

Why Share Faith?...

Because it changes people

Luke 19:1-10

Gordon Randall – Sunday, 15th January 2012

INTRODUCTION

Does sharing come naturally to you? Observing my children growing up suggests sharing doesn't exactly come easily. Why? Because when you share you have to give something up. A follower of Jesus the one thing we're to share more than anything else is our faith in Christ. And that presents some big challenges. In our liberal and politically correct society it's okay for people to have a faith but only if it remains private. In other words "keep it to yourself". But how can we keep the message of Jesus and the hope He offers to ourselves and at the same time consider ourselves to be a biblical community? Basically we can't! But in reality - for a variety of reasons – most of us avoid sharing our faith. We don't want to offend anyone. We don't feel like it's our responsibility or we don't want to be labelled the weirdo Christian person. But in Rom. 10: 14-15 it says: How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? And how can they preach unless they are sent? As it is written, How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!

Today in our reading Jesus demonstrates the perfect example of sharing his message of love and hope with others. We don't need a degree to tell other people about Jesus. It's not as complicated as we think. Our reading describes an encounter which took place about 15 miles northeast of Jerusalem in Jericho. It's a scene loaded with travellers – of people going to Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover. Jesus Himself was heading to Jerusalem where He would face the cross. But before then He found it important to share. The man He shared with was named Zacchaeus. This encounter with Zacchaeus helps us understand the importance of sharing our faith beginning with this important point.

1: PEOPLE WANT TO KNOW JESUS (vv. 1-3)

Zacchaeus was a tax collector and the people couldn't stand tax collectors mainly because they were typically corrupt. They collected taxes for the Roman Empire, but often charged more than the tax to make extra cash for themselves. So Zacchaeus was basically a thief and wouldn't have been high on anyone's priority list to get to know! But depraved as this guy was, he still had a desire to see Jesus and get to know him. Why? My guess would be even though he'd made a load of money, even though he was had a higher standard of living than many others, he still wasn't satisfied. There was something missing in his life.

At this time Jesus was a well known figure. In v. 3 & 4 we're told there was such a big crowd following after Jesus that Zacchaeus had to climb up a tree to get a look at Him. Zacchaeus was interested in seeing this chap Jesus in action.

In many ways it's still the same today. Most people are at least curious about Jesus. Also consider this...we have huge wealth, a higher standard of living and more freedom compared to most of the rest of the world. Yet despite all this if you surveyed people here in Chineham and people answered honestly I suspect the majority would reveal they are not satisfied. Over the last few years many will have lost thousands of pounds on things like pension funds and other investments. Others have lost their jobs. Some have faced pay cuts. The very things many have put their faith and trust in have proven not to be trustworthy. For many there is an ever increasing intensity to find something that's trustworthy; something stable; something you can count on that won't be affected by the economy. The time is RIFE for us to open our eyes and see that people, just like Zacchaeus want to know Jesus. They're looking for something they can hang on to regardless of what life throws at them. They're looking for something to fill the hole in their heart.

Politically correctness says we are to keep our faith to ourselves. But biblically correctness says we have a responsibility to introduce Jesus to the people around us.

Zaccheus was looking for firm ground to stand on. I don't know many people who enjoy uncertainty. Most of us prefer solid ground; and to be able rely on things we can count on!

A few years ago while on holiday in Denmark my son John persuaded me to go on a particularly fearsome looking fair-ground ride. It took you up in the air and while the contraption span round in one direction I found the compartment I was in spinning a different direction. It was awful and I couldn't wait for it to stop – I felt sick and was so relieved when finally the ride finished and I could get back on solid ground. People today – those around us, neighbours, work colleagues, our local community are also looking for solid ground. There are people who are anxious and desperate for someone to help calm their soul. Jesus said in John 16: 33, I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.

So a question - do we think people are hungry for solid ground - for peace? If this is the case then people will actually be eager to find Jesus. More than we realise it people want to know Jesus.

Here's another good reason to help us understand the importance of sharing our faith... it's this:

2. PEOPLE HAVE OBSTACLES IN COMING TO JESUS (vv. 3-6)

Zaccheus wanted to see Jesus but he couldn't at first. Why not? Because he was short! There was a huge crowd standing in front of him blocking his vision. Think about that because actually there will always be obstacles standing in front of people coming to Jesus. One main reason why (but we don't like to talk about it) is because the devil is going to do whatever he can to keep people from following after Christ.

Here's another obstacle - some people have a difficult time coming to Jesus because they've had a bad religious experience in the past. Someone or some church really turned them off and consequently they've a hard time seeing past that event to Jesus. Others struggle with coming to Christ because they don't want to give up control of their lives concerning how they live. They feel like the cost of following Jesus is too great. Others are blinded by the bad testimony of people claiming to be Christians. They see them say one thing and then witness them living in a completely opposite way. All these obstacles are frustrating - but here's the good news. Every obstacle that stands in the way of a person and Jesus can be overcome! How? Jer. 29: 13 says, (CLICK) "You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart". The Lord promises - if we seek after Him then He will allow us to find Him. God's not playing hide and seek - He wants people to find Him and He won't allow any obstacle to be insurmountable. A person simply has to be willing to be open to finding Jesus. And God promises that He'll reveal Himself to that person.

On the flip side we as existing followers of Christ have obstacles in reaching out to others to help them find Jesus. We're afraid we don't know enough to talk to someone about Jesus, or we don't want to be viewed as weird! Don't get me wrong – I'm not trying to pretend this is easy but hear this which I read in bible notes last Thursday

"As believers, we have purpose and direction, we know where we're going, and we know how to get there. This gives us confidence as we go about fulfilling God's call in our lives. When this kind of confidence is evident to others, the lost will look to us for direction". We have a responsibility to lend people a hand, help them over their obstacles and discover Christ.

Zacchaeus had an obstacle. So he climbed up a tree to see Jesus. Then what happened? Jesus came his way and introduced Himself to Zaccheus, which led to a transformation. Notice it was Jesus who approached him. Jesus didn't wait for Zaccheus to come running up

to Him. He didn't wait until He was in the temple to talk to Zaccheus. He approached Zaccheus where he was.

That presents a lesson – a challenge to all of us. The greatest impact this church will make on our community won't occur while we're inside this building. It will occur while we're outside this building. Why? Because the stage of life is outside this building and people are curious to see how we perform on it. It's the testing ground. And when others see us living out our faith not just in this building but also outside of it, they're going to be a little more open to listening to what we have to say. The substance of what we believe, concerning how our faith will impact our lives will be exposed when we're at work, at home and in our neighbourhoods.

And when people find that you're solid in your living, that there's substance underneath what you say, it'll give you an opening to bridge the gap between them and Jesus.

We need to get to know the people who live and work around us. We need to take time to have conversations with them and invite them over. Become their friend. Pray for them. Maybe even invite them to a church event or even a church service.

When I was 36 some people made time for me (I've put some of their names on the screen). Unbeknown to me at the time they also prayed for me. Because of them I was led to Jesus resulting in me giving my life to Him. That also led to my daughter being raised as a Christian. I am eternally grateful to those people who shared Jesus with me. They help me overcome my obstacles and they overcame their obstacles so I could see Jesus.

Christ Church has a calling to be a bridge to help people get over their obstacles so they can also see Jesus.

So let's take stock - we are up to? Firstly people (more than we realise) want to know Jesus. And secondly recognise we need to help people – because people will always have obstacles in coming to Jesus.

So what's the final thing that will help us understand the importance of sharing our faith? The answer is...

3. JESUS TRANSFORMS LIVES (vv. 8-10)

Look at verses 8 to 10 from our reading: Zacchaeus stood up and said to the Lord, Look, Lord! Here and now I give half of my possessions to the poor, and if I have cheated anybody out of anything, I will pay back four times the amount. Jesus said to him, Today salvation has come to this house, because this man, too, is a son of Abraham. For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost".

Zacchaeus was a cheat and was only interested in looking out for number one but when he encountered Jesus in his life, everything changed. In v. 8 Zacchaeus made an offer to give half of what he had to the poor and to pay back, with interest, everyone he'd ripped off!

I'm not an accountant, but my guess is that'd pretty much left Zaccheus broke! Don't get me wrong – I'm not trying to say "get rid of everything and go live in a tent." The point is Zacchaeus at one time had everything, but it wasn't enough. But after meeting Jesus he was willing to release his grip on what he thought would make him happy and follow Jesus instead. For the first time in his life Zacchaeus realized all he needed was Jesus!

People can't come into contact with Jesus and not be changed! You can't become a follower of Christ without it having an impact on your life. 2 Cor. 5: 17, If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!

The love of Christ in Zacchaeus' life transformed him. Jesus loved Zacchaeus even when he was an out and out thief! And people need to know that there is a God who loves them, not when they get better, but who loves them RIGHT NOW! So many people spend their lives wanting to be loved. They think if they have more stuff, they'll be lovable. They think if they do more good things than bad things that they can earn the love of people and even of God. Yet so much of the love we seek is conditional. Jesus loves us unconditionally. Rom. 5: 8, "While we were still sinners, Christ died for us."

We've got to get the message out to people that Christ desires to be in relationship with them. And when that happens there will be people who will willingly lay aside themselves for God. And they'll discover joy and peace in their lives.

Zacchaeus saw the sacrifice Jesus was willing to make to be with him. People ridiculed Jesus for reaching out to this outcast, yet He was willing to reach out to Zacchaeus because He knew He could change his life. That sacrifice by Jesus enabled Zacchaeus to sacrifice his old way of life for Jesus. That's the sign of a life transformed; one who takes the example of Jesus and follows it. Some feel they can't measure up to being a follower of Christ. Some believe they have to get their life right before they can come to Jesus, because they're afraid Jesus can't accept them as they are. But that's not the way it is. Jesus takes people just as they are. And when they respond to Him He WILL change them.

CONCLUSION

So let's finish...Almost every week we see news about a search-and-rescue mission. It may involve a child who wandered away from a family picnic and is lost, or a hiker stranded on a mountain, or people trapped in the rubble following an earthquake. In every case, the people at risk are unable to help themselves. Those who are found and saved usually have lasting gratitude for those who joined in the search and rescued them.

Zacchaeus is a story of search and rescue. At first glance it may seem like a series of chance events—Jesus was passing through Jericho and a rich tax collector climbed a tree to catch a glimpse of him. But this encounter with Jesus was not a coincidence as verses 9 and 10 confirm "Today salvation has come to this house . . . ; for the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost" (vv.9-10).

The DNA of this church should be a people sharing our faith. More than we realise it people want to know Jesus, (yes - obstacles will always exist) but crucially remember Jesus transforms lives.

So pray for your neighbours and work colleagues. Pray and ask God to give you opportunities to get to know them. Ask God to make their hearts receptive to you. And then be praying and asking God to give you an opening to invite them to join his kingdom. And then go and do it because Jesus began His search-and-rescue operation on earth by His life, death, and resurrection. He continues it today through the power of the Holy Spirit, and He graciously invites us to participate with Him by loving those who are lost and helping them to see him.

Please can I ask you as we close to take a brief moment of silence and pray right now for someone you know who is lost and ask Jesus to find and rescue them. Amen