

This Week's Theme: Jesus Wants Me

This Week's Memory Verse: *This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. 1 John 4:10*

Monday, May 5

Scripture Reading: Luke 5:27-32

Yesterday's sermon looked at the life of one tax collector: Zacchaeus. Today we will look at the life of another: Levi (aka, Matthew). There are several similarities in both stories: both involve tax collectors, both have Jesus to their home, and in both accounts religious leaders are critical of Jesus for his association with such "sinners." But the one similarity that will set the tone for this week is the fact that Jesus is the one who takes the initiative. If Jesus doesn't take the first step, we don't have these stories.

On the one hand, Jesus took the initiative because He had to. Let's face it: most people only approached tax collectors in those days to spit on them. And certainly Zacchaeus and Matthew wouldn't have approached anyone for friendship for fear of what might happen to them. Especially in this story where Matthew is sitting in his tax booth – do you really think he expected someone would approach him with warmth and affection and offer him a life-changing opportunity?

On the other hand, I think Jesus also took the initiative because He wanted to. He wanted Matthew to join him. He wanted to see Matthew use his gifts and keen mind for the Kingdom. He wanted Matthew as a friend. So Jesus took the initiative: He called first, He made the invitation.

And He does the same for us. He still takes the initiative. He does so because He has to – we are typically so filled with intimidation or disbelief we would never think of approaching Him. And He does so because He wants to: because He wants us to join Him, to use our gifts for the Kingdom, to be our friend. The question is not does Jesus want me: the question is how will I respond when He extends His invitation to me?

This week we will look at different times Jesus made the first move and took the initiative with someone. Each lesson will have its own particular word for us, but the over-arching message is the same in each occasion: Jesus wants me!

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Tuesday, May 6

Scripture Reading: Luke 10:30-37

Today's passage is one of the most familiar passages in all of Scripture: the parable of the Good Samaritan. Jesus told this story to illustrate who is a true neighbor (friend). It's a great story anyway you look at it, but I think it especially comes to life when you think of Jesus in the role of the Samaritan, and us left for dead – the one in desperate need of a friend.

The first thing I notice is how unlikely it was for the Samaritan, the hated half-breeds of the ancient Middle East, to be the one to stop and help, especially considering the others who passed by were clergy. This would have been an astonishing turn of events for Jesus' audience. What is equally astonishing for many of us is the fact that the God of this universe would do the same for us. I have no trouble believing I am the one in need; it's just hard to imagine that the almighty (and very busy) God of this universe would take the time for me.

A second item that stands out is that the man in need never cried out. The Samaritan saw him, took pity on him, and took care of him. Jesus did and does the same for us, and He proved it on the cross. There Jesus took pity on each of us and took care of our greatest need – our sin; and He did so before we were even born (before we ever cried, much less cried out!). Such is the amazing love of Jesus. He takes the initiative; He wants me!

Finally, Jesus tells us he wants us to take that same initiative with others. He wants us to stop, to take pity, to help, to respond to needs both spoken and unspoken. "Go and do likewise," He said. So, how are you doing obeying that command? Do you see needs in your home, your community, your world, and walk by on the other side? Or do you stop and render what aid and care you can? The Samaritan didn't wait to be asked to help. Jesus didn't wait to be asked to save us. Do you?

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Wednesday, May 7

Scripture Reading: John 4:1-30

Another great story of Jesus' friendship and love is found in John 4 and the story of the woman at the well. I think it is a great passage that reveals what can happen when we say, "Yes," to Jesus' initiative in our life and open ourselves up to Him. This brief yet powerful encounter shows us several things Jesus will do when we simply give Him the chance to spend some time with us.

- Jesus will ask us to do something (v.7). There is much to do in the Kingdom of God and many to serve. Who will Jesus ask to be a part of His work? Those who are near him and listening, of course.
- Jesus will teach us. In this short encounter Jesus teaches this woman about Himself and the living water He came to bring all who would receive Him (vs.10-14), as well as revealing Himself as Messiah (vs.25-26). He also gave her instruction on true worship, addressing a question she asked him (vs.19-24). When we spend time with Jesus, we will learn much about Him, as well as get some of our own questions answered. Sitting down with Jesus is the best way to fill your need for spiritual growth.
- Jesus will give us insight into our own life. Here He told the woman many things about her life in order to bring conviction, belief, and salvation to her (vs.16-17). He'll do the same for us. The more you know Jesus, the more you will want to be like Him. And if you want to be like Him, you'll have to spend some time holding your life up next to His and doing some comparing and contrasting. It's not an easy thing to do, but it is necessary in our goal to be like Christ. He'll give us insight into what is holy and what is not; what we need to hang on to, and what we need to get rid of. This can be a difficult and even painful process, but it is also so rewarding.

Look at the woman's response as Jesus lays her life out before her. Maybe she is a little hurt and certainly a bit stunned, but she doesn't run and hide. She wants more of Jesus. And then she wants others to know Him, too. In other words, she has become a growing, multiplying follower of Jesus. Isn't that what God wants for all of us? And it didn't come about from taking a class or reading a book; it happened because she gave Jesus her undivided attention. And it all got started because Jesus took the initiative to get the relationship started.

Jesus takes the initiative because Jesus wants me!

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Thursday, May 8

Scripture Reading: John 5:1-15

Thirty eight years is a long time. Think about it: 38 years ago:

- Richard Nixon was president of the United States
- Four students at Kent State were killed by National Guardsmen during a anti-war demonstration
- The median household income was \$8,734
- Kansas City beat Minnesota in Super Bowl IV
- IBM introduced the floppy disk

For 38 years the man in our text was an invalid. And for 38 years he had come to this pool in Jerusalem with the hopes of being healed. It seems that if you were the first one into the pool when the waters stirred, you could be healed. But being an invalid with no one to help, he continued in his life of frustration . . . for 38 years.

What he discovered was he didn't need the chance of this pool; he needed something more certain. What he needed was Jesus, and lucky for him Jesus came his way. But Jesus did more than show up: He took the initiative. He made it all happen when He said to this man, "Do you want to be healed?"

"Do you want to be healed?" It seems like an easy enough question to answer – of course I want to be healed! Do you? Sure you want to be healed from any physical ailments you might have, but that is not what Jesus is most interested in. Jesus wants to know if you want to be healed spiritually. Verse 14 makes it clear: Jesus was much more concerned about this man's spiritual condition than He was his physical health.

So, do you want to be spiritually healed? Jesus is asking: Do you want to confess and repent of your sin? Do you want to reorient your life around the things of God? Do you want to follow Jesus or just call on Him from time to time? Do you want to be obedient to God's word? Do you want to get to know Jesus better than you get to know anyone else?

The healing is there for the taking. Jesus is making the offer to you. He is taking the first step. What will your answer be?

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Friday, May 9

Scripture Reading: John 11

According to Hebrews 4:15, Jesus was just like we are except without sin. We usually focus on the “without sin” part, but don't lose sight of the fact that He was just like us. Jesus got hungry. He had aches and pains. He laughed when something was funny. And when someone He loved died, He grieved. Jesus wasn't some emotionless robot who spoke in a monotone voice while He lived so perfectly. Jesus wept openly when He received news of Lazarus' death (how else would we know He wept?).

What we see in this story is what we have seen all week: Jesus wanted more. He knew He could do more. He knew there was yet more glory for God to receive and reveal in this circumstance. So (you guessed it!), He took the initiative:

- “Your brother will rise again>”
- “I am the resurrection and the life. Do you believe this?”
- “Where have you laid him?”
- Take away the stone.”

In spite of resistance at His every request, Jesus didn't give up until He finally got His chance – and then things got really good! Lazarus came forth, and they loosed him and let him go.

Isn't it great we have the same Jesus in our lives? We have a Savior who takes the initiative; a Savior who is persistent despite our resistance; a Savior who keeps pushing and challenging; a Savior who never gives up on helping us experience the so much more he has for us. He wants to loose us and let us go into the new life He made us to experience. He makes it happen. He takes the initiative.

So when do we experience it? When we quit being Mary and Martha to all his requests, when we are quiet, listen, obey, and let Him do what He wants – even if it seems a little unorthodox. The text teaches us well: if my life lacks the resurrection power of Jesus and reflects a more bored, routine kind of life, it's not Jesus' fault. Jesus wants me! It's time to take away some of the stones keeping Him at bay so He can loose me and let me go.

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Saturday, May 10

Scripture Reading: Colossians 2:6-15

Have you learned this week's memory verse yet? I'm sure you have if you have given it any effort at all. Now, let me ask you something else: have you thought about what it says?

The bottom line is that God took the initiative with His love. True love doesn't start with us; it starts with God. And the ultimate demonstration of that love is not just that God took the initiative by sending Jesus, but by sending Jesus to be the atoning sacrifice for our sin. Our text today reminds us of just how much God does when it comes to our salvation: He does it all!

- He made us alive in Christ (v.13)
- He forgave our sin (v.13)
- He canceled the punishment against us (v.14)
- He took away our sin (v.14)
- He disarmed the powers and authorities that war against us (v.15)

It was at the cross Jesus took His greatest initiative. It was at the cross He proved the depth of His love. It was at the cross He did everything for my salvation. It was at the cross Jesus made it clear: He wants me!

And what are we called to do in return? Paul actually tells us at the beginning of the passage:

- Continue to live in Him (v.6)
- Put down roots and be built up in Christ (v.7)
- Be strengthened in faith (v.7)
- Overflow with thankfulness (v.7)

I believe we are given a checklist of sorts here. If the items in verses 6-7 are an evident part of my life, then my salvation is about God; and if they are not, my salvation is about me.

*Amazing love, how can it be That you my King would die for me?
Amazing love, I know it's true Now it's my joy to honor you
In all I do, I honor you*

By Billy Foote, c.1999 by worshiptogether.com songs

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Sunday, May 11

Pick out a favorite Jesus passage. Read it once for your enjoyment. Then read it again. What initiative is Jesus taking in your life through this passage? What is He revealing about Himself? What does He want you to do? Who does He want you to be? Read it again aloud. Does anything else stand out to you? Read it one more time. See where the Lord takes you in prayer and spend some time in communion with Him.