

Introduction: “My Close Encounter with Jesus Christ”

James (Jim) Hall

When my son was born, I was working at a daily newspaper and, among other duties at the paper, I wrote a regular general-interest column. This column had earned me some notoriety as a writer, winning various press association awards and it was picked up and circulated throughout the world by the New York Times News Service.

One day, I decided to write a column about the birth of my son, telling of the great sense of awe and wonderment I experienced as is common among parents.

Many readers were deeply touched by this column and I got much positive feedback from it. But, despite the fact that this particular column was far from controversial and written about a very positive subject matter, I received rather harsh criticism as well. I didn't understand this criticism at the time and still don't, but there is a lot about human logic and behavior that I don't understand and likely never will.

Over the close to 25 years I worked as a reporter, columnist, sports editor and copy editor for daily newspapers, I was used to such criticism. It was a part of the job and in journalism school I was taught that a journalist is supposed to have "skin as thick as a rhino."

During my newspaper career, I had covered presidential

appearances, interviewed Michael Jordan and many other professional sports stars, and I had written about and gotten to know personally many prominent political and cultural figures.

But it took me close to 30 years to write the “best story” I would ever write or will ever write. This is the story of the night Jesus Christ Himself actually came into a room with me and poured out upon me what I can (inadequately) describe as “wave upon wave of liquid love.” This was an event that shook me to the core, that rocked my world, and that has been with me each and every day of my life for the over three decades since it happened.

So, as a published book author, why have I waited so long to write a book about this astounding spiritual experience? Because I worried about the same dynamics involved in my “baby column.” For 10 years, I never told a soul about what had happened to me. I feared how my story would be criticized, ridiculed, distorted - “dirtied up” as is so often the custom of this world in handling things that are beautiful and pure and holy. Then, about five years ago, I sensed the Lord leading me to begin to make my story public. A computer company agreed to post my “close encounter” story on its website. People all over the world have read it there and I have heard personally from many of those folks over the years.

But recently, I began to feel that the Lord wanted me to make my story more accessible to the average person and to many people who can't even afford to own a computer. A book can go where a computer can't often go.

As I began to pray and meditate about what I felt the Lord was directing me to do, I began to understand why the Lord would see an importance in getting my "close encounter" story out to a greater number of people than who might accidentally run into it on a website.

I grew up going to a church that was a part of a theologically liberal denomination. Even though much basic Scriptural doctrine was either ignored or doctrine was distorted, I did gain some idea of who Jesus Christ was and is in my Sunday School classes. But I was never taught that Jesus Christ could actually be known and that I could actually establish a personal relationship with the Son of God. The teaching I received could be summed up as follows: "If you imitate the life of Jesus and embrace his teachings and do good works, then someday you will die and go to heaven." That certainly was a part of the truth, but not the substance of it.

Things have changed in America in many so-called evangelical Christian churches where the simple and powerful truth of the Gospel was once preached and taught. The Gospel has been "watered down" to make

it more palatable to young people who (it is presumed) want only a shallow and superficial version of Christianity.

I recently wrote in a national Christian magazine about a “seeker friendly” church in a community which has grown to relatively mammoth size in relation to the other local churches. This has been accomplished by diluting the Gospel, watering it down, making it more palatable to the “attention-deficit generation.”

I visited this church for several weeks and never once heard a clear and concise explanation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ: His life, death, burial, and His victory over death when He rose from the grave. Instead, I heard preaching and teaching about getting along with co-workers on the job, making one’s spouse happy, and coping with stress.

Finally, I stayed after a service and asked one of the pastors why the pure, simple Gospel was not being preached and he smiled and answered: “Well, we don’t want to offend any of our new people.”

When young people in so-called evangelical churches are not being taught about Jesus Christ and who He really is, then how can we expect young people who have never set foot in a church to understand about the Lamb of God who took upon Himself the sins of the world?

We are living in an era in which people - especially young people - are confused about Jesus. Was He simply a great philosopher? One of many

great spiritual teachers? Or, reasons the 21st Century American, maybe He doesn't even really exist. Maybe, they surmise, His life was (and is) a total fabrication dreamed up by superstitious and gullible people who lived in the First Century.

Hundreds of thousands of people in the world are asking these kinds of questions about Jesus Christ, especially young people. And, too often, they are being misguided and misdirected. They are not being told that Jesus Christ is real and He is alive and actively involved in the lives of human beings throughout the world.

This book speaks to the people who question, who doubt, who suspect that Jesus Christ may not really be the only Son of God, but merely a moral man, a 1st Century version of Gandhi.

As a daily newspaper journalist for close to 25 years, I reported on what I saw and heard and experienced. Like every journalist who is ethical and responsible, I tried to present unadulterated facts to my readers so that they could arrive at their own opinions about these facts and make informed decisions.

I write this book with the same goal in mind, to present the reader with the truth about a phenomenal spiritual event which I was blessed to experience decades ago - an experience that has been an important part of my life literally every day since then.

Perhaps you do not have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. Or, perhaps you have known the Lord, but your love for Him has grown cold over the years. The “news” I will share with you in this book could literally change your life and for one reason: because Jesus Christ is in the life-changing business!

The Bible says that “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today and forever.” (Hebrews 13:8).

He came to His disciples and to Mary Magdalene soon after He arose from the grave. He had conquered sin and death by willingly giving up His life so that those who believe in Him can spend eternity in heaven. And so He came to me - a confused and troubled young man - over 30 years ago. And, if you invite Him into your life, He will come to you today.

May the Lord minister to your mind, to your soul, and to your to spirit as you read the following pages of this book and learn about my mind-boggling and life-changing “Close Encounter With Jesus Christ.”