

Hanging Out with the Lost

Luke 19:1-10

Intro

Who do you spend your time with socially? Do you hang around mostly with your Christian friends and acquaintances? Have you connected or socialized with non-Christians? Do you have friends who are not believers?

Who do you sit next to in class? What is your neighbor's name and what do they do for a living? What is the name of the person next to you in your place of work and what do they do for fun?

When we as believers talk about "meeting the lost" we often feel awkward, and a bit apprehensive. Many Christians have a hard time making friends with people who show no interest in faith and God.

Have we created a Christian culture of an "exclusive community" that we have no time or make no time for relationships with people who aren't in our immediate circle of fellow believers?

What would it take for you to make time to spend with your classmate, neighbour, and co-worker, on their turf? At times Christians can be insular, cliquish and segregate themselves from the so-called "heathen."

Monastic Movement

Throughout church history there have been religious believers who have segregated themselves from what they called the pagan world. The monastic movement had a great effect on Christianity. Monks, hermits, and nuns became secluded in monasteries where they separated themselves from the corrupt world and devoted themselves to the ascetic life, a life of prayer, meditation and good works. Most of these religious folk did not connect much with the outside world. That kind of thinking influenced the church and many did not engage with the lost world.

Paul Harvey (a radio celebrity) said, "*Too many Christians are no longer fishers of men but keepers of the aquarium.*"

With so few believers actively sharing their faith, we must get back to the heart of Christ's mission and passion so that the Church, (Christians) can be the voice of truth to those who are lost.

The encounter of Zacchaeus and Jesus teaches us what we must do to reach people for Christ. Jesus often hung out with sinners and befriended them. Let's look at a passage found in Mark's Gospel.

Mark 2:13-17, "*Once again Jesus went out beside the lake. A large crowd came to him, and he began to teach them. As he walked along, he saw Levi son of Alphaeus sitting at the tax collector's booth. "Follow me," Jesus told him, and Levi got up and followed him. While Jesus was having dinner at Levi's house, many tax collectors and "sinners" were eating with him and his disciples, for there were many who followed him. When the teachers of the law who were Pharisees saw him eating with the "sinners" and tax collectors, they asked his disciples: "Why does he eat with tax collectors and 'sinners'?" On hearing this, Jesus said to them, "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners."*"

Religious people had a hard time with this, but Jesus was firm in his calling. As He says, "The healthy don't need a doctor, but the sick do." Jesus wanted to be around "sinners."

The coolest thing is that Jesus didn't go to judge or to punish them. He went to them with love and grace. He befriended them and spoke life into them and changed their lives.

Sinners were drawn to Jesus. They saw something different in Him - that He loved them and accepted them. And after they were exposed to that kind of love, it changed them.

I'm not sure my life would attract that many "sinners." Maybe it would if I was around more "sinners." I guess what I'm saying is, we need to evaluate our "saltiness." We are to be the salt of the earth as Jesus said (Matt. 5:13). Salt is used as a flavor enhancer. In the same way that salt enhances the flavor of the food it seasons, believers stand out as those who "enhance" the flavor of life in this world. Christians, living under the guidance of the Holy Spirit and in obedience to Christ, will inevitably influence the world for good, as salt has a positive influence on the flavor of the food it seasons.

Story of Zacchaeus

Let's look at another passage of Scripture where Jesus connects with the lost sinner. It's the story of Zacchaeus found in Luke 19:1-10.

Zacchaeus: His name in Hebrew means *pure*

- I think there was a lot of fun in Jericho when he was called by his name.
- They would say: "Hello, Pure!"
- What a name for a tax collector! Quite the opposite!
- He was a chief tax collector, the head of the local taxation department.
- He would employ others to work under him.
- As a leader of tax collectors he was filthy rich.
- As a tax collector he was ostracized by the religious community.
- Zacchaeus had no access to the temple.
- He was hated in his community and perhaps had little social life.

Religious Attitude and Mindset

- He was hated and despised by the people.
- This guy was a hopeless case and no body bothered with him.
- The religious leaders ignored him and passed judgment on him.
- They wanted nothing to do with him and most likely were glad that he was going to hell.

About Zacchaeus

- But Zacchaeus was not pleased with his life.
- All the wealth he had could not satisfy his heart.
- He desired a new start on life but didn't know how it could happen.
- From the account of the story we gather that he wanted God to be merciful to him.
- His only hope was Christ.
- His heart was ready and willing.
- Zacchaeus probably prayed for God to do something with his miserable life.

Luke 19:3

- He was short and couldn't see Jesus so he climbed a tree. He wanted to see Jesus but there were obstacles.
- There are obstacles that prevent people from seeing Christ. Like disbelief, materialism, greed for wealth, immoral lifestyle etc.
- Jesus did not pass him by but called out his name.
- Jesus did not say, '*I would like to stay at your house*', but He said, "*I must stay at your house.*" This is a strong expression. Jesus saw his visit with Zacchaeus as a divine encounter.
- It is interesting that the Lord did not stop in the house of a predominate person nor in a home of a reputable religious person.
- Our Lord decided to have a meal in the home of a low down sinner despised by society.
- Zacchaeus quickly climbed down and received Jesus joyfully!

The Crowd Disapproved

-The people complained about it.

-First they condemned Zacchaeus as a sinner. He is not worthy of such a visit.

Second they criticized Jesus for being the guest of such a low down crook.

-But Zacchaeus stood and proceeded to give striking evidence of what Jesus' visit would do for him by announcing the restitution he was about to do.

Those he cheated:

-If a widow could not pay her taxes he probably would put her out of her house and take possession of it.

-If a man could not pay enough taxes, Zacchaeus would take a mortgage on the home.

-This was a common practice in those days. That's why they were hated because people knew they were money grabbers and thieves.

- Zacchaeus makes a public confession and he repents and makes restitution.

-He promises to give half of the goods back AND restore fourfold to those whom he had falsely taxed.

* Notice that Zach uses the present tense in his confession and resolve.

Luke 19:8, *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."*

In Numbers 5:7 we read, *"The person... must confess the sin he has committed. He must make full restitution for his wrong, add one fifth to it and give it all to the person he has wronged."*

The law required 100% plus 20% to pay back those one has wronged.

BUT Zach gives back 400%. He goes beyond the law and gives from the heart.

-This is true repentance. It is a change of conduct and making restitution.

-Faith and works go hand in hand. *"What good is it, my brothers, if a man claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save him? ... faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead."* (James 2:14, 17).

*Jesus sought Zacchaeus who was certainly among the lost. But Jesus did not leave him there; He changed him and saved him!

Conclusion

Zacchaeus was hated, despised and rejected by society and worse, by the religious community. He was neglected spiritually, a lost soul who no one cared for.

But our Lord cared and saw him in a different way – He felt compassion and love for him and he did something about it. He went to stay in Zacchaeus' home in order to save him.

We need to see people the way Jesus sees them. We need to feel love and compassion for them as Christ feels love and compassion. We need to seek opportunities where we can connect with those who don't know Christ.

FOR GOD SO LOVED THE WORLD!

Jesus is friend of sinners and the lost. We too should befriend sinners and the lost.

We must follow Christ's example on how He saw the lost. We must go to the lost and the rejected and share with them the love of God and His plan for their eternal salvation!