

Would Jesus have had time for you?

Do you wonder sometimes whether God is actually interested in you? Perhaps you think that what you've done in the past rules that out. Or that your present life is too bad for him to give you a second glance? Or perhaps you just feel too old, too uneducated, or you have too many hang-ups. Maybe you think you are too stressed and occupied with this life for God to approve of you? Perhaps you may think you are too poor, or even too wealthy to be someone God wants to spend time with.

Jesus said we could learn what God is like by looking at his example.¹ So if we look at the kind of people Jesus had time for, we should be able to see if he would have 'bothered' with us, too. The four accounts of Jesus' life, the gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John tell us quite a lot about who Jesus had time for, even though they focus on only a few of the thousands of people he must have met. They included:

The sad...

It was obvious that Jesus was interested in the poor and the outcasts in his society. He responded to the cries of the blind, and the lepers who sat begging on the roads. Back then, leprosy was thought to be incurable and highly contagious. The symptoms were revolting, and were seen as a mark of God's displeasure. A leper had to cry out "Unclean! Unclean!" so everyone could avoid him. Yet Matthew tells us of a leper calling out to Jesus as he passed by on the road. This man knew Jesus had the power to heal him, but was Jesus willing to do so? Most people were not willing to do anything to help a leper. But Jesus had time for him. He walked over to the leper, assured him that he was willing to heal him, and then he restored the leper to health.²

John also tells us what happened when Jesus met a Samaritan woman. The Jews hated and despised the Samaritans, who they considered to be opportunists and impostors, and avoided contact with them. But to reach Galilee from Jerusalem, it was necessary to go through Samaria. As Jesus travelled north, he stopped by a well and sent his disciples into the town to buy food. As he rested, a woman came to draw water. This woman was not just a despised Samaritan, she was even an outcast among her own people. She had had five husbands and was now living with a sixth man. With a reputation like that, she was not someone any respectable person would want to be seen with. But Jesus treated her kindly, and with respect. He patiently answered her questions, and she became convinced that he was the Messiah. In her excitement, she spread the word throughout her town, and many people there came to believe in Jesus.⁶

The mad...

People with mental problems were also considered outcasts, but Jesus

showed that he was concerned for them, too. Three of the gospel writers tell us of a demoniacal man bursting out from a cemetery to meet Jesus as he disembarked from a boat after crossing the lake of Galilee. The man was naked and violent. Although attempts had been made to chain him, he had always managed to break loose. He spent his days amongst the tombs and in the hills, yelling and cutting himself with stones. Most people probably saw him as a dangerous nuisance. But Jesus had time for him. It wasn't long before this former maniac was sitting at Jesus' feet, clothed and completely sane.³

The bad...

The masters of Jesus' world were the Romans. Both Matthew and Luke tell us about a centurion, who came seeking Jesus' help for his servant. He was an army officer from the army of occupation, and an outsider. But Jesus didn't turn his back on him. He even praised the man for his faith.⁸

A man from the village of Cana once asked Jesus to heal his child. We are not told his name, but he seems to have been a high-ranking government officer in the employ of Herod Antipas, the ruler of the province, and the beheader of John the Baptist. Herod's administration was cunning and unprincipled, so this officer in his administration may well have been viewed with suspicion or even fear. But Jesus meets his request there and then. He doesn't even need to travel over to Cana. He simply tells the man that his son is healed, and indeed he is. The official and his entire household become followers of Jesus.⁷

Finally, on the day of his death, in spite of the agony of crucifixion, Jesus had words of hope and encouragement for a convicted thief sentenced to die beside him.¹

The rich and powerful...

Jesus did not turn his back on the rich and powerful, either. John's account of Jesus' life tells us about a man of great wealth and authority called Nicodemus, who came by night to talk to Jesus. He was a Pharisee and a member of the Sanhedrin. The Pharisees were a powerful religious and political sect, and the Sanhedrin was the highest ruling body and court of justice. The Romans left most of the routine day-to-day business of governing Judea to them, and it was many of these same Pharisees who became the implacable enemies of Jesus and hatched a plot to have him killed. Nevertheless, Jesus spent time with Nicodemus, patiently explaining some fundamental teachings that he had not understood, and started him on the road that led to his eventual conversion.⁵

...and even women!

The society of Jesus' time relegated women to an inferior role. Jesus did not. One day Jesus was on his way to the house of a man named Jairus, whose twelve-year-old daughter was dying. Jairus was the ruler of the

synagogue, and thus an important man in the town. Unknown to Jesus, a woman was desperately pushing her way through the crowds that surrounded him. She didn't want to be a nuisance, she just wanted to touch his garment. She had been haemorrhaging for twelve years, and she was penniless, having spent all on her money on doctors who couldn't help her. She believed, though, that if she could just touch the bottom of Jesus' robe she would be healed. She was frail and weak, yet somehow she struggled through to reach him. She touched the hem of his robe, and instantaneously knew she'd been healed. Jesus knew, too. He stopped, and asked who touched him. The crowd wondered what he was fussing about, but the trembling woman came forward. Jesus had set aside the urgent needs of one of the town's leading citizens and looked to the needs of this woman of no importance, with words of encouragement and reassurance. Jairus had to wait.

By the time Jesus had finished talking with her, a message arrived to say that Jairus' daughter was dead. It looked as if Jesus had put the needs of a poor sick woman ahead of this influential man. But, no. Even though the girl had been pronounced dead, Jesus still made his way to Jairus' house. The crowd at the house laughed when Jesus told them the girl was only sleeping. They knew better. She was dead. So, Jesus told them all to leave. He then took Jairus and his wife to their dead daughter and quietly, in their presence only, restored her to life.⁴

So why not you?

So what have we learned? Well, it's abundantly clear that all kinds of people - whether they were nationals, foreigners, believers, pagans, rulers and ruled, rich and poor, young and old, the sick and the strong, the sane and the deranged, the esteemed alongside the despised, the righteous with criminals - were helped by Jesus if they came to him. No one who truly wanted his help was turned away. These people the Gospels tell us about represent all society, and Jesus had time for them all.

He once said "'Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest,"⁹ and he clearly meant it. He meant it for the tired, the poor and the troubled of his time, and he has not changed.

We may think we must be too bad for God to want to be with us. We may feel deeply about our inadequacies. We may think that we are either useless and of little value, or that we are too worldly, with too much wealth or status. But the writers of the Gospels tell a different story. From them we can be sure that we have no cause for doubt, whoever we are and whatever our circumstances. God has time for us. Yes, even the likes of you and I matter very much to him.

¹ John 14:9

² Matt 8:1-3

⁶ John 4:1-42

³ Matt 8:28-34 Mark 5:1-5 Luke 8:26-35

⁸ Matt 8:5-13, Luke 7:1-10

⁷ John 4:46-54

ⁱ Luke 23:39-43

⁵ John 3:1-21

⁴ Mark 5:22-43

⁹ Matt 11:28-29