him, Zacchaeus became a different man. He immediately gave up money as his god, and turned to Jesus instead. His rock-hard heart was replaced with a compassionate, giving heart that saw money as a tool, not a god. And because he had a new heart, Zacchaeus wanted to make up for all of the cheating he had done in his life. He wanted to rectify all of the wrong he had done to others. Because Jesus noticed him, he began an entirely new life – one that would give glory to God for all He had done for him.

We are not told how long Jesus stayed at the house of Zacchaeus, but at some point, Zacchaeus makes a decision that would forever change his life. He accepts Jesus as his new Lord and he commits his whole life to Him. “...*Zacchaeus stood up and said to the Lord, “Look, Lord! Here and now I give half of my possessions to the poor, and if I have cheated anybody out of anything, I will pay back four times the amount”* (Luke 19:8).

Do you know what that meant for a man who had focused his whole life on the acquisition of money and possessions? Half his possessions to the poor! Repayment to those he had cheated up to four times the amount he had taken! A total transformation in Zacchaeus released his heart from the pursuit of money, to the desire to use that money to touch the lives of those in his community in order to share the love of God with them. All because Jesus noticed him, and showed him love, even as he was.

The movie “*Fly Wheel*” is a modern day version of the life of Zacchaeus. If you haven’t seen it, look it up. It tells the story of car dealership owner, Jay Austin, who wants to sell used cars in the worst way...and that’s exactly how he does business in his dealership (in the worst way). He lies, plays on the needs of the buyer, makes promises he never intends to keep, and even trains his staff the art of deception in order to make a sale. He even goes so far as to lie to his pastor in order to sell a car. But no matter what he does, the income just doesn’t meet the bills, and the bank is ready to foreclose on him if he doesn’t come up with the payment. So Jay is forced to evaluate his life, coming face-to-face with

who he really is, and how he is using people to get what he wants. So he encounters Jesus in his own life, and he decides that he will honor God in all aspects of his life – his business, his family, and even his personal life. He commits to repaying all the people he cheated, which drains all his savings, selling the cars for reasonable prices, and giving honor to the Lord in the process.

But a twist comes up. A student wants to do a study of Jay Austin Motors and discovers the change in the life of Jay. He is doing this as an undercover investigator looking at all of the used car dealers in town to see which is the best dealership to go to for a used car. And because he has made amends with all the people he had cheated, he gets some heat, but also gets the top rating of the dealers.

However, he still has the bank on him. So he looks at his inventory of cars and the amount he owes the bank, and finds that it would take him selling the whole lot full of cars to finish the bank loan. So he gives it to God and the transformed life is rewarded, and Jay finds business like he has never seen before. All because he took the chance to let Jesus truly live in him and through him.

Folks, when we have Jesus notice us, when we give ourselves to Him to begin the relationship with Him, we become brand new people, “*the old things pass away, behold new things come*” as 2 Corinthians 5:17 tells us. When the Lord removes the veil of our worldly eyesight, we begin to see in a completely different way, and that leads our lives to new and marvelous things. But we have to “*turn to the Lord*” so that we might “*reflect the glory of the Lord with uncovered faces*” demonstrating “*the Spirit transforming us into His likeness in an ever greater degree of glory*” (2 Corinthians 3:16-18).

Jesus’ desire is that we are all saved from the sinfulness of this world to find the glory of God within us. That was Jesus’ purpose on earth, “*to seek and to save the lost*” (Luke 19:10). But are we brave enough to give up on ourselves and take on Jesus Christ as our friend? Can we risk coming out of our hiding, with all our secret sins and shame? Can we dare let Jesus transform us from the people we are into the people God intended us to be? Can we release all our own wants and wishes to allow God to work in and through us so that we might touch the lives of those right around us, too?

Jesus calls out to us through the words of the prophet Joel, wherever we are, whoever we are,

whatever we are involved in. He says, “... *‘repent sincerely and return to me with fasting and weeping and mourning. Let your broken heart show your sorrow; tearing your clothes is not enough.’ Come back to the Lord your God. He is kind and full of mercy; He is patient and keeps His promise; He is always ready to forgive and not punish. Perhaps the Lord your God will change His mind and bless you with abundance...Then you can offer Him*” honor and praise for what He makes you into (Joel 2:12-14).

Perhaps you can look at Jesus and see His love for you and find His desire for you as you allow Him to become your Lord and Savior. He desires to give you new life so that you are set free from all of your struggles and trials and worries and guilt.

Jesus speaks to each one of us, just as He said to Zacchaeus, “Come down from your lofty hiding place and let Me come into your house, so that you may rejoice in Me and find the real life that I desire to give to you. Trust me! Let’s begin to walk together so that I can lead you to something new that will transform your life. Come with me.”

We see what a difference it made in the life of Zacchaeus. We aren’t told what happened beyond that encounter with Jesus, but we can imagine the difference he made in his community from then on. He would have been one of the most popular people in all of Jericho for a completely different reason, a man who loved to bless people with the abundance of the Lord. Will you let Jesus make that difference in you, too?

Let’s pray: Lord Jesus, you know each one of us, right where we are, the way that we are living, doing business, treating our families, and interacting with others around us. You know our hearts’ desires. You know our failings and our worries, our hurts and our struggles, our shame and our guilt. Yet You love us tremendously nonetheless. Jesus, encourage us to turn to You so that we might become free from all that holds us captive. Guide us in our ways so that we might seek You out, if only to see if what is said about You is true. Then touch us with Your look into our hearts. Bless us with Your invitation to come home with us, so that we might become transformed by You, in Your precious and holy Name, Jesus our Lord and Savior. AMEN