

Encounters With Jesus
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Many Christians, including many of us in this room, described the heart of our faith as having a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. Well, for the price of \$1.99 per minute, the technology company “Just Like Me” is taking that concept to a new level. Users of the platform can join video call with an avatar of Jesus. This is a digital, maybe cartoon like figure, which is generated by available AI tools. This “Jesus” can offer words of encouragement and prayer in various languages. The avatar “remembers” previous conversations it has had with you. However, it does have a few glitches, like speaking though lips not quite synced to the words you hear.

Or one could travel to Switzerland, where you can go into a confessional to confess your sine, not to a human priest, but to an avatar of the great high priest Himself, Jesus. I suspect one receives only mild rebukes and minimal penance from this Jesus avatar.

Well, I don’t think I am interested in developing a relationship with a Jesus avatar, and frankly, I don’t think you should be either. There is not actually any connection between a Jesus avatar and the real Jesus.

All of us do, however, have opportunities to encounter Jesus. To truly encounter the real Jesus. God provides these opportunities through the Bible, the New Testament, especially through what we call the four gospels. These tell us about encounters real people had with Jesus. On Sunday mornings this summer we will be exploring about a dozen of these encounters that Jesus had with different individuals in the gospel of John. Our desire is, through God’s Word and God’s Spirit, we will encounter Jesus, the real Jesus. As we do that, I believe our faith in and love for the Lord will grow. Let’s pause and pray that will indeed become reality.

As an introduction to these sermons, I wanted to talk about four important things to keep in mind throughout the summer, and really every day of our lives.

#1 Exploring what the Bible records about Jesus, in John’s gospel and other parts of scripture, enables us to know Jesus better. The best way to

get to know someone is to spend time with them, listen to what they say, watch what they do, and interact with them. Most of you have at least one from whom you know really well because you have been able to spend a lot of time with that person. This is what the 12 disciples were able to do when they spent three years with Jesus as He conducted His public ministry. They also witnessed Him being arrested, tried, and then executed on a Roman cross. And then they saw that His tomb was empty within three days of His crucifixion and they then encountered the risen Christ, Jesus very much alive, that occurred a number of times over the next 40 days. And then they were there when He ascended into heaven.

When Jesus chose His apostles, the ones who would be His representatives and carry on His work when He was no longer on earth, He chose these 12 men, minus Judas Iscariot. They were not the most intelligent or most educated individuals. They were not the people with the most charismatic personalities or dynamic leadership skills. They were not even necessarily very religious or devout. But these were the men who knew Jesus. They knew Him because they had been with Him, day after day. I suspect the daily interactions the apostles had with Jesus made them better educated than the top scholars and Rabbis of that time.

Their accounts of Jesus’ life and ministry have great credibility because they were eyewitnesses. The apostle John begins a letter like this **1 John 1:1 We proclaim to you the one who existed from the beginning, whom we have heard and seen. We saw him with our own eyes and touched him with our own hands. He is the Word of life.** *John really knew Jesus.*

“But, Pastor Dan, what good does this do us? We cannot do time travel and spend time with the real Jesus.” No, but we can encounter Jesus as we read and study the accounts written by John and the other gospel writers. One of the best books I have read in the past 20 years is David McCullough’s biography of John Adams. It is an engaging read. And after I finished the book, I really felt like I knew John Adams, a prominent signer of the Declaration of Independence and the second president of the United States. Incidentally, I

think reading or listening to “John Adams” would be a great way for anyone to celebrate the 250th anniversary of the Declaration this year.

But my point is this: a good biography can cause us to feel we know the subject of the book, but reading John’s gospel is much more powerful. David McCullough never met John Adams, but the apostle John was a very close friend of Jesus. McCullough’s expertise and hard work give us considerable confidence he is telling us the truth about John Adams. The fact the apostle John is inspired and guided by the Holy Spirit as he writes his gospel guarantees the total accuracy of what he says. And while John Adams has been dead for 200 years, meaning we can never personally encounter him, Jesus is very much *alive*. He desires a relationship with us. We have an opportunity to know Jesus far better than we could ever know John Adams.

#2 We should let the Bible be our guide as we seek to get to know Jesus. I just noted that unlike John Adams, Jesus is very much alive. The Bible says, Revelation 1:18, Jesus is risen from the dead and He is alive forevermore. He currently, is our great high priest, interceding for us in heaven.

And since Jesus is very much alive, it is no surprise that numerous Christians insist they are frequently interacting with Him. They may say, I communicate with Jesus in prayer, and He speaks to me as well. These folks seldom mean they hear an audible voice. Rather, they say that through the Holy Spirit, the Lord speaks with a “still, small voice” to their soul. These can even be daily conversations and encounters with Jesus.

Now, folks, the Lord is free to do whatever He pleases. If Jesus wants to speak to me or to you in an audible voice, He can certainly do that. If He wants to speak to me or to you in a still small voice, He can do that. However, I would suggest that this is not the way the Lord usually speaks to us.

We hear God’s voice most often through His Word, the Bible. The primary way Jesus communicates with us when the Holy Spirit takes the words of scripture that we read or hear and helps us understand what they mean and what they mean for our lives. And the Holy Spirit usually uses our study, our pondering, our discussions with other Christian believers to

enable us to know what these words mean for us. When that happens, we have heard the Lord speak.

Friends, it might seem preferable that you would have direct encounters with Jesus and that He would speak words intended only for you. But I don’t think that would be best. Without the Bible, without God’s words written for all of His people, at all times and all places, it is very difficult to discern whether that voice you hear is really the Lord. It may be the voice of your own heart, your own thoughts and desires, which can easily lead you astray. All this is to simply say, if we want to encounter Jesus, let’s open the Bible. It is here that we can be confident we will truly meet Him, and not a Jesus created by AI or in our own mind. That is how we can ensure that we will get to know Jesus better. And that is what we will seek to do each Sunday this summer as we encounter Jesus through various passages in John’s gospel.

#3 Even as we are guided by the Bible, we can use our imagination to help us see Jesus more clearly. Over 300 million people have watched at least one episode of “The Chosen,” the five season dramatic series about the life of Jesus, produced by Dall Jenkins. Many of you have watched some or all of the episodes. And I suspect you found them interesting and inspirational. I know I have.

Some pastors and others are a bit critical of “The Chosen,” saying it sometimes adds to scripture, distorts scripture, and omits important parts of scripture. That is true. And it is also true of almost every dramatic presentation of biblical stories ever produced. And it is also true that many sermons, Sunday School lessons, and Bible study discussions do the same thing.

Whenever someone retells, summarizes, or expounds on a portion of the Bible, it is always a good idea to compare that to what the Bible actually says. And then you can determine which parts may contradict the Bible, and which parts are speculation. Yes, some speculations are much more plausible than others. And some speculation actually helps us more clearly understand what the Bible teaches.

That happened for me with one episode of “The Chosen.” **Matthew 9:20-22 Just then a woman who had been subject to bleeding for twelve years came up behind him and touched the**

edge of his cloak. She said to herself, “If I only touch his cloak, I will be healed.” Jesus turned and saw her. “Take heart, daughter,” he said, “your faith has healed you.” And the woman was healed at that moment.

Now, I had read those three verses and the parallel accounts in Mark and Luke at least 100 times over the years. I understood the woman had some type of gynecological problem, and according to Mark’s gospel was healed as soon as she touched Jesus’ cloak. Yes, amazing. But I missed a big part of what this story is about, until I watched season 3, episode 5 of “The Chosen.”

It vividly portrays how this woman’s life was horribly difficult because of her condition. She endured great social embarrassment, because in the first century there was no way to hide her frequent bleeding. Even worse was the fact she was excluded from religious life in Israel, because her bleeding made her “ceremonial unclean.” In a sense, she was not even allowed to go to church. And, as Mark’s gospel tells us, she was taken advantage of by physicians who loved to take her money, but never did anything to stop the bleeding.

But then she touched the hem of Jesus’ garment. The bleeding stopped. The woman is very happy and grateful. But I never realized how happy and grateful she must have been, until I watched season 3, episode 5 of “The Chosen.”

Folks, as you read the Bible, especially the gospels, as you listen to the sermons on encounters with Jesus this summer, ask the Lord to guide your imagination, so that you might see Jesus more clearly. A Holy Spirit led imagination is no substitute for Holy Spirit led logical analysis of the Bible text, but a Holy Spirit led imagination can help us realize the great impact Jesus words and deeds had on the people around Him, and it can help you see His glory and grace, His greatness and goodness in a way that you never have before.

For example, next Sunday, we will, Lord willing, be exploring the encounter a man name Nathaniel has with Jesus, recorded in John 1. My prayer will be that the Lord would guide our imagination, our minds, and our hearts, so that we can understand better what it was like for Nathaniel to meet and speak with Jesus. And through that we will get to know Jesus better.

#4 To get to know Jesus, is to get to know God. Now, to some of you this is obvious. You understand that Jesus is the eternal Son of God, second person of the divine trinity. I find that many children at Chisholm Baptist Church use the terms “Jesus” and “God” interchangeably.

But there are many people who don’t equate Jesus with God. They see Him as a teacher, religious leader, or maybe even a prophet, but certainly not as the creator and sovereign of the universe. But. The gospel of John tells us that is exactly who He is. **John 1:1-3 in the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made what was made.**

“The Word,” is clearly a person, and that person is Jesus, **John 1:14 and the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth. John 1:18 No one has ever seen God; God the only Son, who is at the Father’s side, he has made him known.**

Folks, those verses are full of theological implications and would be worthy of a whole sermon, or maybe even a series of sermons. But the point we need to see is this: if you want to know God, get to know Jesus. To know Jesus is to know God. I don’t believe it is possible for us as human beings to ever know God totally or exhaustively. He is the infinite creator; we are finite creatures. But what Jesus, the Word becoming flesh, enables us to do is see God more clearly than ever before. As Jesus says in **John 14:9 Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, ‘Show us the Father’?**

And friends, this means these encounters with Jesus that we explore, seeing what He did, hearing what He said, and learning more of who He was/is, has to be just about the most important thing any of us could ever do. To get to know Jesus is to get to know God.

And there is really nothing more important than that. Education, career, hobbies, recreation, family, friends, are all important. But nothing matters as much as getting to know God. And that is why I think this series on encounters with Jesus can be so beneficial. No matter who you are, no

matter what circumstances you are in, no matter what challenges you are facing right now, getting to know Jesus better, getting to know God better, would be good for your soul and truly good for you.

#5 Our goal should be to get to know Jesus better, because the better we know Him, the more we will love Him. "To Know Him Is to Love Him," was a 1959 hit song by the Teddy Bears. It was revived in 1987 in a trio recording by Dolly Parton, Linda Ronstad, and Emmy Lou Harris. Many of you have heard it. ("To know, know, know him, is to love, love, love him.) Yes, it is about a romantic relationship, but it parallels an important teaching of the Bible.

To know God is to love Him. And the more we get to know God, the more we love Him. That truth is reflected in **1 John 4:7,8 Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God. Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love.**

And to love God is to love Jesus, and to love Jesus if to love God. Friends, this is really at the heart of Christianity, at the aet of your Christian life. Why do I say that? Because it is love for the Lord that propels our trust, our worship, and our obedience. When you love Jesus, you will trust Him. Even when you face difficult situations involving health, finances, or relationships, those who love Jesus are willing to trust Him. And the more you love Him, the more you will trust Him.

Those who love Jesus naturally want to express that love through worship. When we love Jesus, we worship in spirit and in the truth. And those who love Jesus seek to obey the commands He gives us, even the ones they find difficult to obey. In **John 14:15 If you love me, you will keep my commandments.**

The is the ESV. Some versions say, "If you love me, keep my commandments," what imperative command. But most versions read, "You will keep my commandments," meaning an indicative promise. Love for Jesus naturally leads to obedience. That seems to fit with what Jesus says a few verses later: **John 14:21a Whoever, has my commandments and keeps the, he it is who loves me.** And **John 14:23a If anyone loves me keep my word.**

Folks, for years, I thought the keys to the Christian life were duty and discipline. Following Jesus, living as He desires, obeying His commands, was my duty as a Christian. And I needed to be disciplined; I needed to work hard to make sure I was doing the right things.

But then I led a study on the book of 1 John. It was the summer of 1983. Nancy and I were not dating yet, but the Bible study was held at her house. As I studied 1 John and realized that while duty and discipline have their place, they are not bad things, the key to the Christian life are to know the Lord and love the Lord. When you know and love the Lord, the other parts of the Christian life start to fall into place. For example, **1 John 2:3 And by this we know that we have come to know him, if we keep his commandments.** And **1 John 5:3 For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments. And his commandments are not burdensome.**

To obey Jesus is not burdensome. To trust, follow, worship and serve Jesus is not burdensome, if you know and love Him. And the better you know the Lord, the more you will love Him, and His commandments will become even less burdensome.

Over the past 40+ years as a pastor, almost 33 of them here at Chisholm Baptist, my number 1 goal in ministry has been pretty simple: Help people to know God better. Help you to know God better. Because when you know Him, when you understand and experience His greatness and goodness, His glory and His grace, it fills you with gratitude and love.

When you love the Lord, you keep His commandments, you seek to live in a way that pleases Him. And the better you know God, the more you love Him, the more pleasing to Him your life will be. My desire, my delight is to be the pastor of a church where people are growing in their knowledge of and love for God.

And that is why I am excited about these "Encounters with Jesus" sermon this summer. I believe they will help you get to know Jesus better. And knowing Jesus better means you know God better. And that means you will love God more. And that will mean you will grow to trust, follow, worship, and obey Him in new and better ways. And that will be good for you. It will deepen your

joy. It will be good for this church. And most importantly, it will bring glory to God.

So, your assignment is: 1)when possible, be here on Sunday mornings to hear these sermons. 2) when you cannot be here, make sure you listen online. 3) Be praying the lord will use these encounters with Jesus to help you know Him better and love Him more.