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Encounters With Jesus
Nathanael The Skeptic
Rev. Dr. Kim Engelmann
West Valley Presbyterian Church

Today we are starting a new series called Encounters with Jesus.

It is by Tim Keller.

In this book, Tim Keller asks us to look at the life of Jesus seriously, and recognize maybe for the first time, or maybe again in a new way how the person of Jesus Christ really does answer the big questions in our lives.

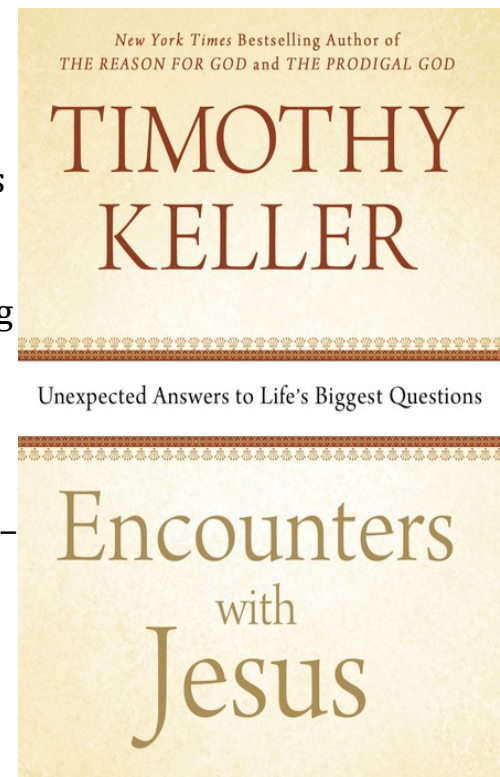
You can buy the book **Encounters with Jesus** electronically or hard copy through Amazon...and, if you read each chapter *before* you come to church on Sunday – I think you will get more out of the sermons. It will help you follow along. Tim has some great points to make that I am not going to be able to touch on in these sermon just because of time.

Tim's first chapter centers around the **person of Nathaniel** – who was at first a skeptic.

What you got to know is that one of Tim Keller's gifts is working with folks who are skeptical...

Now I know many of you have been in the church a long time, and you may not be in the category of skeptic today

But for me, it was great to read this book, because once again it helped me realize how very believable and authentic Christianity is – *not just because I may have had an experience of God in my life, which many of you have had which is why you are sitting here today* – but also when you look at the facts, and you truly do investigate Christianity, there is so much credence to what you find.



Reading this book also reminded me again how unique the claims of Christianity are and helped to put me in the mindset of someone who might be questioning, unsure, or simply have no idea what all this that we do at church is all about.

If you do have somebody in your life who is asking hard questions, this is a good series to bring them to, and a good book to buy.

So...the series starts with story of Nathaniel that Mike just read to you
Now Nathaniel, the skeptic does eventually
becomes one of the twelve disciples because of
Philip who goes to find Nathaniel in order to bring him to Jesus

And so Philip comes to Nathaniel and he is all excited and says..., ***We have found the Messiah! He is from Nazareth...***

And Nathaniel's response is not OH YAY...I can't wait to meet him
...what wonderful news
No...

It is rather a cynical response that belies a deep prejudice, and stereotyping

He says, "***From Nazareth? Can anything good come out of Nazareth?***"
Why does he say that?

Well, the town of Nazareth was always looked down upon – it wasn't as big or as prominent as some of the other towns around Jerusalem. It was kind of a backwater primitive place in Galilee...

So what went on then, is like what goes on now - in order to make ourselves look good – what do we do sometimes?
Label certain people who are from certain areas...and look down on them in order to feel better about ourselves...human nature doesn't seem to change over the centuries

Maybe you have heard someone say, "*Oh... they are from that neighborhood...wrong side of the tracks...don't hang out with them.*"

So he says that awful thing, "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" and Keller says he probably rolled his eyes.

My kids went through a stage of rolling their eyes. Its normal for teenagers to roll their eyes.

They need space, they see it differently, they are discovering who they are. OK...OK...

But any marriage counselor knows that when one spouse in a marriage rolls their eyes at something the other spouse says it is an indication of total disdain and lack of respect for their partner.

Which means...there's a lot of work ahead...because the one person is dismissive of the other one...

Sometimes people can be just as dismissive when it comes to Christianity.

Christianity? Come on...really believe all that stuff? You have got to be kidding...

Nazareth...you have got to be joking!! Nathaniel says "rolling his eyes"
Can anything good come from there?

Tim Keller actually whom we have studied before in our adult education class and his wife years ago wanted to start a church in Manhattan o that would be filled with young adults seeking answers to life; and they were told "you will never be able to do it".

Young professionals don't want to hear about Christianity.

They are doing just fine without it, and don't care. NYC is filled with the ambitious and brilliant

They have fast-paced successful lives and don't have time for God.

Plus they look down on Christianity and all organized religion. In other words, ***Christianity for them is "from Nazareth"...held in contempt.***

Tim and Kathy went on to start Redeemer Presbyterian Church in Manhattan which now has more than 5,000 regular attendees.

You see, despite all of the loud public assertions of skepticism in that area, there was a lot of covert spiritual searching going on.

Keller writes

"All those, young ambitious and brilliant people wanted to look like they didn't care ...underneath they had the same need we all have

for God...they had to look for answers and many found them in Christianity.”

Much the same as living here in Silicon Valley - *Christianity is still from Nazareth* – people don’t get it – they roll their eyes
Only 2% of people in the Bay Area attend church
They say, You have got to be kidding me
You believe all that stuff? Really? And organized religion? (roll eyes)

Yet dismissiveness of something we haven’t really considered seriously is always deadly for us.
It cuts off so much possibility, if we just hold something at bay and don’t really examine it...look at it seriously...and simply dismiss
We could be missing out on a whole lot

Notice that, despite Nathaniel’s loud skeptical push back he still goes with Philip to meet Jesus...

Philip says to Nathaniel **“Come and see” and Philip goes..**
Isn’t that telling
Good for him! He would give it a try – clearly he was searching still for understanding – and was willing to investigate

He probably thought to himself “Maybe I should look at Nazareth as unbelievable as that sounds.”

Today, if you aren’t sure about Christianity I invite you to consider doing what Nathaniel did
Despite his skepticism he went with Philip anyway...and did a thorough investigation...

So, let me share with you in a preliminary way just two reasons why Christianity is worth considering from an intellectual perspective...and not simply from a warm fuzzy one...

The first thing you have to know is

- I. I have said before that **Christianity is unique in its claims**

Now that might throw some of you...because the truth is that today it is politically correct and popular for people to say "*All religions are the same. All paths lead to God*". You can say that if you want to – you'd be in synch with the culture - but if you do, it means you haven't done a thorough investigation. You are just going along with the crowd.

Let me tell you the difference.

The very real truth is that every other religion says that if you want to find God, if you want to improve yourself, if you want to have higher consciousness, if you want to connect with the divine however it is defined – you have to DO something.

The genius of Christianity is that it is NOT about "Here's what you have to do to find God."

Christianity says that Jesus Christ came to do it for you.

Every other religion says you want to get close to God– read up on it in this how to do it manual.

Christianity says, (you don't need a manual) JESUS DID IT FOR YOU.

I don't know about you but every time I read "no assembly required" on the side of a box of anything, I *breathe a sigh of relief*. Thank goodness. I don't have to do anything. No screws, no instructions, no mess for two days on the floor with little sharp pieces the rug that I can step on the middle of the night. I breathe a sigh of relief because I know that whenever I try to assemble anything I am a complete failure. (some of you are great at this, I am not)

All I have to do if there no assembly required, is take the item out of the box and use it.

A relationship with Jesus is like that – it is not about you putting your faith together piece by piece, trying to create something by

your own effort cause you can't – its already been done on the cross. All you have to do is say yes to Jesus Christ... Jesus Christ... *that is how you get close to God*

Not abstract concepts or philosophical arguments, or steps to the Divie...

Does anyone remember how Johns gospel starts?

“In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and Word was God...And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth”

Do you know what a radical statement that was? **The word LOGOS in the Greek means “word”**...but for the Greeks the word was always a philosophy or an abstract concept on the meaning of life – .

That's what Logos represented.

John is sayingnope...LOGOS...the Word...the meaning of life...is not an abstraction...or a philosophy...rather **it is a person**. In relationship to this person, Jesus, you will find meaning and purpose and draw close to God and be saved.

Christianity is about God coming to earth in the form of Jesus Christ and dying on the cross for you; because of the depth of our sin God came in the person of Jesus Christ to do what we couldn't do for ourselves – to save us.

God says, you cant assemble a relationship to me by your own effort...I've already taken care of it in Jesus...say yes to me...let me save you!

Christianity is not just for the strong – it is for everyone, especially for people who admit that where it really counts – they are weak.

It takes a certain kind of strength to admit your flaws...to say “my heart is a disordered heart in a deep kind of way”

Ever know anybody who never said they were wrong or sorry
Who never admitted that they had any flaws
It looks like strength at first, but really that's a sign of terrible
weakness and dishonesty – because we all have flaws

If want to be honest, we have to be courageous enough to
recognize that we are frail, sinful, weak, and unable to make a holy
God proud of us...No matter how much I try, I am incapable of
rectifying my heart - that is wrong.

Christianity is for those who are honest enough to admit their
weakness...and by so doing know they need a savior.

People say that when Christians declare there is “**Only one way to
God through Jesus Christ**” that it is an arrogant statement and
exclusive. I've heard this so much. But, in actuality it is the exact
opposite. (statement of core tenets of WVPC)

When we say this what we are really saying is that first off Jesus
Christ is available to anyone who would receive him...so it isn't
exclusive.

Second, this is actually a very humble statement...essentially that
“I got to the point where I knew I couldn't make it on my own. I
am weak. I know it. I needed a savior.. I can't assemble the pieces
to save myself so Jesus had to do it for me.”

The second reason to take Christianity seriously is that...

II. Christianity is the taproot of many of our commonly held core values anyway...

These core values I am about to list ...these ideas of what is right
and wrong came from Christianity – most of you will agree with
these...

a. Christianity originated one of the foundational ideas of a peaceful civilization – that you should love your enemies and not kill them

b. Christianity is the source of our generally agreed upon value that every single person is made in God's image and therefore has dignity and worth and rights.

c. Christianity acted upon the Biblical mandate in a broad sweeping way the concept that we should take care of the poor. That was an outrageous thought at the time of the early church. No one did that.

The elites said that loving your enemies and taking care of the poor was crazy. They said that society would fall apart because that's not the way the world works. It's the talented and the strong that should prevail. The poor were born to suffer...

But the teachings of Christianity on this revolutionized pagan Europe in the early years.

And in the early church? It was the Christians who took in people ravaged by the plague and nursed them to health dying themselves in the process...it was the early Christians who adopted widows and orphans...standing against the culture of the time and saying "these people matter"

So...the dignity of the person (human rights), the primacy of love toward ones enemies, and the care of the poor and orphans all have their start in Christianity.

So if you hold those core values, for whatever reason, I would suggest to you that you take a closer look at the rest of Christianity. This is just the beginning of exploring this amazing truth.

Now of course we all know that there have been abuses of these central core values down through history as people who wanted

power twisted things for their own gain. But many things get distorted... but just because they get distorted by people, it doesn't ruin the original truth.

I often tell people, just because hamburger meat can go bad, it doesn't mean there isn't something called a really good cheeseburger.

So...what is the end of this story?

Nathaniel the skeptic comes to see Jesus...he investigates – good for him.

I hope during this series that we do with Tim Keller you will investigate too.

And as Nathaniel draws near to investigate

Jesus says, **“Nathaniel, I saw you under the fig tree”** which is a mini miracle.

We don't know what Nathaniel was doing under the fig tree or when that happened...

But obviously Jesus had seen him, and knew he had been there... maybe something significant happened under the fig treewe are never told, but God knew

We have a very personal God...

And Nathaniel is shocked

How did you see me? What's going on! Wow...you really must be the Messiah!!

He goes from cynic to believer in 30 seconds...

And Jesus says..."Hold on"...take your time...don't just believe in me because you had an emotional experience...continue to investigate...watch me...check this out some more causae this is for real – believe in this not because you have to, or because you are emotionally jazzed up – but believe in this because it is true...

You are going to see angels ascending and descending – in other words this references Jacobs ladder where heaven and earth connected in the OT

“Very truly I tell you,^[i] you^[i] will see ‘heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending on’^[k] the Son of Man.”

And Jesus saying “*I am the way to heaven...a relationship with me is the link between heaven and earth Nathaniel. Believe in me because of that.*”

This gets personal now because God says to you and to me
I see you today
You may not be standing under the fig tree, but I see you
I see you through and through
I know where your doubts and skepticism are coming from
I see how you’ve been disappointed with the church in the past –
in history or in your own life
I see the discouragement of things that you might be holding, and
why you are not able to pray because you have been disappointed
I see the person in your life that may have turned you off to me
I am not that person
Or I see your distraction from me with many other things
crowding me out; you are running here and there without
grounding yourself in me first
You are going to get tired after a while and burn out...I will be
there when you do...
I see you through and through, and I’ve been pursuing you
I made you, and I know you, and nothing is hid from me

Jesus saw Nathaniel and he sees you, and in seeing you
Loves you completely – whether you are cynic or full of faith

Now as we approach the Lords table today remember...
This is a holy moment...and if you roll your eyes and think of it as
just a ritual... you will miss the great power of it
The mystery and the grace of this is that Jesus is here

He asks that you come to him today, in honesty and humility
aware of your weakness to seek him, at this table
To draw near, in whatever way you need to draw near today
Wherever we are in our faith walk we all need to draw closer to
him

Ask him to reveal himself to you

This is a table that God has given to you, not because of your own effort, or good morals, or good life

This is what God has done for us because of his great mercy and our great need – This is what God has done for us to forgive our sins and reconcile us to him...This is the table of our Lord...

No assembly required – he's already done it – all you have to do as you partake is say yes to him from your heart...**COME AND SEE...**