

# Encounters With Jesus

## When the Heart is Touched

Luke 19:1-10 NIV

### Preface

I have heard many old sayings in my life. Frankly, most have proven to be true. Some familiar examples include; “Birds of a feather flock together” and “Where there’s smoke there’s fire.” One I ran across this week was; “Wherever you go you can’t get rid of yourself.”

And then there is the old saying of “People change.” Or, is it “People never change.” We have heard both and usually in context they both seem true. Some people never change. But occasionally someone does change; drastically.

Luke gives us an example of someone whose life was changed when his heart was touched by Jesus Christ.

### Scripture – Read

<sup>1</sup>Jesus entered Jericho and was passing through. <sup>2</sup>A man was there by the name of Zacchaeus; he was a chief tax collector and was wealthy. <sup>3</sup>He wanted to see who Jesus was, but being a short man he could not, because of the crowd. <sup>4</sup>So he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore-fig tree to see him, since Jesus was coming that way.

<sup>5</sup>When Jesus reached the spot, he looked up and said to him, “Zacchaeus, come down immediately. I must stay at your house today.” <sup>6</sup>So he came down at once and welcomed him gladly.

<sup>7</sup>All the people saw this and began to mutter, “He has gone to be the guest of a ‘sinner.’”

<sup>8</sup>But 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.”

<sup>9</sup>Jesus said to him, “Today salvation has come to this house, because this man, too, is a son of Abraham. <sup>10</sup>For the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost.” Luke 19:1-10 NIV

### Introduction

We sing a song that goes; “Change my heart oh God, make it ever true. Change my heart oh God, make me more like you.”

For anyone to experience real change, it must begin with a change of the heart. Real change doesn’t take place in a person’s life until the heart is touched.

I have seen people’s life completely changed by certain events that take place such as death of a loved one or a close encounter with death themselves. I recently heard of someone who walked into a quick stop one Sunday evening. He walked in and there stood a man with a gun robbing the store. He says he has viewed life differently ever since.

We can learn important lessons from the account of Zacchaeus and his encounter with Jesus. Zacchaeus made some immediate changes in his life and attitude but first his heart had to be touched by the Savior.

Often I find people caught up in a vicious cycle. Some people are caught up in negativism where they view everything with a sour grapes attitude. Others are caught up in a state of constant anger or fear. Some people are consumed with worry and it eats them alive.

Still others know of very personal changes that are needed in their life. They know that certain behavior is wrong but they just can’t seem to get their life turned in the right direction.

Sometimes we want to change but we just can’t make it happen. Zacchaeus found the answer to real change in his life.

What is required for real change to take place in your life?

### Content

## 1. We must have a heart that is seeking

For real change to take place in our lives, the heart must be seeking. Sometimes we are simply searching for answers. Often we are hurting. Zacchaeus had a burning desire to see Jesus.

Illus: I must admit that in my younger days I went to a few Mardi Gras parades in Mobile. I recall standing in amazement as people struggled and went to great lengths to get their hands on plastic beads that can't be worth over 50 cents. And the throngs of people yelling "moon pie" is enough to leave one in awe. I can recall people climbing up street light posts just to get a better vantage point for catching a moon pie. I like moon pies but not enough to climb a street light.

Zacchaeus wanted a better vantage point for seeing Jesus. He wasn't going to let the fact that he was short prevent him from seeing Jesus. He was willing to lower himself to climbing a tree just to get his chance at seeing the Messiah about whom he had heard so much.

**What about you?** Do you have a real desire to know Jesus? Are you willing to go to great lengths to know him? Or, do you just sit back and mumble "It sure would be nice if God would do something in my life?"

David wrote in the Psalms, "As the deer panteth for the water so my soul longeth after thee." Do you long to know God in a deeper way? Do you thirst after him or do you thirst for other things?

Are you willing to put forth the effort to know Jesus and allow him to touch your life? I am sure Zacchaeus had a million other things he could be doing that day. Instead he took the time to put forth the effort to see Jesus.

You and I must long to know him, so much so that we are willing to climb a tree or a mountain if need be. We must dedicate the time and arrange our schedules so that we can talk with him and study God's word.

A desire to know him is the starting point. I wonder how many, even "church people," really want to intimately know him.

We must have a heart that is seeking Him.

## 2. We must experience conviction

When Jesus said; "I must stay at your house today." The word translated "stay" actually carries the meaning of abide or remain permanently somewhere. Jesus was saying I am coming to take up permanent residence in your heart.

Zacchaeus understood what Jesus meant. Immediately Zacchaeus realized that Jesus was penetrating through his facade and looking directly into his heart.

Zacchaeus was not very well liked. He was a tax collector. The custom of the day was that they could collect all they could get out of the people. What was left over and above the tax to the king was theirs to keep.

Illus: I recall going on a mission trip to Honduras to do some work at an orphanage. There were three of us and we each had a duffle bag of supplies and a bag containing our clothes. At the customs counter in Tegucigalpa, Honduras they looked in my duffle bag and then sent me to a little office. There they went through the duffle bags carefully. My bag had two ceiling fans that had been purchased and donated for the orphanage. They were new still and in the box. The customs agent wanted to charge me \$200.00 for a tax to bring them into Honduras. I said no. I said the fans together didn't even cost that much. I reminded him they were for an orphanage but that didn't seem to matter. After wrangling for over an hour, he finally agreed to allow me through with the fans for \$25.00.

Tax collectors of Jesus day were much like this. It was a matter of get what you could out of the people.

Zacchaeus had to carry that burden of knowing he had not always been fair with the people. When he met Jesus, all of the feelings of guilt and shame bubbled to the surface as he reflected on his standing with God.

**Has Jesus had that effect in your life?** It doesn't matter how long you have been a Christian, when you sit down and talk to God, it should always stimulate conviction.

When we pray and when we read our Bible, it begins to penetrate our hearts and speak to us about our life. It causes reflection which turns to conviction about the things that need to change in our life.

### 3. We must be willing to change

God's word says he is the God of yesterday, today and forever (Hebrews 13:8). Obviously this means he is the alpha and omega; God from the beginning of time to infinity. However, I believe it means much more than that.

Illus: I once heard a elderly black Pastor preaching a sermon in which he gave testimony about that verse. He explained that there had been a woman in his past that he had done wrong and treated very unfairly. He went on to explain that this had weighed heavy on his heart and he was greatly convicted. He began to pray for her everyday and became increasingly concerned about her welfare. He spoke with his wife about the matter and they agreed to contact the woman and check on her. When they did, they found that her life had been a struggle but that things began to turn around with their prayers and assistance.

When we walk with Christ, he begins the process of purging our heart and addressing the things of the past, present and future.

Zacchaeus knew that to really know Christ he had to make some things right with his fellow man.

Zacchaeus felt the conviction in his heart. He began to pronounce certain changes and retribution he was eager to make as a result of his encounter with Jesus. When we feel the conviction of the savior, change becomes natural.

When we get our arms around the concept of God's grace and love, the natural response is to change and become more like our savior. The closer we get to God, the more we change because God does not have the same priorities as the world. God does not care about the same things man cares about.

**What about you?** Is there something in your past that continues to convict and haunt you? Perhaps God is calling you to go back to that dark place and make some changes. Perhaps a simple "I am so sorry" is what is required.

Is God convicting you to make some changes now in your life? The answer is yes if you are seeking and communicating with him. God wants to make changes in you and in me. When Paul instructs the Philippians to "Work out your salvation" he is speaking of this very process in which we grow in our relationship with Christ. We desire to be more like him.

### Conclusion

A long time ago I heard that the opposite of love is not hate. It is indifference; no feeling at all. I pondered that and have come to see the truth in that statement. Love is a feeling and an emotion that causes a response. Indifference is no feeling or emotion and consequently no response.

Where are you in your relationship with Christ? Are you seeking him? Are you climbing a tree to know him better? What change is he making in your life?

I have seen some people's life changed in the last year. I have seen people learn to trust their futures to God and commit to him in ways they never imagined.

Illus: When our children were small Pam and I took them on a vacation to Disney World. While we were in one of the little restaurants at the park, Pam saw a couple getting food and condiments for their two small children. She began to point and declare that was Doug Drabek the Cy Young winning pitcher for the Pittsburgh, Pirates. "Let's see if we can get his autograph." I calmed her down and convinced her to leave him alone as he was having quality family time just like us and any other normal person. Every time we saw him pitching on TV, she reminded me we could have had his autograph.

People want the autograph of famous people. Autographs on baseballs, footballs and posters make nice mementos but they do not change one's life. **Jesus wants to autograph your heart and change your life forever.**

Life changed that day for Zacchaeus.

They can change for you today.