

Make Disciples 4

I don't know where most of you are concerning your walk with Christ and particularly how it relates to your personal obedience to the Great Commission. But, no matter where you are in the spectrum of readiness to engage people in meaningful spiritual conversation leading to a presentation of the gospel, I **hope these examinations of Jesus' encounters with lost people will:**

***Get you thinking**, looking, considering ways to interact with people for the kingdom's sake.

***Equip you** with general and specific ideas that you can implement in your own personal witnessing endeavors.

***Inspire you** to be less condemning and more compassionate toward people who are lost.

***Lead you** to be more confident and fruitful in sharing your faith.

Today we're going to look at another very familiar encounter between Jesus and someone very much in need of forgiveness and salvation. But, we will be looking at it through the particular lens of what we can learn from Jesus in order to more effectively relate to people we meet as we go through our daily activities. There is such a great need for hope and peace, love and acceptance in this crazy world we live in and we have the Good News to meet all those needs and so much more.

Jesus and the disciples had been on a rather extensive journey through Galilee and Samaria, which are in the northern and central regions of Israel. They were approaching Jericho

headed toward Jerusalem for the last time. He would soon be crucified.

1 He entered Jericho and was passing through. **2** There was a man named Zacchaeus who was a chief tax collector, and he was rich. **3** He was trying to see who Jesus was, but he was not able because of the crowd, since he was a short man. **4** So running ahead, he climbed up a sycamore tree to see Jesus, since He was about to pass that way. **5** When Jesus came to the place, He looked up and said to him, **“Zacchaeus, hurry and come down, because today I must stay at your house.”** **6** So he quickly came down and welcomed Him joyfully. **7** All who saw it began to complain, “He’s gone to lodge with a sinful man!” **8** But Zacchaeus stood there and said to the Lord, “Look, I’ll give half of my possessions to the poor, Lord! And if I have extorted anything from anyone, I’ll pay back four times as much!” **9** **“Today salvation has come to this house,”** Jesus told him, **“because he too is a son of Abraham.”** **10** **For the Son of Man has come to seek and to save the lost.”** **L**uke 19:1-10 (HCSB)

Learn from the Master One thing we have repeatedly observed is that there is no cookie cutter approach that will work effectively with each lost person we encounter. Each time Jesus encountered someone new, He seemed to throw out the old witnessing guide book and write a brand new one just for that particular situation.

1. Passing through This entire encounter with Zacchaeus happened, for all practical purposes, while Jesus was on His way to do something else, to die.

Jesus was passing through Jericho on His way to Jerusalem. Remember Jericho, with the exception of Rahab's house, was totally destroyed about 1500 years prior. The region including the destroyed city of Jericho was given to the tribe of Benjamin when the Israelites took over the Promised Land. It was occupied during the time of the Judges and is mentioned sporadically throughout the Old Testament. First Kings mentions a building of the city of Jericho.

Jericho is mentioned in the gospels a hand full of times particularly when Jesus passed through. It was an occupied city in Jesus' time but was not on the exact same location as the city that was destroyed by God as the Israelites marched around it.

As we have discussed before, Jesus was just passing through Jericho on His way to Jerusalem. Jesus had to have been heavily burdened with what He knew would transpire in Jerusalem but still seemed to be very alert and sensitive to the needs of the people of Jericho, particularly Zacchaeus.

Application: Our lives are so often cluttered, busy, stressful, distracted and rushed that we often miss opportunities to meet needs, help someone, to shed a little light and sprinkle a little salt in our world. Nothing in all of human life, then or now, is as of earth shattering importance as that of Jesus going to Jerusalem to die on the cross yet He took time to touch lives in

Jericho. There is nothing in my or your life that is so critically important that we shouldn't take time to notice people around us who are suffering, hurting, and in need of a Savior. Jesus took time to even notice a "wee little man."

2. Noticed Zach

Jesus' ultimate, bigger purpose was to go to Jerusalem to die for the sins of the world, but even though the time was very near for all this to happen, He took time to notice the "wee little man" that had climbed up a sycamore tree in order to get a better view.

I'm quite sure that Zacchaeus' problem in getting close to Jesus was not just because of his short stature. Zacchaeus was a traitor to his own people. He, a Jew, agreed to work for the occupying Roman government by collecting taxes from his own people. And, he made himself rich by collecting more taxes than were due and keeping them for himself. He was a traitor and a thief. Everyone in Jericho new him and hated him. So when he showed up to try to get a view of Jesus, he not only had trouble getting a decent view over the crowd of taller people surrounding Jesus. He was boxed out. Normally, a small person trying to get through a crowd might be shown some courtesy and be allowed to pass, but not Zacchaeus. They would have boxed him out like the Angolan point guard trying to drive to the basket against team USA. So Zacchaeus got creative. He spotted a sycamore tree overhanging the parade route ahead. He ran ahead and climbed up hoping to at least get a glimpse of this One that all the fuss was being made about. Jesus noticed.....

Application: Do we only notice people who are like us while ignoring or even judging those who are “different?” Do we even notice people at all?

When you pass by someone as you are on your way doing what you do, do you think about him or her at all? Do you consider them redeemable, loved and of great worth to God, a potential candidate for the kingdom? I urge you, to be more diligent and alert in noticing the people around you as you go through your day. Certainly there are some seemingly tough, hard to reach cases but there are also many who just need someone to take the time to notice them and their need.

3. Requested a meeting

You and I might consider it rude if a stranger came up to us and said “Me and my twelve disciples are coming to your house to have dinner and spend the night.” I could see especially if you were Mrs. Zacchaeus going into panic mode. Who are all these people? What are they doing at my house? I just swept and mopped the floors! How many people are coming to dinner? They’ve been traveling all day? What are we going to feed them? They’re spending the night? Where are they going to sleep? Slaughter the calf! Fetch some more firewood for the stove! We need more water! Who’s selling what at the market today?..... But remember, Jesus, though all man, was all God. He knew the best way to reach Zacchaeus. And apparently the best way was to totally invade his world.

I would love to have more detail of what transpired when Jesus and the disciples arrived at Zacchaeus’ house, but we don’t know.

Application: Remember that was a different time and culture. A similar action in our culture that would potentially lead to an extended opportunity to meet someone's need and present the gospel would be to say "you wanna' run over to Chick Fil-A and get a sandwich and some lemonade?" In doing so, you would be greatly extending the amount of time you have to show you care, win the right to be heard, and present Christ in a non-threatening manor.

4. Declared salvation

Because we have so little detail, we have to take Jesus' word for it that "salvation has come to this house." Of course we should want to know that Zacchaeus confessed and repented of His sin, believed that Jesus was truly the Son of God, and received Him as Savior and Lord. Those details are not given to us. Jesus said He was saved. That is good enough for me.

That said, we are given some evidence that Zacchaeus was saved as revealed in his publicly expressed desire to give half of his possessions to the poor and to pay back money extorted from his fellow citizens. That is a really good sign because.....

17 Therefore if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation; old things have passed away, and look, new things have come. **2** Cor 5:17 (HCSB)

When Zacchaeus encountered the Son of God and faith led to salvation, he was changed from the inside out. His heart changed leading to the changing of his morals, habits, ambitions, and priorities. He was changed immediately. He didn't automatically become a perfect person but he was changed for the good.

Application: We really don't have the privilege or responsibility to declare someone saved. That distinction must be made clear between us and our Lord and Savior. But, we do have the clear and concise command to, as we go, to present ourselves and the gospel of Jesus Christ in a way that people will want to be saved. And, immediate, external change is good evidence that true salvation has taken place.

When someone truly experiences life-changing salvation in Christ, they certainly don't instantly turn into a perfect person, but they should immediately begin to show some evidences of "change." If they continue in their old ways doing the same old sins without any remorse, they are not in Christ. That's not judgment. That's just a fact. Salvation, true salvation, changes a person.

Since Pentecost, The Holy Spirit began to live in the lives of believers from the moment of conversion and remains until they leave this earth by death or rapture. This begins a life-long journey of change, shaping the believer more and more into the image of Christ.

10 For we are His creation—created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared ahead of time so that we should walk in them. **Eph 2:10 (HCSB)**

Thankfully, it is never our place to judge someone's conversion experience, not matter how scant the evidence of salvation. But we do have an opportunity and even responsibility to make sure we are in the faith. No earthly person is better equipped to test our hearts to see if we're in the faith than our own selves.

Look back to your conversion experience. You should be able chart a reasonably steady course of change, transformation throughout your life. And these changes are compelled, not by guilt or sense of duty, by a response to the love and grace God has shown you. You grow in your understanding and appreciation for God's love for you which leads to your growing love for Him. This will naturally bring about a steady flow of change, good change, in your life.

5 Test yourselves [to see] if you are in the faith. Examine yourselves. Or do you not recognize for yourselves that Jesus Christ is in you?—unless you fail the test. **2** Cor 13:5 (HCSB)

Are you in the faith? Will Jesus declare “salvation has come to this house” when you stand before Him? If there is any doubt, there doesn't have to be. Settle it today.

Jesus, in this short encounter with Zacchaeus, revealed His entire purpose in coming to earth, “to seek and to save the lost.” Are you lost?