

OVERHEARD AT STARBUCKS

What Difference Does Jesus Make?

1 Timothy 1:12-17

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A little girl came home from school with a stomach ache and her mother explained that her stomach probably hurt because she was hungry. "When it's empty, it sometimes hurts," explained Mom. A few hours later, Dad came home from the office, rubbing his head and said, "I have a headache." His daughter quickly volunteered, "I know why it hurts, Daddy, it's empty!"

Well, there are a lot of aches in the world, and a lot of emptiness! And I want us to visit over a cup of coffee this morning about the difference that Jesus can make regarding that emptiness, that hole in the soul. Through the years, I've had lots of conversations over coffee regarding the difference Jesus can make, and I'd like for us to have that conversation this morning. We're using as our guide this conversation which the Apostle Paul was having with some friends.

To begin with, I would tell you that Christ gives me strength and purpose (v. 12). Strength! During good days and bad ones. Problems big and small. One of our titles for Jesus is "Lord." That's because he has conquered death and is above all. So you see, this Risen Lord is not just a great, inspiring role model who is dead; he is alive and shares his power.

But not just strength. Strength and purpose (v. 12 again). A typical inscription on a first-century Roman grave read: I WAS. I AM NOT. IT DOES NOT MATTER. Is there more to life than washing dishes, getting them dirty, washing them again? More to life than getting up, going to work for 40 years and then dying? Someone described life without Christ as the soul without any friend, without any company. How empty. How sad. But here comes this Risen One who fills life with a new energy and a new purpose. While we're busy throwing our lives away, this Risen One puts his hand on shoulders and calls us by name, choosing us! Calling us to life.

I would also say that meeting Christ shows me the depth of my need (v. 13). We don't like to talk about our sin, our pride or our spiritual needs. But Paul was open and transparent. Here's a pretty good summary statement about our condition: Sin is being confused about who Jesus is and about who I am. When I begin to think I am my own creator, sustainer and rescuer AND my own judge and jury, I'm really lost!

But now that I've described what it means to be disconnected from God, wallowing in our own disobedience, ***here's another thing I love about Christ. He is all about mercy and grace, not cruel judgment (vv. 13b-14).*** Note how Paul describes it. Though the list of wrongs and offenses grew longer, the grace of God was greater. The grace actually overflows. Whenever I hear Bible verses describing God's grace as overflowing, I always remember The Big Dipper ice cream parlor in Stanberry, MO. When I was a boy, what a treat to go there and choose an ice cream

flavor and watch them fill up a cone or a cup and let it just drip, hanging over the sides. That's Paul's description here. Overflowing. Not just barely enough.

God treats me better than I deserve! And no one is beyond God's reach. That's because Christ is all about the three words mentioned in our text: mercy, grace and love (v. 14). Love is the word *agape*, used 75 times by Paul as a noun and another 35 times as a verb. It's not just that it is a love that never quits. It's also the clue that God is interested in a personal relationship with you. Think about that. Author and pastor Timothy Keller has a good warning here. If we go after God based on the question, "What do I have to do to get this or that from God?" we will always be frustrated and immature. But if we make the transition to ask, "What do I have to do to get God?" we will meet the real God vs. a distorted caricature of God [*The Reason for God*, p. 228].

Now here's where all of this is leading. ***This Christ whom we've been discussing invites us to trust him (v. 16).*** Now trust is a tough challenge. It's simple. You're trusting the seat you're sitting in right now. You trusted the brakes on the vehicle you rode in today. But it's complicated. That's because we want evidence. But think about that for a moment. Blaise Pascal wrote, "In faith there is enough light for those who want to believe and enough shadows to blind those who do not." In other words, we could never have enough evidence to trust Christ--if we really don't want to. We can't argue anyone into God's family!

I've told some of you about Tolik, my translator when I was in Ukraine in September. He had lived in Canada, making good money in construction work. Then he got hooked on cocaine. He heard voices, suffered from paranoia. He lost his apartment lease and was evicted. While trying to retrieve his belongings from his former apartment, he fell three stories from a balcony. He broke both ankles. But through that hospitalization, he got clean...and he found Christ. Or Christ found him! Now, he serves in the seminary we are partnering with! God has a call on his life.

Jesus Christ is in the business of transforming lives. He can transform yours. I invite you. Trust him.