

Title: “With Jesus in the Community”

Series: Living Like Jesus

Introduction:

What happens when Christ visits a community? In Luke 19 we have the story of Christ entering the city of Jericho. His entrance created a stir; people crowded around Him, trying to touch Him and hear His words. As we consider this passage today, we will be encouraged to remember that Christ visits us today, too; not in bodily form, but by His Holy Spirit. At least some of the same phenomena that happened back then, can happen today.

On at least three occasions, the United States has had a special visit from Christ, if I might be permitted to use such terminology. I'm thinking of the three great revivals – we call them the Great Awakenings. Usually, God waters the earth with a gentle rain, but sometimes He sends a cloudburst. That's what a revival is — the revitalization of the spiritual life of thousands of Christians simultaneously.

Remember that we have had such a special visit even in the twentieth century. In 1904 the news of the revival in Wales spilled over to the United States, generating much religious interest. For example, in Atlantic City, New Jersey one observer thought that nearly sixty thousand people had professed faith in Christ. In Newark, the secular press dedicated an entire column each day to what was happening in the churches. In Atlanta, one thousand businessmen united for intercession and, on November 2nd, stores and offices were closed at midday for prayer. In Louisville, Kentucky one man wrote, "The whole city is breathing a spiritual atmosphere – everywhere in shops and stores, in the mill and on the street, salvation is the sole topic of conversation."

But, perhaps the most striking example of revival occurred in Denver in 1905. On January 20th there was a day of prayer in the city, and by 10:00 in the morning churches were filled; by 11:30 almost all the stores were closed so people could pray; and at 12:00 noon four theaters had been designated by the mayor, and were filled for prayer.

In Portland, one writer says, "For three hours a day business was practically suspended; and from the crowds in the great department stores to the humblest clerk, from bank Presidents to boot blacks, all abandoned money-making for soul-saving."

That's what happens when Christ comes to town! And that's what happens when we come to town, following the example that Jesus has set for us. When God works mightily, people will know about it. Christ's visit to Jericho will serve as a backdrop to revival for us today. To remind us of what happens when Christ visits a community.

*He entered Jericho and was passing through. And behold, there was a man named Zacchaeus. He was a chief tax collector and was rich. And he was seeking to see who Jesus was, but on account of the crowd he could not, because he was small in stature. So he ran on ahead and climbed up into a sycamore tree to see him, for he was about to pass that way. And when Jesus came to the place, he looked up and said to him, "Zacchaeus, hurry and come down, for I must stay at your house today." So he hurried and came down and received him joyfully. And when they saw it, they all grumbled, "He has gone in to be the guest of a man who is a sinner." And Zacchaeus stood and said to the Lord, "Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor. And if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I restore it fourfold." And Jesus said to him, "Today salvation has come to this house, since he also is a son of Abraham. For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost." – **Luke 19:1-10 (ESV)***

When Christ visits a community:

1. THERE IS CURIOSITY

When Christ entered Jericho, people lined the streets to see the parade. The crowd was so great that Zaccheus (a man of small stature) couldn't even see Jesus. But among the crowds, there are always those individuals who sincerely desire to meet the Living God. Zaccheus was such a person.

Verse 2 tells us he was "a chief tax-collector" and was rich. That means he promised Rome a certain amount of money for the privilege of collecting taxes. But tax-collectors were notoriously evil — they were extortionists who levied as much tax as the traffic would bear. The country was divided into three districts; Jericho was one of them. As trade moved through the city, Zaccheus determined the amount of tax to be levied. Be assured, he was hated.

But when Christ came to town we read of him:

So he ran on ahead and climbed up into a sycamore tree to see him, for he was about to pass that way. – Luke 19:4 (ESV)

It is safe to say that Christ generated excitement. When God visits a nation with special blessing, when people become aware that God is working in their communities, the curiosity of the multitudes is aroused. Even notorious sinners want to see what God is doing. They are skeptical, but just possibly God might be at work! Keep in mind that many people no longer believe that God is doing anything in this world. They find it difficult to trust in God.

Just a few years ago a man walked into a church where testimonies were being given – reports of answers to prayer and changed lives. This insurance executive was astounded and said, "I don't know what you folks have, but I want it..." He went on to say that he was shocked to hear people talking about what Christ had done because, in his words, "I didn't know that Christ had done anything in the last one hundred years." **[end of illustration.]**

And that is the attitude of our world, and sadly, the attitude of many Christians. But when Christ comes to town, faith is revived, and the curious begin to investigate His power. Even hardened tax collectors wonder what all the fuss is about.

2. THERE IS CONFRONTATION

Zaccheus, sitting up in the tree, hoped that Christ's eyes and his would meet as Jesus walked through the crowd. He could not have expected much more. But to his surprise, Christ initiated direct contact and said:

"Zacchaeus, hurry and come down, for I must stay at your house today." – Luke 19:5 (ESV)

Christ always takes the initiative as we come to Him. Interestingly, among the hundreds of people, Zacchaeus is the one who was chosen. Perhaps he had, as the ancients used to say, an "awakened conscience." That is, Zacchaeus had a hunger for Christ and the Truth.

Zacchaeus had not planned this special meeting. But now, with Christ in his home, he freely shared with Him. Yes, there are crowds, but there are still individuals. A question for us is: do we want to meet God personally? The obvious answer is "yes," but keep in mind that such a confrontation can often be painful. We can't see God without seeing our sin.

3. **THERE IS CONFESSION**

We wish we could be privy to the conversation that took place in Zacchaeus' house that day. I suspect that Christ talked to this tax-collector about his lostness and his need for confession of his sinfulness before God so that he could receive a transformation of character; Zacchaeus needed to be saved. We know Christ spoke this way because in verse 10 it informs us of Jesus gave His purpose:

“For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost.” – **Luke 19:10 (ESV)**

When Christ comes to a community, everyone is affected. Believers are restored to their first love, and sinners are converted. Every city has those in whose hearts God is working. They might not be looking for God, but God seeks them out. Zacchaeus was looking for Christ only because God had already awakened his heart. When Christ comes we always hear the cry of new born babies, spiritually speaking, in the churches of the land.

This transformation immediately affected Zacchaeus' relationships with others.

And Zacchaeus stood and said to the Lord, “Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor. And if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I restore it fourfold.” – **Luke 19:8 (ESV)**

One of the sure signs of revival is restoration. Zacchaeus was required by law to return what he had stolen plus one-fifth of the amount (Lev. 6:1-5). But he goes beyond that and is willing to make restitution at great sacrifice.

When God sends a revival, it usually is reported in the secular press because of the number of people who are trying to make restoration for previous wrongs. Stores report individuals returning goods that were stolen years ago; grocery stores are besieged with money because of items that have been taken.

In Canada, a woman who had not paid for a ninety-eight cent bag of potatoes (it was left on the bottom of the shopping cart and not seen by the cashier) went to the manager of the store several weeks later to make things right. He responded, "Either it is my lucky day, or something is happening in this town, because you are the second person that has come to me today." She assured him that something was, indeed, happening in that town.

Customs agents reported people coming to confess that they had lied about goods that had been taken between Canada and the United States.

Many years ago, a woman had won money in an essay contest, however, someone other than she, had written her winning entry. Now, the organization that had sponsored the contest was no longer in existence, so she paid the money back to the church. **[end of illustration.]**

This phenomena is referred to as "conscience money." Yes, when Christ comes to town, people know about it. Children are reconciled to their parents; long-standing feuds are ended, thieves restore what they have stolen, and the Word of God brings much joy. Just ask Zacchaeus.

4. THERE IS CONVERSION

Christ said to Zaccheus, "Today salvation has come to this house." Yes, when God comes to town, people are converted. We've already quoted Christ's words, "For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost" (v. 10). One of the indisputable marks of a spiritual awakening is the desire of people to share the good news of the Gospel. Tongues that have been silent about Christ are made alive to His grace and power; people who, previously, would not have shared the Gospel, now feel free to tell others about Christ.

Think of the story Zacchaeus had to tell. I like to think that he became an evangelist, sharing with everyone the forgiveness that he, himself, had experienced! Think of the witness he could have been to all those who paid taxes! Only in heaven we will discover the works that God did through him.

Now, what do you think would happen if we were serious about following Christ? First, we would be anxious to be completely right before God and man. Second, we would stand up for Christ in our schools, court houses, businesses and homes. Like Zacchaeus, we would let the word get out that we had met a Redeemer who had changed our hearts.

Billy Sunday wrote, "One spark of fire can do more to prove the power of gunpowder than a whole library written on the subject." And so it is.

Conclusion:

If we wish to see a spiritual awakening in our community, we must begin where we are. Make sure that we are fully right with those around us; and then begin to pray that the blessed Holy Spirit would revive our heart and the hearts of those whom we know.

Ask yourself often "What would Jesus do?" It is true that we cannot force God's hand to bring us revival. But it is also true that we can set the sails of the ship in the direction that the wind is blowing.

There is a new wind blowing, but it's up to us to set the sail. God may come to our town, and want to use us. He begins with the best Christians he has, revives them and sets them on fire so that they can begin fires elsewhere. When Christ came to Jericho, the town was never the same again. And now, God's finger is pointed at us.