

First part - Illustration testimony

About 5 years ago I was at a conference in West London, the idea was the conference would teach you how to approach random people on the street and talk to them about Jesus. Sceptical....well wait and see what happened. So after a mornings training we were dispatched off in two's to a local leisure centre to hand out bottles of water and talk to people, and let people know how much God loved them. We listened loads, and people opened up. They talked openly about their experience of spiritual things and their thoughts on God. Some talked about finding peace by water, or when out walking, some talked about trying hard to do things right, we talked to Hindu's, Muslims, agnostics, atheists. We listened, and after a time explained our experience and often ended the conversation praying for the person. We were could talk for a good 20 minutes with each person and found that West Londoners could chat.BUT one conversation stood out. We had started talking to a young man in his late 20's, he was catholic but not in church, and I had told him how Jesus was so real to me. And that He LIVES. Well mid way through my expression of faith, my partner looked straight at him and said why do I feel the Lord is saying, you have to 'decide'. That stopped me mid stream in part because the guy physically stepped back. And I said 'why do you have to decide? He said because of this...he pulled up the sleeve of his jumper, and he had a massive burn scar from elbow to wrist. He said I was in an industrial accident and I nearly died....well I did die. I came out of my body and started moving up and out

toward the light, I met Jesus when I got to the top of the tunnel, but I was allowed to go back down. I re-entered my body, and I came back round. I was given my life back.... Oh.... 'So I have just been talking to you about how Jesus definitely is real/alive, but you already knew, because you have already met him?' He said yes....and so I said you need to DECIDE to acknowledge Him, to follow Him to change your life? And probably start by getting back into church... he said yes.... and he said he would.

Now, not all conversations I have had with non-christians out and about are as STANDOUT as that, this guy had a glimpse of heaven..... and not all my conversations are on a street corner, but each one I think is significant, and will add if done sensitively, to both my journey and the person I have talked to.

Part 2 - Talk 10 mins

In our reading Zaccheus encounters Jesus on the streets of Jericho and his life is turned around the young man we met on the streets of West London experienced something similar. Both had very real and life changing encounters with Jesus.

As we read Zaccheus's story we can see Zaccheus in 4 different ways, and it gives a great outline to this talk. Firstly, Zaccheus was a **Sinner**, he is a despised tax collector. He was also a **seeker** he pursued Jesus he climbed that tree so he could see him. Equally he was **sought....he was sought** by Jesus, he was singled out as Jesus called him down from the sycamore tree. And and then finally he was **saved**.....he encountered Jesus and decided to follow Him, putting his money where his mouth was, he said he would pay back any he had defrauded. He made a clear choice.... he knew who he was following and he was all in.

So lets look at Zaccheus the sinner. In verse 2 we learn that Zaccheus was a tax collector, despised by Pharisees as unclean (they would never have entered his house, as they would have been defiled) and he was equally **hated** by fellow Jews because he exorted money out of them, both rich and poor alike and lining his pockets on the way. He was totally completely persona non grata to that neighbourhood, and to make matters worse Zaccheus was no ordinary tax collector, verse 2 describes him as

the chief tax collector he was the ring leader/ team leader R.Kent Hughes describes him as:

the kingpin of the Jericho tax cartel and had the scruples of a modern day crack dealer - drug dealer, he was filthy rich in the fullest sense of the term so not a likely candidate for the kingdom'.

Now we probably don't know many drug dealers or crack addicts here at Christchurch, but I am sure we can all call to mind some unlikely candidates for the Kingdom. Those that are on the margins or are 'so far gone'....Or not even vaguely on a Christ's buzz or radar.....well I am going to ask you to visualise that person, possibly the black sheep in your family, a crusty neighbour or snarky co-worker, someone you would say no way can I see them coming to Christ, no way can I see them getting baptised, well it was just that type of person that Jesus went after..... someone just like Zaccheus.

And now I am going to ask you to visualise that person againand as you do, I would like you to think on 1 Corinthians 1:27 which says. **But God chose the foolish things** of the world to **shame the wise**; **God chose** the weak **things** of the world to **shame** the strong.....so maybe don't limit in your mind what Jesus is capable of and maybe start praying for that person.....as it says in Isaiah 59 v 1 'The Lord's arm is not too short to save'. He saved Zaccheus, he could save that person you are thinking of.

Now let's look at Zaccheus as a seeker he was certainly a sinner the first of our first headings. But as a seeker well Zaccheus was motivated to see Jesus. Jesus's fame had gone before Him, the crowd pursued Jesus wherever he went. And what's not to like...as Jesus has entered Jericho **that** day he had healed a blind man, we read about it in the previous chapter. Jesus was exciting, and Zaccheus wanted in. He didn't want to miss out on the action...but being short he couldn't see above the crowd. Miniture puffed. He climbed a tree. He positioned himself so he could see...he was motivated, he was seeking.

Now, speaking to Christians in the congregation, are there seekers in your life that you know, if not could you pray for people to be made known to you.....or if you can already think of someone.... could you help them on their journey towards Christ by answering their questions as best you can, and pointing them in the right direction, towards Christ. Normally this require more listening than speaking but would you be open to help them on their journey, give them the insight they need to move forward. Our God is alive and active in our community, he is continually reaching out and wants every single person in this area to know him. We just need to open up conversations to find out what he is up to. To find out where people are at...what they are looking for.... How they are seeking.

You see the real seeker is Jesus....he pursues us...he wants us to know Him and for us to be part of His Kingdom. When we have a conversation

with someone about Christ we are really just joining in with what the Lord is doing...on the underground....linking in with His master plan....

Ok, now a question..... can you talk, argue,debate someone into becoming a Christian? I would say no.....because Christianity like our guys experience on the street in West London is about real life encounter...a real life relationship. So debating gets you nowhere...because. Conversion is about encounter.....And that is what we see in the story of Zaccheus...Jesus sought him...he pursued Him. And in the Zaccheus story he does so in a specific way.....Jesus uses the supernatural to wake Zaccheus upJesus knew Zaccheus's name...from nowhere..because no one had told Him. But he was God, he knew. And that is what some people call a word of Knowledge, a specific type of message from God.

When my co-partner outside the West London Leisure Centre had a similar type of word. That word 'decide?? Decision???' And it went straight to the heart of that guy, so much so he stepped back....it got to the nub of it...and it was powerful. He turned back to Christ.....And with Zaccheus it was the same....but this time Jesus knew his name and it lead him to experience Jesus's whole presence.

So we read in verse 5 :

5 When Jesus reached the spot, he looked up and said to him, ‘Zacchaeus, come down immediately. I must stay at your house today.’ **6** So he came down at once and welcomed him gladly.

But who wasn't happy...the crowd...they started grumbling...verse 7

7 All the people saw this and began to mutter, ‘He has gone to be the guest of a sinner.’

But Zaccheus was having none of it he knew the direction he was taking.... he was following Jesus...and, he was determined and he was going to make amends. Drawn and inspired, and focusing on Jesus, his self-seeking fell away,and his generosity kicked in...all in...he was fully committed to this new way and his Lord.

So in verse 8 we read:

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.’

And Jesus's response:

9 Jesus said to him, ‘Today salvation has come to this house, because this man, too, is a son of Abraham.’

Jesus sees Zaccheus's change of heart...that genuine move towards him, a 180 degree turn leaving...whatever...behind him. Jesus turned a heart of

stone as Ezekiel call it.... into a heart of flesh. A soft heart that he can now relate to....minister to.....?love? That's why the Lord loves a soft heart. He can meet with us when our heart is soft. And he met with Zaccheus.

...in verse 10 it says:

10 For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost.'

So I am going to leave you with this thought.I am going to challenge you....Jesus came to seek and save the lost. He is already at work in this area, but he needs your help to point people in the right direction. That is towards Him. Will you this week open up conversations, listen well and give your best answer as you love people into the Kingdom? And if no one at present is on your radar to talk to will pray that the Lord will put someone in your path? And while you're at prayer could you also pray for that least likely person to come into the Kingdom...because you will be praying in line with The Father's heart. He wants them in too...

And lastly if I am speaking to you and you don't know Jesus, **and would like to, I will repeat that, if you would like to...** can I suggest you say quietly to him now the following, it's a prayer to God...Jesus ...I want in...forgive me for my past....lets put it behind us...if that is ok with you....please come and dwell in my house today like you did with Zaccheus...I am motivated to seek you...I would like to get to know you. Amen.

