

What Are You Here For Jesus?

The story Matthew tells of his first encounter with Jesus brightly illuminates the radically distinct difference between Jesus and the Pharisees. *“Passing along, Jesus saw a man at his work collecting taxes. His name was Matthew. Jesus said, ‘Come along with me.’ Matthew stood up and followed him. Later when Jesus was eating supper at Matthew’s house with his close followers, a lot of disreputable characters came and joined them. When the Pharisees saw him keeping this kind of company, they had a fit, and lit into Jesus’ followers. ‘What kind of example is this from your Teacher, acting cozy with crooks and riff-raff?’ Jesus overhearing, shot back. ‘Who needs a doctor: the healthy or the sick? Go figure out what this Scripture means: ‘I’m after mercy, not religion.’ I’m here to invite outsiders, not coddle insiders”* (Matthew 9:9-13 MSG).

Matthew could not have made the truth of Jesus’ coming any clearer: Jesus came for sinners—for those as common as tax collectors and for those caught up in stupid choices, botched dreams and dreadful disappointments. Never changing, Jesus continues to come to this day for street people, corporate executives, repairmen, widows, addicts, public servants, school children, AIDS victims, rock stars, orphans, farmers, politicians, IRS agents, soldiers, hookers,

athletes...for you and for me. Jesus not only talks with these people but shares meals with them—totally aware that his involvement with sinners will provoke the condemnation of the religious elite. He confronts the illusions of those who carefully follow rules to achieve rightness with God, who consequently recognize no need for a savior. What a profound irony, that those who talk the most about others’ need for a savior are often blind to their own need for one.

There is no passage in all the scriptures that is more important than Jesus’ words in Matthew 9 for the evangelical church in America to heed. And the same is true for the rest of the world too. This passage should be read, reread, pondered, and prayed until its words have worked their way deeply into the fabric of our lives. Ever since Jesus came, every Christian generation has attempted to dim the blinding brightness of its meaning because the gospel seems too good to be true. As Brennan Manning writes,

We think salvation belongs to the proper and pious, to those who stand at a safe distance from the back alleys of existence, clucking their judgments at those who have been soiled by life...In effect, Jesus says the Kingdom of his Father is not a subdivision for the self-righteous nor for those who feel they possess the state secret of their salvation. The Kingdom is not an exclusive, well-trimmed suburb with snobbish rules

about who can live there. No, it is for a larger, homelier, less self-conscious cast of people who understand they are sinners because they have experienced the yaw and pitch of moral struggle.

What does this mean? It means that we can finally stop lying to ourselves and deceiving others. Thank God, we can finally “damn the torpedoes” and openly admit, without fear of reprisal, shame or guilt, that despite knowing Jesus and being forgiven, the fierce clash with lust, envy, fear, and pride still rages inside us. However, because Jesus has audaciously chosen to declare that we are his sisters and brothers, we can be ourselves...and ignore the objections that we don’t have what it takes, that we don’t belong. The truth is that we have been warmly embraced and wildly welcomed into God’s family, and because of that we can acknowledge that we are often unkind, mean, angry, selfish and resentful, especially toward those we love. Yet, amazingly, God, whose very nature is love will never love us any more or any less because of anything we do or fail to do. Therefore, we don’t have to strive any longer to make ourselves acceptable to God. After all, what would be the point of striving to gain something that’s already in our possession? At long last, we can embrace our deficiency and helplessness and failure, knowing we have been deeply and irreversibly forgiven.

Investing in Journey Resources

From its inception, Journey Resources' mission has remained simple and clear:

Journey Resources offers the message of God's love, grace and mercy for all people found through Jesus Christ. Providing thoughtful and creative opportunities to discover God's loving care, our mission extends as far as God leads and reaches through us.

Following are several distinctive elements of our mission:

- It is our earnest intent to be as self-sustained as possible. Approximately one half of our essential funds are covered by fees for speaking engagements and proceeds from the publication and sale of books.
- We charge no fee for spiritual direction. In addition, we regularly consult with individuals and groups and accept invitations to speak with no associated fee.
- We believe that the services we provide globally are enhanced and preserved by being well-grounded and involved locally. Therefore we deliberately attempt to place limits on out of town travel.

As you consider these things, if you are not already doing so, would you please prayerfully consider assisting us? We have begun a new fiscal year and are still greatly in need of additional support. No gift is too small to be considered insignificant.

You may make a donation by returning your gift in the enclosed envelope, by visiting our web site at www.journeyresources.com and using an existing Paypal account or credit card. Or, if you wish to establish a monthly draft, please notify us and we'll gladly provide you with the needed information.

Another means of supporting our mission would be to prayerfully promote our services to those people you know who might benefit from them. Perhaps your church could host

Fil for a conference or your small group might wish to enlist his leadership in the direction of a retreat.

Mere words cannot express how grateful we are for the privilege of being engaged in this mission. It's our desire to continue offering the message of God's relentless love, grace and mercy for years to come. Please accept our heartfelt thanks for partnering with us in whatever way you have in the past are now or may be led in the future.

Winter Reading Recommendations:

The Jesus I Never Knew by Phillip Yancey

Velvet Elvis: Repainting the Christian Faith by Rob Bell

Blue Like Jazz: Nonreligious Thoughts on Christian Spirituality by Donald Miller

Heart Speaks to Heart: Three Gospel Meditations on Jesus by Henri Nouwen

Reaching for the Invisible God: What Can We Expect to Find? by Phillip Yancey

Jesus: A Gospel by Henri Nouwen

Ruthless Trust: The Ragamuffin's Path to God by Brennan Manning

A Glimpse of Jesus : The Stranger to Self-Hatred by Brennan Manning

The Relentless Tenderness of Jesus by Brennan Manning

Fil's Winter Schedule

January

4-5 Private Retreat, St. Francis Springs Prayer Center, Stoneville, NC

25-27 Soul Satisfaction Conference, Christ Lutheran

Church, Valencia, CA, (Contact: Lynne Rieck 661/259-0200 ext. 23)

February

11-21 Spiritual Director in Residence, George Fox Seminary Residency, Canon Beach, OR

26 The Divinity School of Wake Forest University, Winston-Salem, NC, Contact: Dr. Doug Bailey 336.758.3219

March

4-6 FL Young Life Staff Silent Retreat, Ocklawaha, FL, contact: Shannon Harmon, 407.540.2752

31-April 2 Spiritual Life Conference, Barclay College, Haviland, KS Contact: Dave Williams 620.862.5674

A Personal Note from Fil

The Knowledge of the Holy, first published in 1961, two years before the author's death, is in my opinion, one of the most compact and powerful visions of God penned in my lifetime. In the edition I own, Tozer explained in the foreword that he wrote the book on his knees in prayer – yet he didn't need to tell us this; the alert reader will sense the fact as soon as he or she reads the first four pages!

I hope the quotation on the enclosed bookmark taken from *The Knowledge of the Holy* provides you with a greater awareness of the width, length, height and depth of Jesus' love for you.

What Are You Here For Jesus? is from the book I'm currently completing. It will be published by InterVarsity Press. PLEASE hold me in your prayers as I attempt to emulate A.W. Tozer's example and write from my knees in prayer.