

Meeting Jesus in Scripture, Spirit, and Secret

Luke 20:41-47

Have you ever noticed how people craft their public image to influence how others view them? Scroll through social media, and you'll see curated posts of perfectly staged photos, clever captions, even AI-enhanced images that hide every flaw. Why? They're trying to project a life that looks successful, even spiritual. But so often, it's not who they really are. Maybe you've done it too. At work, when the boss is around, you choose your words to impress. As a parent, you share your kids' best moments to seem like you've got it together. Even here at church, you might project a polished faith, smiling through a worship song while your heart wrestles with doubt or sin. But then someone who knows you best—your spouse, a close friend, or the Holy Spirit Himself—asks a question that exposes your soul: Who are you when no one's watching? That question uncovers the hidden person of the heart, revealing what drives you when the curtain is down (1 Peter 3:3-4).

In Luke 20, Jesus confronts the scribes, religious leaders who had their image perfected. They wore flowing robes, relished respectful greetings, and sat in the best seats at feasts, projecting spiritual authority. They thought they knew the Messiah—a political king to restore Israel's earthly glory. But their lives told a different story, as they chased human praise while exploiting the vulnerable. Jesus asks a question that cuts through their facade, inviting them, and us, to know Him truly—not just in our heads, but in our hearts—so we live for His eyes alone and love others as He does.

Main Idea: To truly know Jesus, we must meet Him through Scripture, the searching of the Spirit, and sincere devotion in secret, letting His truth shape our hearts to serve others humbly.

Let's explore three keys to move from surface knowledge to a life transformed by Jesus, where we love others for His glory, not use them for our own.

1. Know Jesus Through the Study of Scripture

In verses 41 through 44, Jesus challenges the scribes: *“How can they say that the Christ is David’s son? For David himself says in the Book of Psalms, ‘The Lord said to my Lord, “Sit at my right hand, until I make your enemies your footstool.”’ David thus calls him Lord, so how is he his son?”* Jesus isn’t employing a trick to trap them, as they tried to do to Him earlier in Luke 20 with questions about taxes and resurrection. Jesus is inviting them to dig deeper into Scripture, namely Psalm 110, verse 1, to discover who the Messiah really is.

The scribes expected a human king, David’s son, to overthrow Rome and restore Israel’s power. They studied the Scriptures, but selectively, blinded by their own ideas of a political deliverer. But Jesus points to Psalm 110, where David, inspired by the Spirit, calls the Messiah *“my Lord,”* who is exalted at God’s right hand. This Messiah isn’t just David’s son; He’s God’s Son, divine, sovereign, and victorious over all enemies. But the scribes’ shallow knowledge missed this, like the Sadducees, whom Jesus rebuked in Mark 12:24 for knowing *“neither the Scriptures nor the power of God.”* Their preconceived notions kept them from seeing the Messiah standing before them.

Church, to know Jesus truly, we must study all of Scripture—not just the verses we like or the stories we know. We must not approach scripture like a buffet. We should come to it like a treasure map: you don’t skim it; you pore over every detail to find the prize—Jesus Himself.

Consider Luke 24:25-27, where Jesus meets two discouraged disciples on the road to Emmaus after His resurrection. *“And he said to them, ‘O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory?’ And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself.”*

It’s important to note that the hearts of the disciples burned within them—not when their eyes were opened to see Jesus’ physical presence, but when He revealed what the whole of Scripture said

about Him. This shows that the Scriptures are more than sufficient to know Jesus and encounter Him in a transforming way.

Charles Spurgeon, in his sermon *Folly of Unbelief*, says, “Why, if you will but look through the Word, you shall find passages so pertinent to your condition that, as a key fits a lock, they will seem made for you! Those two disciples did not, for a while, see how the prophets met the case of the crucified and risen Christ; but as they did see it, their hearts burned within them.” J.I. Packer, in *Knowing God*, adds, “What were we made for? To know God. What aim should we set ourselves in life? To know God. What is the eternal life that Jesus gives? Knowledge of God.” Knowing Jesus through Scripture changes us from the inside out.

But like the scribes, we can read the scriptures with biases shaped by cultural pressures or discomfort with truths like marriage as one man and one woman, eternal judgment, or Christ’s atonement. Brian McLaren, a progressive leader, illustrates this error in *A New Kind of Christianity* where he wrongly asserts: “What if the Bible is not a constitutional document full of divine fiats, but a community library full of human conversations about God, written in different styles and from different perspectives? ... It’s a record of the evolving conversation between God and humanity, and like any conversation, it develops over time.” This view reduces Scripture to human opinions and bends it to fit modern sensibilities.

Watch out for Bible teachers who, when asked what the Bible teaches on controversial cultural issues, respond with vague answers, mumble jumble, or suggest the Bible is about conversations, not direct answers. As Alisa Childers counters in her critique of progressive Christianity: “In Progressive churches, personal experiences, feelings, and opinions tend to be valued above objective truth. As the Bible ceases to be viewed as God’s definitive revelation, it becomes a source of God stories from which we can find helpful insights.” This low view of Scripture dims God’s character, which leads to dismissing biblical teachings on subjects like sexuality as outdated or Jesus’ substitutionary atonement as “cosmic child abuse” to suit modern tastes.

So how do we let Scripture shape us? Immerse yourself in the whole of scripture. To do so, let me suggest you follow a bible reading plan like Robert M'Cheyne's. It's a simple schedule: read four chapters daily—two from the Old Testament, one from the New Testament, and one from Psalms—to cover the whole Bible in a year, keeping you consistent and guarding against bias. Just as Jesus taught the Emmaus disciples from the entire Bible to reveal Himself, M'Cheyne's plan can help you see Jesus in every page—His suffering, His glory, His lordship and transform your heart as you encounter Him.

As I've said before, God blesses not just Bible readers, but Bible meditators, as Psalm 1 and Joshua 1:8 show. Like Jesus, ask good questions: What does the text say—who's speaking? What did it mean to the original audience—what does it show about God? How does it change me—what sin does it challenge, how does it point to Jesus? Don't ask, as many do, "What does this text mean to me?" That's the wrong starting point—it risks bending Scripture to fit our feelings, like the scribes or progressive views. Instead, let God's Word shape your heart as you truly encounter Jesus. Use a Bible study method like OIA: Observation, Interpretation, Application. This method guides you to see Jesus in every page, just as He revealed Himself to the Emmaus disciples. Journal what God reveals about Himself and His will, and pray it back to Him.

Don't just read the Bible to gain knowledge about the Word, but to get to know the God of the Word so that His glory shapes you. It's been said, if you don't plan to succeed, you're planning to fail. Get a reliable reading plan and stick to it so that it sticks to you. Read responsively and it will.

Now, let's move to our second key:

2. Know Jesus Through the Searching of the Spirit

Jesus' question in verse 41, *"How can they say that the Christ is David's son?"* is more than intellectual; it's a heart check. Hebrews 4:12 says, *"The word of God is living and active, sharper than any*

two-edged sword... discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart.” Jesus’ approach—asking probing questions—shows us how to engage Scripture: not just to know Him, but to know ourselves. How many of you know, a true encounter with Jesus won’t just encourage our hearts but expose it.

In verses 45 through 47, for example, Jesus exposes the hypocrisy of the religious leaders: *“Beware of the scribes, who like to walk around in long robes, and love greetings in the marketplaces and the best seats in the synagogues and the places of honor at feasts, who devour widows’ houses and for a pretense make long prayers.”* These scribes knew Scripture superficially, but their lives were a performance. They loved the spotlight—fancy titles, prime seats, praying to show off—all while exploiting the vulnerable, like widows, for personal gain. Because they didn’t truly know Jesus, they treated people transactionally, asking, “What can you do for me? How can you boost my status?”

Beloved, when we only know *about* Jesus, we risk the same trap. Maybe we don’t devour widow’s houses, but we might slander a person to get ahead, manipulate a coworker’s trust for our benefit, or ignore a neighbor’s need to protect our comfort. It’s subtle, but it’s the same heart: valuing people for what they can give us, not what we can give them. But when we let Scripture, through the searching of the Spirit, probe and purify our hearts, everything changes. It’s like an MRI scan revealing a hidden issue that needs healing. Jesus’ questions expose where we chase applause or exploit others.

Philippians 2:1-11 offers the antidote. Paul writes, *“...do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others.”* Paul is pointing to Jesus, who *“though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant... becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.”* Knowing the heart of Jesus searches our spirits, turning us from users to servers.

Remember Zacchaeus in Luke 19? He was a tax collector, who exploited people for wealth, much like the scribes. But when Jesus called him down from the sycamore tree and entered his home, Zacchaeus' heart was searched. He didn't just meet Jesus; he was transformed, vowing to give half his goods to the poor and repay fourfold those he'd cheated. That's what happens when the Spirit uses Scripture to probe us.

This week, as you read Scripture, ask Jesus' searching questions: Where am I seeking man's approval? Am I valuing people for what they can give me, or what I can give them? Again, journal your reflections, and pray like David in Psalm 139: "*Search me, O God, and know my heart!*" Don't just read the Bible, let the Bible through the Spirit read you. Maybe you're struggling with caring more about your outer appearance than the hidden person of the heart. Confess it to God, and ask a trusted friend to pray with you for accountability (James 5:16). Let the Spirit use His Word to reshape you into a servant like Jesus, loving others for His sake.

Finally, our third key:

3. Know Jesus in the Secret Spaces

In verse 47, Jesus not only calls out the scribes as those who devour widows' houses, but "*for a pretense make long prayers.*" In other words, their prayers were a performance to impress, not to meet God. Their hearts were far from Him, focused on what others saw, like flowing robes, prime seats, and public admiration. But Jesus offers a better way in Matthew 6:3, 6: "*When you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your giving may be in secret... When you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.*"

These secret spaces—private moments of prayer, of giving, of seeking God—are where we meet the real Jesus. Your Father is there, in the hidden place, waiting to meet you with His love. No audience, no stage, just you and Him. In that quiet place, your heart is laid bare. Let

me ask you, are your prayers heartfelt, or just words to sound spiritual? Is your giving selfless, or a show to gain praise?

Brothers and sisters, it's when no one's watching or when you're not focused on who's watching that you encounter Jesus, the humble servant who gave everything for you. Without this, we live like the scribes, using people for our gain—leveraging relationships for status, withholding kindness to guard our time, or praying publicly for show. We might gain the praise of man, but we forfeit the reward of God.

Consider the artist Michelangelo, who in 1508, at age 33, was commissioned to paint the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel. A sculptor by trade, he faced a daunting task: paint a 12,000-square-foot vaulted ceiling. But Michelangelo, driven by a divine sense of purpose, expanded it to over 400 figures and nine scenes from Genesis. For four grueling years, he toiled on a custom scaffold, his body aching, his skin irritated by plaster and paint, which friends said aged him beyond recognition. Yet he poured intricate detail into every inch, even the dark, obscure corners no one on the ground could see. When a friend asked, "Why work so hard on a spot no one will notice?" Michelangelo replied, "God will see." That's the heart of the secret spaces—giving your all for the One who sees, not for human praise, but for divine honor.

Think also of Joseph in Genesis 39? Betrayed by his brothers, far from home, rising in Potiphar's house—yet when Potiphar's wife tempted him to sin, he was alone, no one watching. But Joseph declared, *"How can I do this great wickedness and sin against God?"* (Genesis 39:9). His deep awareness of God's presence, forged in secret devotion, kept him faithful. Like Michelangelo, who poured intricate detail into the unseen corners of the Sistine Chapel for God's eyes alone, Joseph's private faithfulness shaped his character. God saw it and rewarded him, raising him up to save nations.

As Leonard Ravenhill said, "If we displease God, does it matter whom we please? If we please Him, does it matter whom we displease?" That's the freedom of secret devotion. You're free to lead with integrity, love your wife sacrificially, disciple your kids unapologetically, anchored in God's security, satisfaction, and strength.

As a pastor, I've seen this struggle to be seen firsthand. Christians from other churches, sometimes serving in leadership roles, have come to me for counseling because of serious sin struggles in their lives. When I ask if they've sought help from their own pastor or someone in their church, they say no. Why? Because they're more concerned with projecting a perfect image before others than being real before God. What's more, when some Christians are confronted in love about sin, as scripture teaches in Galatians 6:1, they don't stay and seek accountability. Instead, they leave for another church, hiding behind a new facade. Why? Because they care more about what people think than being authentic with God and His people.

Church, that's the danger of secret spaces when our hearts are far from God. This is why Jesus warns us in Luke 20:47, by exposing the scribes' hypocrisy saying: *"who devour widows' houses and for a pretense make long prayers. They will receive the greater condemnation."* In other words: Faking devotion to exploit others brings God's severe judgment, but being real with Him in secret or about your secrets leads to His reward.

But God offers a better way. A.W. Tozer, in *The Pursuit of God*, writes, "We need never shout across the spaces to an absent God. He is nearer than our own soul, closer than our most secret thoughts." Again, your private prayers—a midnight cry for a struggling child, a quiet plea for strength—shape a character like His. Your unseen acts—giving anonymously, serving without fanfare—reflect His servant heart. Trust that God sees these moments and rewards with His manifest power and presence for eternal impact, filling you with His Spirit to live and love for His glory.

Conclusion

As we close, let's hold these keys close: Meet Jesus in Scripture to discover His true identity, unfiltered by our biases. Meet Him in the Spirit's searching to become a servant like Him. And meet Him in the secret spaces, where private devotion, for God's eyes alone, fuels a life of humble service. The scribes missed Jesus because they only knew about Him. Don't miss Him—He's here, inviting you to know Him deeply.

Beloved, commit to action: Join a Next Level group, register for SCTS, follow a Bible reading plan like M'Cheyne's, journal how the Spirit searches you, and spend some time each morning in responsive secret prayer, asking God to make you a servant like Jesus. Find where God wants you to serve quietly—a ministry, a coworker, a family member, a stranger—and do it for His eyes alone. Let's live for His glory, loving others as He loves us.