

# A “PERSONAL RELATIONSHIP” WITH JESUS

BY LAVONNE JAMES MCCLISH

## Introduction

There is a sense in which we do have a personal relationship with Jesus. We are indebted to Him for our salvation, which is definitely on an **individual** basis. However, the expression, as used by so many people today, is not a Scriptural concept at all. They usually mean that we should be “pals” or “buddies” with Jesus, and that we should talk with Him as we would to an equal.

## Incidents in John

The entire Gospel according to John is an excellent study of the relationship we should have with Jesus the Christ. However, certain passages are more direct and specific than others.

John the Baptist was a fleshly cousin of Jesus, and was sent by God to prepare the way for His Son. Yet he did not presume to claim a “personal relationship” with his Lord (John 1:29–36; 3:27–30). In chapter 8, Jesus says only those who continue in His Word are His disciples; only the Truth could make them free (vv. 31–32). Does this sound like a “personal relationship” with Jesus? Our relationship to Christ is that of sheep to shepherd (10:1–15). It is not a “personal relationship.”

Jesus did have a close **earthly** personal relationship—a friendship—with Mary, Martha, and Lazarus (John 11:1–44), but even so, it was not a relationship of equals. It cannot be used to say that we today should have such a close “personal relationship” with Jesus. Martha called Him *Lord* (vv. 21, 39) and stated her belief that He was/is the

Christ, the Son of God (v. 27). When she went to tell Mary Jesus had come, after the death of Lazarus, she said, “The Master is here” (v. 28). Mary also called Him *Lord* (v. 32).

Jesus’ friendship with Mary, Martha, and Lazarus calls to mind the close friendship Abraham enjoyed with Jehovah (Gen. 12–25; Heb. 11:8–19). Second Chronicles 20:7 calls Abraham “the friend of God,” as does James 2:23. And yet Abraham did not presume to be “buddy-buddy” with God, but referred to himself as “dust and ashes” when compared with God (Gen. 18:27). He felt very unworthy to be asking God for favors.

Jesus said, “If any man serve me, let him follow me; and where I am, there shall also my servant be; if any man serve me, him will my father honour” (John 12:26). This doesn’t sound like a “personal relationship.” After He had washed the apostles’ feet, He said, “Ye call me Master and Lord: and ye say well; for so I am.... The servant is not greater than his lord; neither he that is sent greater than he that sent him” (13:13, 16). No “personal relationship” here, either. Jesus was closer to John than to any of the other apostles (vv. 23–26), and yet John still addressed Him as “Lord.” The apostles were **disciples**—followers—of Jesus. He was their Master.

Jesus said in John 14 that no man could come to the Father except through Him (v. 6). He told the apostles they should have known Him **and** His Father (v. 7), but apparently they did not, from what Philip said in verse 8. Jesus then proceeded to say (summarizing and paraphrasing), “Do you mean to tell me you **still** don’t know me, after all the time I have spent with you?” (vv. 9–12). He then promised that, whatever they

asked **of the Father in Jesus' name**, they would receive (v. 14). (It must be understood that this promise was to the apostles. Our prayers are answered, yes, but not in the same way as were those of the apostles.) Verses 16 through 31 contain Jesus' promise to send the Comforter, the Holy Spirit, to them after He (Jesus) went back to the Father. The Comforter would teach them all things that they needed to know (v. 26), and bring to their remembrance everything Jesus had taught them while He was with them on earth. From the time of His ascension on, Jesus' relationship with the apostles was that of a Mediator, through Whom they could go to the Father. They were given their inspiration by the Holy Spirit.

If ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love; even as I have kept my Father's commandments, and abide in his love.... Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you.... Whatsoever ye shall ask of the Father in my name, he may give it you.... But when the Comforter is come, whom I will send unto you from the Father, even the Spirit of truth, which proceedeth from the Father, he shall testify of me (John 15:10, 14, 16, 26).

Jesus was going back to the Father and, rather than leave them comfortless, He was sending the Holy Spirit to them. It was best for them that Jesus go away (even though they would see Him no more, 16:10), otherwise, the Comforter would not come (16:7).

Again, their relationship with Jesus would now be as a Mediator and an Intercessor through Whom they could go to the Father. Over and over we see that, while the apostles had a close relationship with Jesus for the three and a half years of His ministry on earth, that changed when He went back to Heaven. "Whatsoever ye shall ask of the Father in my name, he will give it you" (16:23b) They were not to ask

**Jesus**; they were to ask the **Father** in Jesus' name. Mary Magdalene was weeping at the tomb of Jesus, thinking someone had taken His body away (20:11–18). When He had revealed Himself to her, Jesus told her not to touch Him, because He had not yet ascended back to the Father. The relationship had changed.

### **Incidents in Matthew**

Jesus said that not everyone who calls Him *Lord* will enter in to the Kingdom of Heaven, but those who do the will of His Father (Mat. 7:21–27). Matthew concludes this passage by saying, “For he taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes” (v. 29). Jesus said, “All things are delivered to me of my Father; and no man knoweth the Son, but the Father; neither knoweth any man the Father, save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son will reveal him” (11:27). The Father and the Son have a “personal relationship” with each other; we do not have that kind of relationship with either. Once, when He was teaching, His mother and His brothers came, wanting to see Him. But He said, “For whosoever shall do the will of my Father which is in Heaven, the same is my brother, and sister, and mother” (Mat. 12:46–50). Apparently Jesus' earthly family thought they had a close personal relationship with Him. The relationship that matters to Him is with those who **obey** Him.

In Matthew 14 we read the account of the apostles in a boat on the stormy Sea of Galilee. Jesus came to them, walking on the water, and when they saw Him they were afraid. Peter wanted to walk to Jesus on the water. But when He took his eyes off Jesus and began to look at the waves, he was afraid and began to sink. Jesus scolded him for doubting. When they got to shore, the apostles came and worshiped Jesus, saying, “Of

a truth thou art the Son of God” (Mat. 14:24–33). No close “personal relationship” here. The apostles knew themselves to be vastly inferior to the Christ.

In Caesarea, Jesus asked the apostles who men said that He was. Then He said, “But whom say ye that I am?” Peter answered, “Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God” (16:13–17). No “personal relationship” here. Jesus went on to say that we would have to deny ourselves if we want to follow Him (v. 24). When He comes again, He will reward every man according to his works (v. 27)—clearly we are in a subordinate relationship with Jesus.

In Matthew 17 we have the account of Christ’s transfiguration in which He was apparently given His Heavenly glory again for a short time, and Moses and Elijah came to talk with Him. He had taken Peter, James, and John with Him. Peter, not realizing what he was saying (Luke 9:33), wanted to honor Jesus **and** Moses **and** Elijah. But the voice thundered from Heaven, “This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye **him**” (vv. 1–6, emph. LJM). Not Moses and the law, not Elijah and the prophets, but Christ only. Clearly there was no close “personal relationship” here, but an atmosphere of awe. They had seen the glory of Christ and heard the Father’s voice. Matthew 18:11 says, “For the Son of man is come to save the lost.” He is our **Savior**. We can have no “personal relationship” with such a One.

Zebedee’s wife, the mother of James and John, came to Jesus, **worshipping Him**, asking Him to give her sons places of honor in His kingdom. Jesus’ answer shows that the earthly relationships were not going to be the important ones (Mat. 10:20–23). Even two members of His “inner circle” would not be guaranteed closeness to Him after

His kingdom came. Jesus used this occasion to teach the lesson that the greatest in the kingdom is the one who serves (v. 26–28).

In the parables related in Matthew 25, do even the **faithful** have a “personal relationship” with Jesus? Jesus, while He was on the earth, was even closer to Peter, James, and John than He was to the rest of His apostles. Did they have a “personal relationship” with Him, according to Matthew 26:36–46, when they were supposed to be waiting and watching with Him? Jesus, in talking to the apostles just before He went back to Heaven, said,

All power is given me in Heaven and on earth. Go ye therefore and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.

Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you; and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world (28:18–20).

Jesus would be with the apostles, yes; but He was clearly the One in authority—not a “personal relationship” of equals.

### **Incidents in Mark**

In the first chapter of the Gospel according to Mark, Jesus called His apostles: “Come ye after me, and I will make you fishers of men,” He said to the four fishermen (vv. 17–20). This was a follower/leader relationship, not a “personal relationship.” Jesus was even able to command the unclean spirits and make them come out of people (v. 27), which showed His Deity.

The second chapter of Mark tells about the man sick of the palsy (he was paralyzed) whose four friends let him down, on his bed, through the roof because that

was the only way they could get to Jesus. To everyone's surprise, instead of healing him right away, Jesus said, "Thy sins be forgiven thee" (v. 5). As usual, some of the scribes were present, and they began to "reason" in their hearts, "Why doth this man thus speak blasphemies? Who can forgive sins but God only?" (v. 7). Jesus, knowing their thoughts, said,

Whether is easier to say to the sick of the palsy, Thy sins be forgiven thee, or to say, Arise, take up thy bed, and walk? But that ye may know that the Son of man hath power on earth to forgive sins, (he said to the sick of the palsy,) I say unto thee, Arise, take up thy bed, and walk (vv. 9–11).

Could they—or can we—have a "personal relationship" with One who has the power to forgive sins and to cure diseases?

In Mark 4, we have a different account of a storm on the Sea of Galilee. This time, Jesus was in a boat with the apostles, only He was asleep on a pillow. When they, in terror, woke Him, He rebuked the storm by saying simply, "Peace, be still." The fearful apostles, talking among themselves after Jesus had rebuked them for their lack of faith, said, "What manner of man is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?" They didn't seem to feel a close "personal relationship," but a reverent realization that they were in the presence of Deity.

The fifth chapter of Mark tells of a woman who had an issue of blood for twelve years, and had spent all that she had on physicians, but still had her disease. She thought to herself that, if she could just touch His clothes, she would be healed; and surely enough, she was. But what she had not counted on was that Jesus felt power

(virtue) go out of Him. She was afraid, but she came forward and fell down before Him, telling Him the truth (vv. 25–34). She realized that He knew what she had done.

Question: Did that woman have a close “personal relationship” with Jesus?

When, in Mark 8, Jesus began to teach them that He must suffer many things and be killed, Peter took Him aside and began to rebuke Him (v. 32). Now, it may be that Peter thought he had a close “personal relationship” with Jesus, but Jesus relieved him of that notion: “Get thee behind me, Satan; for thou savorest not the things that be of God, but the things that be of men” (v. 33).

### **Incidents in Luke**

In Luke 5:4–5, Jesus, sitting in Simon Peter’s boat, told Simon to launch out into the deep and let down his net. Peter replied, “Master, we have toiled all night and have taken nothing. Nevertheless at thy word I will let down the net.” Here, again, we have the Master/Servant relationship, not a “personal relationship.”

Jesus said to His disciples, “And why call ye me Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say?” (Luke 6:46). If we had a close “personal relationship” with someone, would we call him *Lord*? Jesus said in Luke 17:7–10, speaking to His apostles,

Which of you, having a servant plowing or feeding cattle, will say unto him by and by, when he is come from the field, Go and sit down to meat? And will not rather say unto him, Make ready wherewith I may sup, and gird thyself, and serve me, till I have eaten and drunken; and afterward thou shalt eat and drink? Doth he thank that servant because he did the things that were commanded him? I trow not. So likewise

ye, when ye shall have done all those things which are commanded you, say, We are unprofitable servants; we have done that which was our duty to do.

What kind of relationship is that?

### **Conclusion**

In none of these accounts (and we have only skimmed the surface of four of the books of the New Testament) do we find any hint of a “personal relationship” with Jesus Christ. We are His servants, His followers, His sheep—and He is our Master, our Leader, our Shepherd, and our Mediator between us and God.