

Encountering Jesus

I love Jesus, and Jesus loves me! I'm so thankful for that truth. Many years ago, I came to recognize that I need uninterrupted time with Jesus. I crave uninterrupted time with Jesus. When I encounter Jesus, something significant happens; I'm moved, I'm refreshed, I'm encouraged. I become excited for the things that excite Him! Most often, when I encounter Jesus, it's through the studying of His Word, the Holy Bible. My encounters with Jesus always benefit me. Sometimes those encounters are challenging and uncomfortable, but they always benefit me. This essay aims to expose some of the realities that come with encountering Jesus.

A man named Saul (his name in Hebrew), who would later be more commonly known as Paul (his name in Greek), had a radical encounter with Jesus. This encounter came as Saul was traveling to Damascus. Acting on behalf of the Sanhedrin (the supreme court over the Jewish nation of Israel), Saul was the figurehead of a growing movement to expand the persecution of the Christian Church. Saul had already been killing and arresting Christians, and now he'd been deployed to ensure the persecution spread far and wide; from Jerusalem, into Damascus, and beyond.

The following Scripture is a compilation of the accounts of Saul's conversion, when he saw Jesus and subsequently turned in faith. The verses are taken from Acts 9, 22, and 26. ***"As he was traveling and so engaged with the authority and commission of the chief priests, it happened that he was approaching Damascus about noontime, and suddenly a very bright light from heaven, brighter than the sun, suddenly flashed around him and those who were journeying with him; and he fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to him in the Hebrew dialect, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me? It is hard for you to kick against the goads." And he said, "Who are You, Lord?" And He said, "I am Jesus the Nazarene whom you are persecuting." And I said, "What shall I do, Lord?" And the Lord said, "For this purpose I have appeared to you, to appoint you a minister and a witness not only to the things which you have seen, but also to the things in which I will appear to you; rescuing you from the Jewish people and from the Gentiles, to whom I am sending you, to open their eyes so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the dominion of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who have been sanctified by faith in Me. Get up and stand to your feet and enter the city Damascus, and it will be told you what you must do." The men who traveled with him stood speechless, they saw the light to be sure, but did not understand the voice of the One who was speaking to him, hearing the voice but seeing no one. Saul got up from the ground, and though his eyes were open, he could see nothing; and the men who were with him were leading him by the hand, they brought him into Damascus. And he was three days without sight, and neither ate nor drank."***

Encounters with Jesus are dramatic. They will not likely be accompanied by something supernatural, as was Saul's experience here, but when you seek Jesus, your encounter with Him will be dramatic. I know that when I leave my church on a Sunday morning, after I've worshipped the Lord and have heard from His Word, that I feel invigorated! That's one of the main reasons I go to His Word daily; to experience Him. He feeds my soul!

Encounters with Jesus are often challenging and uncomfortable. Saul was made blind, literally, for a time. Why? Though physically blind, the purpose was metaphorical; showing that before he met Jesus, he was blind to the truth. It is Christ, by His Spirit, who allows us to see clearly. Although physically blind, Saul was seeing for the first time! Saul sees that he was fighting against God instead of serving God. Saul was one of the people that Jesus had prophesied about in John 16:2, when He told His disciples about those who would soon

come and kill some of them, ***“They will make you outcasts from the synagogue, but an hour is coming for everyone who kills you to think that he is offering service to God.”*** Saul believed he was honoring the Lord, by persecuting Christians, and now he knows the truth. He sees that Jesus is the resurrected Lord and not a fake. He sees that he himself has been the cancer in the synagogue, and not the Christian believers.

Encounters with Jesus change you. Though Saul was a very misguided individual before Jesus got ahold of him, Saul was a man who was eager to be righteous and to do what he thought pleased the Lord. After his encounter on the roadway, Saul spent the next three days in prayer. With his eyes shut, unable to look outward, Saul was forced to focus inward and upward. Saul was shown that a relationship with God is not earned by works, but received by faith. Saul’s heart turns in faith, having experienced the miracles of God’s mercy and grace. Of all the people that God could have struck down in justified wrath, it was Saul. Instead, God calls Saul to lead the charge of bringing the gospel to the Gentiles.

Encounters with Jesus expose our need for His grace. Saul was a man who had no idea he needed grace. He thought he was the pinnacle of a righteous man, and by Jewish standards, he was. Saul was born to a Jewish mother, and circumcised as an infant. He was a faithful Pharisee and a defender of the Jewish religion. With regards to the legalities of the Law, Saul was faultless. He was a successful, religious, self-righteous, self-made man. Since he didn’t think he needed Jesus, Saul didn’t seek Jesus. Jesus intercepted Saul. Just like us, we don’t seek Him first, He pursues us first!

Encounters with Jesus put you on mission. Jesus told Saul that his life had a new direction, ***“to appoint you a minister and a witness not only to the things which you have seen, but also to the things in which I will appear to you; rescuing you from the Jewish people and from the Gentiles, to whom I am sending you, to open their eyes so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the dominion of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who have been sanctified by faith in Me.”*** Each time we encounter Jesus through His Word, we are given orders that redirect our attitude, our purpose, our perspective about people, and our circumstances. We are reminded that His kingdom work is why we are here. Romans 12:2 tells us that we renew our minds with His Word, so that we may prove what the will of God is.

Reading ahead in Saul’s story, we understand how God used another man to open Saul’s eyes. Acts 9:10-20, ***“Now there was a disciple at Damascus named Ananias; and the Lord said to him in a vision, “Ananias.” And he said, “Here I am, Lord.” And the Lord said to him, “Get up and go to the street called Straight, and inquire at the house of Judas for a man from Tarsus named Saul, for he is praying, and he has seen in a vision a man named Ananias come in and lay his hands on him, so that he might regain his sight.” But Ananias answered, “Lord, I have heard from many about this man, how much harm he did to Your saints at Jerusalem; and here he has authority from the chief priests to bind all who call on Your name.” But the Lord said to him, “Go, for he is a chosen instrument of Mine, to bear My name before the Gentiles and kings and the sons of Israel; for I will show him how much he must suffer for My name’s sake.” So Ananias departed and entered the house, and after laying his hands on him said, “Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on the road by which you were coming, has sent me so that you may regain your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit.” And immediately there fell from his eyes something like scales, and he regained his sight, and he got up and was baptized; and he took food and was strengthened.”***

Encounters with Jesus may come through other believers. Ananias was God's instrument to Saul. In these verses, I see Ananias wanting to make sure he heard Jesus right. God may prompt you to correct someone, confront someone, bless someone, caretake someone, disciple someone, and in hundreds of ways minister to someone. God will call you to do something for someone that you are afraid to do. Remember, fear doesn't exempt you from obedience. You'll be better for it, so will the recipient.

Encountering Jesus can happen today. Read His Word. Meditate and pray on what you read. Seek the counsel of others who are wise and know Jesus intimately.