

Monday, AUGUST 3, 2020

SERIES: REWRITING JESUS

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TITLE: Who Should We Spend Our Time With? Pt. 1

Today we're kicking off a new series called, "Rewriting Jesus". There is a popular concept today that you have your Jesus, and I have my Jesus. In other words, who Jesus is, what He said, and what He stood for, and what He did, is relative to each individual.

But is that true? Is Jesus relative? Can you have your Jesus? Can I have my Jesus? The simple answer is, "No". There is only one Jesus Christ. And what He said, what He did, what He stood for, is found in the Bible.

But if we're honest, many of us still try to rewrite Jesus. We treat Jesus' words and instructions like a Chinese buffet. We pick and choose what we want. We read a passage where Jesus says to *love your enemies*. But we say that really doesn't work for me, Jesus. I'm going to rewrite you, so instead, for me, it is ignore your enemies... ..or badmouth my enemies on Facebook.

You see, we've rewritten Jesus. So this month, we're going back to the Bible, to see exactly who Jesus is, what He said, what He stood for, and what He did.

So let's begin by meeting a friend of Jesus. Her name is Lucy. No, you don't find Lucy in the Bible. You actually meet Lucy in Francis Chan's book, *Crazy Love*.

If you met Lucy at church, you would probably think she was somebody's innocent, dear grandma. She is the kind of woman who will come and give you a huge hug, and then introduce herself. You would never guess that Lucy is an ex-prostitute. When she was in her teens and early twenties, drugs and prostitution controlled her life. Through an older Christian woman who reached out to the prostitutes, Lucy met Jesus, and her life was completely changed.

To this day, almost forty years later, Lucy lives near the same streets where she once worked as a prostitute and consistently opens her home to other young women who are caught in prostitution. It is common knowledge on the streets, that if you need anything, you can come to Lucy's house. She doesn't have a lot, but her home is always open. Prostitutes, pimps, drug users, dealers, and anyone else, who most people avoid—Lucy invites them in. This is her way of loving people who are in desperate need of the hope and love that Lucy found forty years ago.

Now, I am not a betting man, and would say none of you come from a background like Lucy's. But what I can be sure of, is that all of us have the opportunity to open our hearts, our lives, and our doors, to people like Lucy. They may not be prostitutes, but the world is full of lonely, hurting sinners. Your workplace, your neighborhood, your favorite stores and restaurants are full of lonely, hurting sinners.

But are we spending time with people like this? Or are we spending time with those who are just like us? Do we spend time on other people's turf, or do we only invite them to church? Do we spend time with the lost at our homes, or do we merely throw articles and quotes at them on social media? Many Christians today spend time with only fellow Christians. They create a "country club" model of Christian living.

What exactly did Jesus say about this? Is this what Jesus taught? I don't think so. In fact, I believe every Christian can change their community by adopting three traits. So let's go meet with Jesus in Matthew 9:9. In the previous 8 verses of Chapter 9, Jesus had healed a paralyzed man. The crowds were amazed and gave God the glory. That's where we pick it up in Chapter 9, verse 9 (NLT).

As Jesus was walking along, he saw a man named Matthew sitting at his tax collector's booth. "Follow me and be my disciple," Jesus said to him. So Matthew got up and followed him.

I don't know about you, but whenever I read through the Gospels, and I come to verses like this, I scratch my head. Jesus sees Matthew, and He says to him, "Follow Me"! And what does Matthew do? He gets up and goes. Very strange in my world. But once we understand more about Matthew, it will make sense why he has an urgency to leave his post.

Matthew is a tax collector. What's the big deal with that? Sure, today, we don't like paying taxes. It's a bit depressing seeing 20%+ of our paychecks disappear, before we are able to spend the money. But we hardly shake our fists in the air with disgust when seeing our paystub. So what's the big deal? In Jesus' time, tax collectors were the most despised and often corrupt people in the area. Matthew was a traitor to his own people – the Jews. He was a tax collector for Rome.

Tax collectors were franchisees of sorts. They would pay money to be able to collect taxes. They would have a minimum they would need to collect for Rome, and anything above that the tax collector could keep. There was no guide to how much to tax and what they should tax. The tax collectors had total freedom. The possibility of abuse and extortion was limitless. The wealthy would often bribe tax collectors to reduce their taxes. This would shift the burden to the poor and middle class. You can see why tax collectors were hated! They were bad dudes. Fellow Jews would ban tax collectors from the synagogues and social settings. Simply put, they were ranked with thieves and murderers.

Matthew, no doubt, fell ostracized, alone, and experienced the emptiness that the pursuit of money brings. It reminds me of the quote from C.S. Lewis:

"If we find ourselves with a desire that nothing in this world can satisfy, the most probable explanation is that we were made for another world."

In other words, we all have worldly things we use to make us feel whole. But they only leave us desiring more. For some, it's success at work; for some it is sex; others, it is power. Maybe for you, it's buying and accumulating stuff. For Matthew, it was money. But I have to believe, he found it empty.

DISCUSSION:

N: Let's turn to Arnie Cole and Cara Whitney for a little added perspective to our topic today. What are some of the signals that someone you're engaging with is finding life to be futile? I ask, because as believers, it's important that we pick up on the signals of others, so that we can minister to them.

C: Well, I'm a big lover of body language. I think that's why I like horses so much, because they rely on our body language, and we rely on theirs. But, in my opinion, I would say you just have to get to know everybody, and then you don't have to worry about looking for signals, or just looking up from your phone is a good start, right? I mean, I'm sure Arnie can tell you why horses are so great, because they force you to pay attention, or else you're going to get your head stomped in sometimes. So, just get out of your phone, look at people. And I think you could see what's going on.

A: Maybe stop talking, and take a look, and look for clues. Because most of the time, it's just super obvious. And especially the younger people get, you know, you see all kinds of signs, but you have to look and listen, and you can't listen if you're talking all the time. So at least that's one thing that I've learned in all of this, is people will tell you what's going on, and try to both in verbal and nonverbal ways. You've got to be there for them.

C: I would appear to an outside person that I didn't want anything to do with the Gospel, but it was smoke and mirrors. It was like a way to – inside, I'm in turmoil. My outward self is cool as a cucumber. Does that make sense? [Totally]. Get to know everybody and then you don't have to sweat it out.

N: Yeah. I think being aware of what's going on around you, paying attention to the people that we're engaging with, and then being willing to listen. Those are key if we're going to reach people for Christ. I'm just curious, how have you actually seen this play out and be beneficial in a relationship? I'm sure there's got to be a time when you've reached out to someone you've been engaged with, for the sake of the Gospel. And by being aware, you were picking up on the trials in their lives, or in the hurdles, or in the disappointments. I mean, how, how have you seen this play out?

A: I think there's a lot of room for great stories, but you have to remember too, that this doesn't always have happy endings, and there's some people where you never know really what the ending is. And then there's some people, I mean, Shar and I have a saying, the people that we've helped the most usually are the people that turn on us the most down the road. You know, we're commanded to love other people and to go the extra mile; that doesn't mean that they need to, or they're going to, or they don't turn around and bite your head off. And I know for me, I kind of kid myself, but if somebody bites my head off, you know, it's like, if I fight back, then I don't even get credit for the nice thing that I tried to do. So you just have to be there for people, irregardless - as they like to say in the new dictionary - of the response.

N: At the end of the day, we are called to love selflessly and we leave the consequences to God. That's definitely not easy to do so, but that's exactly what God has done to us. And so we can do it to other people.

There's no record of Matthew knowing Jesus personally, or ever seeing Him in person. But Jesus was known in the region, and Matthew likely knew of this physical and spiritual healer. And I can imagine, when Matthew saw Jesus and heard Him call out, "Follow me!", his soul leapt, because he could experience a fresh start.

It is here that we find the first trait of a Christian who wants to change their community: **They are obedient.**

Matthew didn't have to get up and follow Jesus. He could have stayed at his post, depressed and rejected. But instead, He gets up and follows Jesus. And the moment Matthew got up, there was no turning back to his old position. But I think he understood what the Apostle Paul understood. Paul wrote in Philippians 3:7, **"I once thought these things were valuable, but now I consider them worthless because of what Christ has done."** Just like Paul, Matthew's past pursuits left him empty and far from God. So off Matthew went. He was obedient.

As I was wrapping up my undergrad at Grace University, I became friends with Trevor Otto. Trevor was one of a kind. He worked in a cubicle in Omaha, but when he wasn't solving first world problems at work, he and his family would walk through neighborhoods, going door to door, praying for people and sharing the Good News. Then he and his family would make up sandwiches and load them in a wagon, and they'd go and distribute them to the homeless. This is why, when he told me that "my family and I are moving to Africa to be missionaries", I wasn't shocked; well, a bit shocked, because you'd have to see Trevor. He's got red hair and is as fair-skinned as snow! I told him, "Trevor, you've got to buy yourself some sunscreen!" But after some friendly joking, I asked him, "Why are you going? When?" "We are going in a few months: Selling the house and packing up the family to move into a village. And why? Because Jesus asks us all to follow Him. He's asking my family to move to Africa and share the Good News. So we'll go." Trevor was obedient to Jesus' call, and his new community is being changed. So we should be obedient to Jesus' calling.

Where is God calling you today? Maybe He's not calling you to go to Africa. But I can almost guarantee, He's asking you to go and reach the lost. This is the Great Commission. As a follower of Christ, he has put you on a mission, and that mission is obedience to a great calling. Matthew 28:19-20 (ESV) says, **"Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age."**

This is how we've memorized this verse: *Go, therefore, and make disciples.* Maybe make a couple observations here: First, Jesus said, *therefore*. Whenever we see the word, *therefore*, we have to look backward. It's indicating that something has been declared, and therefore something should be done. What did Jesus just say? He said, *"All authority has been given to me in heaven*

and on earth.” In other words, I am the sovereign Lord of the universe. So He's made an authoritative statement about His position. He is Lord, and He is God. *Therefore, go!*

But secondly, *go* is actually not a command, but rather a present participle. It should say “while going”. It's not so much a “now, go,” as a marching move. But rather, *as you live your lives* - while going from place to place, while living your life in your neighborhoods, in the marketplace, in the restaurant, in the store, in your hobbies - wherever you are going, and whatever you are doing, *go* and make disciples.

That's the third thing I want us to notice. Because Jesus Christ is God and Lord, He says, while you go through your daily lives, *make disciples!* “Make disciples” is the main verb. It's the central command of the verse. It is both the combination of believing and learning. It's not just simply a conversion. It's not someone saying, yes. That concept is not found in the Bible. But rather, he uses the Greek word *mathēteuō* (ma – they – too – o). This isn't just someone who sits and listens. No, it says, as D.A. Carson put it, “Disciples are those who hear, understand, and obey Jesus’ teaching.” This isn't just for the 11 disciples hearing the Great Commission. No, it's all of us. Carson continues, “It is binding on all Jesus’ disciples to make others what they themselves are -- disciples of Jesus Christ.”

This command to make disciples is imperative. When the God of the Universe, Who is our Savior and King, tells us to make disciples, we make disciples. This isn't a point for negotiation. He says to do it. As His disciples, we say, “my pleasure.”

God is calling you and me to be obedient. He's calling you to make disciples of the people in your neighborhood. He is calling you to make disciples of that person at the counter at the coffee shop. He's saying, make a disciple of your server at the restaurant. He's saying “While going, make a disciple of your boss or your coworker.”

As we know, you and I do not do the saving. We are called to love people, by sharing the Gospel. It is God who does the saving. This should relieve us of any fear of rejection. We know God is the One who is at work in the hearts of mankind. So we easily get to go and play, while scattering the seed of the Gospel.

Who is God calling you to reach today? How is he calling you to obedience?

N: Let me turn to Cara Whitney and Arnie Cole once again. Cara, give our listeners a first-step to focus on today, to help them share Christ with the people they meet.

C: “How are you doing?” That's what they should ask them and actually mean it. Not a superficial, “Hey, how're you doing?” and then really don't care what their response is, or even hear it - an actual true concern for that person's wellbeing, where they're at. I think, especially now, “How are you doing with all of this?” You know, be prepared for an opinion you may not want to hear. That doesn't matter. Just, “How are you doing?” Something, some words of encouragement would be helpful as well.

N: Yeah. And I think that our willingness to actually listen too is so key in that process. And I

think you're right. Be prepared. I mean, sometimes when you ask people, how are they doing? - Get ready for the answer. And that may mean carving out a little bit of time, but I tell you, and you know this, when we engage with people sincerely, it opens doors to conversations we will never have had otherwise.

C: Well, I remember I was in a locker room one time; it was kind of like this spa setting place, and I was waiting to get my hair cut. And there was a woman in there. She was older, and I just said, "How are you doing?" And I wasn't prepared for her to actually tell me how she was doing, because her response was, "You know what, I'm not doing that great". But by the end of the conversation, she told me she fell, hurt her leg, but then she was so encouraged by the end of it, because she realized that she'd been married to this man for 40 some years. And now he was stepping up in incredible ways that she had never seen before. It was such a great conversation. It was the first time I really realized how powerful a "How are you doing?" is.

N: Arnie, was there ever a time when you doubted that you would be a good witness for Christ?

A: Oh yeah. There were several years as a new believer, that I thought because of my past failures, spiritual failures, you know, I was lucky to be saved and going to Heaven. And I didn't, you know, my biggest thing was for people not to know me, or know my past. And so yeah, you have that period of shame that can set in, and if you're not careful, Satan can use that to defeat you. So yeah, multiple times I can remember going to church, and having been divorced, and sitting through about how divorce is so terrible. Well, you know, I wasn't a believer, I got divorced. You know, you're sitting there and you feel just so ashamed and so guilty, that, you know, the last thing you'd ever want to do, is talk to someone about a relationship with Jesus Christ.

N: And I bet there are a lot of people out there who have felt the same way or do feel the same way today. What changed for you?

A: I hate to admit it, Pastor Nat, but it was a pastor just like you, a youngster, he just came up and said, "You know, what are you doing? You know, you've got to tell people." And I said, "Well, nobody wants to listen to somebody who's been such a spiritual loser all their life". And he goes, "No, it's just the opposite of that". So yeah, it was some youngster just came up and kicked me in the butt.

N: It's amazing how God uses people of all ages and experiences to impact us and to change our lives. Well, even though we are saved, we still have the flesh to battle. I struggle with it. And I know you do as well. The reality is we still have a great need for Christ.

C: Well, and I think it's just like Arnie said - if I'm honest about my struggles and my questions about, and also the ones for God, I think that makes my witness and my testimony that much more credible and more helpful to people. Who just like we talked about - people struggling, who've been divorced and those things, you know - that's helpful to them. It's encouraging.

A: Yeah. I mean, I would agree. The big thing you have to be careful is, you don't get too hooked into your own story, so that you're not listening to the other person's story. Because as

much as people can appreciate knowing where you're coming from, they really want you to know their story. And so it's kind of a fine balance also in going into too much detail. You know, if you struggled with drugs, or... .. going into too much detail, sometimes derails any hope of the other person getting a word in edgewise. So it's a balance.

N: It is a balance. I think one of the key communication principles that I've really tried to learn and build into my life is, learn to be interested and not be interesting. Now that's hard. That's really hard, but it's so true. If you want to be a good at ministering to people, you need to learn to be interested and not interesting. And when we do, it's amazing the doors that God will open, and then they will naturally ask you: "So tell me about you. Tell me more; tell me about the hope that you are experiencing in your life."